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Who Killed Who First: Lineages of Technology and  
Liberation Through Experimental Film

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***Who Killed Who First: Lineages of Technology and Liberation  
Through Experimental Film***

***Hector Laidlaw***

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## ***Abstract***

Experimental film is a vast and difficult to navigate field, with many undetectable roots that lie beneath its grainy soil. This study traces and connects some of these both well-known and obscure, analysing how the specifics of the filmmaker's film mediums worked in tandem with their outsider perspectives. Specifically, it shall explore 3 distinct eras, firstly Maya Deren and her roots in Socialist activism in relation to her 1943 film *Meshes of the Afternoon*. It then connects her practice to that of Richard Kern and the Cinema of Transgression operating in New York in the 1980s. This movement is underrepresented in academic research, so this shall act as an academic contribution to its discussion within the history of underground film. It finally draws from there to the use of videotape by the filmmakers Charles Pinion and Cecelia Condit, whose work has experienced a cultural resurgence and the contemporary work of Kasper Meltedhair. The research has drawn together numerous sources that have previously been disconnected and also benefited from the insight of Pinion and Meltedhair, semi-structured interviews with whom have supported the 3rd chapter.

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## *Introduction*

This dissertation shall serve as an exploration of changing film technology and how mediums such as 16mm, Super 8 and videotape allowed experimental filmmakers to reach towards political and personal liberation in their work. Currently working filmmakers are at a point in history where generations of preceding moving image can be accessible to them and filmmaking technology is simultaneously at its most accessible. However, some creatives are opting to utilise more analogue mediums, prompting the question as to what influences them to do this, and how does this interact with their own attempts to circumvent the cinematic and societal mainstream? This exploration of filmic lineage will trace through three very specific periods. In chapter one, I will tackle the early American avant-garde work of Maya Deren (b.1917-d.1961) critically examining how early film technology was an effective vehicle for Deren to express her conceptual ideas, formulated in her identity as a socialist immigrant to the USA. Following on to chapter two, this will explore the 80s transgressive filmmaking of Richard Kern (b.1954) and act as an academic discussion of the Cinema of Transgression movement. Through my research I have found this era to be underrepresented, and I am confident that this writing will provide an original contribution to knowledge of the academy. It will also analyse how Kern's economic and pragmatic filmmaking technique was effective at expressing his dissatisfaction with conservative 80s America. Chapter three will finally take us to the present day of experimental underground filmmaking, which draws equally from the formal constructions of Deren and the feral abjectness of Kern. This is prevalent in the shot-on-videotape works of Kasper Meltedhair, a filmmaker currently working in Kentucky and in the resurgence of SOV filmmakers Charles Pinion and Cecelia Condit. This element of the research will be underpinned through a series of one-on-one semi structured interviews with Pinion and Meltedhair, enquiring as to how their choice of film technology has impacted their practice and the lineage of influences that they are informed by. I argue that there is an unrecognised lineage from the work of Deren and her ethical pragmatism, to the aesthetic scrappiness of the New York Cinema of Transgression which cumulatively influenced the current underground of psychotronic shot-on-video cinema which will be supported by my analysis.

## ***Chapter 1 – Maya Deren: Early Experimentation and Socialist Origins***

Our first chapter contends with Maya Deren and her groundbreaking practice in experimental film in the 1940s until her death in 1961. Deren was born in Ukraine, immigrating to the United States in 1922, and quickly became involved in student activism at Syracuse University. This engendered in her an anti-corporate collectivist viewpoint, one that influenced her promotional practice as a filmmaker and her involvement with Jonas Mekas and the New American Cinema Group. Her independence of practice and promotion of her work and indeed the fantastical imagery she engaged with became a major influence on American cinema, both experimental and cinematic contemporary filmmakers including Derek Jarman, Prano Bailey-Bond and Jane Schoenbrun, solidifying Deren’s long reaching shadow of significance in the canon of film. (Christie, 2022)

Discussion here will be focused on her unprecedented avant garde debut film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). Deren is considered to be one of the earliest pioneers of American experimental cinema. Her narrative playing with time was inspirational to descendant filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage (b.1933), whose more impressionist work can be seen as counterpoint to Deren’s highly structured imagery and once referred to her as “the mother of us all.” (Starr, 2025) Brakhage’s wife Jane Brakhage Wodening described Deren’s personality as “fiery”. I posit that it is reductive to paint Deren as an intense, arcane figure when her strong independence of vision is merely a product of her being one of few women occupying the almost totally male arena of 1940s cinema. It is undeniable the singularity of Deren’s approach to promoting her film work at the time, hosting screenings for critics in her own home and independently showing them at colleges. (Nichols and University of California Press, 2006) These methods of operating alongside her imagery clearly echo into current independent film culture and DIY screenings past and present, such as those put on by the Toronto Film Co-op of the late 60s, screening in alleyways and other non-traditional locations. (Cronenberg and Rodley, 1997) She has been cited as a key influence on modern “analogue horror”, a lo-fi subgenre of horror moving image born on the Internet, desperately nostalgic for the age of celluloid and videotape. (Monohan, 2024). This technological nostalgia feels antithetical to earlier filmmakers such as Deren’s use of film as this

was driven by necessity rather than an aesthetic pursuit. This is echoed by Jarmusch's discussion of Mekas and his viewing of different filmic mediums as merely practical tools that incidentally contain a perceived aesthetic by way of technological limitation. (Jarmusch, 2024) This is clear in Deren's images presented in unobtrusive black and white, a neutral canvas upon which the arcane events of the narrative occur.

*Meshes* was filmed handheld using a second hand 16mm Bolex camera on black and white film (Cox, 2016, p. 180), one of the few mediums available at the time in 1943 to create a moving image. 16mm was indeed most commonly used as a format for home movies. Deren was drawn to this after meeting her second husband Alexander Hammid while touring as an assistant and publicist with modern dance troupe the Katherine Dunham Company. Hammid had already spearheaded the movement of avant-garde film in his home country (then known as) Czechoslovakia with 1930's *Aimless Walk* and set about creating a film work with Deren. (Ferrier, 2023) Dance itself was also extremely important to Deren and played a large part in her filmic practice, informing the deliberate movements of her character in *Meshes* and being a centerpiece in many of her later works such as *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946). Even her movements contain a joyous expression of liberation and working in concert with the expressive and mysterious imagery, elevating the mundane environment of her and Hammid's home into a lo-fi moving image dreamscape. (Clark, Hodson and Neiman, 1984b)

Katherine Dunham became known for leading the independently run Katherine Dunham Dance Company troupe of African American dancers, focusing on keeping alive aspects of Haitian movement in American dance and indeed the wider culture. Like the younger Deren, Dunham was considered suspect by the US government, who refused to fund her company despite them representing America abroad. I propose that Deren's time spent working with Dunham only served to strengthen her belief in independent self-sustaining practice of filmmaking and undoubtedly the involvement of dance in her films. Deren would later make the film *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, exploring aspects of Haitian Vodou. It was left incomplete after her death and the footage later re-edited by Teiji Ito (her husband from 1960 until her death) and eventually surfacing in 1985. Her introduction to the culture of Haitian Vodou and dance is



Fig 1.1 – Deren in *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)

proposed to have been a comfort for her living in New York and separated from her Ukrainian roots. This was an exhilarating new language in the same manner as her discovery of moving image. This sense of exhilaration is baked into *Meshes of the Afternoon's* onscreen world of wondrous and frightening edits and startling images, such as Deren appearing with glasses made from chrome orbs and her dreamlike

movements as the camera turns and she falls along the wall. (Fischer-Hornung, 2008)

The film begins with a mannequin arm lowering from the sky to place a flower on the ground, suggesting a larger miraculous force at play guiding the events of the film. Deren, playing an anonymous woman, walks by and picks it up before taking it to her home, dropping her key on the way inside. The closeness with which we view the flower and key being interacted with, along with multiple point-of-view shots heighten the sense of a subjective personal experience that Deren so wanted to convey. Small moments such as dropping a key, a knife falling out of a loaf of bread, or the feeling that someone has been in your room before you echo out of reality and into a dream, becoming now fantastical talismanic events. In sleep, these events coalesce, as doppelgangers of the woman repeat the same action. A cloaked figure with a mirror for a face is eventually seen, seemingly transforming into another double. It leans in with the knife before



Fig 1.2 – The mirror-faced figure from *Meshes*

waking her up. We see from her now awake point-of-view that a man is now there. Her dream makes her suspicious of him, her key now transformed into the knife which she uses to shatter his mirror face.

We then see him now walking into the house with the flower and key to find

the woman where she had been sleeping, dead in the chair, having cut her own throat with a mirror shard. The 1959 score by Teiji Ito uses drones and percussive sounds, following Deren's every footstep and stare. The result is a deliberately oblique narrative, more to be felt than intellectually understood and heightened by the close-up cinematography which reflects Deren's want for a personal cinema of subjective experience. (Deren, 2024) (Maya Deren: experimental films [DVD], 2002) This was indeed Deren's issue with critical interpretation of the film, which used a spiralling, chronemically confused narrative to hopefully sweep the viewer into a state to purely engage with the film as a mood piece. Its construction of image is undoubtedly successful at this as its central character doubles, leaving the viewer with the impression they have been transported somewhere familiar yet unsettling, an unease all but confirmed by the death of Deren's character. (Clark, Hodson and Neiman, 1984b)

Deren's upbringing clearly also fostered reasonings that would later draw her towards the fringe of celluloid experimentation. As a teenager she became heavily involved with socialist activism and presented a critique of the USSR to an audience of male activists. Her reading of the politics of the Soviet Union as "industrial feudalism" was met with dismissal (Nichols and University of California Press, 2006). It is clear in her film practice that collectivism and decentring of ego were clear values that she wished to express, extending into her practice of eschewing acting credits and finding independent channels of distribution.

Her work can further be seen to be one of the most steadfast examples of early American independent avant-garde film, in creation, content and release. In Soussloff (2001), she aligns the circumstances around *Meshes of the Afternoon's* gestation to Lauren Rabinovitz' terms of "contradistinction" from Hollywood which Deren herself is known to have described.

I reject the accountant mentality which could dismember such a complete miracle in order to apply to it the simple arithmetic of statistics—which would reduce this principle to parts, to power pluralities and status singularities, as if human were an animal or a machine whose meaning was either a function of human's size and number...I reject also that inversion of democracy which is detachment, that detachment which is expressed in the formula of equal but separate opinions—the vicious snobbery which tolerates and even welcomes the distinctions and divisions of

differences, the superficial equality which stalemates and arrests the discovery and development of unity. (Deren, 2024)

This also chimes with her statement defining the film as an attempt to visualise the way humans experience sometimes mundane instances and expand them to be something much stranger and more personally significant. (Maya Deren: experimental films [DVD], 2002) While not overtly gesturing towards a feminist ideology in film, *Meshes of the Afternoon's* intense specificity and personal focus I feel is clearly informed by Deren's Ukrainian upbringing and socialist thought. This then being transplanted into the much more socially conservative realm of 1943 America gives context that serves to set Deren and her work apart, othering it from the established cinematic canon of the time. This was indeed a dangerous time to work as a left-wing creative as America was deeply societally suspicious and fearmongering of communism. Her first husband Gregory Bardacke describes being under investigation by the FBI during his time at Syracuse University for his association with the Young People's Socialist League and suspects that Deren was also. One can imagine the feeling of paranoia this would instil in a younger Deren. This can be felt in the tone of *Meshes*, containing repeated shots of her looking from a window and observing an ominous cloaked figure. It is true also that it climaxes with Deren shattering the face of her lover, symbolising an escape from an oppressive relationship. The narrative personifies the sense of state oppression that she must have felt during her years as an active organiser, engaged in politics that would have her viewed as suspect by Hooverist security services. (Clark, Hodson and Neiman, 1984, p. 187) (Schrecker, 1998) Its close-up focus on small mundane moments to heighten their surreality also suggest Deren's point of view escaping from the conservative constructions of the everyday. The film reaches beyond simple moralistic Hollywood construction in production and plot, exemplifying her desire to reach towards a more collective, intimate and compassionate way of life as opposed to the oppressive and machinelike structures that she abhorred for their suppression of the miraculous, from life as well as film.

