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2  Gus Van Sant on Gummo


- “Venomous in story; genius in character; victorious in structure; teasingly gentle in epilogue; slapstick in theme; rebellious in nature; honest at heart; inspirational in its creation and with contempt at the tip of its tongue...”

3  "Life is beautiful, really it is, full of beauty and illusions."

4  Bio (b. 1974)

- Started NYU, dropped out after a semester
- Met photographer Larry Clark in Washington Square Park, 18 years old
- Wrote script for Clark’s 1995 Kids

5  Larry Clark: Tulsa

6  Bio (b. 1974)

- Becomes a celebrity/curiosity with an edgy/dangerous screenplay; talent to watch
- Fine Line (which produced Kids) funds his \$1m production, Gummo (1997)
- Fine Line again: Julien donkey-boy (1900), which he proclaims Dogme #6 film.
- Screenplay for Larry Clark’s Ken Park (2002)

7  Diane Arbus

8  Docu-fictional characters

- “When I go to the movies, there's usually nothing on the screen that compels me, and with this film I wanted to see people who were amazing looking. I was watching an episode of Sally Jesse Raphael called "My Died From Sniffing Paint,"and I saw this kid on it named Nick[Sutton] who's a paint-sniffing survivor. They asked him, "Where are you going to be in a few years?"and he said, "I'll probably be dead." I loved him and wanted him to star in the film, so we tracked him down. He told me he'd been on acid on the show.”

9  Borders & Edges

10 Casting

- Tumbler seen on Sally Jesse Raphael Show
- Solomon seen as extra in The Road to Wellville
- Chloe Sevigny: American Psycho
- Max Perlich: Homicide (TV)
- Linda Mantz (Solomon's Mom): Boardwalk

11 Film School

- Herog: "I guess you didn't go to film school."
- HK: "I hate that shit. It's eating the soul of cinema. Filmmaking has become like a process, and it's all garbage. All these rich kids who were going to be doctors who want to be filmmakers, but they have very little life experience and they're just writing really shitty wit for each other. That's perfect for when they go to Hollywood and meet the people who finance films, 'cause those guys are fucked up too. That's why films are the way they are now and why I've largely stopped going to see them in the last two years."

12 Borderline: Attraction/Repulsion

- Pleasure/horror of "looking"
- It's OK to blast a person apart in a movie, but not a cat
- Presence/absence of a guiding moral perspective: moral/vacuum

13 Borderline: Fiction/Reality

- "I make my films from the inside out. I have to in order to blur the line between what really happened and what is made up, manipulated, fictitious, and completely correct, until I don't recognize it anymore."

14 Borderlines: Horror/Humor

- "Xenia Ohio. A few years ago a tornado hit this place. It killed people left and right ... Houses were split open and you could see necklaces hanging from branches of trees ... I saw a girl fly through the sky and I looked up her skirt." (Opening Voice-over)

15 Borderlines: Known/Unknown

- "I just wanted you to see these things that no one else would show you. And if you get something emotional from one scene in the film -- if there's one image you can take away from the movie after you leave -- then it's a success."

16 Borderline: Fiction/Documentary

- Actor/non-actor
- Events: conceived by the director/invented by improvising characters/documentary "givens"
- Hyper-realism/surrealism
- Carefully-crafted images/documentary contingency

17 Borderline: Themes / "Feelings"

- "Korine has shown that he is not interested in making judgements and creating 'meaning' in a film, he is more intent on presenting a story for its intrinsic values and instilling 'feeling' into film. The desired reaction to Korine's films is not that they contain some vague meaning (that ultimately leaves the audience feeling empty), he wants the film to 'feel right'." [Fergus Grealy]

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18 Borderling: Plot / Non-plot

- "With Gummo I wanted to create a new viewing experience with images coming from all directions. To free myself up to do that, I had to create some kind of scenario that would allow me to just show scenes, which is all I care about. I can't stand plots, because I don't feel life has plots. There is no beginning, middle or end, and it upsets me when things are tied up so perfectly."
- "We were just driving around -- that's how I got a lot of that footage, the Super-8 and video stuff. Just walking around neighborhoods, walking up to people."

