

Just a Second

Joseph Yaeger

In 2003, after a months-long search on eBay¹, I managed to track down a DVD of Russian Ark, Alexander Sokurov's 96-minute single-shot opus, which I watched for the first time in my childhood bedroom with rapt attention one afternoon that same spring. I was seventeen years old. So moved was I by the magnitude of Sokurov's—as well as his actors'—achievement that in the weeks and months following I sought out everything I could on the film. I watched the behind the scenes footage on the DVD² and sifted through dozens of film magazines for any coverage—critical, theoretical, even the marginal snippet review. Unfortunately apart from several blurbs and a lone fan-site in the proto-blog style of the time I found no satisfactory writing on either Sokurov or his film.

Frustrated, feeling very much held at arm's length by the artistry and specificity of Russian Ark's form—as well as its subject matter—I wrote in to the now long-defunct *24 FPS* (a film quarterly containing, as I recall, a brief 'Letters' section following the Editor's Note) with a kind of plea for information.

As scarcely any evidence of *24 FPS* exists in the now-corporatised, -SEO'd state of the contemporary internet, I cannot exhume nor frankly recall even trace passages of my letter. However I must have signed it with my email address at the time (eider3@hotmail.com), because the email I've included below was among the handful forwarded from that address to my current gmail account in May 2005³.

The email—which I did not initially respond to—was from a woman called Julia Whitting, with whom I eventually shared a scattered decade-plus correspondence. I never got the chance to meet her in person, and unfortunately never will; she died in that dismal stretch after Trump's election but before his inauguration. I miss her, but because our relationship was only ever epistolary the dimensions of my sadness feel, in a manner of speaking, virtual.

What follows is her first email, sent at 10:46pm on 24 November 2003.

From: Julia Whitting [j.whitting76@aol.com]
Subject: ANTICINEMA

Hello,

I have some insights in response to your letter about Russian Ark in 24FPS. Did you see it in the theaters? I

hope so. What a magical experience. It was playing for a few nights down on 11th or 12th when my husband and I saw it. I found it mesmerizing so I was happy to come across your letter. It's nice to encounter a likemind, even if it's 'penned.'

Part of why I'm writing is my husband is of the opinion that no matter how successful the film's execution, the gimmick of the endeavour - he calls it schlocky! - precludes any real discussion of quality or merit. (He teaches film at NYU.) I suppose I could see things from his angle were this a film about a first date or something, but I believe Sokurov chose to shoot it in one go BECAUSE of the subject, not in spite of it. Don't you agree? I mean he even uses the homonym ark.

We're made to believe, or at least are taught, that history is comprised of tidy epochs and eras - that the fall of a civilisation or the end of an administration equates to, as it were, the nailed coffin. As I see it Sokurov denies this stance. Denies linearity generally, hence the roiling sea at the film's close - like how different would we read it if those doors opened and all we saw were train rails?

Part of the reason I'm writing you is out of curiosity. Do you find you see things differently now that you've watched Russian Ark? Have you been able to watch movies or television the same since? I have to say it's altered how I think of the whole silly practice of film- or television- or advertisement-making.

When I was in college I had this roommate named Heather who was absolutely obsessed with the television show Cheers. Neither of us were social butterflies, but unlike me she seldom left our room at all. (I think she dropped out after freshman year.) She had several volumes of 'The Best of Cheers' on VHS which she would watch on our TV/VCR with almost religious fervor. This annoyed me. It annoyed me a lot, but I found smoking pot would quell my irritation. (I could also tell that smoking irritated her, even though she wouldn't say anything.) I remember I would hit my little one-hitter and the two of us would leave the show running every night until we dozed off.

Anyway the difference between 'before' and 'after' smoking was significant, and it reminds me of what Russian Ark has recently done to me.

Before smoking I readily accepted the reality or diegesis of the show; the characters were PEOPLE in a BAR and

the words they spoke were CONVERSATIONS volleying NATURALLY between them as in lived LIFE; after I smoked something grotesque happened (even thinking of it now gives me the creeps): the characters became ACTORS dressed in COSTUMES on a SOUNDSTAGE speaking LINES OF DIALOGUE which had been COMPOSED by a professional team of WRITERS. I would watch Ted Danson's and Woody Harrelson's faces and have the eerie impression that I could see or read their inner thoughts, which ran against or completely separate to the lines they were speaking, which - although they were good actors - I sensed had been memorised by rote and meant nothing to their individual personhoods, which I always darkly pictured as being hogtied and blindfolded in the unfurnished basements of their subconsciouses. This was disconcerting, depressing, and occasionally frightening. Try as I might to wriggle free from this angle of view - to see, that is, the show for what it purported to be, I could no longer suspend my disbelief.

