

NOTES ON *JUCKS*

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written on the occasion of the preview screening of Raef van Putten's feature *Jucks*

Obelus Offsite

Berlin, July 18, 2025

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What follows is a sequence of loose intuitions and impressions.

I think it is safe to say we are here gathered for an act of cinema. Though I would suggest that what we encounter with *Jucks* compels us to interrogate what exactly constitutes and characterizes such an act in our contemporary moment.

Cinema, as apparatus, has always functioned through a specific strategy: the prolonged duration of being somewhere without being *fully* there. A brain chamber, dark and velvety, where spectators occupy the same space while remaining fundamentally alone in their subjective encounter with the image. This spatial paradox—simultaneous collectivity and isolation—has defined cinema's phenomenological structure since its inception. In this sense, cinema is perhaps nothing short of a perfected, perverted version of ancient Greek theater, which may itself be a technologically more efficient, thus by rulebook, more advanced version of the Biblical scapegoat. In the Bible, a scapegoat is one of a pair of kid goats that is released into the wilderness, taking with it all the sins and impurities of the community, while the other is sacrificed; in Greek tragedy, it is the mythical hero to provide the ethical repository for the community of the *polis*, allowing the citizen to conclude an evening of festivities with a heightened consciousness of what is at stake in the management of life thanks to the distant, yet cathartic experience of fate, tragedy and absolution on the stage.

Moving down this track, cinema could be understood as an apex, an optimal technology of embodiment. Unlike other more 'advanced' media forms that demand physical compromise (the handheld screen, the strapped headset, the implanted chip), cinema achieves maximum affective intensity through minimal bodily intrusion, almost perfectly simulating the natural posture of rest in the viewer, and the organic movement of their dreams. It operates at something like the limit point of mediated experience. Since its consolidation during Hollywood's classical period between the two world wars, cinema has consistently functioned as a constitutive force in our collective (un)conscious. Films and series have been providing the symbolic coordinates through which we navigate desire and identification to an extent that is objectively, unambiguously equal to—if not wider than—lived experience. All we dream is closure, a happy ending, the repair a good script offers to a broken life. We all wish to leave our foreign country to head home as Bill Murray leaves his in the final moments of *Lost in Translation*. We all live to know what Bob whispered to Charlotte, words we cannot hear, words that matter precisely because they cannot be heard, leaving space for us our to complete them with possibly our own story, most likely our fantasy.

Now, a quarter of a century into the 2000s, in light of its industry's degeneration the apparatus of cinema can still carry us to radical transformations. Vexed by its bosses' productive dementia and amnesia, cinema not only maintains a potential for nurturing collective dreaming: it also becomes an opportunity for interruption. A means of halting the seemingly smooth flow of an over-stimulating yet profoundly under-nourishing system. Contemporary cinema, at its most rigorous, is a deployment of ancient means of prolongment that make us break, wait, look and listen, to discover.

To pick at a recent example of this deployment, consider Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2023), featuring Tilda Swinton. Here is cinema operating at the extreme limit of temporal expansion—endless takes, static compositions, a deliberate assault on spectatorial impatience. The film's temporal structure performs a durational resistance by refusing the accelerated rhythms that have colonized both our media environment and our modes of attention. The initial experience of *Memoria* often registers as tedium, even failure. Yet the film's true operation occurs in its afterlife, in the way it continues to work within spectatorial consciousness long after the screening concludes. This delayed effect is really not a delay but a continuation: of the acute awareness of a habit—consumption—that curbs the specificity of experience; and of a presence that resists comprehension but requires attention: the details of an-other vision of the world.

Jucks seems to me to play within a similar logic—albeit posthumously. We are already in an afterlife. The film opens with a scene of awakening: a human raises from the waters of river that once (and again, and again) witnessed a massacre, one of their limbs indelibly stained in black. We then proceed to follow the character's wanderings within a post-industrial, dystopian scenery, a land saturated by a dark omniscient radio frequency, flooded with a hallucinogenic substance called Crude. The protagonist wants nothing to do with this world, and searches high and low for only one thing: Gold.

Jucks could be considered as a reflection on how experiences of scarcity and desire interact when framed by two major aesthetics: fetishized ruination, and the ever-green, recursive architecture that is montage. As artist Pierre Huyghe has it, "it is by montage, the way we combine and relate images, that we can create a representation of an event that is perhaps more precise than the event itself." Huyghe suggests that cinematic representation doesn't simply reproduce historical events but produces new forms of historical knowledge through the very process of combination and relation. This process is perhaps the great miracle that distinguishes art from the lot of other product-driven practices, ensuring its autonomy, its capacity to form its own laws and principles and, thus, sustain life and resist oppression. In this context, we might understand *Jucks* as engaging what Huyghe terms 'third memory', the displacement of an event onto its representation in order to create a new object of translation. The film doesn't merely document the protagonist's quest: it moves on to produce such quest as a more or less legible, yet definitely inscribed historical phenomenon, and does so through its specific deployment of cinematic techniques. The beauty here is that the historical phenomenon ends up being as vivid as it is intimate, and eventually untranslatable; the result being that psychosis might be read in the film just as much as ecstasy. And it is precisely by preserving this oscillation that the work remains rich and contemporary. In alignment with Michel Foucault's insight that history is always micro-history, *Jucks* shifts our attention to the molecular level of experience. In the film, fiction operates not as fabrication but as production. This production occurs through interruptions and discontinuities, through the strategic deployment of ellipses that refuse narrative closure. Within this micro-historical framework, experiences function as 'effects', the term Foucault picked to point at how objective historical elements produce new forms of subjectivity. The film departs from the waters of Denver's Sand Creek to develop into a personal experience made of the same matter of myth, and it ultimately remains up to the audience to judge—if indeed they are into judgement—whether the path is legitimate, or if it will be casted into the desert as a sin.

Stylistically, *Jucks* situates itself in the hybrid tradition of cinematic experiments such as Lynch's *Eraserhead*, Edward Owens' *Tomorrow's Promise*, Mandico's *The Wild Boys* and, to some extent, some of the most visionary French new waves such as Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad*. It is an experiment in so far as it gives total lead to its material: it is an hypothesis waiting to be confirmed, faithfully (and jealously) watching itself develop under its own eyes, bearing faith in all of its moves; at the same time, it is a document, a collection of sites, a sequence of clauses, a way to express the inexpressible, the way of a witness that is only called on to affirm or negate. All the film wants is to unfold. Its experimental method demands a material fidelity, a commitment to remaining with the image, to learning alternative modes of seeing that transform passive spectatorship into active looking. This transformation of seeing into looking is always, already a form of listening, an attentiveness to the image's own temporal unfolding. As such, *Jucks* does not entertain in the conventional sense. It does not 'hold you within itself'. Instead, it fugues, it moves on and around you, operating within a path of spectatorial engagement that demands a courage to abandon familiar modes of cinematic pleasure in favor of more demanding forms of encounter.

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