

BY PIA BOLOGNESI

A telling introduction to the Canadian experimental filmmaker Isiah Medina, whose debut feature film *88:88*, recently premiered in the Festival del film Locarno, takes its name from the flashing displays on home appliances when power is suddenly restored. Medina focuses on instances experienced by those who live in poverty and frequently cannot afford to pay the electricity bill.

Isiah Medina was born in 1991 in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. His first short film was *Semi-auto Colours* (2010), and his first feature was *88:88* (2015). After completing studies and working with Alexandre Galmard in Montréal he currently lives and works on cinema in Toronto, making movies under the production logo Quantity Cinema.

The impossible is the only (no-)thing that ever happens

Hovering between reality and fiction, between the investigation of form and subversion of canons, between dialectics and empiricism, Isiah Medina's work invites us to separate the image from itself, following the trail of consequences.

In his first full-length film, *88:88*, the Canadian artist and filmmaker uses perceptual, linguistic and temporal ellipses to shift the compositional balance of his previous *Semi-Auto Colours* (2010) and *Time is the Sun* (2012), expanding into a reflection that superimposes the subjective dimension of time on a deconstruction of the socioeconomic crisis.

PIA BOLOGNESI

What is most striking about *88:88* is how the layering of form and content calls the language itself into question. Your work shows strong ties to cinema—late Godard, Eustache, Direct Cinema, the second American avant-garde—but, at the same time, you update the language until they are camouflaged within an extremely contemporary flow of sound and image. How did you build these relationships?

ISIAH MEDINA

88:88 was about how to begin. I think cinema began with *Démolition d'un mur* by the Lumière brothers: with the reverse motion. There is a cancellation, a self-recoiling. But this return of an image to its starting point is a different nothing from the nothing of the cut. Cinema begins in reflection. Cinema begins in the montage of an image separating from itself, the absolute difference or externality created by merely re-ordering the frames. If in editing we run the footage backwards and forwards to find the cut (it is never given, it must be found) then the framed image will be cut, the image will become a (no-)thing that only is what it is insofar as it withdraws from itself. Withdrawing and creating coincide.

I like that you used the word camouflage, since there is a relationship here between spirit and nature, and spirit camouflaging itself in nature. We can look at the different eternities created in cinema. Eternal because they were created—these forms were not there for all time. We can take these forms and have them wear uniforms, or sew different uniforms for different situations, different seasons to disappear in. Different points of nature coming-to-be and coming-to-not, ceasing-to-be and ceasing-to-not. We might catch it moving forward or backwards, but the key is to freeze it at a precise moment by adding the same frame; then we cut it, and find a way to continue the stasis these forms were trying to conceive. I am fond of what Olivia Lucca Fraser said, that we do not add time, we subtract eternity.

PB

Before this conversation, we tried to single out certain elements underlying your practice. I'd like to start with

the concept of the "cut" that you also use in the audio: a process that reminds me of the syncopated forms sometimes found in hip-hop, aiming for a dialectic between repetition and interruption, building a narrative tension from samples. How did you approach the sound?

IM

We can cut and frame either sound or image, so it is more useful to think in terms of frame and cut than image and sound. Sometimes the sound frames the image or cuts the image, and sometimes the image frames the sound, cuts the sound. Some rappers speak of finding pockets in the beat, and it's similar, but sometimes the sound finds pockets in the image, and sometimes the image finds pockets in the sound.

If philosophy develops a manifest image to put into montage with the image (or sound) of politics and science, one must find where to glue together disparate elements to show that they are not so separate. For instance, at one point I sample Big L saying "I wasn't poor I was po' / I couldn't afford the o-r" and then link it to the classical logic of P or non-P when I walk through the Financial District in Toronto. To say I could not afford the "o-r" means being poor can blur the division between P and non-P, because we cannot afford the "or."

PB

And with the images, which run parallel almost throughout the film, did you follow the same process?