## Chapter 2 – Richard Kern: Transgressing New York

Here I want to explore and academically discuss the Cinema of Transgression movement that sprung from New York in the mid-1980s, specifically focussing on the work of Richard Kern and his 1985 film *You Killed Me First*. This short lived but highly volatile movement reacted against the commercialisation of the New York art scene which had co-opted the work of once underground figures such as Warhol, Basquiat and Keith Haring. Kern and his cohorts wished to make highly expressive and immediate films to expunge the dread of the American experience and escape from the political straitjacket of Reaganomics and a return to 50s style family values. This was an aim pursued by the artists by any means necessary. I wish to examine how Kern's use of limited resources was of benefit to this method of practice and examine whether the aforementioned aims were met in the work. (Blank City, 2010)

We must begin by discussing the Lithuanian born filmmaker and key figure in American underground film, Jonas Mekas. Similarly to Maya Deren, Mekas immigrated to the US from eastern Europe, eventually settling in New York. He also became important to the American underground, setting up Anthology Film Archives. (Jarmusch, 2024) This was an ongoing archive of experimental film formed by the collective of Mekas, Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, Jerome Hill and P. Adams Sitney in 1970 to redefine cinema and film as art and preserve it as such. Fast forwarding to the late 70s, Mekas and others had now become the "establishment" of the filmic avant-garde. The musical movement of punk had acted as an iconoclastic force with its inspiration extending not just to music but also to the moving image, continuing as punk morphed into no-wave, a highly abrasive subgenre that reacted against what some saw as the commercialisation of punk into new wave music. Documentarians of punk such as Amos Poe grew to be an early practitioner of no-wave cinema and the musicians populating New York's East Village at the time became its acting troupe. Debbie Harry of Blondie was one of them, featuring in Poe's *The Foreigner (1978)*. As other no-wave cinema adherents such as Michael Oblowitz began to move up into the establishment of American independent film (his 1983 feature *King Blank* became a regular double bill feature alongside David Lynch's famed *Eraserhead*), a filmic reaction was also brewing

to this, a counter wave against the now established underground of Oblowitz, Poe and others. (Blank City, 2010)

Nick Zedd was an artist and filmmaker emboldened by this, to the point as to write an infamous manifesto, published in 1985 under the pseudonym Orion Jeriko in his own publication *The Underground Film Bulletin*. In Thurston Moore's *Gangs of New York* article for *Sight & Sound*, he asserts that Zedd likely considered the established New York experimentalists as "boring". (Moore, 2016). He describes his early exposure to the work of Amos Poe and Jonas Mekas and that even within the filmic underground of that period, there were still outliers. Though Zedd does not explicitly call out specific filmmakers, his writing in the Cinema of Transgression manifesto strongly reflects this viewpoint. Moore's recollection of the period and conjecture on the motivations of its key players made this a useful piece of research material. He is not entirely positive about some of the New York director's works, describing some of Zedd's early work as "completely terrible" and Poe's as an "interminable experience". His lack of bias or rose-tinted nostalgia in his recollections further make this source of benefit to my research and effective in highlighting the differences of attitude between the likes of Mekas and Zedd.

This aesthetic difference is even more apparent when viewing the work of Kern, Zedd and others that made up what would be canonised as the Cinema of Transgression. (Jeriko, 2019). Indeed, Zedd emphasises his vitriol towards the avant-garde that Deren, Mekas and Brakhage were proponents of, describing the canon of their work as operating with the aim to "bore, tranquilize and obfuscate." These are not aims that could be applied to the incendiary works of Zedd and his filmic associate Richard Kern, who shall be henceforth discussed.

Kern was born in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina in 1957, the son of a newspaper photographer who became exposed to his father's front-page shots of car accidents and accompanied him to shoots. These formative experiences in combination with the highbrow cinema of Nagasi Oshima, trash films by John Waters and Russ Meyer and the lo-fi experimentalism of Bruce Conner all led to Kern's cinema of punk-inspired violence and degradation. (Sargeant, 2008) All seemingly superfluous elements were stripped out, leaving only the immediacy of action, demanding the viewer's attention. Indeed, Kern wryly admits to this in a 1985 interview with *Videowave*. He

refuses to attribute any meaning in his films beyond them acting solely as entertainment, describing from cinema visits that the only time viewers pay attention is when there is violence or nudity on screen. (Videowave, 2019)

Kern's responses in the *Videowave* interview are emblematic of the attitude of his work. He displays his trademark pitch black humour that he brings to screen, answering questions gnominically and openly making fun of the show he himself is appearing, hoping aloud that he doesn't look as stupid as other people he's seen being interviewed. Kern's films explore extremely charged imagery of violence and eroticism, highly confrontational to the viewer and drawing tension from the line it walks between camp and exploitation. Through the lack of seriousness with which he takes the interview process he extends this confrontational tightrope to his own presentation, coyly deflecting the interviewer's attempts to divulge serious philosophical motive behind his filmmaking and embodying the twin terminals of humour and horror contained within it. His 1986 film *Fingered* begins with a similarly goading statement to the audience:

"Although it is not our sole intention to shock, insult or irritate, you have been warned that we are catering only to our own preference as members of the sexual minority."



Fig 2.1 – Lydia Lunch and Marty Nations in *Fingered* (1986)

This was Kern's second collaboration with artist, musician and actress Lydia Lunch, formulated after the uproarious response to 1985's *The Right Side of My Brain*. (Blank City, 2010) (*Fingered*, 1986) This aspect of catering to oneself is important to Kern, Lunch and many of the

Cinema of Transgression's other adherents. Lunch herself describes these cinematic collaborations as acts of "public psychotherapy" as an expulsion of the fear that surrounded those living in the economically run down New York of the late 70s and early 80s. The artists surrounding

the Cinema of Transgression were living in a climate of post-Manson, Cold War, Son of Sam cultural anxiety, and this is the world they simultaneously reflected and rejected on celluloid. Kern and Lunch's confrontational, audience-baiting humour and insularity of creation also plays with the idea of promotion and the dilemma this poses for Cinema of Transgression artists. Their cinema is self-cateringly grotesque, rejecting and inviting audience with a bastardisation of commercial film violence and pornographic eroticism. Kern himself confirms this, describing *Fingered* as "anti-pornography" to make people "feel bad about sex". In their interviews, Lunch and Kern negate attempts to canonise or discuss their work in terms of nostalgia or celebrity. In an interview with Anthony Bourdain, Lunch vehemently denies the importance of this period in New York art, defining it instead in terms of pragmatism and a necessity to do something and express herself, indifferent to its perception by anyone. While sometimes frustrating to the process of research, this approach is emblematic of the negation and oppositional nature of No Wave art, as summated by this term, reflecting and co-opting the commercialism of New Wave which grew from the corporate takeover of punk rock and spitting it back into New York's cultural face. (Blank City, 2010), (Bourdain, 2018)

Of all his films, I wish to specifically explore his 1985 short *You Killed Me First*, considered by Sargeant to be one of his most "concise" works. The film exemplifies the Cinema of Transgression's aims as laid out by Jeriko/Zedd: nihilism, repulsive levels of gore and uncomfortably confrontational sexuality. The covert violence inherent in American socio-politics is brought to the surface in a grand-guignol lash-out. This climate is summed up well by Kern collaborator and artist David Wojnarowicz in his memoir *Close to the Knives*, describing his rage at conservative politicians' dismissal and fuelling of the AIDS crisis.

"I'm beginning to believe that one of the last frontiers left for radical gesture is the imagination. At least in my ungoverned imagination I can fuck someone without a rubber, or I can, in the privacy of my own skull, douse Helms with a bucket of gasoline and set his putrid ass on fire or throw congressman William Dannemeyer off the empire state building." (Wojnarowicz, 2017)

I propose that Kern's films and others from the Cinema of Transgression group attempts at bringing what Wojnarowicz speaks of as the "ungoverned imagination" to screen, radical filmic gestures of nihilistic violence against a political system that made life harder for those within it.

*You Killed Me First* could be the most successful at fulfilling this vision. The film jumps immediately into action, with a traditional American thanksgiving dinner, its Rockwellian façade broken by actress Lung Leg’s character railing against the quality of the food and her parents’ religiousness. Her twitching, erratic performance, which Kern later attributed to the taking of ecstasy on set by cast and crew (Kern, 2016) feels like a personification of untrammelled rage towards the right-wing Christian politicians and anti-gay lobbyists that Wojnarowicz would righteously skewer in his memoir.



Fig 2.2 – Still from *You Killed Me First* (1985)

The film’s jarring intense opening displays Kern’s strength of conviction and opposing philosophy to the established New York avant-gardists, aiming for shorter, punchier and more action led films such as *Stray Dogs* and *Thrust In Me* (both 1985). (Blank City, 2010) This is even present in the stumbling line readings, a product of the speed with which the film was made, using totally improvised dialogue, non-

professional actors and secretly shooting in the loft apartment of an artist that Kern worked for as an assistant while he was away on business (Kern, 2016). This sense of loose immediacy extended to Kern’s instruction to actors during shooting. Instead of “action”, Kern would commence a shot by saying “Find something to do.”, which might even be the best summation of the Cinema of Transgression’s modus operandi. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, pg. 55) The film’s textural scrappiness only serves to heighten its incendiary anti-authoritarian thesis. At this point Kern was filming on sync-sound Super-8, cheap and handheld technology that allowed him to film quickly and capture more immediate and borderline documentary happenings. It is true that the film was based on real life recollections of Wojnarowicz and Leg’s upbringings. Wojnarowicz is essentially playing his own father, leading to an almost frighteningly uncomfortable comic scene where he simulates sex with Karen Finley’s mother character while Lung Leg as their daughter

secretly looks on. This scene is emblematic of Kern's twisted sense of humour, and indeed one that runs through much of New York's underground filmmaking of the 80s. Despite the iconoclastic approach and messaging at the heart of *You Killed Me First*, featuring a gay man playing as his own father having heterosexual sex is the kind of horror-camp that harks back to the early 70s filmmaking of John Waters, who admired and influenced the Cinema of Transgression filmmakers, describing Zedd's *They Eat Scum* as having his favourite ever title and Kern's *Fingered* as "the ultimate date movie for psychos.". (Blank City, 2010) This sex scene later fuels the film's incendiary finale where Lung Leg castigates her family for being "just as disgusting as me" before shooting them at the table. Despite their exterior as a nuclear family in the Universe of the Neatly Clipped Lawn (Wojnarowicz, 2017), they use this to hide their abject human transgressions of lust and violence. Kern uses his lo-fi lens to spit these dichotomies back at the viewer and question why these must remain hidden and how conservative repression breeds societal harm. This is echoed in Wojnarowicz' later writings where he directly challenges the lawmakers that censored health information around AIDS and safe sex, asking what they find so repulsive about the human body. (Wojnarowicz, 2017) (*You Killed Me First*, 1985)

Kern's use of Super 8 is integral to the potent effect of *You Killed Me First*. The film is grainy and out of focus which only lends the action a more frenetic, queasy and disconcerting atmosphere. The viewer feels as if they are watching horrific events in the room with the characters, half closing their eyes to a scene they do not wish to observe which invites comparison to the dream logic of Deren's personal point of view cinema. This results in a perverse, voyeuristic feel, as we do not want to look away, much like the pathology of rubbernecking at car accidents. Like much of Kern's work, it has a snuff film quality that twists the images of violence and sexuality from being cinematically alluring to being hyper-realistically uncomfortable, simulations that regurgitate themselves as documentary. He is explicit in this as an aim, one that contemporary and sometime collaborator Cassandra Stark (as an actress in *Submit to Me Now* (1987) and *X is Y* (1990)) responded to as feeling that his films were becoming too close to her surrounding reality of poverty and death that she wished to escape from through her art. (Blank City, 2010) I assert that this is in fact the great strength of Richard Kern's filmmaking and *You Killed Me First* in particular, drawing dramatic tension from its balance between lo-fi camp and verité horror and

emboldening wider independent filmmaking practice through its immediacy of production and resultant effect on the viewer.