Similarly as I watch films or television today, even good films, I can't shake this sense that the 'cut' or 'edit' is a result of - or direct reaction to - boredom, or perceived boredom, and can be thought of only as a desperate plea for the viewer's attention. I cannot get away from this awareness of the once-invisible and it's driving me crazy. Look! Look! Look! Each cut seems to say. Constant interventions, speeding up time. Possibly in the same way a substance's 'never-enough'ness to an addict exacerbates the addiction itself, so too do I see our collective attention span being truncated by its own truncation.

I'm sorry I know you wrote to the magazine wanting to know more about Sokurov or the film but I'm curious if you've considered this before? What the cut might mean in actual terms? What it's doing to us? I don't want this to become some kind of manifesto, but perhaps you share these concerns and will join me in championing or exploring what I've lately been calling ANTICINEMA.

I don't yet have a form for it, but the goal or ideal is to invent a cinema that acts AGAINST cinema. I don't know why but I'm assuming you're a filmmaker? If you aren't then you can disregard everything I'm writing, but if you ARE then I'd love to hear your thoughts or for you to expound on these ideas!

ANTICINEMA is a cinema that undoes the durational aspect seemingly native to the art form, allowing or even necessitating a protraction or elongation of time.

In ANTICINEMA one can move into or through time as it's captured or created by whatever tools or means the filmmaker deploys. ANTICINEMA addresses a person's interior as much as it does the exterior. ANTICINEMA inverts the Hollywood mode of action, denies the ruling show-don't-tell model. ANTICINEMA believes that if plot exists it does so only retrospectively and outside the bounds of formal structure - it resists, for example, Chekhov's (or anyone's!) Gun. ANTICINEMA is neither fast nor slow, but crucially resists the 'cut' as it is today being used. In ANTICINEMA a cut is never used; rather, it is attained. ANTICINEMA, in its ideal state, undoes the vocabulary of filmic history: there is no such thing as a reverse shot, the 180° rule is nullified, eye-lines needn't match up, and so on and so forth. I could go on but I think - hope! - you get the point?

Please don't feel the need to respond with any hurry, but I would love to hear your thoughts! Thank you for your thoughtful letter and for making me feel less alone!

Yours,
Julia

I did not read this letter again until September 2008—presumably just before the next email in our chain, which I sent, drunk, from my girlfriend's and my Miracle Mile apartment in Los Angeles.

Much had changed in the intervening years. While I can assume my reluctance to respond to Julia in 2003 was due as much to my youth as the intensity of her tone—the sort of unhinged quality of the penultimate paragraph, say—I can likewise speculate that my second nonresponse (in '05) was based on the fact that I'd decided, after months of depression, to give up on film school in MSU Bozeman and, by extension, a future in filmmaking.

By the close of that first semester I'd already lost interest—plus hope, faith, etc—in the even the basic notion of filmmaking. Somehow I hadn't considered the inescapability of collaboration, and I found my classmates (the only available collaborators) bemusing and sort of embarrassing, taste- and conduct-wise, nursing my social anxiety—which was, in a word, total—with a superiority complex that left me, if it's possible, even further alienated. The fact that I couldn't seem to speak to anyone without my face flushing and throat clenching was tolerable, I told myself, insofar as no one from my vantage seemed to have anything worthwhile to say.

I spent the early part of my second semester applying as a transfer to the Rhode Island School of Design—a measure I regarded as something of a hail

mary, but in my thinking it was either RISD or discontinuing college altogether and moving back in with my parents, so the arithmetic in that sense was straightforward.

I didn't think of Julia's email during my summer transfer session at RISD nor indeed at any point during my subsequent three years in Providence. In fact it was not until I moved to Los Angeles and encountered the vertiginous blues of the recently graduated (one's freedom from the bounds of institutions feeling at once like an infinitely wide, horizonless plain and equally like some indeterminately long and very narrow corridor) that I felt compelled to go through my gmail archives.

My girlfriend worked in the film industry, the hours of which were gruelling and demanded something like an inversion of the notion that one works in one's life; as I saw it in Hollywood (and she shared this—she left the business in 2010) one lives in one's work. This trade-off is tolerable and even ideal if the work is meaningful, but most of her—and by extension, our—life was subsidised by costuming a pulpy show on NBC about would-be superheroes. All to say production had devouring tendencies: Monday's call time might be 6am, but if any snags plagued production—and snags *always* plagued production—by Thursday her days might wrap at at 11pm, midnight, or later. For me this equated to an excess of free time, which, new to the city and already reluctant to socialise, equated to loneliness.