IM

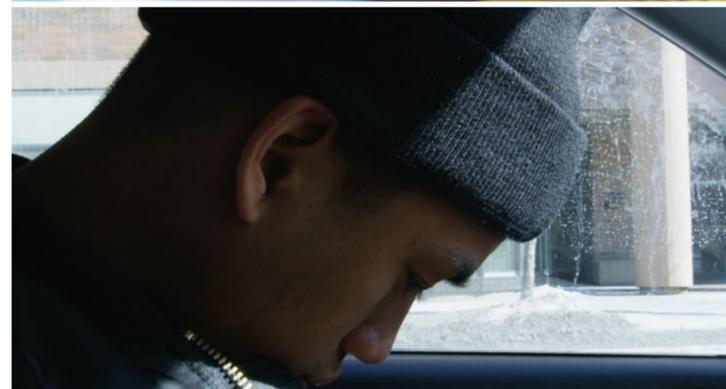
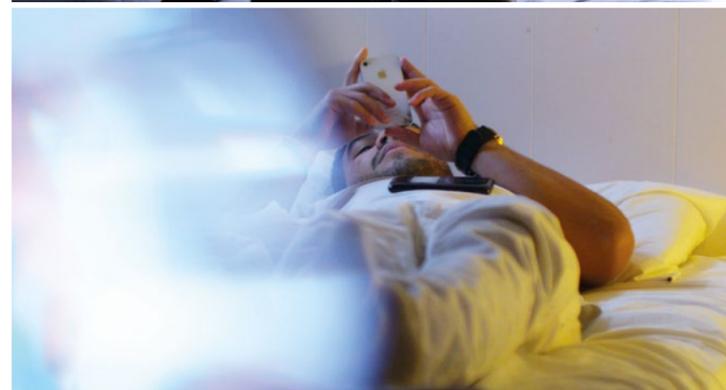
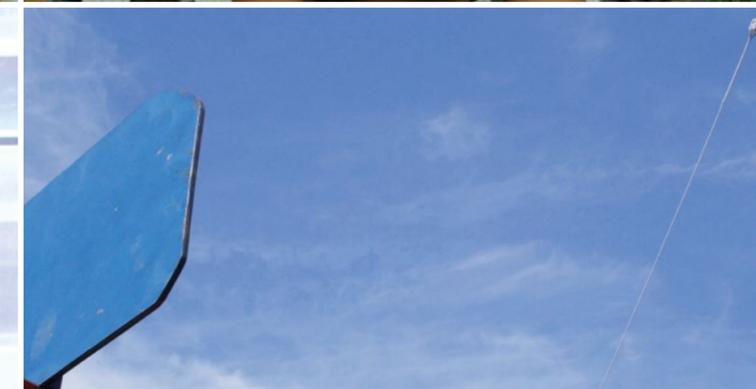
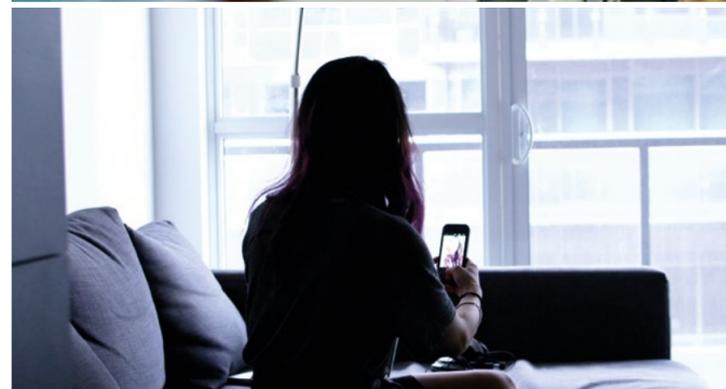
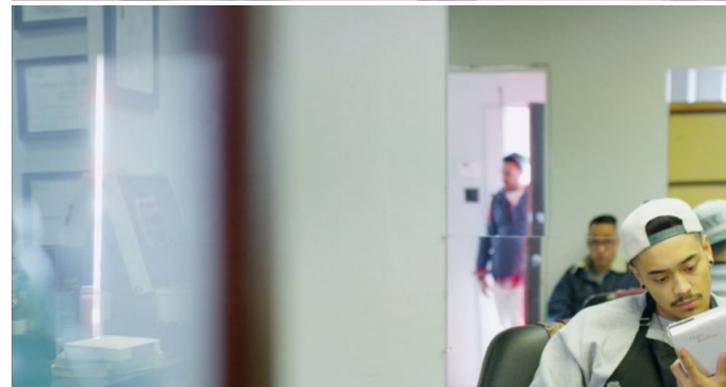
I always think about the diagonal in the frame; what is important is to find invariances between images, since cinema deals not with movement, but the retroactive production of stasis. By working with compositions and diagonals, we can force certain invariances, glue different shapes together, to allow different logical affordances. When it comes to cutting, I thought of what Serge Daney said, that John Ford only leaves the image on screen as long as is needed to take it all in. Once the rhythm in the image is dead, I cut, even if it is just a frame. Then you build hierarchies of image and sound, as all hierarchy is the organization of complexity, the different levels that allow a process to continue.