### ***Chapter 3 – The Contemporary Videotape***

It is largely agreed by many of the Cinema of Transgression's progenitors that the movement had begun to wind down by the late 80s. This is attributed to multiple factors, excess drug use and the AIDS epidemic taking the lives of several key figures in New York art such as Klaus Nomi and David Wojnarowicz in 1983 and 1992 respectively. Actress Ann Magnusson poignantly discusses this in Celine Danhier's documentary *Blank City* (2010), describing how many of her friends and her brother confided in her about their HIV-positive diagnoses and the mental toll this took on her. This perfectly exemplifies the sort of societal atmosphere that surrounded the Cinema of Transgression filmmakers, a tension and dread that could not be maintained. In this concluding chapter I wish to examine what is happening in underground film in the wake of the early American avant-garde and its influence on the Cinema of Transgression and then consequently those movement's combined effect on experimental cinema today. This shall be concentrated around research taken from semi-structured informal discussions with filmmaker's Charles Pinion and Kasper Meltedhair and drawing parallels between the resurgence of Pinion's film work with that of Cecelia Condit (b.1947).

While some filmmakers such as Zedd left New York, describing the gentrified city of the 90s as making him feel "ready to die", their influence was still prevalent. Charles Pinion is a filmmaker from Gainesville, Florida, who moved to America's capital in 1988 after creating his shot on video debut feature *Twisted Issues* with friends. The film formulated around his desire to document the underground bands of Gainesville house parties, echoing the actions of Cinema of Transgression progenitor Amos Poe and his documentation of early CBGB performances (Moore, 2016). As Kern in the early 80s was drawing influence from the slasher horror of *Friday the 13th* as well as art film (Moore, 2016), Pinion was catalysed by the video store discovery of shot-on-video horror sequel *Crazy Fat Ethel II* (also known as *Criminally Insane II*). These along with the exploitation film history publication *Incredibly Strange Films* established the VHS splatter lane that he would work in. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, pg. 46) Despite a defined aesthetic in the vein of Deren's strictly curated image crafting, Pinion's approach to elements such as casting and plot draw parallels with Kern and the Cinema of Transgression's highly collaborative and loosely pragmatic

approach to film. Much like in *You Killed Me First* and *Fingered*, the characters that populate *Twisted Issues* were dreamt up by the cast, who would formulate their own characterisation and backstory sometimes on the spot before filming, resulting in surreal interludes such as a scene between a mad scientist and his assistant as they experiment on the skateboarding main character. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, pg. 47) This also extends to the filming locations of the movie, much of it being shot in Pinion's apartment and wider neighbourhood, a low budget necessity also utilised by Kern in almost all of his films and Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid in the use of their Hollywood home as location for *Meshes of the Afternoon*. These filmmaker's utilisation of resources, actors and locations accessible to them ensured that they could create free from outside influence affecting decisions of capital, resulting in highly powerful cinematic work that might otherwise not have been made. This resourcefulness also allowed Pinion to create a much more expansive feature length work, developing on from the short films of Kern and Zedd that he had only yet read about in issues of *Film Threat* stocked by his Gainesville record shop workplace. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, pg. 38) (*Twisted Issues*, 1988)

After his move to New York, Pinion immediately set about forming another feature entitled *Killbillies*. Looking to expand his palette as an artist, he purchased a brick of out of date Super 8 film, enough to shoot a feature and a step up from the gestural scuzz of the imagery in *Twisted Issues*. This grew after finding a cinematographer to an expansive 16mm project with numerous New York cognoscenti in talks to star including Richard Edson, Debbie Harry and Willem Dafoe, reaching a point where the filmmaker ended up in debt with the little footage made languishing in a development lab. It took now friend Richard Kern urging him to "Make a film, dammit!" to encourage Pinion to abandon this and return to the accessible roots of video. Ideas from *Killbillies* were later repurposed into his 1996 film *We Await*. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, Pg. 36) After being burned by his foray into the more glamorous echelons of the New York independent film world, returning to more guerilla accessible techniques resulted in more productivity of work for the filmmaker, echoing Deren's meditations almost 40 years beforehand, solidifying that the use of more accessible technologies such as videotape and Super 8 allowed for more unrestricted creation for filmmakers, out-with systems of studio and financing and resulting in some of the strongest works in their respective eras. This eventually resulted in 1994 with Pinion formulating

his own manifesto in the vein of Nick Zedd a decade before him. In this he castigates the corporate funding structures of contemporary Hollywood that still linger today and champions the concept of the filmmaker answering, “to no-one but themselves”. This I believe is the great strength of the use of accessible mediums in film, as it allows an



Fig 3.1 – Still from *Twisted Issues* (1988)

untrammelled expression of the filmmakers ideal and opens the form to more marginalised creatives who otherwise would find their work either suppressed or never allowed to come to fruition at all. (Lerner, 2013) (Pinion, 2025)

Pinion’s route to videotape began as his family’s documentarian, eventually borrowing his father’s RCA camcorder to bring *Twisted Issues* to the screen. Pinion’s embrace of video came about instead

through it being the most accessible medium to him at the time. This necessity eventually extended into an aesthetic as he came to appreciate its painterly, smeary quality of image, being a visual artist and painter in addition to filmmaker. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, Pg. 44) This is also supported by his humorous ratio employed during *Twisted Issues*’ production “blood per square inch”, made to gauge the goriness of certain scenes as they were reviewed on a CRT monitor after shooting. This monitor even appears within the film on which a character played by Pinion himself observes the psychotronic happenings of the other players. There is a clear parallel here between the supernatural feel of colliding timelines in Deren’s *Meshes*, its central character observing a looping timeline of a mysterious figure taking her place and the observations of Clark, Hodson and Neiman (1984b) defining the literal setting of *Meshes* as a window into the very environment the film was conceived in. The homespun feel of both films increases the personal nature of the narrative and thereby the potential for viewers to respond to it. (Pinion, 2024) This is especially apt when observing both these works as they were both filmed on what was considered at the time to be media for use in “home movies”, only heightening this sense of

cinematic intimacy. As his filmmaking practice developed into the 90s, this embrace of video took on a more politically charged nature. In the era of analogue image recording equipment being used for television, anything broadcast had to reach a standard of quality. This was rendered useless in the wake of the 1992 Police beating of Rodney King as footage captured by nearby Los Angeles resident George Holliday with his newly acquired VHSC camera became broadcast worldwide in the days after the event as evidence of systemic police racism and injustice. This watershed moment in the politics of the fidelity of video, of what can and can't be shown emboldened Pinion after the collapse of his *Killbillies* project, returning to the consumer grade of Hi8 video for 1993's *Red Spirit Lake*, starring Cinema of Transgression luminaries Richard Kern, Holly Adams, Tessa Hughes-Freeland, Annabel Lee and Tommy Turner. This simultaneously instilled him with a confidence in his lo-fi DIY practice and cemented its place in the sociopolitical landscape. As Pinion's use of film technology and independent approach was distilled by his political climate and left-wing punk roots, so to was Deren's approach in the wake of her activism and Kern's filmic response to 80's American Conservatism. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, Pg. 37)

In the last two years (2024/25 at the time of writing), Pinion's work has experienced a resurgence in the world of cult cinema, being issued on Blu-ray by film label Vinegar Syndrome's subsidiary Saturn's Core, discussed on numerous film podcasts and in the case of *Twisted Issues*, experiencing its first screenings in cinemas throughout America since its initial release, save for two 1988 screenings at the University of Florida Rathskeller and a New York bar respectively. His cinema is now undeniably part of a family tree of underground film in the post-Cinema of Transgression canon of filmic outliers and is now striking a chord in the digital age as movie lovers explore the ever-deepening history of undiscovered low fidelity art and find themselves drawn to the raw intimate, gestural nature of stories told on video. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, Pg. 41)

The cultural renaissance of shot-on-video cinema experienced by Pinion has undeniable similarity to the sudden virality of artist Cecelia Condit's 1983 short film *Possibly in Michigan* on short-form video app TikTok in 2019, a short clip of which becoming a sonic meme. Devoid of context, the sound is rendered an uncanny internet curio but within the world of the film it reveals a world of cannibalism, femicide and homemade quasi-musical oddity. Much like the semi-autobiographical approach of Kern and Pinion, her films draw from intense personal experience of male violence

against women and capture through videotape collage and screens within screens (mining the mood of televisual voyeurism also explored by Deren and Pinion) the feeling of ambient terror this engenders within society. A prime example of this is the 1981 piece *Beneath the Skin*, abstracting through voiceover, shots of a young woman on a swing, photographs of mummies and footage of seizures, Condit's own experiencing of discovering that her ex-partner had murdered his previous girlfriend and kept her body in a box in his cupboard while they were together. The film's devolvement from a faltering,

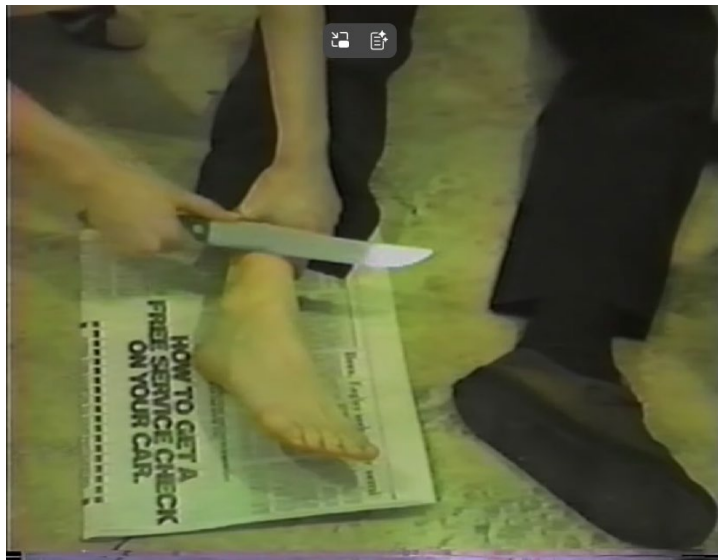


Fig 3.2 – Still from *Possibly In Michigan* (1983)

laughingly nervous narration to stream of consciousness nursery rhyme simultaneously informs a mood of escape from real life horror and also the frightening unhinged desperation of events too disturbing for the mind to react to conventionally. This is echoed in the narration as it is repeated that the events feel as if they didn't happen to her and are merely a remembered dream. (*Beneath The Skin*, 1981)