Bored, I would pour myself some form of alcohol—I believe Jameson and/or Jack predominated in those days—and type random words into the search function of gmail's interface. Of the dozens of emails that would pop up usually a handful were long or lyrical or worthwhile as I saw it, and these I would read sitting upright and fully clothed on our made bed, piqued by a nostalgia it seems, paradoxically, only the young can experience.

After stumbling across Julia's email I remember fixating on the '76' in her address. Assuming this was her year of birth, it made her twenty-six or -seven at the time of her letter's composition. Young by most measures, at the age of twenty-two I still saw it as coming from someone unreachably mature and worldly. Perhaps this explains the rigid tone of my response⁴.

I've edited my email for length and content but have retained, somewhat to my chagrin, aspects that today strike me as cautious or poorly phrased or, and this is difficult to articulate, things I know to be lies, either in sentiment or intention. I also can't believe I used to have a Marquez quote as my signature, and double-spaced after periods.

From: Joseph Yaeger [josephyaeager@gmail.com]
Subject: ANTICINEMA

Dear Julia,

I'm really hoping you still check this inbox and haven't changed your address, but first I wanted to apologize for my lengthy silence and offer what is now a shamefully tardy response to your email about Russian Ark that you wrote me back in 2003.

[...]

Third, you'd have no way of knowing when you wrote your note to me, but I was in high school at the time, and to be perfectly honest I don't think I knew what to do with your letter. [...] All to say it got me thinking: what came of your concept of anticinema? Did you wind up developing it into a working theory or make anything under the heading of that concept?

I don't think I particularly understood what you meant by Anticinema back when I received your email, and frankly even today I still find the concept a bit opaque, but I suppose my first question is about technology. It's funny I haven't watched Russian Ark in a number of years but I can still remember how the first time I saw it how long it took me to get over the digitalness of the 'film stock'. Again I'm just working from memory here but I especially have this recollection of these very dressed-up women getting out of a carriage, right at the beginning, and how the frame rate sort of glitchily lagged as they passed too close past the camera. I suppose what I'm trying to get at is I felt even as a teenager that perhaps Sokurov hadn't waited quite long enough for the technology to catch up with his ambition. (Not unlike Kubrick and his waiting to make AI.) Anyway is your notion of anticinema at all tied up in the fact that technology as it stands today can't handle the vision you might have about duration?

[...]

I hope you don't mind my asking, but some of the details in your letter were enticing yet unclear. For instance - and again, I hope you don't mind my asking - but do you still live in New York? And does your husband still teach at NYU? [...] You also mentioned college, where'd you go out of curiosity? And, gosh, what do you do now? Are you a filmmaker?

Sorry for all the questions, as I've said I just moved to LA and was thinking about your letter and was wondering, to be dramatic yet honest, what to do with my life.

[...]

Please don't feel obliged to respond (lord knows how long I took). Hell, this might not even get to you. But I hope it does.

Take care,
-Joe

P.S. That same thing happened to me, by the way, but with Seinfeld. And only once. But I definitely do know what you're talking about. Eerie.

- -

"He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings." -Gabriel Garcia Marquez

When I received her response the following summer I had a vague sense that I knew a j.whitting, however at a glance I couldn't place the name; was he/she a RISD classmate whom I'd forgotten? I'd composed plenty of drunken emails in my life to that point, however they'd almost always gone to close friends. Shame or regret might haunt the following morning, but it never lasted long. I think because I didn't really know Julia all memory of having written her dissipated pretty instantaneously. When my eyes landed on the subject line and I saw 're:' I felt a nauseating jolt of dread.

Half expecting to be castigated, I waited a day or two before clicking on the email, which, as it turned out, was unnecessary, even silly. Not only was Julia unbothered by my drunken missive, she seemed amused. Her tone was chaotic and buoyant and funny—unpredictable right from the jump. Plus her form had shifted: where previously she'd stuck to tidy paragraphs and accepted sentence/punctuation structures, her second letter, as you'll see, read more like free verse, which, to my surprise, I actually found more approachable and/or appealing. I had never read an email quite like it.

I can't recall now the specifics of where/when I read this second email, but in the nebulous timeline we all keep on ourselves I know I would have been working almost full-time at a bakery not far from our apartment, whilst in my spare time painting thickly impasto'd geometric oils. 2009 was, on the whole, a tremendously happy year: one of youth and freedom and new friendships and contented cohabitation, the clearheadedness of generally feeling—and this is silly to think of it now—as if I had it all figured out.

Which should double, really, as a good explanation as to why I did not respond to Julia's letter until the following year. While not exactly unhappy, 2010

was characterised by upheaval: my girlfriend moving to London, an extensive application for a visa as her dependent, moving back in with my parents from September through December, and my decision—in a vague mirroring of quitting film, really—to give up painting in order to write fiction.