PB

The cut is what gives your works formalization, but also allows the division and dilation of time to define the internal narrative. To quote your notes on the title: "You cannot pay your bill. Your heat and lights are cut. You pay. The clocks initially flash 88:88. You set the clocks. You cannot pay. You pay. 88:88. Repeat. 88:88. Cut. You stop setting your clock to the time of the world. 88:88. Subtracted. You make do with suspension."

IM

88:88 becomes a counter, a beat that can be broken down until you choose a stopping





Top and bottom - Preview of *We Will Grow Old Together* (stills), 2016. Courtesy: the artist

point. Dialectics produces what suspends it, as the suspension of suspension of dialectics. There is a non-dialectical, contingent element that dialectical montage encounters, but this contingency is the repetitive motor of dialectics itself in a new guise. We must not hypostatize one mode of repetition, one form of the repeating 88:88, --:--: --, -. The count of time thus depends on an intervention, producing new forms of continuity editing. But this suspension is also a Cartesian question, a Kuleshov question. What is true presents itself even when we are suspended in doubt. We just need to doubt the doubt. When I was young, my electricity would get cut and we would get the lights back when the bills were paid. After a while I stopped setting the clock back to the time of the world I was in, and accepted it as a sign. There is the time of the world, then there is the exception that its count is based on. There are two "there is," and that's when the cut splits a frame from itself, an event splitting a world from its idea of itself. If the freeze is a glimpse of eternity and the repetition of frames is time, time is just eternity trying to catch up with itself at the cut. **PB**

You've talked at length about how logic, math, the philosophy of Hegel and Badiou were fundamental to your writing process... **IM**

I wanted to start the movie in a manner that was absolute. I was thinking of Hegel's beginning to *Science of Logic*: "Being, pure being—without further determination." It reminded me of the clock I saw, but instead of 88:88, --:--: --, -. What happens between being, what type of repetition, or iteration, is required to get to pure being. For montage, I take inspiration from Badiou's set-theory ontology, but in terms of (movie) set theory. For Badiou, logic is a site of appearing, so I study intuitionist logic to find ways to superimpose and order what is in a frame, and how frames relate to each other, while mathematics is the discourse of being. We shouldn't phenomenalyze or ontologize the relation between appearing and being. They exist in non-relation. Light exists in non-relation to the cut, but the absolute change of light from minimal to maximal and back can appear the same as a cut. Our new world of appearances can produce a change in what is. **PB**

The relationship between reality and fiction is a constant that takes different forms in your filmography: more diary-like in *Semi-Auto Colours* (2010) and *Time is the Sun* (2012), more reflective in *88:88* (2015). It's hard to separate the elements of fiction and documentary because they alternate and accumulate without converging; they preserve a degree of ambiguity. **IM**

We are always acting in daily life, so we are always within a space of fiction. What is important is to find the link between being and appearing. When what is can appear in a new frame, we can reorganize what exists and what does not. How do we share a frame, a fiction of totalization? Even if we "fake" this or that, or make fiction appear as reality, through this play of fiction a real, binding normative space can emerge. We begin as actors, then start to believe our lines and actions, and this fiction begins to take hold. Reality itself would disappear without it. What is fiction and what is reality is always decided in the process itself, so the problem is really what idea we attempting to think through together and make true. Again, like hearing images and seeing sounds, the

division and placement depends on the idea at hand. Perhaps equality between humans can begin as a fiction but then take on reality. **PB**