Condit's formalism strengthens in her

next and famously viral work *Possibly in Michigan*, containing a more expansive narrative in which two women are stalked by a cannibal Prince Charming figure, attacking one of them before being killed by her friend and eaten by them as revenge. This has echoes of the transgressive content of Richard Kern's later short film works concealed beneath a thin layer of fantastical fairy tale iconography. Rather than reflecting and hyperbolising the reality she found herself in a-la the Cinema of Transgression, Condit opts for the obfuscating dreamlike editing style similar to that employed by Deren and Hammid. Deren's goal of capturing personal subjective experience on film is undoubtedly tied to and prevalent as an influence within Cecelia Condit's filmography, an influence that Condit herself recognises. (Fay, 2023) (*Possibly in Michigan*, 1983)

Her discovery of video became a haven in which she could cast off preconceived notions of aesthetic, in film and in her own sense of identity. This is a phenomenon shared by Deren, Kern and Pinion as their respective filmic mediums became a liberating playground bending cinema into raw and engaging new forms. (Eddy, 2019) British video artist Catherine Elwes summates and concurs with this perspective, describing how the sudden commercial availability of the video camera in the 1970s was so new as to be divorced from any historical precedent or male dominated canon, allowing women artists to carve out a new space for themselves. (Moir, 2020)



Fig 3.3 - Still from *Busted Babies* (2024)

Videotape has also become a haven for current filmmakers such the Kentucky based artist Kasper Meltedhair. Despite describing her efforts to expunge herself of references during the making of a project, she simultaneously draws from past straight-to-video exploitation and sci fi cinema such as *Video Violence* (1987) and *Ozone: Attack of the Redneck Mutants* (1989), twisting these genres into strange new shapes in a manner familiar to Pinion's

discovery of splatter via *Incredibly Strange Films* and the tenets of his Pulp Video Manifesto, written in 1996 to define himself as proud of the use of VHS technology in his work. This embrace of more lowbrow forms of cinema recontextualised for surrealist effect is also seen within the Cinema of Transgression works. This is noted by Sargeant, comparing these filmmakers use of transgressive content to the experimentation of the Dada art movement. (Blank City, 2010) Meltedhair's 2024 film *Busted Babies* is undoubtedly within this descendancy as it plays with cut up language, homemade costuming and props and an aesthetic of video grain and gunge, reminiscent of bastardised children's television programming. The bloody splatter of Kern and Pinion instead becomes otherworldly green goop. Her work can be seen as taking these past

transgressive ideals to further and more fantastical places in the manner of Deren and Condit but with a grittier sheen. (Busted Babies, 2024) As America swings ever further towards the political right, underground film such as Meltedhair's reacts, becoming increasingly uncanny and insular as escape from corporate encroachment. Her perspective on this is in tandem with the previously explored writings of Deren, Zedd and Pinion, describing corporate models of creation to be "void of the magic of art.". From viewing her work this is a clear objective which is informed by the use of videotape encouraged by childhood memories of watching VHS in early development. Meltedhair argues for using the medium to heighten the action away from the more lifelike sheen of digital video. This in itself feels like a contemporary equivalent to Pinion's rejection of the idea of broadcast quality, imbuing her images with a more physical texture at odds with the world of 4K video that we carry around with us in our pockets every day. This also supports her efforts to push her art towards new uncharted places in the manner of the no-wave filmmakers aforementioned taking a "scorched earth" approach to cinema. Conversely, Pinion and Meltedhair have also recently been working on new projects that utilise 4K digital video as their medium, reminding us not to value the medium to the neglect of the work's substance. Pinion also discusses his use of the 4K medium to artistically challenge himself, despite his love of low res media and describes his recent collaboration with Meltedhair in which she has utilised the same. Meltedhair's films and indeed those of her peers such as Case Esparros and Brewce Longo have clearly revitalised Pinion's cinematic drive. This circle of collaboration across generations of filmmaker is extremely encouraging in the genre of the underground and will undoubtedly fuel work for both Pinion and Meltedhair that pushes the form forward. (Laidlaw, 2025, see Appendix A, Pg. 52/B)

## *Conclusion*

This text proves that there are clear lineages in the independent practice of the filmmaker's discussed. The descendant use of videotape, super 8 and 16mm film by Meltedhair, Condit, Pinion, Kern and Deren is a testament to the creation of film out with corporate and studio structures of production. These increasingly low fidelity and accessible mediums allowed for each to express highly specified concerns with the society they engaged in and sometimes rejected. The films discussed act as havens of release and expression that would not have been able to exist if their creators had anticipated greater financing or support and are a testament to the preservation of independent methods of practice such as the Film Co-ops of Jonas Mekas or the current wave of blu-ray reissuing. This is also emboldening to the author's practice as a filmmaker and a reminder that no medium is off limits and that the variety of which can be the key to breaking open the form and that independence of practice can be a truly an asset instead of a limitation.

The discussions with Pinion and Meltedhair that underpin the third chapter point forwards to areas that I believe require further study in the academic field, as they both discuss contemporary and past filmmakers such as Chester Turner and Case Esparros that are unrepresented in research. This could be the focus, for example, of a master's level thesis and I hope that this writing encourages further investigation and championing in the academy of moving image work that would otherwise be discarded as lowbrow.

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## *Appendix A – Discussion with Charles Pinion*

Hector: Yeah, basically, I'm doing my dissertation and, I've kind of been writing about lineages of technology and otherness in experimental film. You've always got to come up with a very pretentious title for these things, but yeah, so I've been kind of talking from, like... Maya Deren, Meshes of the Afternoon, the sort of connection between that, Richard Kern and the Cinema of Transgression period, and then to now. So, I've also got in touch with, do you know Kasper Meltedhair?

Charles Pinion: I do. I just met her recently. I love her work. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hector: Yeah, I'd seen Busted Babies, which was fantastic.

Charles Pinion: It really is.

Hector: I've also asked her for some, like, questions about her relationship to using video and, especially because I assume when you were making Twisted Issues and your films, do you feel it was more, like, pragmatic? Because it was the only technology kind of available to you?

Charles Pinion: Yes, it was not a...I mean, I admire Kasper and Bruce Longo, who she works with.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: The Bloodsick pair. I admire their commitment to the aesthetic of the VHS thing. Though in their most recent movie, they did it in 4K, and I... and I, you know, I think that's, I mean, I think an artist should do whatever the fuck an artist wants to do, basically, but, in my case, it definitely was...pragmatism...And, you know, I had no idea that there was this shot-on-video thing, happening or about to happen.

Hector: Yeah, yeah.

Charles Pinion: I was just kinda into doing my... you know, telling the story I wanted to tell, and what did I have access to?

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: I mean, I had this idea I wanted to make a movie in 16mm, and I had... I had written some... written at least one short story about a filmmaker, as though I had majored in that in college instead of art. I majored in art, and we didn't really have an interdisciplinary... thing, and you know, and video, when I was coming up, was sort of... you know, the viewing for such a thing was, you know, folded chairs in a gallery space, you know... Hmm. You know, like a... you know, not narrative.

Hector: Yeah, it's the kind of white cube, I guess it's called, like... I guess, like, people have an idea of what they'd come across in a gallery, film-wise.

Charles Pinion: Yeah. I mean, video... when I was making... when I made Twisted Issues, basically video was, you know, for documenting things, that was an acceptable place for it. Art, you know, which sometimes, you know, in the case of, I feel like, video art, sometimes tedium was maybe part of its raison d'etre, or at least the side effect of it. But I really just wanted to use what I had access to. Now, I didn't really understand how difficult editing would be. And that's what you would have an advantage today, shooting in video, you can dump it to digital, and then edit it digitally. But then it was two tapes, and a lot of it, in the case of Twisted Issues, was you're just tossing horseshoes at an edit point, you know, you're hoping you'll get somewhere close to it, you know?

Hector: Yeah, I've been using video, we... I've... one of my lecturers just gave me, like, an old camera they weren't using anymore, which is very kind of them, and just because I never had it, I was like, I should probably use this. And yeah, I've just been digitizing the tapes and then editing them, as opposed to... I think the camera can do, like, manual editing, but...

Charles Pinion: Right. In the nature of video, too, you know, it has this little run-up. you know...

Hector: Yeah, yeah.

Charles Pinion: It has to hit speed to be a clean, clean edit, and otherwise, you'll get, you know.

Hector: Yeah, glitches.

Charles Pinion: They're delightful aesthetic artifacts viewed from a distance. And in fact, I noticed that Bruce and... I don't know if Kasper does as well, but they... they'll inject, glitchy stuff as deliberate choices, as opposed to, you know, literally, it was just like oh, fuck, I didn't start the... if you didn't start shooting the camera before what you needed, the beginning is gonna be wonky, you know, a little bit of... there are a couple of shots in Twisted Issues that are that. You know, I can... I can tell, that there's, like, a... it's because I have, you know, we'd gone to action too soon after I'd pressed.

Hector: I'd found that out quite quickly, getting footage back, and then being like, oh, I'm missing, like, several seconds of this, and then I had to go back and do it again, but...I guess that's the charm of these things for some people, I guess. I don't know, yeah.

Charles Pinion: I mean, the first, we saw, Busted Babies, there's this one part where, early on, where...just men are opening garbage bags, and then... and they're sort of fluttering, and... I just think that's, like, so beautiful. I mean, I'm just like, wow, this is so great. And I don't think it would have worked, maybe, if it were in 4K. I do think the video does add a kind of...wonderful quality, I mean, you know, like, I'm... I hope to make a movie with that crowd, I mean, Kasper...might not be in it, but she might help with some of the art and stuff for a movie in Philadelphia in, the spring. And, I plan to shoot it on a 4K camcorder. I still want the engagement and gestural thing that I really like about camcorders.

Hector: Yeah, there's a kind of... it moves... like, the image even just, like, moves differently. There's kind of a nice movement to the image, I think.

Charles Pinion: Yeah. But it's gonna be 4K. So that... the challenge there, well, gee, I hope it's still interesting without the pleasantly smeary qualities that VHS or video can add, you know.

Hector: Yeah. Did you have, kind of an idea that you would, like become, like, a filmmaker? Like, did you have the kind of aspiration to, like, shoot on, you know, 35 or whatever in a professional way, or were you set from the beginning, kind of, like, based in the more kind of punk DIY, you know?

Charles Pinion: I'm definitely, definitely rooted in DIY. I was also in bands, did artwork and stuff like that for, the scene, and flyers and t-shirts and all that kind of stuff, and I like DIY, I still really like DIY, but it... for me, it was more about, well, what's the next step aesthetically? You know, not so much, I'm gonna make Hollywood movies.