From: Julia Whitting [j.whitting76@aol.com]
Subject: re: ANTICINEMA

Holy shit I was NOT expecting your email but I've had it starred for months and you're catching me in a good moment just a second

plenty to discuss

Who wrote that first email I have no idea but I don't recognize her
ignore her
put her in the corner like baby
(actually maybe I do, but keep that to yourself)

First things first

Yes I'm still in NYC (BK now)
No I'm not married but he still teaches at NYU as far as I know
WashU undergrad
From St Louis originally
Grad school at Hunter
Not a filmmaker but not NOT a filmmaker, kinda multimedia thing

Your email made me laugh have you figured out what to do with your life yet? Ha!

I seriously cannot believe I only wrote that email six years ago
jesus it feels like ten lifetimes.

Can I bore you a bit? This might help to clarify that YOU'RE FINE but I'm sure you already know that

Listen here's who wrote you that email all those years ago

I had gotten to NYC in late 99 after living with my parents and working a couple years in this drag of an ad firm in St Louis

Most of my downtime drinking with this guy who I'd been obsessed with in high school, good sex dim conversation

you get the picture
Long not very interesting story
Breakup + promotion + job offer + college friend with an
inherited East Village apartment and a couch = bye 27th
city (fuck Franzen btw)
So I get to NYC and within a MONTH have met this older
guy. BIG LOVE
indistinguishable from psychosis as I look back now
a love blackout
I fall out with friends
his friends become my friends that kind of thing it's sort of
a cliché but he's older and I tell myself that I'm *mature*
Like part of me likes that I'm falling out with my friends?

Move in with him
Married at twenty-four
Parents eyebrows slightly raised but he's only 41 not like
he's geriatric or anything and they like him or at least they
don't dislike him
9/11 happens and we decide fuck it why be in advertising
when you could just die any second
(what's the difference!)
Looking back he's essentially handling me at this point
but he's so complimentary. He believes in me so much
I'm painting and making mediocre in retrospect proto-
Trecartin videos. But he LOVES them. Like I'm autonomous
but I'm also totally being handled
I feel famous in his eyes
He's helping with applications he actually WRITES my
references Jesus
And me who is basically a baby I'm just in awe of him
And he's sweet thoughtful all of it, super intelligent he
really is at this point
I kind of think of him as a mentor who as luck would have
it also loves me

So I get into my MFA and I love it INSTANTLY and I'm ALL
IN
But this thing starts to happen
My husband's personality starts to change
he's ill tempered, impatient, crabby
First I blame it on myself I'm thinking: I'm not doing
enough for him. He's the one who got me here and I owe
him. All that
I'm thinking either maybe he's seeing the real me finally
or I'm changing for the worse or I'm not showing enough
dedication all of it self loathing the whole thing
Heaps of it. My fault whatever it is. Seventy thousand
sorries to this sulking manchild

But all of it goes away when I'm at the studio, all of it, it's
amazing
I meet my best friend she's amazing
still my best friend
So of course I start spending all of my time in the studio
And it takes a long time probably not until a year after I
graduate for me to realize that for the first time he was
coming second and he just couldn't handle it
So I'm out, graduated, and then I epiphany
is that a verb?
slowly then all at once
I don't want him to come first anymore
Boom
What a realisation, like ever
I get the feeling that I want to be free
If you ever get the feeling you need to be free it's not a
good marriage

You say you moved to LA to be with your girlfriend
remember you don't always have to come second
K there's my little advice column

I was REALLY dedicated to my MFA (Do an MFA!!!) but
seriously such a strange thing for this person you admire
to suddenly start behaving like a toddler.
I hated coming home, hated hated hated it
never knowing what he was going to nitpick
Ha I remember once this isn't funny but I remember once
I was in the studio and it was late and there's this car horn
blaring outside the building that will NOT stop. I go to the
window and it's him
I was so mortified
Fucking furious sure but mortified

Anyway that was my thesis: ANTICINEMA. I don't
remember writing you that email but I do remember the
fight we had over Russian Ark. We used to fight over
basically every film. Like I iced that fucking cake in the
way I presented it to you, it was a blowout fight our
disagreement over Russian Ark. A movie! All the way
home and then continued in bed, tears, blah blah blah

Looking back I think that letter must have been one of the
first real efforts I made at getting out of my marriage
It reads like an admission to me, to myself
huh
It wasn't abusive or anything just dumb and painful and
childish
Plus he was cheating
Or no let's say his next wife appeared on the scene *just*

as the ink was dry

Get married if you want but honestly never get divorced

I really should have an advice column

I'll attach a scan of the 'manifesto' part of my thesis. Peruse away. It's only a few pages. The rest of it's on some hard drive that I probably lost. Ce la vie. It sort of leaves a bad taste in my mouth to think about that time so I won't get into any of it in detail here but you're welcome to read it. Makes more sense than my email for sure

So yes is the answer, re my work and anticinema

I'll send you some stuff later if you want to see

You should send me your paintings when you get the chance do you have a website?

