

# Notes After Long Silence: Super 8 Films From Boston

A program for:

TIE, The International Experimental Cinema Exposition – 2001, Telluride

Pixillation	3m	1976	Anne Charlotte Robertson
Suicide	8m	1979	Anne Charlotte Robertson
Triple Decker	6m	1986	Sam Durant
Can't Swim Can't Fly	3m	1998	Laurie McKenna
Sweet Feed Charger Oats	1m	1998	Laurie McKenna
Halloween	9m	1974	Mark Lapore
Remains to Be Seen	17m	1989	Phil Solomon
Green	36m	1989	Tom Rhoads (Luther Price)
Death of Feeling	12m	1989	Amanda Katz Posner
Notes After Long Silence	14m	1989	Saul Levine
Deadbeat	39m	1987-2001	Joe Gibbons
Depth of Field	7m	1983	Anne Charlotte Robertson

## *After Long Silence*

*Speech after long silence; it is right,  
All other lovers being estranged or dead,  
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,  
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,  
That we descant and yet again descant  
Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song:  
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young  
We loved each other and were ignorant.*

*W. B. Yeats*

Program curated by Bill Storz. With thanks to Chris May, Jane Sarah MacFarlane, Reed O'Bierne, and all the filmmakers.

The program title is taken from Saul Levine's film, which in turn was partially lifted from the Yeats poem. As Saul's film is in part, and the poem is in larger part, this program is an intended looking back and reflecting upon the past, and an attempt to make sense of it for the present. There is no intention here to be fully representative of Boston experimental filmmakers, nor is the intention to showcase the "greatest hits" of the filmmakers included. Rather, the intention is to bring a time capsule to you, a personal take on what I see as a remarkable moment, where these particular works, and inspiration between and amongst these important makers, helped each to, in varying degrees, come into their own. I feel that, as the poem says, "after long silence; it is right,"

With the exception of Laurie McKenna's films, which were created during her second Mass Art go around in the 90's, Anne Robertson's work, which is from the late 1970's and early 80's, and Mark Lapore's "Halloween" (1974), all of the work included here dates from 1986-1989. The creative heart of this group was the Massachusetts College of Art, where all these folks were together for a spell.

The critical mass of schools and institutions in Boston generally makes for a great deal of movement and youthful activism, but in the mid 1980's, at Massachusetts College of Art, we had a particularly lively time. The school was then and is now the only state art college in the country. The official "state" status of Mass Art meant to students two important things in the 1980's. One, you could afford to go to school. This in turn meant that the student body was more diverse and distinctly different in character than other art schools. The other important thing was that, like it or not, you were going to get an education in politics as well as art.

Mass Art was then fighting for its survival, and moving to new buildings abandoned by another, recently failed, state college. At the same time, the "five year plan" of our school president was unpalatable to students and faculty alike and together we rose up and ousted him. During the chaotic transition of administrative turmoil and temporarily occupying two campuses at once, we celebrated in a wealth of space, and, exploiting the lack of coherent oversight, did whatever the hell we wanted. Possibility was in the air, to say the least. Though the "official" art scene in Boston was far from lively, an incredibly vital mix of film, video, and performance activity spilled outward from Mass Art into numerous collective galleries, lofts and grassroots performance spaces. Making, going, and seeing work, all was daily, around the clock activity, and much of the work was outstanding.

The film department at Mass Art, with its strong faculty (Saul Levine, Dan Barnett, Phil Solomon, Ericka Beckman, Abigail Child, and Mark Lapore), was a particularly exciting place to be, naturally attracting many students from other art disciplines. Tom Rhoads and Sam Durant, for example, came to filmmaking after years of making sculpture. The scene developed a momentum and the gravity of this pulled persons into itself, inspiring the best from each, sustaining a kind of collective laboratory.

Super 8 seemed to happen for a few reasons: economy; the political stance of small is better; intimacy of use; easier synch sound and potentially better sound quality than 16mm... And it did not hurt at all that long-time advocates of Super 8, Bob Brodsky and Toni Treadway, hovered in nearby Somerville. Their expertise and technical support,

along with the Super 8 Sound business (now defunct) in Cambridge, and a variety of labs, all these contributed to a Super 8 renaissance.