Hector: Yeah

Charles Pinion: So when I moved to New York after making *Twisted Issues*, the first thing I tried to do was make a movie called *Killbillies*, which was gonna be a feature and my thought was to do it in Super 8 sound, color, as sort of an e... what am I trying to say? An incremental...move up in the aesthetic realm, just like as an... just as an artist, I just didn't... I'm just gonna make movies and... I mean, that wasn't it, it was just like, what's the next step? 16 would be too expensive, 35 far too expensive, you know, for DIY. So, I... I... there's this great film store in, you know, film supply, everyone...I don't know if someone's done a documentary about it, maybe they have. It's called... it was called Rafik, R-A-F-I-K a guy named Rafik owned it, and you'll hear... if you... read an... see an interview with Steve Buscemi, say, he'll talk about Rafik. Lots of people talk about Rafik, because it was just a place to get...

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: you know, stuff. And so I found a brick of Super 8 film you know, like, I don't know how many were in it, but maybe...16 or something, times 3 minutes. Whatever it was was enough to make a feature, as I... is what I thought if you shot one-to-one, you know, and, slightly outdated. Just a little outdated. And, and thus, on, sale. I thought that, you know, and I had this very rudimentary, or reductive, I should say, idea of what I required to make this film, and it was...You know, light the scene, you know, light the actors in the scene. The actors say their lines. I have a movie. I just had this very reductive, and efficient, it seemed to me, way to make the use of... because I wasn't going to do multiple takes, not with film, you know, boom, boom. So that never happened. I mean, the, the, the...the film... I did buy the film, and I met a director of photography who wanted to do it, and he sold himself to me, but within no time at all, he had convinced me, no, no, we need to do it in 16. And, and basically, I, you know, and I was producing, I just went into debt, and... making this thing that was a larger thing. I mean, I think had I made it, it was

1990, so let's see, Sex Lives and Videotape had just come out, there was an independent movie thing going on.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: if I'd have...succeeded in making it, and, like, Willem Dafoe, I don't know if you've seen We Await. We Await is what Killbillies became, as a...

Hector: I've not seen We Await or Red Spirit Lake yet.

Charles Pinion: I see, I see. I apologize in advance, then. There's... there's... might be some things that offend someone. Not a person like you. Anyway, but, like, Willem Dafoe was gonna be in it, playing this Jesus, like, like, because it was underground, because it was so underground, the more underground artists as Willem Dafoe at that point. He had done, Last Temptation of Christ, but, there's a part in the Spirit Drive, which is in We Await, which was also in Killbillies where there's this giant lumbering Jesus as a kind of Godzilla monster, and he really wanted to do it. And to me, I was thinking, well, maybe he...you know, was sick of all the Last Temptation of Christ, adoration, and he wanted to do something, kind of, to fuck with that image. I don't know, but it didn't happen, and, the 16mm collapsed, and then, then it became this 35mm project, where then I was, you know, all these kinds of... Debbie Harry, I, I, you know, it's just... it is not an unusual phenomenon to have a lot of hot air, a lot of artists, a lot of interest. But ultimately, the people who want to finance such things weren't interested in it.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: So, so my aspirations were always to, make things. And anyway, then after Killbillies, the 35mm kind of just died on the vine, that's when Richard Kern, was a friend of mine, he, you know, he, like... I think we actually wrote letters back then, I'm trying to remember, like, I actually... I either still have this letter, or it was a phone conversation, but in any case, he was like how's it going? I said, well, I met with this investor, and da-da-da, and you know, I got a good meeting with Debbie Harry, and she's kind of interested, and he said, make a film, dammit! This is why I think it was written... I think that's why it was written, because I feel like I can see the words on a page. In any case, make a film, dammit. And I was like you know, I'm trying to make a

35mm feature, you know, I can... I'm not making these Super 8 girly pictures, or whatever, you know, I mean, I wasn't really being that, but I was more just responding, petulantly, I acknowledge, to this... But what actually finally happened was I just said, well, fuck, I was so disappointed at Killbillies failing, that I said, well, fuck it, and I'm gonna make, Red Spirit Lake. So that's... that's what really was the fuel to make Red Spirit Lake with a kind of, proviso on a camcorder with friends, because that's how I did Twisted Issues. And I think, you know, arguably, Red Spirit Lake is my most... people either really... I mean, lately, people really like Twisted Issues, I think, because it's getting so much attention. For the longest time, Red Spirit Lake was the one people liked, but it had boobs and violence, a guy cutting his dick off and all this stuff.

Hector: Hmm.

Charles Pinion: It's definitely an exploitation film. But it wouldn't have happened had not the other one failed, so I guess I'm saying that... I mean, it was an upgrade in the sense that it went from VHS to, Hi8 video. So it was a small, I mean, that was just the... you know, there... back then, there was this whole thing about...is it broadcast quality? That used to be this kind of thing, like, it was... I mean, in retrospect, so... it seems so stupid, but...And as an artist, it's like, fuck you, broadcast, you know. But, it was this whole thing about broadcast quality. Oh, and the next one's gonna be... that's gonna be broadcast, but, like, some... whatever kind of weird way they'd read the thing, you know? And then my, argument at the time, the guy who got beat up by LA cops that caused the riots in 1991 or something, I'm just drawing a blank on his name, but.

Hector: Rodney King?

Charles Pinion: Rodney King. And that was... the only reason that happened was because someone was up in their apartment or whatever, and looked out with their little VHSC, another kind of compact VHS tape and suddenly, broadcast quality didn't mean shit, because, certainly, that was broadcast everywhere. So I actually think that, as tragic as that whole thing was, that really kind of kicked the door open in this notion of what is broadcast quality? And then someone like Oliver Stone doing the JFK movie, which mixed all these media. I mean, we take that for granted now, but it really wasn't a thing. It wasn't really a thing, and it needed these kind of

pioneering efforts by Oliver Stone, and I think that's... I think I've completed a sentence. I don't know if, overstaying my rhetorical welcome, I'm just...

Hector: No, that's great, yeah. Yeah, I really like when, like, stuff blends, like, film stock and things, and I saw JFK earlier this year, and I think that was a really kind of engaging part of the film.

Charles Pinion: Yeah.

Hector: How did you become aware of Richard's films?

Charles Pinion: In Gainesville, I worked at a record store. And we got all kinds of magazines, in addition... and one magazine we got was called Film Threat out of, I believe, Detroit. But it was the first to kind of somewhat broad circulation magazine, and kind of slick covers, and, you know, magazine. Not a zine, per se. that, dealt with cinema Transaction, Lydia, Nick Zedd, all of that.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: And, and a bunch of other more underground stuff. And me, actually, they reviewed one of Twisted Issues when it came out. Gave it a great review. So, I was aware of Richard's films, but I hadn't seen one yet. Then when I moved to New York, there was a place to, where one bought... it was called See Hear, S-E-E-H-E-A-R, and it was a place that was basically, zines about music and art, you know, so it was a great, little store. And I went there with, you know, because I noticed they sold VHS on consignment. I said, hey, do you want to carry this, and sure, you know, and then I came back a few days later, a week later, whatever, and see if anyone bought it or whatever, And he said, hey, no, no one bought it but...Do you know Richard Kern? And I said, yes, I'm like, of course I do. And, well, he really... I lent it to... you know, he wanted to borrow it, and he watched it, and he loved it, thought it was funny, and he wants to trade tapes with you. So that was great, and I'd barely moved to New York, so it was a very, you know...I call it a soot-stained fairy tale.

Hector: Yep.

Charles Pinion: So I went to his place, and if you've seen his films they're all in this one space with the wooden floors, and the...

Hector: Yeah, I've watched a good, a good, a good chunk of...

Charles Pinion: Yeah, yeah. So, have you seen The Bitches?

Hector: Yeah, I've seen The Bitches.

Charles Pinion: I'm sorry. So anyway, and that was a really affirming, you know, artistically affirming. Richard liked my shit. He said take... borrow whichever one you want, and I borrowed a... Rather, trade, I took, Submit To Me Now which I thought was great and, yeah, so that, that kind of made me feel like I was in the groove. But then I, said, well, Richard liked it, maybe Nick said will like it. So I got it, found his address somehow, and sent him...the movie, the whole package... I had a kind of cool package, which was a Ziploc bag with the VHS tape, a cassette soundtrack, 90-minute cassette soundtrack, and a little booklet. And it was, like, you know, 15 bucks postage paid back then. But Nick hated it, and he said so. He just wrote back, I hated... I really hated Twisted Issues. I also really hated the soundtrack music. So I made that a pull quote on the cover for.

Hector: Haha yeah.

Charles Pinion: some time, because it puts his name on the cover, he actually names the movie by name, so it's like, you can't buy publicity like that, so...

Hector: I think it was for Lost Highway, David Lynch put two thumbs down on the poster to get people to come see it or something.

Charles Pinion: That's great, that's great.

Hector: No, Nick Zed's stuff is interesting. I've seen a couple of those, like, some of his shorter films.

Charles Pinion: Police state is great.

Hector: Yeah, I'd say that's probably the best... the best one. That's, like, a fantastic film.

Charles Pinion: The sheer balls, that... that opening credit sequence.

Hector: Yeah, just, like, just on the car, and it's fantastic.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, no.

Hector: Like, I've seen... I've seen Geek Maggot Bingo, as well. He's got, like, Richard Hell playing, like, a cowboy, and he's just clearly...drunk and not getting through his lines. It's kind of... It's a kind of interminable film, but it's, it's, yeah, I don't know.

Charles Pinion: Yeah.

Hector: I think that's the great thing about the cinema Transgression stuff, which is kind of, like, even... even if it's not the best film you've ever seen, it's kind of... you watch it and you're like, I want to make a film now, which I think is, like, the most valuable kind of thing.

Charles Pinion: That's my favorite thing to hear from people when they say they see a movie of mine, and that makes them want to make a film that's like great, you know.

Hector: Yeah, no, totally. I watched... I think I watched Twisted Issues, like, last year, because I found it through, the Sleazoids podcast, and I was like...Oh, shot on video, punk skater thing, I need to watch this, and... yeah, no, totally, it... yeah. It totally kind of gave me that, like, get-up-and-go for a project I was doing, so yeah, no, it's awesome.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, those are great, those are great guys, by the way. You know, I have since met them, since that, they actually... I showed them...

Hector: Yeah, I saw they were screening it, yeah.

Charles Pinion: And I went up there, and that was fun. Yeah, that was... that was a blast.

Hector: Hmm. Did you... at the time it came out, did you, like, screen it? Much at all?

Charles Pinion: No. I mean, it played at... at the college. It's called a... many colleges have something called a rathskeller, and that, would be what this was, though it was called something else, and April of 88, we did show it, and it was a lot of the people who were in it, and the bands, and, like, you know, if everyone in the movie or in a band in the movie brought one friend, you'd have a pretty crowded... and it was, it was, like, hugely crowded, great audience. You know, great response to the gags, and but I was very aware that, well, yeah, but this is, you know, you're shooting fish in a barrel. This is like having a recital for your grandparents or something. So then I did have a screening in New York, right after I moved there in some bar, and at that point, it was

a lot harder to find places, for one thing, that had any kind of video projection. I don't even think it was a projector, I think they played it on the monitors. I'm thinking... I don't remember now. So I saw that, but it was a bar, so it wasn't, everyone really wasn't, like... I mean, people were there to see it, I don't know, it was, like, a handful of people, I don't know what the response was. Only now, as of this year, have I now seen it with an audience four, five times or something. And that's very gratifying, because it's...huge laughs, and whoops, and you know, okay, this is exactly what... I would have loved to have known this nearly 40 years ago that this... but it... but it definitely...it, you know, if it's a good audience, man, it's... it's so much... it's such a fun screening. It really is, you know.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: Yeah. Man. So that's been a delayed pleasure, because over the years, yes, people will write me, oh, I like your movie, da-da-da, can I order it, or...We showed it to...in our living room, and we loved it, and... but this new... brave new world of, like, showing things in theatres and stuff, has really, been very gratifying, because, like, oh, okay, so this is a movie, like, I'm feeling... because, you know, you... after a lot of years of sort of being, like I don't know, feeling like a second-class citizen or something. Which is, of course, part of DIY and part of the whole thing, you know, it's like, the work has to be the reason you do it, not... not...

