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INTIMATE STRANGER. DIARIO DE TRABAJO. SELECCIÓN 1989-1991

INTIMATE STRANGER. WORK JOURNAL. SELECTED ENTRIES 1989-1991



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January 31, 1989

1:54 am

What is this all about?

Why does knowing that I would one day do this make it all that much more special? Why is it especially pertinent that I intuitively chose to do it now, at this point in time, at this stage/phase of my life when (after *The Family Album*) I am confident enough and synchronistically evolved enough to suffer the patience, to risk the paradoxes, and to confront the spirits of my maternal familial roots.

February 2, 1989

2:02 am

I was slightly disturbed by my mother this evening. She asked on the phone why it was or would be necessary to bring up negative or unflattering aspects or comments about JC. Why can't we (she asked) just remember the good in him, his good deeds only. I responded by saying that we all are composites of flattering and unflattering characteristics and traits, and that a fuller understanding of both sides helps us to know a person. I stressed to her that I wanted to know who this person JC was. Of course I didn't mention to her that this very issue will ultimately be at the crux of the film itself, and infuses the element of risk throughout the process—how to

reconcile truth, mythology and fact with a sensitivity to the feelings of the living who have altered, distorted, and hybridized memory, emotion, story, reflection and insight into various convenient fictions—some valid and appealing, most self-serving and facile.

AND—

Who am I as his grandson to burst into these sacred places and start rushing about making trouble, causing tears, opening wounds, exposing scar tissue, and raising the dead. My uncle Al said that he had a love/hate relationship to this project. That's the appropriate tension for all of us.

I am myself a character in this play. I am in it. Not passive, but actively seeking out and stirring up the water that on its shimmering surface still retains reflections of past motion and emotion and then calls me forward to jump in, dive in, swim around, and hopefully touch the bottom.

July 22, 1989

1:37 am

I am going about this project like a private detective, like an archaeologist, exploring the site stone by stone—in this case—letter/document by letter/document (18 boxes worth), noting any or everything there is to learn from each new bit of evidence. Circumstantial, tangential, mundane, provocative, curious—each detail is a piece of a puzzle—the image, size, scope and meaning of which is still and perhaps forever a mystery. I want to know and get a feel for the characters, their inter-relationships, how they evolve—who said what when, and maybe even deduce why. I want to lay out a geography so that every new clue fills in a bit of the map. In short, I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING and simply do not know any other way to go about doing it.

My grandfather, Joseph Cassuto left behind a mountain to climb. there may not even be a good view when I get there, but it is the journey that is the treat.

August 17, 1989

2:59 am

I have come to realize why he saved all of his letters. I give the reason by asking a rhetorical question:

What would you do if virtually every letter that you ever received...

thanked you for some kindness you inflicted,

couldn't express enough gratitude for some gift you presented, and in general wished you and your family a lifetime of happiness, special treatment in God's heaven, and the promise that you would never ever be forgotten, if for no other reason than they would spend the rest of their lives trying to find the words to convey, to fully convey their appreciation of you?

You might do what he did. You might save them as (if nothing else) a testimonial to yourself—a way of reminding yourself who you are—a form of currency—and—if you're lucky enough, someone someday might come along and read them and/or write about them and/or salute you, but at least remember you, who you were, what you did and how you were thought of.

This is absolutely fantastic really, this process I am undergoing. I am actually meeting this man in this way, digesting his ups, his downs, his sense of mission, his gifts, and of course, his tragic flaws. How many?/Not too many people get a chance to do this. Biographers and historians of course. But how many get a chance to do this about a relative, a parent or a grandparent with whom there are fabrics of connection—actual and unspoken threads of affinity—sparks of cultural similarity and/or difference, familial pattern and mysterious unknowable genetic links.

August 24, 1989

2:51 am

Who am I to claim ownership of "family property? Who am I to publicly disclose family information—to refute or explore dark or hidden or forgotten family mythology? To open wounds that have finally healed and TO MAKE SOME NEW INCISIONS?