In your early Winnipeg films, your friends and neighborhood are the epicenter and boundary of the work. In *88:88* this community seems to develop the need to relate to the outside and reflect on broader social questions, particularly what Frank Ruda calls the ever latent possibility of suddenly being poor. How did you expand this local perspective (individual social relationships) into a global one (the financial crisis)? **IM**

I looked at the link between the suspended time of poverty and the financial world. If cinema exists at twenty-four frames per second, but in high-frequency trading there are 300,000 trades in the blink of an eye, what level of abstraction or cutting does film require to think about the situation we are in? What if this speed of trade is like the intermittent mechanism of cinema hiding the fact that nothing is changing? With the poor having their power cut, I was also fascinated by the autosabotage of power through pricing and what Suhail Malik calls "the contingencies of abstraction, revision, and thetic futurity of the arkhé derivative that splits the present from itself." The luxury rabble can make claims, new prices force recalibration, and politics becomes a question of pricing. There can be losses, so we wonder if politics begins from the contingency of prices or the necessity of poverty. What we begin with is simple: both the luxury rabble and the poverty rabble are separated and unbound from the state, through pricing or poverty. So we need to find a new division to see clearly. **PB**

To bring up layers again, you use 16mm, HD, smartphones, screen recording. This creates a well-defined aesthetic that overturns certain canons of classic experimental cinema; for instance, you use superimposition in a totally new way. **IM**

I think the question of superimposition is again the idea of listening to images and seeing sounds. It is a question of projection beyond local separations; through cutting we can make what was continuous into something discrete, or we can smooth out images and sounds through fades, matches, making the discrete continuous. Making cacophony soft. But sometimes an indefinite transit is itself finite, so it is also about knowing when to stop: when an investigation begins yielding the same results, it may be time to find new paths. Editing is always an act of anamnesis. By working through a section of precise vagueness, we begin the slow work of differentiation. To maintain particular rhythms of thinking, it becomes logical to proceed in a certain way, and you simply follow the consequences. What may appear discontinuous may find its rhyme twenty minutes later; what seem like absolute ruptures may from a more global perspective be smooth space. **PB**

88:88 came out in 2015, and you're busy with another project now... **IM**

I am working on a new feature, about love, sex work, and the army. The title is *We Will Grow Old Together*, since there is a sense you cannot cut anyone or anything from your life: we must navigate this space and grow old together.

di Filipa Ramos

Un triangolo, un rettangolo, un cerchio — geometrie che gocciolano delicatamente da una tela beige. Un fegato, una mano, uno stomaco — belle masse viscerali che possiedono il loro sistema nervoso.

Inter-waver, Robber's robber, Two chord wake — i titoli di tre grandi acrilici dell'artista svedese Regna Bley, che sono stati i punti di partenza per questa conversazione in forma di abecedario.

La costanza di Bley nel giocare con la materialità delle cose e con i modi di rappresentazione la portano a diluire pittura, scultura e story-telling in un complesso corpo di lavoro in cui si possono incontrare

geometrie organiche, forme corporee, gamme cromatiche morbide, colori sintetici e materiali naturali, tutti piegati uno nell'altro. Questi diversi livelli uniscono i suoi interessi per letteratura di fantascienza, per il linguaggio, per le scienze naturali e per la biopolitica in un modo che incorpora anche la rivelazione di memorie personali e intimità. L'astrazione non è mai stata così concreta. Filipa Ramos le ha chiesto di rivisitare alcuni dei tropi affrontati dal suo lavoro e il risultato ne è un alfabeto incompleto, privato e profondamente idiosincratico.

ARTIFICIALE

Migliorato alterato cambiato, migliora altera cambia, migliorando alterando cambiando,

nessuna natura, no alla normalità, nessuna categoria, cambio di categorie, nuovi livelli.

BLUE

"Poseidone ha sempre le sopracciglia blu di Poseidone".

Da un'email che ho ricevuto dal mio amico Ragnhild Aamàs prima che aprisse la mia mostra *Pine Pitch* da Hester, New York, e che includeva anche questo estratto sull'uso degli aggettivi, dall'introduzione di *Autobiography of Red* di Anne Carson's:

"Di sicuro ci sono molti modi diversi di essere. Nel mondo dei poemi omerici, per esempio, l'essere è stabile e la particolarità è fissata velocemente nella tradizione. Quando Omero parla di sangue, il sangue è