Hector: Yeah. Yeah, I had a question there. It got away from me.

Charles Pinion: It'll come back.

Hector: Yeah, yeah.

Charles Pinion: My mother used to infuriatingly say, if it's important, it'll come back. Not necessarily. What else you got?

Hector: What else I got? I'm looking here.

Charles Pinion: How close are you to Glasgow? No, Edinburgh. Edinburgh. Now, which one is it? Do you know this, podcast, King... a guy named King Cult?

Charles Pinion: That's his, that's his Instagram name. Him and another guy do a podcast called IFTWO...

Charles Pinion: If you look on my friends list, which at this point might be... gigantic, I don't know, but a guy named King Cult, two Scottish guys who do a podcast. We've done 2 so far. You know, we did one on Twisted Issues, one on Red Spirit Lake. We're doing one, actually, I think, a week from tomorrow for, We Await.

Hector: Oh, nice.

Charles Pinion: And, I mean, there might... I, you know, it's like, oh, yeah, we go to the same pub or something, I don't know.

Charles Pinion: You're in, where are you, in Aberdeen?

Hector: Dundee, which...I'm, like, 2 hours away from Glasgow, an hour and a half from Edinburgh.

Charles Pinion: You know how idiots like me will go. Scottish people, are you guys friends? Y'all don't know each other?

Hector: Yeah, I was gonna... I remember I was gonna say, I think, like, Dundee's a pretty small city, but I do feel like it has kind of a good...sort of appreciative kind of cult film audience, because there's a cinema that's actually right across the street from my flat, called the DCA, and they do, They have, like, a strand in their programming every year called Dundead where they have their, like...horror, like, cult film retrospectives.

Charles Pinion: Cool.

Hector: They recently did do a, It's kind of interesting, for, like, their Halloween season, they... you know the film Evilspeak?

Charles Pinion: Evilspeak. I don't think I do. No.

Hector: Clint Howard's in it, who's kind of in a lot of... You know, 18 months.

Charles Pinion: Oh, Clint Howard. Huh. I don't know that by name. So many great movies.

Hector: He's kind of one of these character actors that's kind of got a very recognizable face.

Charles Pinion: Right?

Hector: But they, yeah, they've tracked down, like, this VHS copy of it, because it's a... I don't know if you're aware, but, like, in the UK in the 80s, there was the Video Nasties and Evil Speak was kind of one of the titles that got kind of indicted. And, so they showed it on videotape in the cinema, which is quite interesting. Because, you know, usually you're going to see, like, the 4K anniversary restoration of... but they just... they decided to just show the tape, which was quite good.

Charles Pinion: Wow.

Hector: It was kind of 10 minutes, it was, like, the first 5 minutes, you're like, I don't know if this is a good idea, because I can't hear anything that anyone's say. Oh, right. And then you're like, it doesn't matter, there's, like, you know, exploding heads or whatever, it's fun.

Charles Pinion: Right.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, the audio is.

Hector: Mmm.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, there's a... there's a drive-in in Mahoning, Pennsylvania, called the Mahoning Drive-In that, they do a VHS weekend once a month, once a year. And, Twisted Issues, that was, like, its national premiere of the new, version of it.

Hector: Oh, nice.

Charles Pinion: And they played it off the Blu-ray, which is... I'm glad they did. But there is, you know, there's a whole, obsession with that format for sure.

Hector: Do you still have the tapes you made the films on?

Charles Pinion: Red Spirit Lake and We Await, yes. Sadly... Twisted issues, no. At one point, when I was moving from one place to another, you have to make choices, and I think it was, like.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: You know, this... a stack this high of, you know, 8 feet high of tapes, you know, which, I mean, you know, within a few years, I realized, fuck. But at the time, I didn't. I just thought, I'll just get rid... I'll digitize them all.

Charles Pinion: And that's what I did, that's... thank God. I mean, of course, I wouldn't have thrown them away if I didn't digitize. So I digitized all the master's...and from that is what I constructed the, blu-ray. But I don't have the physical tapes, you know.

Hector: Yeah. How did you, like, first get a camera? Like, what was your first, like...

Charles Pinion: My dad, he bought an RCA...camera, that, VHS camera. But I should say, you know, since about 8th grade, I was the family documentarian, so it was Super 8. I reached a certain age when, like, my dad and mom are so happy. Oh, you want to do this instead of us? So I started shooting Super 8 first, and I remember dad got a camera that was like a camera, but then you had this big heavy thing where the recorder was a separate thing, and so there's at least one sort of family reunion that I shot on that. But my dad was, you know, we lived in Japan, he was in the Air Force, and so new technology... he was always into new technology, so then, oh, this camcorder, which, you know, he got, I'm sure he dicked around with it, and then goes, you know what? I think Chuck would like this more than me, would probably get a kick out of this, so that... that's literally how, hey, you guys, you want to borrow my, I'm not really using it. So, or I might have said, hey dad, I noticed that thing sitting on the closet of there. May I borrow it for a while? And my desire at that point, initially, was just to document the bands in Gainesville. Not all of them. I didn't even have a goal of, like, a documentary, per se, but I just wanted to archive these moments. Because I... because I... cause I could feel, like, a gig would be over, and especially house parties, which were, like, the coolest thing. A gig would be over, and then... you know, I just go, fuck, no one is keeping track of this.

Hector: Yeah, yeah.

Charles Pinion: You know, wasn't... weren't phones, and there weren't, people weren't audio recording it that much, and so that's kind of was my initial motivation, and then just, but I knew I wanted to make a movie, and I just read... there's a book called Incredibly Strange Films. If you have not, you know that?

Hector: I have it, yeah.

Charles Pinion: Did you have that, you say? Yeah. That book? Yeah, yeah. It was so...It was so important at the time because... I mean, me. I'd never heard of Ray Dennis Staeckler, or Al Adamson, or Herschel Gordon Lewis. I mean, I just didn't. I mean, you don't come out of the womb with that information, and... living in Florida, whatever, I had never heard of any of these guys. So that book...you know, opened up my eyes to, wow, and... and then also, the notion... that's when I first said, I want to make a splatter film.I remember telling it to my friend, I want to make a splatter film, and he said, what's a splatter? You know, blood splatter. Huh, I've never heard that term. I said, I think I got it from that book, I'm not sure, I'm not really sure, you know? You know, and around that time, I got a VCR, you know, because the thing is, I went from having nothing, because I didn't want it, no TV, no phone even, I just, like...I had a bunch of musical instruments in my living room. Actually, if you saw Twisted Issues, that's... that was where I lived, and none of that was set dressing. You know, except for the strobe lights, I didn't have those. Basically, every... that was just what my apartment looked like, and you know, it was a great time. And so, then I got a TV to watch what I'm shooting on, then I got a VCR, because I don't want to wear out the camcorder. And, and then I started, going to the video store, oh my goodness, you know, and that's when I...something weird, editions of this and that, and Crazy Fat Ethel 2, I remember was, like, a hugely significant film to me, because it was shot in video, and very obviously shot in video.

Hector: Have you ever seen... there's a film called Things? I had a really weird experience, like I think it was, like, two Halloweens ago, someone I knew, It was really strange. They, like, rented a room in a castle across the river, like, the river from where Dundee is, and he was like, hey, my friends coming over to watch this film, and I was like, I know about that film, I've never seen it, and it's just... we just sat in this, like strangely ornate room and watched Things on Halloween.

Charles Pinion: So cool.

Hector: Yeah, it was really weird.

Charles Pinion: I've thought maybe... I've seen it within the last decade, for the first time. Yeah. I had... Yeah, that, I believe, is Super 8, if I'm not mistaken. Is it? I can't remember.

Hector: I haven't... in my head, it looks like it's video, but I'm not sure.

Charles Pinion: I mean, by the time we all see it... I mean, that used to be my thing, too, like, I don't care what format it is, you're gonna end up watching it on a VCR anyway. That was kind of my...you know, like, philosophy, if you will.

Hector: Hmm.

Charles Pinion: But yeah, Things is great. Things is a good one.

Hector: Yeah. Crazy Fat Ethel, I've never... yeah, I've never heard of that one.

Charles Pinion: I mean, more than anything, Crazy Fat Ethel, because it so obviously was video, it encouraged me. It's like why not, I don't know, I just... it just gave me a sense of aesthetic...freedom, like, oh, they made this... and that movie's very, I want to say not artful, you know, like, there's no interesting light. It's very blank. It's about this fat girl in a... fat woman in an institution who...you know, they lock the food from... I'd have to watch it to actually know whether, now I would be offended by it, because it was cruel or something, but that... I mean, the name, come on, it's called Crazy Fat Ethel. I think Crazy Fat Ethel, the first one, was actually a 16mm...real movie kind of thing, and then I think the sequel was, like, their attempt to cash in on it, but that's the first one I saw, and that actually...kind of set the ground. That, reading, Incredibly Strange Films... yeah, so that was kind of the setting of, like, okay, I've got all this footage of bands. I want to do more... I don't want to do a... I knew I just didn't want to do a documentary. I had seen, for example, Decline of Western civilization. I'd seen that a few years earlier. So I knew of this thing called a documentary about music. That wasn't really my interest. I was more interested in, kind of trippy...I mean, what I would now call psychotronic, and what I kind of... when I want to label my shit, I say psychotronic. Because, you know, people say, well, you're a horror director. I'm like, I'm really not a horror director. I mean, for one thing, try being scared at any of my movies. You... you won't be, you know? I mean, you might be appalled, or, you know, but you're not gonna be, like... it's, you know, my movies aren't really about being scared. Psychotronic, because it involves, psychedelia, aliens, you know, it could be any number of things. Boobs, you know, like,

it's just... it's... it's just... I like that as a genre, and I think I intended to make Twisted Issues... Though, again, I don't think I knew the term, but that kind of... We wanted to have some science fiction-y elements, and we do, you know, the two of the writers, the two guys, Hawk and Steve, who are in the movie, they're these writing guys who did this science fiction scene, and... they're the ones who helped me create a kind of skeletal script for it, and then I just also had a very kind of open mic night notion because it was... We were this community of punks, and so on. And I would say, Hey, you guys want to be in my movie? I don't know, maybe, yeah, sure. Come up with a part, come up with a plotline, we'll find a way to make it work, and so, like, the mad scientist and his assistant... That whole subplot was Chuck and Jen, who were, like, sitting, you know, would be on the Plaza of the Americas eating free Hare Krishna food at the University of Florida, and I just remember pitching... I was standing, and I was like, you guys... and they're sitting there eating, yeah, we'll, come along. And then, I don't know if it was within days, within hours, with moments later, but they... okay, I'm gonna be a mad scientist, she's gonna be my assistant. Great! And suddenly that gave us... but the thing that actually, the anchor to the movie for me, in terms of how it came to be, is the scene where he bolts his foot to the skateboard?

Hector: Yeah, that's a great image. I think that was, like, the... after watching it, that was the... the drill through the foot feels like the defining image.

