

Cathy Lee Crane
**Letters to
Harun**

01/05

Wed 5/28/2014 8:05 a.m.

Dear Harun,

I hope this finds you and finds you well. I wanted to propose something to you.

My Pasolini film will be showing at the Arsenal as part of the Pasolini Roma exhibit at MGB during the last weekend of September. I have been invited to the ICI on 9/25 to present previous work.

I wanted to know if you'd be interested in having a conversation with me that evening about three of my short films, *The Girl from Marseilles*, *Sketches after Halle*, and *Adrift*. I suppose we could talk about the flâneur, the archeology of historical remains, and me and my camera (perhaps our work on the prison project too).

I await your thoughts on this.

Much love to you and Antje.

Cathy

Mon 6/2/2014 4:02 p.m.

Dear Cathy,

it took me some days to find out about my schedule. And I am free on 9/25 and even in Berlin and am happy to confirm that I will stand with you on the stage of the Arsenal – or in front of it.

On Sep 9th an exhibition with new work of mine is scheduled at Greene Naftali. Perhaps you are around and we could finalize the program and the procedure in Berlin!

Love,

Harun

Tue 6/3/2014 10:08 a.m.

Ah how wonderful, Harun!

My first thought might be to consider one of your early short films alongside one of mine ... perhaps ...

Remember Tomorrow with Sketches after Halle

Einschlafgeschichten 1–5 with Adrift

The Taste of Life with The Girl from

Marseilles or On the Line

The ICI event is a sidebar to the Pasolini and is intended to ground the viewing of that film at Arsenal with a look into the conceptual drive of my early work.

Much love.

Really grateful and excited to have a public conversation with you.

Cathy

Fri 6/13/2014 9:40 a.m.

Dodici, Dicembre

Dear Cathy,

Have you ever heard about this film by Pasolini and others?

I learned today that a copy was found.

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More soon,
Harun

Mon 6/23/2014 9:49 a.m.

Dear Harun,

I have downloaded the film which no, I had never heard of.

ICI thought it best for us to consider our conversation around Pasolini, perhaps works that the Arsenal doesn't show or something about his formal approach to the critiques of capitalism that your work (I wonder what of your works you could look at with Pasolini in mind) takes up.

Well, how would you feel about the following proposal:

**Adrift in the Gesture of Hands: A
Conversation with Harun Farocki and Cathy
Lee Crane**

In *The Cinema of Poetry*, Pasolini introduces the notion of a system of gestural signs. Harun Farocki and Cathy Lee Crane will discuss this idea (among others) in the context of viewing their collaboration (*Prison Images*) as well as some of their previous individual work.

So of course, I wonder WHAT films and if one of your own might fit into his schemes of the language of reality or free indirect discourse or any of Deleuze's takes on this essay.

I hope you get a nice summer break. You were so present in the conversation at Flaherty last week in part because Jill Godmillow showed *What Farocki Taught ...*

big love to you, antje, and anna.
xoxoxxCathy

Thu 6/26/2014 7:29 a.m.

Dear Cathy,

because I have a new computer some mails are missing. I can't find the one in which you proposed the titles we should show together in the Arsenal. Please resend. I remember that some titles are not available – luckily, in some cases! – and I will propose others. I'd love to do the Arsenal event with you – when? – but i don't think I should perform at a P-conference.

I have a fellowship, I attended a summer school, I had to sit on far too many podiums. I'm not a Pasolini-expert – Germany is full of young film scholars!

Love from Weimar.

On the way to here I always pass through Halle.
Harun

Mon 6/30/2014 1:10 p.m.

Hello Harun,

Greetings in your Weimar holiday. It seems absolutely certain that we would need to discuss at ICI on Thursday 9/25 our collaboration and earlier work in the context of Pasolini's essay "The Cinema of Poetry." I can appreciate if you would prefer not to do this though I think we could have fun. And really, I've talked with enough scholars that as practitioners it could be great. But again, I would understand if that is not your preference. When you can, please do let me know. And of course we shall see each other in NYC earlier in September and Berlin in the latter part of that month no matter what you decide.

I look forward, as always, to that.

Much love,

Cathy

Tue 7/1/2014 3:33 p.m.

Dear Cathy,

please excuse my stubbornness, but I would really prefer not to do something on PP!

Far too many times I have recently sat on podiums without feeling comfortable about it – I imagined what i would think about somebody who has not really something urgent to say about a topic.

I would love to do something with you about your films. And it should be your evening – not mine.

Because we collaborated on it, we should perhaps include *Convicts* – if you want. If not, I would be fine if we just show works of yours and talk about it.

Best,

Harun

Wed 7/2/2014 9:20 a.m.

No problem Harun!

I look forward to the moment we can talk publicly about my work ...

Love to your ladies!

Cathy

Fri 7/18/2014 3:37 p.m.

Hi Cathy,

I want to put you on the guest list for a superb dinner at Greene Naftali on September 9. Are you around?

Best wishes,

Harun

9/26/2014

Dear Harun,

Someone steals your name plaque. What a fuss. My rambling attempt to follow the map Antje makes for me – past Brecht to you (she repeats this) meets with failure. Perhaps my

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story of getting lost makes you laugh that very generous laugh of yours. I find myself here in Berlin as planned. A gray September day. The event at ICI and the screening at Arsenal, fantastic. Except you did not stand with me there. So, I go to you here, undeterred by the almost heavy-as-the-sky fact of your very stubborn absence.