How's that side hustle thing with archiving? I looked him up those coffins are spectacular
don't know about 'white african art dealer' but hey

Stay in touch and let me know if you're ever in NYC, we can discuss long unedited shots in person like proper sophisticates

Take care
Julia

To say that I comprehended her manifesto would be an exaggeration. And it wasn't as if I skimmed it. Unlike after her first email I found myself taken with Julia, attracted in the platonic sense, so I read the manifesto closely and felt ok with the fact that most of it went over my head. Instead of just seeming mature, I now saw Julia as discerning and savvy and cool. Intelligent. Rather than feeling frustration I believe I was generally in awe of her, and filed all of it—graduate school, a thesis, the studio, multimedia practice etc—in the back of my mind under 'future aspirations.'

Mostly I remember a smouldering sensation of: why? Why did this matter to her? What were her motivations? How could you *care* so much about something so esoteric and yet banal? (Many years later, doing my own Master's and indeed composing my dissertation I discovered the answer to that question, but in those fledgling years in LA such considerations bounced off my mind's surface like houseflies against sunny glass.)

ANTICINEMA

PART ONE: MANIFESTO

1. Cinema depends upon the observation of diegetic motion.
 - (a) Diegetic motion is an illusion.
 - (b) Diegetic motion is comprised of set and numerable chronologies of non-motions.
2. Cinema, therefore, is a metaphorical anti- or re-animation of passing time.
3. Cinema is an exploitation of its depiction of time insofar as it resembles its viewers' experience of time's passage.
4. Cinema, being comprised of set and numerable frames of non-motions, may be physical—i.e. of film—but cinema's truest state is non-physical in that it resides in the mind.
5. Cinema, residing in the mind, is a fundamentally liminal form.
6. Cinema's liminality is predicated upon the consecutive spaces between frames creating an illusion of diegetic motion.
7. Being liminal, cinema's determination of 24 frames per second (&c &c) is arbitrary, or liquid.

8. Because cinema is a liquid form its durational aspect must be regarded as a lie.
9. Because cinema is a lie it cannot be regarded moralistically or using truth as a compass.
10. Time is a fact, and is tethered inseparably to space, so cinema, a lie, must definitionally deny chronological time.
11. Cinematic time is a failed representation of actual time insofar as it is perforated.
12. Cinematic perforation, native to the form, necessitates the liminal buttress of the observing mind.
13. The observing mind, non-native to the cinematic form, adapted to diegetic motion quickly and violently.
14. The violence of diegetic motion, exemplified in audience reactions to Lumiere's train, was multiplied further with the advent of the cinematic edit.
15. The advent of the cinematic edit, formally speaking, acts as an evolutionary fulcrum between primitive and early cinema.
16. The advent of the cinematic edit, a kind of physical [film] violence, quickly garnered the sobriquet 'cut.'

Rereading it today—I've attached [julwhitanticinemar.jpg](#) for reference—I find her thinking much more robust; the unspoken 'anti' haunting each mention of the word 'cinema' seems to flesh out her theory in absentia. It is a manifesto whose intentions are drawn with negative space, just as cinema, for her, treats the viewing mind as caulk. The worst critique I could launch is most of the conclusions she reaches, though logical, are reiterative. But perhaps this is also the point.

As forementioned I composed the next email in our correspondence in 2010. By then I had moved into a very shabby ant-infested studio apartment not far from my girlfriend's and my former apartment, and was experiencing the anxiety that attends having mistakenly taken a wrong turn at some long-passed fork. My girlfriend had moved to London and I'd decided to stay in LA while applying for my visa. The apartment was small and hot and the air conditioning smelt of burnt something—noodles, plastic, human remains. I had never lived alone. The despair was relentless.

My email, which I won't include here, reflects this state of mind. Misanthropic, it is full of non-sequiturs and a desperation to entertain—for many years rereading it disappointed and embarrassed me.

Julia, to my great surprise—not to mention relief—loved it. She found my pain hysterically funny, a stance that I can today share with her (the melodrama in my letter is spectacularly over-the-top), but at the time struck me as callous and a little bit mean. No one to that point in my life had so brazenly refused to take me seriously, and it felt like a dose of bitter medicine.