19 Borderline: Fiction / Nonfiction

- ...It is not a documentary. But what is it?...What is questionable is the very reality [that Korine] is recording, since it is clearly staged, or, more to the point, since it mixes fact with fiction to meet artistic ends... Where do the actors end and where does reality begin? And what are we to make of scenes that are unrehearsed and spontaneous, placed next to scenes that are clearly fabrication? [Jamie Christley]

20 Borderline: Intention / Mistakes

- “With Gummo, I wanted to invent a new film. I know that there isn't any true invention that hasn't been done before, but I feel that this hasn't been seen in a real commercial context. We tried really hard to have images come from all directions. If I had to give [this style] a name, I'd call it a "mistake-ist" art form -- like science projects, things blowing up in my face, what comes of that.”

21 Borderline: Pre-vision / After-discovery

- “We go from scenes that are completely thought out, almost formal, scenes that resonate in this classical film sense, and then we go to other scenes where it's like, total mistakes, stuff shot on video where the kids forget there's a camera there and talk about how much they hate niggers. I felt like shooting each scene on its own terms and then making sense of it afterwards. And I felt that the styles would blend, that there would be a cohesiveness.” [H.K.]

22 Border: Real / Surreal

- “Going back to that whole thing -- I just wanted to show these kids, kids beating each others brains in. I wanted to show what it was like to sniff glue. I didn't want to judge anybody. This is why I have very little interest in working with actors. [Non-actors] can give you what an actor can never give you: pieces of themselves.” [H.K.]
- “I hate Fellini, because it's all like a cartoon to me. It's not based in any kind of realism. I don't care about it if it's not real. [H.K.]

23 Borderline: Script / Scriptless

- “There was a script, but as a screenwriter, I'm so bored with the idea of following a script. I felt like I had the movie in the script so we'll shoot the script but then shoot everything else and make sense of it in the editing process. That cat tape was a tape that a friend of mine had given me, of him doing acid with his sister. They were in a garage band and there was a shot of their kitten. That [phasing] was an in-camera mistake.” [H.K.]

24 Borderline: Character as Contradiction

- “Each character had to have dimension, there had to be certain aspects that were totally contradictory.”

25 Walter Chaw

- Gummo is a wholly uncompromising document. It offers no apologies for its characters, nor any real justification for its own existence save one whispered voice-over nearly three-quarters of the way through the picture: “Life is beautiful, really it is, full of beauty and illusions.” I don't believe that Harmony Korine means this hopeful epitaph to be ironic nor satirical of the banal horrors of Xenia, Ohio and the feckless inhabitants thereof. Rather, I believe that Harmony Korine's idea of beauty lies in the nakedness of his subject material, and in the discomfort of his audience...Not for every taste, Gummo is among the most powerful statements about the existential absurdity of life, the agonizing torment of it when suffered without contemplative reflection, and the universal loneliness of a frustrated desire for completion. It is a documentary of the potential darkness at the heart of the human condition...

26 Borderline: Multiple Media

- Jean Eyves Escoffier: shot Les Amants de Pont Neuf...most expensive French film ever made, and films for Lars Von Trier, Luc Besson and Agnes Varda
- Super-8/ Home video; Polaroids; 35mm; steadicam

27 Borderline: Viewer/Voyeur

- “The saving grace is that, astonishingly, Gummo steers clear of being an exploitative freak show. The misfits on display certainly lend themselves to such an end but Korine evades this fate by shooting from the inside out. He's not gazing upon these lives from some moral high ground, judging their lack of compass, but is instead squatting down beside them. The problem is that despite Korine's sympathy, it's difficult for the audience not to laugh at the characters, at their stupidity and weirdness. By being a pretend documentary, the film almost asks you to behave in this way; you can't escape the artificiality of the scenes no matter how hard they try to be fly on the wall. Gummo makes the audience a voyeur by constantly raising the shock stakes, then takes no responsibility for the completed article. It's this total absence of a message that makes Gummo a baffling movie.” (Unattributed)

28 Borderline: Esthetics/Engagement

- Esthetic motivation/sociological commentary
- Moral frame/absence of commentary
- Narrative frame/collage