Some of the makers in this program came of age during this time period/place, 1980's Boston, and some were already established in their field and their methods of working. Many of the makers included here have kept up vigorous film production since the 1980's and have established themselves as artists to be reckoned with. Some included here have given up filmmaking entirely. Howsoever, there was much interaction and collaboration amongst them then, and each impacted each.

My own roles in this mayhem included co-founding the Mass Art Men's Center Free Lunch program, where artists, musicians and filmmakers ate and showed work; playing in various musical groups, including a C&W group with Tom Rhoads and Laurie McKenna, and a rock/performance group with Sam Durant; and making Beach Beast (1987-91), a two hour Super 8 epic featuring a host of collaborators, including Tom Rhoads, Luther Price, and Sam Durant. I am proud to have been a part of this crew.

Aside from circumstances, what links these makers? I believe that the strength of this group lies in the diversity of their work. If there is a shared theme it is that of unique, raw, personal visions expressed fully and forcefully in the medium of Super 8 film. A certain lack of reserve, a passion and an immediacy, projecting the collective strength and confidence of artists with something to say. These films are included here together because this is the way it was, then.

## **Anne Charlotte Robertson**

Framingham, Massachusetts

Anne Robertson annoyed me at first. She inevitably monopolized the discussion in Saul's film viewing/history class. But Anne's passion for art-making was palpable, her openness and the courage with which she pursued truth, including her own particular truths, and most importantly, the resultant film work, these were profound, overwhelming.

Anne's extremely personal and sometimes raw work presents a strong challenge to the viewer and I've always had a mixture of feelings in viewing it. Some sense of (her self and my) exploitation of herself, a voyeuristic, thereby enabling, view, combined with a usually overriding exultant sense of truth, and an awe of the simple power of her personal, yet universal vision. It is a vision strongly rooted in questioning, herself, her (our) world, an ultimate vision of struggle and resistance.

Anne's entire body of work is in Super 8. She "fell in love with a Nizo camera and its technical capabilities," especially, "long single frames for low light." Super 8 was "cheap" and presented "synch in camera" possibilities. "I personally think Super 8 is very beautiful." *A.C. R. 2001*

Anne has been an amazingly prolific maker, who has doggedly pursued her personal and political vision from the mid 70's into the present. She has had 38 solo shows across the world and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for 2001-02. Her "Five Year Diary", which she has been recording with Super 8 film consistently for twenty years running, is currently (2001) forty hours in length, and the task of presenting a whole screening of it is a great task yet undone. Anne's recent work, to me, has

undergone a shift from lively and unsettled inward outrage, to a more bittersweet and beautiful resignation. Her vision, in each piece, and in particular when all the pieces are put together, offers a necessary perspective on, as Joe Gibbons calls it, “Living in the World.”

**Pixillation** 1976

Anne’s first film? She is not sure.

**Suicide** 1979

“For three years I was hearing my own suicidal voices. After making, editing and screening the film, a film of these voices, at my first screening of it, my mind... the suicidal thoughts stopped.” *A. C. R. 2001*

**Sam Durant**

Los Angeles, California

Sam Durant was a sculpture major at Mass Art, but in synch with the general spirit of the times there he created work in many media, including film and music. He was a founding member of The Bob Jones Experience, the short-lived yet influential musical/performance group that ruled Boston in 1986-87. His work has always exhibited a strong sense of understanding his medium(s), a sense of craft, a political savvy and inspiration, and a dry sense of humor. His work is invariably rooted and can be deceptively simple. There is always more than meets the eye with Sam.

In answering, “How did the place of Boston impact you/your work?” Sam recently wrote:

”The geographical divisions-neighborhoods. The divisions between people based on race, class, ethnicity. History, John Adams, beginning of revolution, and busing, desegregation. Music scene in the early-eighties. Architecture, being a carpenter.”