Charles Pinion: I appreciate that because, you know, some skater... he said, Charles, I hear you're making a movie. I said, well, that's what I want to do. I got this great idea, a Jason-like killer who's a skater, and he's killed by these heavy metal kids, and yeah, etc. And once I got that image. Oh my god, like, now the movie, you know, now it's funny, you know, the way... humping around on it, you know, like wasn't scripted, it was more just, like, the actor... this is really hard to walk around with this thing. Oh, well, you know, what do you gotta do? Yeah, so that was how that came about.

Hector: I think what you're saying about, like documenting the bands, that's... I think that's a super... especially in, like, scenes like that, I think that's really important. I, I... Play in bands and go to gigs and stuff, and that's, like... Especially on that small scale, there's, like, a couple people

that will, like, film stuff and then they'll, you know, they'll send you a Google Drive link to, like their camcorder footage after, and it's just like, that's like... Yeah.

Charles Pinion: Right.

Hector: It's important, I guess it makes you feel like, yeah, we were... we were here and stuff.

Charles Pinion: Yep.

Hector: Because it's, like, yeah, no, it's super important, and I think it's great as well, like because I think, yeah, most people probably would assume to just make that a documentary, I think.

Charles Pinion: Right.

Hector: Yeah. Like, when are those people gonna have the chance to be in a film, I guess? And the sort of community nature of it, just allowing people to come up their parts, and it's...Yeah, that's good I've not thought about that approach before.

Charles Pinion: Well, I appreciate that now people, I feel like, I feel like, are more, I feel like every... even I felt this as well back then, was, ugh, this party... this band scene is going on for a while, you know, I think if I'd had access to digital, I might have made a much... it might be a 40-minute movie, you know, like, I might not have indulged myself in those. But I did think it was important to show. I mean, now it's easy to say, but I think it was important to show, just the parties, the vibe of that, because, I think that's what a lot of people are responding to right now. Newer viewers, like, whoa, what? That looked like so much fun, you know?

Hector: Did you, like, story... like, you paint, so did you, like...Did you storyboard at all?

Charles Pinion: I storyboarded extensively and quite carefully, and I mean, this is my thing on storyboards, is...Because some people, I don't storyboard, okay, you know, whatever, you know, like...

Hector: Yeah, I think it's like Jim Jarmusch said he never storyboards, he just turns up on the set with the script, and then...

Charles Pinion: Which is... which is great, and he always seems to have really good actors, one thing. You know, I... my thing really is, of course, it's great to have a good actor, but my thing is, I don't even know if... it's not that important to me, I don't know, I just feel like there's a...I just, you know, you go... a movie is a dream. A movie is a...journey. You know, a movie is a ride. You get on the ride, and you... And...You know, oh, its the funhouse? Or it's the horror... ride. And I just feel like you just get on, commit to it. I mean, it's harder nowadays, because you just can flip to another channel, or I'm bored with this already, but just the commitment to actually just sit and watch the thing, I just feel like you accept the reality of... You know, of what it is and I mean, there are parts in, certainly in Red Spirit Lake, where, like, you can see lights edging into the scene and stuff like this, you know, because I'm hand-holding, because I'm the only person there or something, except the actor. And in a perfect world, they wouldn't be there, but to me, they don't really...I don't know. That's the kind of stuff I don't... I... because I know this isn't a real... this is not reality, right? We know it's a movie. So, I mean, yeah, Jim Jarmusch, I would not be surprised if he does that. Also, I mean, who shot his movies? Robbie Mueller, Wim Wenders This guy, and you know, it's like, if you show... one thing, I was doing the shooting, and for me, what I like about storyboards is...you know, because there's a grammar to filmmaking, right? So... You know...I just view them as, like, cards and then... And sometimes you realize, Oh! These two... three... these three shots, what if I did this, and then moved over to this?

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: And then got that, okay, but then still I can go, -And... and I know that I've told the story Visually, via montage, or whatever, the story that I want to tell. The thing is, without storyboards because there's so much going on on a set and then, oh, actress needs to take a... go to the bathroom. Oh, oh, okay, you know, lunch is, you know, whatever. And it's just great to know that you didn't get home, and you're starting editing, and fuck, I didn't get this shot, I just wanted a shot of his hand holding the ring, or whatever, you know, like, so that's... I... for me, it gives me peace of mind. Because I know that there have been times when, you know, it's night before a shoot, and then, oh, wait, I haven't storyboarded yet, and then, okay, and then it just calms. It's just calming, because then you're prepared. You're like, okay. And for me, it's like, as long as I get these 7 shots, and these 9 lines are said, I think, got the scene, you know? Like, once you're there,

then, oh my god, look at the... the... see those birds over in that tree? That looks so cool, let's get that shot. Maybe I'll use it, maybe I won't, you know, I mean, the thing is, once you're that prepared, then... then you're open to surprises. Then... and find yourself combining shots, like I said, like, you know, oh...Boom, and then bring it out...then go in on the hand with the ring in it, or whatever, you know, like...yay! You know, suddenly it's like...You've invented something, but you've done it along a kind of armature of incident in order, or images in order. I think that's...

Hector: Yeah. I'm just intrigued on, like, yeah, what other people's approach is to that, I guess, and, like, because everyone... yeah, some people are, some people aren't. For stuff I've done, I feel like I always kind of, every time I've come to, like, edit something, I feel like the start of the film is, the first 2 minutes or whatever, that's, like, the most, like...intricate in terms of, like, camera moves and things like that.

Charles Pinion: So do you have, like, a Vimeo page of your films or anything?

Hector: Yeah, I have, like, I've just been putting things up on YouTube, and .

Charles Pinion: At some point, let me... give me those links, I'd love to see what you're...

Hector: Yeah, sure, I'll send them over after. In part of my stuff, I've been obviously following from, like, the sort of early 40s onwards, like, Did you ever get into that sort of, like, early sort of experimental film canon of stuff, like Maya Darren and... Stan Brakhage, or...

Charles Pinion: I was gonna say, Stan Brakhage. You know, I'm... I... because I was an art student, so I did... I went to a lot of movies, and I went... and I did see a bunch of...Chantal Akerman, for some reason, was someone who really impacted me early on. Chantal Akerman and Tarkovsky, some of them are... You know, the pantheon of great filmmakers. But I feel like I... only fairly recently, and by that maybe 20 years ago or something, I think I finally sat down and watched a bunch of Maya Deren, because it was available, you know, now you can find Maya Deren. Harder to track that stuff down, a different... But if I was in an art class, or we're gonna...A field trip to the cinema. Oh, cool, you know, like, I always love that kind of stuff. I don't know, are you familiar with Vincent Albarano's book, Aesthetic Deviations, that Head Press put out? It's a Britain... I mean, he's from Ohio, but it's a British company called HeadPress that is a... I mean, it's a great

Publishing House. You should check that out anyway. But he did a book called Aesthetic Deviations, which was, I think, his master's thesis on shot on video cinema, because he's just said no one... he was a film major, and he, already, I don't know if he's... actually, I think he's made some Super 8 stuff, but in any case, he just said no one had done anything on... shot on video as a serious thesis-type thing. And in his thing on Twisted Issues, he did come... he made some comparisons to Maya Deren and stuff, which I... I was like...Cool, I mean, I'll take it.

Hector: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Charles Pinion: Awesome. I love... What a wonderful thing to be... to evoke.

Hector: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think... I've not been kind of...focusing, like, solely on videotape, because obviously a lot of these people, like, meshes of the afternoon was done on, like, 16mm...And, like, all of the... like, most of the cinema transgression stuff is, like, Super 8.

Charles Pinion: Yup.

Hector: Yeah, I think it's... it's kind of interesting looking at... I guess, obviously, people now... now are using those kinds of mediums in a, like, a kind of nostalgic way, somehow, or, aesthetic... like, for aesthetic purpose, which is kind of...Interesting, and of course, it was, like, you know, It was, purely just pragmatic, like. And I think it's kind of interesting, like, I've only seen Busted Babies, but, like, Kasper making something on 4K, because it's so intriguing to think, like, how that would... because I feel a lot of the energy of Busted Babies, like, the visuals of that film is, like, I feel it lends itself to... to what it's shot on, for sure. Yeah.

Charles Pinion: Right, right. It's... the movie's called Vic and Tarstar's Scarecrow Factory, I think is what it's called, and it's a collaboration between Kasper and Brewce Longo. And, Longo did A Corpse for Christmas, and Coven of the Black Cube, both of those shot in VHS. But recently, fairly recently, and like, more recently, like, 24, I think, 24 and 23. And I know that his first two movies he did shoot on VHS, but then, like I said, they got together to make this collaborative movie, and it's a movie about making movies, which I love. I love that genre. So, like, you're watching something, you're kind of engaged, and suddenly okay, cut, you know, and, well, you know, and

then, oh, you know, because you're caught into that. I love that whole genre of... subgenre, whatever you would call it. So that's what this is.

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: And, you know, it feels like a... to me, it feels like a Bruce Longo movie. I mean, it, it, and I think there are some sections that are in VHS, and I think those are Kasper's, I mean, I have my own opinions about doing that, but I mean, I would never stop an artist from doing whatever they want to do. And, and you know, and then we'll see when I make this next one in 4K, it will be, I mean, the challenge, I think, is to have the... Interest in it... Be there, not just or at all because of its format. I mean, we'll see, we'll see. I mean, in a way, it almost automatically puts it in a kind of, different, kind of, gritty... pixelled world to do... to do it already in, VHS or something like that, and I... Just to me, as an artist. I don't want to do that. I want to... I want to push myself to the next thing, you know, so that. That's how I feel about that, you know. Because, I mean, I have a VHS camcorder, I have a Hi-8 camcorder, I have some DV cam camcorders. But I think I would just be annoyed at myself that when I'm editing, yeah, it's just not as sharp, like, I... You know, I... yeah, I don't wanna... again, I... I totally admire people doing what they want to do. So, do it... but to me, I feel like it would be kind of a crutch for me to do it on... some lower-res thing... I feel like... just personally, I feel like it'd be a failure of nerve on my part. No, just get out there, get into the arena, and fucking, you know, see what...

Hector: Yeah. I think, yeah, I guess, as well, like, a lot of people, It's what you're saying, like, as soon as you're shooting it on that, I guess people will come to that with, like, kind of a preconceived idea of, oh, this is a shot on video thing. And, like... Yeah, I guess you don't want to... you don't want to box yourself in, I guess. No one wants to box themselves in with just... the medium they're using, I guess, yeah.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, I don't, you know, I mean, I was in a short film recently with this guy, Case Esparros, do you know him, his name? His last name, E-S-P-A-R-R-O-S, his first name's Case. He's on Instagram and stuff, and he just had something come out from Vinegar Syndrome last year. That I can't remember the name of. He's more of an arty filmmaker, I would say. I mean, the short film that he... I'm just gonna keep dropping names. There's a filmmaker named Sam Spicoli, who

made a movie shot on VHS called Midnight Prowlers and... Anyway, she lives south... Southern California, so she...came up to shoot that on her camcorder, this short film that I'm in with Case. And then it showed at an art gallery, and it's, you know, it's 20 minutes long, whatever, and it just seemed a super appropriate...the kind of fuzzy graininess of the Super 8, and the... It all totally worked and I... I think it works just... Fine. So I either have a failure of nerve, because I don't want to do the same old thing or... I mean, to me, it is just an art thing, it's just, I want to...you're climbing hills, you know? Like, well, what is that next thing?

