

Jim Lopez Discusses Film with

Raymond Salvatore Harmon

Jim Lopez: I had to sit down and get baked to watch all your films (your movies tend to demand attention), and I didn't make it through all of them. I did watch all your mtv's documentaries and 1/3 of your films that are posted on raymondharmon.com, with breaks to fill my glass and roll another spliff.

Your films are difficult to watch. They're not fluid. They force a person to listen, announce correctly and pay attention; otherwise, people just don't bother. There seems to be no middle ground, you're either in for a definite five-to-twenty minutes+ moment (moments are usually understood to be shorter in duration depending on the size or gravity of the experience) or you go fuck off to the bar; actually, your films ignite insightful, or invoke belligerent discussions. What does duration mean to you? Are you a meditative person or medicated person, both or neither?

Raymond Salvatore Harmon: My filmwork tends to fall into a couple of categories. Some are made from the point of view of creating a cinematic experience, especially my early films. These can take the form of music videos like "Rispedal" the Magik Markers video, or abstract short films like "Les Fantomes de Lumiere." The other part of my filmography has a more specific intent in mind than entertainment. The longer works like *YHVH* or *Tree of Life/Tree of Knowledge* are much more contemplative and often challenging films that are meant for a meditative kind of practice. They are made using subliminal content and specifically chosen strobing color frequencies to trigger psychological reactions in the viewer. This part of my work is exploring something beyond the cinematic format, often referencing ritual transcendentalism. Within the context of this kind of work longer durations are required for the effect to really begin to manifest.

Jim: Your videos tend to have intense shots of light in them. Why? What metaphor, if any, does light play in your mind, your thinking, experiencing, interpreting your environment? The tone of your films are like meditative chants occurring in technological ancient gompas.

RSH: All cinema is essentially just light, it's an illusory framework of motion, an architecture of form and color. When I started making films with 16mm projectors I was first dealing with the film as a physical object. But as

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I began to expand the process into something performative its expressiveness revealed a complexity in controlling the manifestation of light, especially in a live setting. As I gravitated away from celluloid in favor of video signal paths and feedback I became aware of the algorithm dictating the shape of the light itself. The path through the electronics that was shaping the unfolding imagery.

This evolution of light revealed something akin to a transcendental experience. Almost accidentally I had discovered a kind of conduit through which to access certain meditative concepts. Within this conduit I experimented with subliminals and found the effect to be exactly what I had been searching for; Something like an alchemy of light.

Jim: Are you saying that if someone gives the proper attention to *YHVH* or *Tree of Life/Tree of Knowledge* that that person may indeed go through a sort of alchemical distillation, that is, something in their consciousness will undergo a profound revolution? Not that your intentions were presumptuous, rather how much of your use of light was directed by your interest in alchemy as a philosophical way of life, i.e., using raw materials to divine structures and then discovering that the same disciplines apply to designing

The soul. You seem to be saying, if I understand correctly, is that what you discovered was that light is evolving, maybe even communicating with the device (camera) that you are using to capture it?

RSH: *YHVH* was my first transcendental film. Up to that point I had approached filmmaking from a much more traditional, though experimental, perspective. I had been inspired early on by Harry Smith's work and later by Norman McLaren and Stan Brakhage. When I was working with film I was dealing with the surface of the celluloid. It was about the process of physical transformation and then with modified film projectors I was creating overlaps and other visual effects while I was showing the film. This slowly became a performative process.

When I started moving toward video one of the things that interested me was the feedback loop. It was very instantaneous and 'live' as a creative tool. I put together a chain of devices (tv, early digital still cameras, VHS tape deck, etc) and began experimenting with the feedback. My work has always been about experimentation. Everything I do comes out of utilizing the process to create raw content and then editing that content to give it form. (this is true whether I am working in film, video, sound, paint, whatever). I created about 6 hours worth of material that would be eventually edited down to the 22 minutes of the film.

During the initial experimental process I realized that this kind of medium could be the trigger for a spiritual experience. What stuck clearly in my mind was that what people call 'god' was somehow 'inside' the video loop. That it is in everything but somehow the video loop could reveal that truth more clearly to someone looking at it in the right way, from a specific perspective. Like a mantra made of light instead of sound.

Once I started researching this field (video as a trigger of thought/mental state) I came across tons of info on photic driving and subliminal images. Through some friends in Poland I got Soviet era research papers that had documented color and strobing frequency rates, (there is an astounding book on the research the Soviets did in the 50s for using cinema as a tool for propaganda.) Those plus some of the papers published by John Lilly in his early years on subliminals and visual periphery all sort of gave me a framework for how the functioning part of the video could be developed. After that it was about serious editing.

Jim: *YHVH* is a genius addition to the genre of Apocalyptic films. It goes beyond destruction through a series of movements that transcend earth, but cyclically returns to earth until the duration of the journey resolves tranquilly.