In truth I likely would not have responded had she not also praised somewhat emphatically the short story I'd attached. It was about a boy who'd recently lost his mother to cancer, though in the story this fact is oblique, inferred. Hers was the first praise I'd ever received for my writing. It still touches me to remember the words she wrote; she had read the story and read it closely and she appreciated the themes and had perceived depths—particularly its handling of cancer and mortality—that even I as the writer hadn't fully intended.

In the story a boy is whittling outside of his house when he senses he's being watched. Standing from the splitting block and walking over to the rope swing (the whole thing's a tad twee-Faulkner for my present taste; I'd recently read *All The Living* by C. E. Morgan and was probably parroting her tone) he gazes down into the small valley that his family home overlooks. At some distance he thinks he sees a shape in the grass, some faint movement, perhaps a twitching ear. He considers running inside but instead stays frozen to the spot. It's dusk, a deep rod-and-cone-confounding dusk, and he can't properly detect the edges of this creature—its shape, its form—so, with trepidation, he begins to walk down the valley. He feels hypnotised. As he walks he thinks of his mother and how she forbade him from walking so far from the house after dark. He feels anger at this directive now that she's gone, betrayal. Turning he sees his father in the window

preparing a late dinner and this too angers him. By now it's clear the creature is a deer, a doe, though no sooner does this occur to him than the doe spooks, stotting blurrily downhill through some brush and into the woods at the edge of the clearing. Night by now has for the most part fallen—he detects stars overhead, a waning moon—and although the boy knows it's against the rules, he decides to follow the doe. Afraid, but resolute—standing at the end of the clearing, the border of this place he'd always been fearful to explore—he gathers himself, then enters the darkness.

In hindsight that email, her response, was when we became proper friends. It was the final gasp of formality, allowing in intimacy and a tendency to playfully rib one another—a tendency she frankly took greater advantage of, but one that I always appreciated. It was big-sisterly, which, sisterless, I liked.

Over the next few years we wrote regularly, with breaks between letters of two to three months at most. Our lives moved as lives do—slow as experienced, fast as recounted: mine to London, marriage, a job, increasingly nicer flats; hers from Greenpoint to a house in Ditmus Park, the hell of adjuncting, and the relative joys of dating a woman for the first time. I looked forward to her emails because they entertained me, but also because Julia didn't really know me, so my decision to become a writer or a cheesemonger or to start painting again was from her perspective as natural as if she'd told me she was taking up paleontology—we regarded one another primarily as present tenses, and took one another at face value.

In this sense it was not exactly distressing when, after six months, I hadn't heard from Julia, nevertheless I decided to break precedent and follow-up—one of those 'hey haven't heard from you how you beens' in which one must actively voice concern to avoid seeming passive-aggressive or spurned. It was 2016 and my thirtieth birthday had recently passed. Her fortieth was in June, just around the corner.

When she responded her form and tone remained unchanged, however now they wilfully belied the content. Her cancer had recurred, she wrote casually—cancer I hadn't ever known was in remission and was frankly disturbed to learn about in chaotic free-verse. She was back in St Louis where she'd undergone a mastectomy and a round of chemo. Her parents and sister were looking after her, which she appreciated. She made some comment about her sister that suggested they'd been estranged, but this was the first I'd ever heard of a sibling, so that's probably conjecture.

Towards the end of the email, almost as if she were performing a public service, she mentioned also that the cancer had spread and that the doctors weren't hopeful; whether she was undeterred by this prognosis or dismissive I couldn't say. She was writing in the little window of time before another series of treatments and procedures, so if I didn't hear from her for a while that would be why, she wrote, and not to worry.

Unsigned, the email ended there. It had been ‘Sent from my iPhone.’

My response, here from the vantage of almost six years in the future, was probably a bit too grave. Or I don’t know. If I’m honest with myself I would probably write something similar today—my reach for profundity exceeding my grasp—still the whole thing feels as if I were whispering it to her on her deathbed. Granted that was indeed how I felt, but I can’t imagine Julia needed any reminding, implicit or not. I think I regret that.

Or maybe I regret that I didn’t follow up that email with something less solemn. That I didn’t ever course-correct, let alone check in again. It wouldn’t have needed to be a long thing—just a little note wishing her well.

Lately though I think that I must have intuited that ‘not to worry’ meant capital-g Goodbye as Julia wrote it. That I’d known somewhere below conscious consideration that my response would, or should, be, so to speak, the end. And really in that sense I don’t think it’s my email that I regret, not really, but rather the circumstances under which it was written, which, if I were to remove those—dismantle the chronology, as Julia wrote to me at one point—I would in effect negate the whole thing, erase every word we’d exchanged over those thirteen years. Add tragedy to tragedy, or, in other words, edit.