Hector: I think it's what's interesting now, because obviously it's, like, when I'm opting to, like, shoot on video, I'm making more hurdles for myself than I would be shooting it digitally, almost, because then it's like...it even just takes longer to look and edit it, I can only... I'll have to, you know, digitize it when the lab at the uni's open and stuff like that, so it's like, I can't just, you know, immediately take it home and just, you know...

Charles Pinion: But it might be worth it. You know, again, I don't want to discourage anyone from using some of these older... because it's not about the age. I mean, believe me, I've had this conversation with myself, should I make this next feature? I have a Hi8 camcorder, I have a digital that's... it would be high def, but not 4K. In certain respects, it would be easier. Because I feel like the more clarity, then you do have to deal with...Clearly, I'm not at peace yet, with my decision.

Hector: Yeah, not to discourage you from doing that either, like, yeah, it's, you know, it's up to you. It's up to everyone to, yeah, do what they want with their art, that's kind of a...

Charles Pinion: Right. I mean, it's, for me, I feel like... It would be an aesthetically safer choice to maybe go with the lower res thing. Because there's a... there's an intrinsic...quality to, say, a Hi8 image. Intrinsic, you know, lack of quality that creates that quality. And, like, everything's in 4K, like, right now, yeah, your phone shoots in 4K, everything's in 4K. So yeah, so I am... I don't think I'm gonna change my mind about that, but it is, it's definitely a... it's definitely a question. I'm not dismissing the use of a lower res... as an aesthetic choice, like, you know. Like, Super 8 has a wonderful quality, you know, that 16 doesn't, 35 certainly doesn't. I mean, that's... I think that's part of being an artist, too, you know, you're weighing things, you know.

Hector: I feel almost as well, it's like, yeah, it's when you're kind of not fully comfortable that kind of then, you know, once you're done, and then you look back, you think, like, yeah, it was probably, you know, like, that kind of tension of, like, is this the right, you know, choice to make this in that way, and then just going for it anyway, that's kind of, like, where I feel like...the best stuff comes from, otherwise, it does feel kind of safe, and then I guess you're not, I don't know, pushing yourself, or whatever.

Charles Pinion: And, you know, I have to say, like, 6 months ago, I didn't think I was gonna make another movie, kind of thing. But because of all this, there's been a lot of heat around Twisted Issues, and then I met the guys from Philadelphia and Kasper and all that stuff, and I'm like, oh! they've got a machine up there, you know, as far as, like, cast, and so basically I just...look at their movies. And I've been kind of casting from their movies. What's her story? What's, you know, and my buddy Dave, who played the bad guy in the backseat, who ultimately gets run through with the...He gives that speech about choice and so on, the ability to choose. He's gonna come up to Philadelphia and be in this movie playing a detective, and... anyway, it'll be fun. I mean, the thing is, bottom line, it'll be fun, and that's what I... Bruce and I, from Bloodsick Productions, who's Kasper's partner in some of these things. You know, he said, look, it's gonna be fun. He said, and we'll move fast. You know, we do move fast. That's just...And, you know, I spent, I moved back to LA, Hollywood, to try to get this movie made. It's called Thousand Eyes, the one I'm gonna make in Philadelphia, and you know, Long. Meetings. Tedium. Opinions. Everyone's fucking gotta weigh in on it. And now I just love that I'm gonna go up and make it in 5 days. Then I'll come home with my fucking movie, you know?

Hector: Yeah, that's super exciting, yeah.

Charles Pinion: You got any more questions?

Hector: Yeah, I guess... well, yeah, when you were working with Richard, like, how was... how was he to work with?

Charles Pinion: I mean, as an actor, he, you know, he's just a force of nature, basically, and you kind of just try to... control him for the shot. Like, his instincts are great, he knows film. I know there's one part in Red Spirit Lake that's this low-angle shot on him, and I came in to shoot it

straight up at him, you know, looking at him, and he goes, do a low angle, man. You know, too many straight-on angles in this movie. Which, I mean, great advice. And, like, suddenly, oh my god, it's so much more dramatic. You know, it's not like I've ever... never thought of it before, but it was sort of like, oh, in the present moment, he offered something which is not an actor offering it, it's a filmmaker offering it, you know. Actors offer it, I'm like, I don't know, you're trying to get your good side, but, you know, he just... You know, he was hard to control, basically, and there are scenes in there, like, you know, he'd laugh, you know, and...Come on, guy, we gotta get this, you know, he was...And then as a director, well, you've seen *The Bitches*, so... you know, we'd be all in position, whatever, and they, you know... Okay, okay, y'all, Find something to do. You know, it was just like funny, you know... Every time, instead of saying action, he would say, Find something to do. Which is kind of cool, I mean, you know. But, you know, his stuff isn't text-based.

Hector: Yeah, I think the film I've been kind of focusing on, that I've been writing about, is *You Killed Me First*.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, that one, yeah, that one does have...

Hector: Yeah, that one is kind of like...I guess it's the most, kind of concise, or, like, well, I mean, he's got shorter films, but I guess, like, the most, I guess you'd say it's got the most narrative, but...

Charles Pinion: Absolutely. Well, *Fingered*, of course.

Hector: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I've seen *Fingered* as well, yeah.

Charles Pinion: *You Kill Me First* is great, and *Fingered's* great, I mean, yeah, that's good stuff.

Hector: Yeah, I think this is what it's interesting seeing, because that's kind of... how I became aware of him. I knew about, David Wojnarowicz, the artist?

Charles Pinion: Yup.

Hector: I think one of my friends showed me a bit of *Where Evil Dwells* and I sort of realized, like, oh, he's in this thing that the guy that did the, you know, the cover of *Evol* by Sonic Youth, and it's kind of... it's the whole kind of community, I guess. And yeah even when they're, you know... even

when I come away, I'm like, that was... that was terrible, it's so in your face and, like, immediate and stuff, and...it just makes me think like, yeah, I could make something right now, you know.

Charles Pinion: Yup.

Hector: Yeah, I think as well what you were saying about, the, like, film within a film has a great effect, like, I've been watching quite a lot of, like, Brian De Palma's stuff recently, and I feel like, I've noticed multiple times, like they start off, like, I just watched Sisters... and that starts off with this, like, fake game show. And Blow Out as well, you think you're watching the film, and then they're like, cut, the scream's terrible, and it's like, it's a great device, I think, yeah.

Charles Pinion: You know, Day for... Truffaut's Day for Night is another great film about, making movies. La Nuit pour la jeu pour nuit? Something like that. And, what are others? You know, I mean, the player...the Robert Altman film, The Player.

Hector: Yeah, I've seen, I've seen The Player.

Charles Pinion: I... I love the ones that... and there's a Haneke, you know Haneke?

Hector: Yeah.

Charles Pinion: I think, Cache, I think, might be have some elements of the... the protagonist...I just know... I think it was that movie where, you know, I'm just engaged in this, like, dramatic... and they're... I'm like... and then suddenly cut! How was I? Was I good? You know, I'm like... Fooled me, you know. So yeah, the charming part, what I really do like about Vic and Tarstar's... Scarecrow Factory, the most recent Kasper thing. Kasper has a new thing she's working on, Garchaster's Cornblade. Her names are great, her titles are...

Hector: Yeah, I've, like, seen... I've seen the names just on I think just on Kasper's Instagram, or on the Bloodsick Instagram page. Right. They're just... I don't know, I'm so intrigued to, like, watch more of those.

Charles Pinion: Yeah, she's a... she... she, I think, is a true artist, force of nature kind of person. There's no real good part for her in A Thousand Eyes, plus she lives in Kentucky, so she's not close enough to Philadelphia to, I think, make it work. But I'm hoping she'll do some artwork, because

there's a character... In the thing who...his art is in it, and I asked her, would you like to do the artwork for it? Because she, you know, just... I like getting people's energies, you know? I like... I like... one of my favorite things is the credits. And they're people I know. Oh! Oh yeah, that, you know, like, it's... I like making movies with friends and having fun, you know. And, you know, like, I don't put people at risk. I mean, Red Spirit Lake, people were cold, it was in the winter, but, you know, I would never... if someone doesn't feel comfortable doing something, some sort of...we'll find another way to do it. I mean, I'm the guy at the camera, that's the way I look at it. Well, you don't want to do that? Okay, you know, like, in Twisted Issues when the guy gets hung, you know, we did want him to kind of, like, have the noose around his neck while we were doing one of the things, and he goes, no fucking way. So instead, you just see his... you just see his feet, you know, of course, hanging on. And that... it sells it just fine, like...it's just not my thing. I just don't want people to feel uncomfortable. I mean, you know, an artist being pushed to their limits is one thing, but I'm just saying, someone really doesn't want to do something, we will find another way to do it, you know.

Hector: Yeah, no, it's super important. Yeah, you're there to push your own limits, not other people's, I guess.

Charles Pinion: I mean, the thing is, I'm just gonna say, like, during the audition process, if you were told that, you know, you're gonna get fake blood on your face or something, If that's a problem, then, you know. So what I'm saying is, if someone said they're willing to do it, and then they're on set, and they're like, I don't want to get out of my face, I'm like...okay, let's figure out how we can do it without getting blood on your face, then, you know. And that's... I might be disappointed, because you... we had a whole conversation about it, but again, I'm not... I'm just not gonna bully. I'm not gonna bully. Yeah, it's not worth it. And then the movie's not what I wanted but that person isn't gonna talk to me anymore. I don't know. I don't think my work is a...Aaaaah! Like, it has to be... no, it must be this way. You know, no, we'll figure it out.

Hector: That's the great thing as well about, like film and collaborating with other people is it's like... it isn't... it almost isn't just yours, it's, like, them. Like, when you're letting someone... you

may have written a whole thing but then, you know, you're working with someone else because they will bring something inevitably different anyway, so...

Charles Pinion: Absolutely, absolutely.

### ***Appendix B – Discussion with Kasper Meltedhair***

Hector Laidlaw: From looking at your work, shooting on video seems important to you. Previous generations of filmmakers such as Cecilia Condit and Charles Pinion are also known for using VHS but more pragmatically cos it was the most accessible medium for them. With digital video available to mostly everyone nowadays, what relationship do you feel you have to using video?

Kasper Meltedhair: I grew up watching horror/cartoon VHS every day until I was about 9, so I have a deep nostalgia for VHS which floods out of my art and music. I think the biggest reason I prefer filming on VHS is because digital looks the same as real life, while VHS makes life look like a refried painting.

HL: Bloodsick Productions seems really collaborative independent community. What benefit do you feel this has as opposed to a more traditional corporate studio system of operation?

KM: Every experience you have should be fuelling love and happiness. That's Bloodsick. Corporate is void of the magic of art.

HL: My research so far has been tracing from Maya Deren in the 40s and her relationship to socialist organising and film, to Richard Kern and the Cinema of Transgression making really nihilistic works while under the economic hardship of 80s New York. Are these filmmakers that have also inspired you and if not, what have been your reference points in film?

KM: I'm inspired by *Ozone: Attack of the Redneck Mutants*, *Dark Planet*, *Meet the Hollowheads*, *Video Violence*. I was also inspired by working with Donald Farmer and seeing his methods, as

well as Caroline Kopko. I try to void myself of reference points though because I only want to make stuff unlike anything I've seen before.

HL: Given what I've been looking at so far are there more unsung filmmakers that I should check out?

KM: Chester Turner, Andy Heck Boyd