Sam credits Saul Levine for teaching him everything he knows about avant-garde film and Joe Gibbons for “making me realize that I could never make films. His genius turned me back to making visual art- thank god.” Sam is currently focused on making sculpture and teaching art at Cal Arts, in Valencia, California. He has had numerous solo exhibits around the world, and has upcoming one-person shows at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, Govett-Brewster Gallery in New Zealand, Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, INOVA at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and Dusseldorf Kustverein, Dusseldorf, Germany.

## **Triple Decker**

1986

“It is really all about Boston-the architecture (Triple Deckers) as both a record of turn of the century immigrant housing and a metaphor for the psychology of Boston. The sound is arias sung by Leontyne Price. She is an African American opera singer. Very important as it raises issue of race in Boston. It's a distillation of my experience of Boston. Depressing, boring, beautiful, calm, isolating, alienating, cold, historical.” *S.D. 2001*

## **Laurie McKenna**

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Laurie McKenna submitted the following statement:

“the films that you are seeing are the result of (my) walking away from the boston film and art scene in 1988. I was searching. I was sick of the city. I was sick of my own debauchery. the stories and images happened only as a result of the hiatus. my films in this program are lonely and are surrounded by water and filled with light. They're silent. they are puns like my dreams often are. they are dreams and work. always dreams and work and desire and tiredness. my tendencies to debauchery continued in a pastoral setting. From 89-95 I hoarded and catalogued the sights in my head. for 6 years I didn't shoot a frame of film or a minute of tape. I painted and wrote and I made collages. I lived on islands one of which had 14 people year round and about 350 domesticated animals not counting coyotes and midget deer.

the friends and artistic comrades that I left are here in this program. they are still my community today. I returned to them and to super 8 film and video in 1995. I went back to MassArt to finish my filmmaking degree. I wanted to make films and videos again because I had stories to tell. I had sights that needed recording and ideas that needed help. I wanted to learn more. I wanted to plug back in. The same incredible filmmaking faculty was there better than ever. and they are key to the scene in Boston. Saul Levine's classes, his endless giving to his students and his prolific output as an artist and his incredible openness to all artmaking efforts. How can such a place not be the root of inspiration?

but the atmosphere of the school had changed. campus security had become the mass art police dept. the school was locked at midnight. studios were empty. students had to work full time just to make their rent. they seemed barely to have time to do their art.

I quickly realized that the 1983-1989 at Mass Art and in Boston was a once in a lifetime mindblowing phenomenal sliver in time that brought together some of the most gifted artists and ideas I have ever crossed paths with. We could afford to be poor in the eighties there were still slums there was still rent control we had the right and the ability

to live on the fringes. we resisted. We got rid of a college president. we said fuck you. the school was open 24 hours. we were in our studios all night. all the time. we would troop over to the other building for Bill Storz's free lunches.

sculpture sim film and textiles were all in one building away from the rest of the school and we cross pollinated. It was explosive - we took our freedom seriously. sculptors were making films performance artists were working with sculptors and everybody seemed to be making super 8 films and in a band. Laija brie aka LA aka Brigk aka Thom Rhoades aka Luther Price went on an artist brigade to Nicaragua and came back and survived the gunshot wound that had blown him apart and he made sculptures and films that were fucking stunning. Sam Durant told me that my soundtrack work completely changed his ideas about what you can do with sound. When most artists abandoned boston for New york joe gibbons managed to keep a foot in both towns. I idolized joe gibbons and although the films in this program don't necessarily reveal it, I would have to credit him as the biggest influence on my process of filmmaking. that being: do it yourself. do it all. do it with super 8. or hi 8 or pixelvision. do it yourself. life is stranger than fiction. life is fiction. Luther and I came up with my name for the 80s: Bud Scrape, and it stuck. it was coined in the Eventworks office, where I plotted and hatched the plan to bring Jack Smith to Boston. He was my other big influence. He influenced all of us. I used student government money to pay a boy I had met in New York to go to Jack Smiths apartment on 1st and 1st. we'd go there together and drink and smash holes in the walls as Jack directed us to do. that was the deal. Jack told me to pay my creature 75.00 dollars a week to come to his place. It was about 500.00. all together. He put him to work tearing out walls and plastering the exotic set within his home. Jack came and he did his shows and got drunk and threw tantrums and enchanted everyone. Mark McElhatten was instrumental in the deal. He was programming at the Boston Film Video Foundation, another great center at the time, and we worked together to get the shows to happen.