1. Including mistakenly purchasing a PAL version from some Canadian distributor.

2. *In One Breath: Alexander Sokurov's Russian Ark* (2003)

3. TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Spring 2003: Watch *Russian Ark*, write letter to 24 FPS

November 2003: Julia Whitting writes first email

September 2004: Start film school in Bozeman MT

January 2005: Apply to RISD as a transfer student

May 2005: Quit hotmail, forward Julia’s email to my gmail account June 2005: Summer transfer session in Providence RI

September 2005 - June 2008: RISD

September 2008: Move to LA, reread Julia’s email, respond

August 2009: Receive Julia’s second email

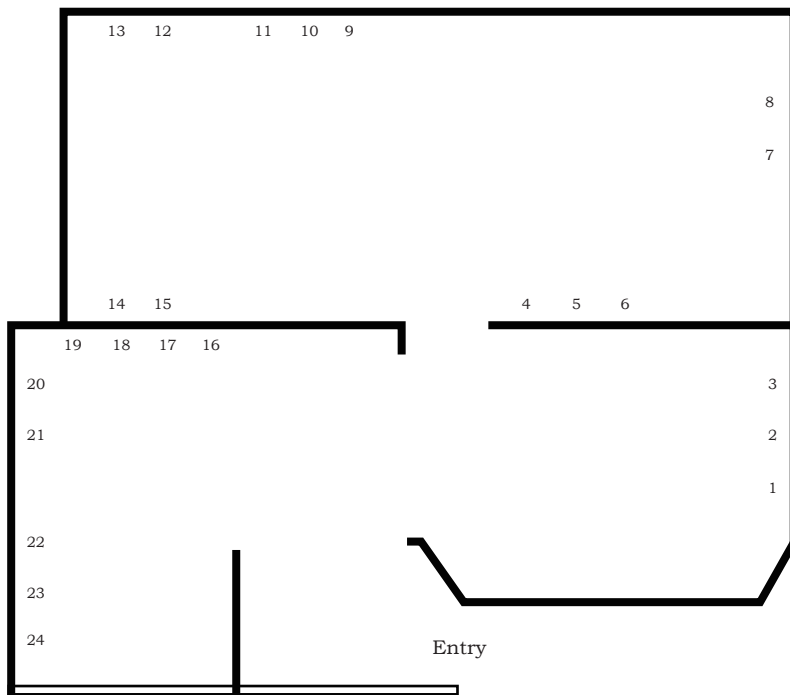
August 2010: Send second email

October 2010 - October 2015: Regular correspondence

April 2016: Check in / update from Julia about diagnosis/prognosis / respond 16 November 2016: Julia dies

January 2017: Discover obituary on www.legacy.com

4. That, and of course the fact that I was replying to an email composed probably without a second thought back in Bush’s first term.



Just A Second

Joseph Yaeger

7/16–8/30, 2022

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Before is a future</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 2. <i>Days stacked against who
we think we are</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 3. <i>Ghost without saying</i> ,
2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 4. <i>Prayer is a deep-reading
of nothing</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |
| 5. <i>It is always years later</i> ,
2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 6. <i>The best way of living well
is getting revenge</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 7. <i>Exhuming the hatchet</i> ,
2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 8. <i>Another solved game</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |
| 9. <i>Charity begins as harm</i> ,
2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 10. <i>At the bottom of the well,
agency</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 11. <i>The world of ought is
coded</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 12. <i>No epiphanies</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |
| 13. <i>History is its own
denial</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 14. <i>Energy is its own
depletion</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 15. <i>Even what is is not</i> ,
2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 16. <i>Even what is not is</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 17. <i>Public solitude</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 18. <i>Blunt instruments still
cut</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 19. <i>Wilderness is not a
place</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 20. <i>From not of</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |
| 21. <i>Solved game</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 22. <i>We are created by being
destroyed</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 23. <i>As I die laying</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm | 24. <i>2023</i> , 2022
石膏亚麻布面水彩
Watercolour on
gessoed linen
26 x 46 x 2 cm |

约瑟夫 · 耶格尔

约瑟夫 · 耶格尔 (b. 1986) 现生活和工作于伦敦。2008 年，他于美国罗德岛设计学院获得绘画学士学位。2019 年，他于英国皇家艺术学院获得绘画硕士学位。

作为一个适应当代文化记忆无常变化的艺术家，约瑟夫 · 耶格尔的实践可以被看作是对当代力比多 (libidinal) 经济中的图像恋物倾向以及绘画在可见而显露的转变和环流中同时存在的原力进行的平行研究。耶格尔作品中的图像乍看是可以辨别的，但却同样是无法追索的，是一种不可思议的曾相识之感。