I load the rental car with water. Betraying my own anxiety over entering a maximum-security prison in Southern California, I insist on taking precautions. That makes you laugh too. 1999. You and I together in a cell as the bars close behind us, and the camera, and the guard who shows us how he checks for contraband in the mattress. Lockdown. Another incident in the yard. And you insist on watching very closely, lovingly even. Somewhere the dripping of a nearby spigot brings to mind the impossibly beautiful end of Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*.

Yes, impossible. I cannot find the beauty in your passing. I turn to Antonioni, the weight of things, to places emptied of people. I read:

For Kant, the difference between the beautiful and the sublime rests on a distinction between a bounded object of contemplation and "a formless object"

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which has the capacity to extend the power of the human imagination. The ideal of beauty in nature "carries with it a purposiveness in its form," whereas an object of sublime contemplation may "appear to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that."¹

I suspect I find my looking for you compelling. Like my looking for Breton's *Nadja*, like my looking for Feininger's *Halle*, like my looking for *Simone Weil*, and then *Pasolini*. What an extraordinary horror, though, this particular longing. The colored squares placed in the dust of a construction site. Comparing. Bricks. A still life of fruit arranged for the camera. Lovers' hands touch while passing a coin. Chaos in the state-run television station. The cigarette burns flesh. Workers leave the factory. Not only these images but how to watch them; potentially even why to watch our bodies awkwardly positioning themselves and our tools in the labor, the strangeness that is our social/public body making our politics. His hands, you told me. Not



Cathy Lee Crane, *Vanishing Point*, 2014. The photograph shows Dorotheenstadt Cemetery in Berlin, where Harun is buried.

the talking head. And so, outside of Sacramento, I tilt down to frame the gesturing hands of the instructor for correctional officer training. He asks his recruits whether the gunshot is a “good shot.” When is it warranted to shoot a prisoner? Watch. Frame. His hands. These are like the hairdresser’s hands in *Shoah*. This is the language of the body that betrays us, by showing to us a discontinuity between our acts and our words. Pasolini called this language the cinema of poetry. Stanislavski called it subtext; the relationship of dialogue to behavior. You are an elegant Marxist. You will critique the regimes of power but you can embrace the messenger – sometimes. Like I refuse the past tense. Sometimes.

The windowpane is what allows us to see, and the rail, what allows us to move through. These are two complementary modes of separation. The first creates the spectator’s distance: You shall not touch; the more you see, the less you hold – a dispossession of the hand in favor of greater trajectory for the eye. The second inscribes indefinitely, the injunction to pass on; it is its order written in a single but endless line: go, leave, this is not your country, and neither is that—an imperative of separation which obliges one to pay for an abstract ocular domination of space by leaving behind any proper place, by losing one’s footing.²

It is your never-condescending compassion for the absurdity of us, our living-ness, this thing or things we do. When we pulled into the little motel somewhere in the Imperial Valley, there was a casino, a disco, and other unattended amenities in a lonely desert. Waiting, we had a beer. Yours was serious business, though never so serious that you couldn’t discuss it in an empty disco over a beer. This project which you made it your business to pursue; to watch very closely; to never stop looking at just how gross and oftentimes subtle our own complicity would be in building structures, regimes of our own oppression, containment, surveillance. Antje is right. Our job now is to think with you.

You are the reason I kept making films. Collaborating with you on *I Thought I was Seeing Convicts* transformed my understanding of the body. In being framed (or captured) we are both shaped by and resist its inscription. The warden let us have that footage of the lovers who meet in the visitation room at the Calipatria State Prison and say, “One day we will all have a bar code here.” He moved his hand across his forehead.

You never stopped exploring the apparatus of the cinema for its implications and

complicities with the quotidian. You found the notion of an “apolitical” cinema absurd. Who then shall pick up your mantel? Who will guide us in order that we do not forget the technologies and mapping that make us?

And how is it that we have not yet built (though perhaps now we will) a dictionary of cinematic gestures? What you began in the *Expression of Hands*, then in *Workers Leaving the Factory*, remains an unfinished work. Such a work, I hope, is not intended to find the reductions of our affective states, the least common denominator required of AI laboratories. No, this effort will operate like an inoculation against the Soma Holiday that is rocking us with increasingly jangling speed. Softly. Innocuous. Nothing, you taught us, is that.

Your words to me as I was finishing my film *Pasolini’s Last Words*: “I find the idea to repeat a gesture out of a film – the cross with hands in handcuffs – great. A real approach. Like remembering something, like whistling a symphony.” Who writes, “like whistling a symphony”? Within the poetic cinema that words like these have encouraged me to explore, I inhabit that which cannot be named; through which, by failing to escape inscription, an outside one can only wish for appears. The ineffable. In those long, impossible days of August, I took up residence in this unknowable place.

x

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Cathy Lee Crane has been making hybrid narrative/documentary films on 16 mm since 1994. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and individual grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the San Francisco Film Commission. Her first feature, *Pasolini's Last Words*(2012), enjoyed its world premiere at the Montréal Festival du Nouveau Cinema as a "gem of world cinema" in the Panorama International section, and is being distributed on DVD in 2015 by Salzgeber. Her short films have been broadcast on European television and are distributed on 16 mm by Canyon Cinema and Lightcone. She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema, Photography, and Media Arts at Ithaca College.

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1
Matthew Gandy, "Landscapes of deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* vol. 28, no. 2 (June 2003): 218–237.

2
Michel de Certeau, "Railway Navigation and Incarceration," in *The Practice of Everyday*, trans. Steven Rendall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

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