its funny that I walked away. but I came back. we are **all** still **alive** and making art. not all of us are in boston but at least 1/2 are. we don't even spend that much time together. but we still make our art. we do see each others work. and the work travels the world more than we do. we're not rich but we sure as hell aren't poor. thanks bill for the free lunches for beach beast for the music for the show. love, bud" *L.M. 2001*

Laurie has a website: <http://buskers.org/steeltoedboots/index.html> She is currently filming cactuses and dreaming of the Sonoran Desert.

**Can't Swim Can't Fly** 1998

"How do you get off island?"

**Sweet Feed Charger Oats** 1998

"The stuff you feed the horses, besides hay."

## **Mark Lapore**

Brookline, Massachusetts

Mark came back on the Mass Art scene in 1985 as a film teacher, having previously earned his MFA there under Dan Barnett. He is still teaching at Mass Art and has continued to be a tireless and conscientious mentor to many. According to Laurie McKenna, "Mark gave exactly what students needed. Inspiration and support." Mark travels the world shooting his films, which may be loosely described as "experimental ethnographic". He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 2000-01 and has exhibited his film work widely.

## **Halloween**

1974

This is an early work by Mark, and it is not typical of his current work. It is a work that was familiar to many of the makers in this program through screenings in the 1980's.

## **Phil Solomon**

Broomfield, Colorado

On Boston as a creative place in the 1980's:

"Many people came to Boston to go to school, to teach, and to live from other places, and ended up staying for longer than they originally bargained for - if you couldn't afford to live in NY and needed to be near the ocean, the mts, the fall, Walden, good public transportation and few great record and book stores, Boston was a very livable and interesting place in the 80s. BFVF (curated by Steve Anker and Mark McElhatten, two of the premiere programmers in the country today), The Museum School, Harvard, MIT, Boston University, The Brattle, The Orson Welles, Central Square Cinema, The Museum of Fine Arts, and most of all, Mass College of Art - where most of the filmmakers on the program worked or studied.

It all started for me with Dan Barnett, who was my teacher at Binghamton. Mark Lapore, who was living with his girlfriend in Worcester, bumped into Dan one day in Harvard Square and Dan told him about Mass Art (where Dan was now teaching) and the grad school - it sounded great to Mark and I, who were looking for a place to get an MFA after Binghamton, and we both felt fortunate to continue to study with Dan, a great filmmaker and a unique sensibility. Mark went in the Fall of 1977, I arrived two weeks before the blizzard of 78. Still my best friend to this day, my running buddy all these years....When it came time for all three of us to search new faculty, Saul Levine was the obvious choice. Simply one of the greatest teachers of film and obviously the most influential artist on this program - and a pioneer of regular 8mm silent and super-8 sound. Saul and Dan - well that's another story - suffice to say that at the time I was there, it was a wild, wonderful very open place, where anything went down. A real sense of an avant-garde film community, film events every week. Everybody came there at one time or another to show work. Steve Anker and then Mark McElhatten were bringing every

major experimental filmmaker to BFVF, Mass Art had a great Film Society (thanks to Saul), Eventworks was exciting - Mark Lapore, Dan Eisenberg, Caroline Avery, Steve Anker, Nina Fonoroff, Abby Child, Erika Beckman, John Casey, Joe Gibbons, and Mark McElhatten were all around the film scene at Mass Art when I was there. Elizabeth Subrin and Amanda Katz were students of mine through Continuing Ed, another very happening program. I taught there for almost ten years. Joe Gibbons, Anne Robertson were friends in the scene, and Luther and I met a few years ago onstage at the New York Film Festival and really hit it off – a wonderful artist and a truly inspiring character. I knew of Laurie McKenna and Sam Durant through Mark and Saul... Saul Levine is the reason I became a filmmaker. Mark Lapore is one of the reasons why I remain one.”  
On the choice of Super 8 medium for this film:

