

SPUD SCUD

I am writing this on a plane en route to Berlin. I have just watched the 2018 film *Searching*, cinema mediated (albeit it a construction) through social media, facetime, live streams, and “Breaking News” feeds. Ronnie’s 41 minute short *LEARNING HOW TO SCULPT* doesn’t feel far from this media-farm. His could-be-canned digital soundtrack isn’t dissimilar to that of the easy-listening backing track for the 3D digitally-rendered inflight safety-video — the one on this flight opened with a prayer. The “what to do in a disaster” short playing simultaneously on the 299 seats on this Boeing 787-9 and 6 or so spare screens, makes cinema a liquid and surround-image experience. In *LEARNING HOW TO SCULPT* there are two camera angles, one Ronnie seems to be aware of, the other not. Seemingly shooting the footage for the forthcoming DVD extras or long awaited documentary about the artist. I am trying to imagine Ronnie’s introverted-yet-recorded instructions for chopping and boiling potatoes as means for making a sculpting material blazoned across the screens around me. It is not all that absurd. I mean, just like the *potatoes co-habiting in their plastic bag*, I am co-habiting in metal-scud travelling at 34000 feet and 535 miles per hour. Not yet half-way to Mars, where the potatoes have trans-orbited their earthliness, waiting for us with the plethora of cooking shows and dime-a-dozen celebrity chefs to be uploaded shortly, if they aren’t already there.

The interlude in this writing is BBC live world news on the screen behind this screen, the woman next to me — eyes closed and map on. Every so often it indicates the direction to Mecca. Scanning around I see Julia Roberts, Brian (the dog from Family Guy), a Prince Harry look-a-like and who I think is Clint Eastwood. BBC cuts to a short reality-tv-style-doco called *Grubs Up* about eating insects as sustainable food source. Adele, the host, is to eat only insect based protein for the next seven days. Her food-box comes with a meal plan, lust like Marley Spoon. Her first recipe is *Salt-roasted grasshoppers and scrambled eggs*. It’s a strange juxtaposition to the previously screened news item — MET Gala CAMP themed with footage of Lady Gaga undressing like a Russian doll — each layer revealing another personality — full-body masquerade.

Sometimes, I think about Ronnie's work like a durational-sculptural performance weaving us all into a multi-linear narrative or reality TV show where we all play ourselves cast in relation to Ronnie's POV. This how I am writing this. This is how *LEARNING HOW TO SCULPT* sucks-us in.

Recall for a minute the entrance to John Malcovich's brain. The small door behind a cabinet on the 7 ½ floor of a filing office discovered by Maxine Lund and Craig Schwartz. The banality of being inside the brain of another to John Malcovich enters the brain of John Malcovich. Legibility collapses into the excess of self. The only words uttered are his own name. Self as spam (or spud, as the case may be). It's a perspective highlighting the interiority of acute anxiety, and the contradictory external experience of perpetual performance — fear, desire, failure and doubt.

LEARNING HOW TO SCULPT, satirically riffs-off the entire "how to (insert creative act)" genre but unlike Paul McCarthy's *Painter Painter*, Van Hout's *Sculptor* isn't a caricature of an artist — but rather he is cast as self, an introverted "influencer" caught in a perpetual rehearsal with his potatoes of superior perennial control. Musing on their ranking as global staple, a rhizome ready to reproduce. Humble, hardy, honest and out of space. In *Close Encounters*, as Ronnie recounts, we find the story of guy, who following his encounter with aliens, starts making shapes in his mash potatoes.

This is how aliens communicate, via tuber, milk and Nuttlex.

Remember, *Mannequin* is a rom-com and *Tourist Trap* is a horror — human-stand-ins reveal an inner terror — the Pygmalion myth folds as Frankenstein mass-production. In 1929 Joan Riverie writes *Womanliness as Masquerade*, and we learn of the mask worn by women as defence revealing the authenticity of mimicry — her claim, that to be a woman is to disguise masculinity in 'femininity'. The inverse is probably also true — to be a man, is to disguise femininity, in masculinity. Or even more horrifying, to be human is to disguise the alien.