To apply this "photo-therapy." What are my credentials? Who do I think I am?

December 17, 1989

3:11 am

I need to create primary experience. I need to invigorate my life, actively absorb everything that derives from this quest, in order to grow into the more mature, wiser, and certainly more vulnerable artist that needs to report back to the rest of humanity with the story.

I can't help but believe that all of his material remains, his personal archives—that veritable mountain of stuff was waiting for me, was indeed planted for me, and that I have come to a plateau of my own destiny....The fact that I believe all of this is in itself a state of self-delusion, a self-fulfilling synchronistic fantasy. I am allowing myself to be drawn into it and have in fact gained attention and funding for a project that essentially lives in my head.

Sometimes I can't help but feel my grandfather is somehow watching all of this, somehow presiding over the events that have and will unfold. Sometimes I imagine that he is with his old friend

Mr. Tojiro Kiba and several other Japanese friends, all of them eager to see me through. I feel protected—in the hands of the gods, so to speak....I can't help but remember that Mr. Kiba wrote to my grandfather, "surely God will bless you some time, sooner or later." Somehow this seems like later.

Tokyo, Japan
January 15, 1990
9:15 pm

Trés fatigué.

A sightseeing day to Kamakura, Hakone and environs. Bullet train home.

Shot six rolls of film today.

Some shots inspired. Some shots habitual.

Somehow it all feels so detached. I come here like a fool, spirited grandson full of facts, details, insight, and questions, the ink barely dry off my pen and the guy died almost 16 years ago for gods sake. These people won't care. I'm fetishizing events, people, stories, and memories, that these people had no reason to think about as it was happening, let alone remember now.

March 24, 1990
6:35 pm

Transcribed from informal notes waiting in a car written on 2/20/90.

...My instincts after college took me away from the closed circuit/insular "ghetto" of avant garde cultism and clubism. I thought, as I still do, that I had to find my own way, assert my own hybrid solutions to ever more complicated and challenging projects.....

...I cannot make traditional form solutions to *Unfinished Business* [earlier title before *Intimate Stranger*]. I must suffer the patience and anxiety of discovering and/or sculpting an original form for the film—frame by frame if need be—erecting my own miniature architecture.

...I am a personal filmmaker—one who tries to (who needs to) do everything—not out of gallant bravado—but out of a deep necessity to be present in the formation of the work at every turn, to savor the entire process of the film's making—and to tax, but thereby to expand, my own sense of encompassing and accomplishment.

August 23, 1990

2:36 am

I'm nervous but
I'm also thrilled
to be in this position.

To have evolved with the entire process of making the film to the point of discerning how to codify the various textual, linguistic and story-telling elements into a work that I am committed to being "exquisitely unique."

"Not knowing" what to do has allowed me the possibility of (re) inventing (for myself) a new documentary form. Of being open to a film that find its own solutions, that can solve itself.

Imagine that.

The film knows the answers. I must be tender enough to recognize and acknowledge them and then enact them.

December 26, 1990

1:55 am

This typewriter technique can become too intrusive and I must therefore be careful that I am judicious in my usage...There is a part of me that wants to go extreme—to use a bell/keystroke for each and every change of image/source!

This might be too much, but after all, when one is typing a letter, or typing a poem—romantic/imagist or even a haiku, ONE CANNOT ESCAPE THE INCESSANT CLATTER/CLATTER/CLICK/CLICK/SHIFT/BELL rhythms of musical accompaniment that inherently feed the very act of writing/typing itself.

March 4, 1991

3:29 am

As I sit here editing, each time I hang a piece of film over and around my neck, I feel an ancient memory—that of the old Jewish custom tailors on either side of my family tree—grandfather (father's side) and great-grandfather (JC's father)—and I know that I too am making a fine custom garment, exquisite and authentic, thread by each and every thread. The other male great-grandparents were either teachers or Rabbis. That's what I am as I sit here making this film: a mixture of custom tailor and Rabbi.