“To use as a Chamber music medium, like a solo piano or string quartet. To be able to show original with sound. Economy. And to be able to mix multi-track sound on mag stripe at home. To play mag sound with reasonable fidelity. Saul's inspiration for sync sound possibilities in a single system.” *P.S. 2001*

Phil’s film work has been widely screened around the world. He is an influential and passionate maker and teacher. He teaches film at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

## **Remains to Be Seen** 1989

A sense of inquiry into frailty permeates this beautifully crafted film. A strong sense of the re-viewing of a life, an important life, with no easy answers. Sound and image combine to ask more and more hard, yet beautiful questions. For this viewer, ultimately transcendent.

## **Tom Rhoads (aka Luther Price)**

Revere, Massachusetts

(LA/Lija Brie/Brigk/)Tom Rhoads studied sculpture at Mass Art. His often intense installations and performances were both loved and hated there. He participated in the school enthusiastically, creating whole events and numerous shows with a passionate flair. Near the end of his studies at Mass Art, he embraced filmmaking with a characteristic intensity. With the encouragement of Saul Levine and a growing audience Tom found film, and in particular Super 8 film, to be a perfect medium for his ideas. He has never looked back. His change of name to Luther Price did not bring a change in his choice of mediums. Tom/Luther’s work has always reflected a passionate and honest interest in his own self, his family, his culture, and not least, the medium of Super 8 film itself. Luther is currently considered one of the top experimental filmmakers in the country, an honor he has earned through his tireless and intense commitment to making, as well as an immense talent. He currently teaches film at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

## **Green**

1989

With *Green*, Tom really put the pieces together. A beautiful eye and an unflinching, accurate, and confrontational sensibility together form a great work of cinema. Like most of Tom/Luther's strongest works, this film utilizes and explores personal and family material/ideas in critical/celabratory ways. A very important film for Tom/Luther, and for the Boston and wider filmmaking community.

*Green is a world where ghosts live.  
Emerging from silent memory, they  
Enter an image of reality, cool, crisp and static.  
Tromping forward, time unravels,  
Tracing to points of the past,  
Conjuring the familiar, reliving  
Events unresolved, revealing  
Very little.  
Beauty is continually redefined,  
Celebrating life and death in a  
Plastic world haunted.  
It is a romantic suicide.*

## **Amanda Katz Posner**

Cornish Flat, New Hampshire

Amanda Katz was a vitalizing force in the Mass Art scene. She was a great collaborator and supporter of others' work. Her passion and her bravery are evident in this, at the time, controversial film. Amanda inspired others in that she was fearless in what she would approach, and in the way she tackled it.

## **Death of Feeling**

1986

"I transferred into Massart in the late 80's and was primarily involved in performance art but found super 8 to be an exciting form to explore both mediums. Saul Levine, who was a great mentor and friend to me, turned me on to the Brackagian idea of the camera capturing one's own sight. With Death of Feeling I tried to incorporate this idea into the editing, most of the footage having been shot by John Russell and others. At the time I was reading a lot of feminist theory on pornography and was attempting to come to terms with ideas of objectification. My female peers were outraged by the film. Although Luther Price came up to me after a screening and said it was one of the funniest films he had ever seen!" *A. K. P. 2001*

Amanda currently lives in New Hampshire with her husband, filmmaker and curator Bruce Posner, and their daughter Clara. She hasn't made films in a long while, but reports that she is working with stained glass.

## **Saul Levine**

Somerville, Massachusetts

Saul is the undeniable center of the Boston experimental film scene, the molten core if you will. His passion for truth and his commitment to making and teaching, these have inspired countless others in Boston and beyond. Simply put, you are a changed person for encountering Saul.

