

ARTFORUM



Michel Auder, Chelsea, Manhattan-NYC, 1990 (edited 2008),
Hi8 video transferred to digital video, color, sound, 6 minutes 21 seconds.

Michel Auder/Józef Robakowski FAHRENHEIT

- Andrew Berardini

I can see you. Perched near a window, looking down on the heat and honk of the sun-bright street or out to the night windows beaming like magic lanterns, you are easily observed. Looking out from their windows, Michel Auder and Józef Robakowski, who record private lives unwittingly played out in public, can see you, too. Close in age but shaped by dramatically different social and political contexts, these artists, perfectly paired by Fahrenheit director Martha Kirszenbaum, keenly observe others with a speculative, subjective eye. Under another's lingering gaze, your most mundane acts acquire sinister shadows.

For more than four decades, French-born filmmaker and video artist Michel Auder, affiliated with New York's downtown avant-garde from the Factory years on, has put his camera in the service of recording both his exhibitionist and voyeuristic proclivities. Auder's great talent lies in harnessing the camera's unflinching stare and editing hard shards of time into weird

confluences and difficult intimacies, sometimes many years after the footage was shot. Here, we have a trio of videos in which the artist looks outward.

Auder's car trawls the streets of New York in Chelsea, Manhattan NYC (Shot in 1990 and edited in 2008), with his camcorder pointed at the pimps and prostitutes who populated a sordid pre-Giuliani New York, now long since disappeared. In *Blind Sex*, 1983, two life-worn lechers stroll the daylight sidewalk among a flesh-baring prowl of streetwalkers. Auder cuts to a nearby sightless woman who pauses on a street corner, cane in hand, seemingly oblivious to the illicit transactions surrounding her. In *Untitled (I was looking back to see if you were looking back at me to see me looking back at you)*, 2002/2014, the artist's single man mechanically spooning dinner into his sad-sack face dappled with TV light, a woman performing a post-shower toilette with thoughtless grace, a sweat-slicked lover mounting his partner from behind, a supine masturbator arching his back in orgasm, and two apartment dwellers on separate floors watching the same asinine program. And when he's not looking through the window, Auder records its interior reflection, revealing a little girl with a pair of binoculars scanning the city alongside him.

Artist-filmmaker Józef Robakowski surveils the spare concrete public plaza in front of his apartment building in Lodz, Poland, in *From My Window*, shot over a twenty-one-year period from 1978 to 1999. A veteran figure within the Polish avant-garde still relatively unknown in this country, Robakowski advocated for a "personal film" that stripped the medium of narrative in order to privilege a thrumming immediacy. Here, Robakowski's gruffly sardonic voice-over description (perhaps invented) of the intimate details of his neighbors' lives defines the arc of the film. Underneath his commentary on the purported homosexual encounter of his neighbor's dog (in fact an innocuous informant and incriminating desire. Alongside these prosaic passings, he films the casual harassments of police shakedowns on the road and the increasingly tense May Day parades, all taking place in view of the artist's window during an era of increasing unrest and subsequent crackdowns.

Robakowski's recordings wryly mimic the police-state reality of his native Poland under Communist rule, in which everyone spied and was spied on. The film ends with this same public plaza videotaped in 1999, ten years after the collapse of Communist rule, in which everyone spied and was spied on. The film ends with this same public plaza videotaped in 1999, ten years after the collapse of Communism in Poland. In a sort of epilogue, he records the construction of a private luxury hotel being erected on the public square.

Auder and Robakowski hint at the impossibility of privacy (even before the sophisticated tracking facilitated by the Internet) and flirt with the temptation of illicit knowledge, probing the boundary where public and private clash and mesh. Now, of course, ever more advanced technology makes the past transgressions of these artists seem downright innocent, shot as they were in a time before our private lives and potential crimes were so thoroughly recorded and stored for easy retrieval, whenever the desire should arise.