Saul came to Super 8 from making a lot of films in regular 8 and 16mm. He appreciated its ease of working with sound, though he believes that the image quality is not as good as regular 8mm. He continued to make films in three gauges, and to date he has made well over 100 films in 8mm, Super 8 and 16mm. He has taught at the Massachusetts College of Art from the 1970's to the present. He recently presented a new film in his "Light Licks" series, Get it While You Can, at the Views From the Avante Garde program at the New York Film Festival.

## **Notes After Long Silence**      1989

This film is one in a series of "Notes" films, in which Saul uses film "for what other people use sketch or scrap, or notebooks. Thinking about 'notes' in all its meanings, including musical." This film in particular is in part, "a response to an attack on abstract expressionism... by trying to work with film in the way that I thought was abstract expressionist. ... Work with all the associations that I think of. A walk. A conversation. Intense conversation as a form for a film. Rousseau did organize some of his essays that way."

Saul also points to displaced people, and in particular, "thinking of the Viet Nam War as something in the past that was still haunting." Saul also mentions jazz and spontaneity as influential in this work and that (via editing) "I like to be able to jam with B. B. King! On Johnny Carson!" Of course, the song in the film is "Thrill is Gone" which also amplifies Saul's theme of thinking/reflecting on the past and dislocation from the present. Another element in the film is its use of digging the raw earth as both a metaphor for "cutting away, what's underneath?", and a pun on "underground film." A certain male dissatisfaction bubbles in the film, which, according to Saul is a response to an entrapping and imposed, restrictive idea of what male consciousness is to be. Finally, the Yeats poem quoted in Saul's title is, "one of my favorite poems. Two lovers meeting, thinking about the past, from the perspective of the present." The poem was influential on the film, but Saul notes that he was "not quoting or illustrating it."

(Quotes from discussions with Saul, 2001)

“A great film. Very contemporary to the time now. Recklessness, new beginning, unearthing... flailing fragments roaring by. Dislocated stories. I love Saul’s work.”  
*Luther Price 2001*

## **Joe Gibbons**

Malden, Massachusetts

Snapshot of Joe Gibbons, circa 1986: Wiry, intense, pacing, tweed jacketed, open champagne bottle in hand, words tumbling from him, magically assembling themselves into ordered sense, seemingly on the fly. Wits and calculation on view, in balance. Going out on a limb in a measured, yet somehow reckless and inspiring way. Sawing it off, tree falls, Joe still in mid air on limb.

Joe’s body of work is amazingly diverse. In his most common theme of a painful and bumbling alienation, an inability to connect, he usually presents a strong sense of irony and distance, and yet his work can also be, paradoxically, very intimate in an uncanny way. His work Deadbeat, in its use of Super 8 synch sound, its inspiring self-camera work, and its stretching of narrative form to and past its breaking point, was a particularly influential film in the Boston scene when it arrived in the mid 1980’s. Joe has had numerous one person screenings around the world, has had films selected to the Village Voice’s yearly “Top Ten” lists, and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for 2001-02. He currently teaches filmmaking at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## **Deadbeat**

1986/2001 (re-edited)

The enigmatic Mr. Gibbons at his most obtuse. Joe, as protagonist and maker, explores a particular American obsession with “other,” attempts to recreate himself within this romantic fantasy, and ultimately falls prey to its/his own vulnerability. The identity crisis of his protagonist becomes inseparable from the fabulously inexplicable identity of the film itself.

## **Anne Charlotte Robertson**

(see previous notes)

## **Depth of Field**

1983

“The first and only in a series on camera puns. (It) supposedly teaches you about depth of field.” This film features Anne and a real field!

Notes compiled by Bill Storz, Reevesville, South Carolina and Telluride, Colorado, 2001

*After Long Silence*

*Speech after long silence; it is right,  
All other lovers being estranged or dead,  
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,  
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,  
That we descant and yet again descant  
Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song:  
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young  
We loved each other and were ignorant.*

*W. B. Yeats*