耶格尔的作品在众多重要的画廊、艺术展会和学术机构中均有展出，如：天线空间，上海 (个展，2022)；弗里兹艺术博览会，洛杉矶，美国 (2022)；巴塞尔艺术博览会，迈阿密海滩，美国 (个展，2021；群展，2020)；Project Native Informant，伦敦，英国 (个展，2021，2020；群展，2020)；VO Curations，伦敦，英国 (个展，2020)；David Lewis，纽约，美国 (2022)；The Perimeter，伦敦，英国 (2022)；Mamoth Contemporary，伦敦，英国 (2020)；皇家艺术学院，伦敦，英国 (2019)；霍克尼画廊，伦敦，英国 (2018) 等。

Joseph Yaeger

Joseph Yaeger (b. 1986) currently lives and works in London. He received his BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2008 and his MFA in Painting from the Royal College of Art in 2019.

An artist attuned to the vagaries of contemporary cultural memory, Joseph Yaeger's practice can be thought of as a parallel investigation in the fetishisation of images in contemporary libidinal economies, and in painting's contemporaneous agency in the transformation and circulation of the visible. The images in Yaeger's works appear at first glance immediately recognisable and equally untraceable, an uncanny déjà vu.

Yaeger's works has been featured in numerous key galleries, art fairs and academic institutions, such as Antenna Space, Shanghai, China (Solo, 2022); Frieze Los Angeles, US (2022); Art Basel Miami Beach, US (Solo, 2021; Group, 2020); Project Native Informant, London, UK (Solo, 2021, 2020; Group, 2020); VO Curations, London, UK (Solo, 2020); David Lewis, New York, US (2022); The Perimeter, London, UK (2022); Mamoth Contemporary, London, UK (2020); Royal College of Art, London, UK (2019); Hockney Gallery, London, UK (2018) among others.

分秒不差

约瑟夫·耶格尔
(Joseph Yaeger)

2003 年，在 eBay 上遍寻了几个月之后¹，终于让我追到一张亚历山大·索库罗夫 96 分钟一镜到底的《俄罗斯方舟》的 DVD²。记得第一次看到这部片是那年的一个春日午后，在我的儿时卧室里，那年我 17 岁。索库洛夫和演员们的壮举非常震撼人心，也让我连着几周，几个月都沉迷在这部片的各种相关信息中。我看了 DVD 的幕后花絮，翻遍数十本电影杂志的相关报道——批判性的、理论性的，甚至略沾边的评论我也看。只可惜，除了一些预告片和一个古董级博客风的粉丝网站，网上几乎没有太多关于索库罗夫这部片的文章。

出于一种失落——一种面对《俄罗斯方舟》创新形式的特殊性（当然，也包括它的主题）不得其门而入之感，我索性怀着姑且一试的心情，写信给现在早已停刊的电影季刊《24 FPS》（还记得，这份杂志的编辑室导言栏目后面还附上短短的读者来信专栏）。

在当代的互联网中，《24 FPS》存在的踪迹早已被淹没在早已被公司企业商务优化过的搜索引擎环境中，我自然也没法借此寻回关于那封读者去信任何确凿的细节。不过，在下列这封 2005 年 5 月转寄到我现在用的 Gmail 邮箱的一批存档邮件中，可以确定的是，我当时是用 eider3@hotmail.com 这个电子邮件地址发出的³。

当初收到这封 Julia Whitting 女士的来信，我并没有马上回复，但后来我们也断断续续通了十几年的信，却从来没有机会见到面，而且也再也没有机会了；她在特朗普当选后就职前的一片愁云惨雾中过世了。尽管想念她，但我们的关系仅止于书信，这份感伤也充其量只能称得上是一种网络式的哀愁。

以下是她在 2003 年 11 月 24 日晚间 10:46 发送的第一封电子邮件。

发件人：Julia Whitting [j.whitting76@aol.com]

主旨：反电影

Hello,

你在《24FPS》上写到关于俄罗斯方舟的事，我有一些话要说。你是在电影院看这部片的吗？希望是的，非常魔幻的体验。当时院线连放几晚，我和我丈夫看的是 11 日或 12 日那场。电影很迷人，也很高兴读到你的来信。尽管只是文字交流，但遇到知音的感觉真是太好了。

写信给你的部分原因是我丈夫觉得无论电影的执行有多成功，这种噱头本身——他称之为笨拙！——也妨害了关于这部片的优点或在品质上提出任何洞见的可能性。（他在纽约大学教电影。）我想，从他的角度来看，这可能就是第一次约会的电影之类的，但我选择相信索库罗夫一镜到底的决定是为了带出主题，而非其他次要的考量。你不觉得吗？而且，他甚至用和弧度（arc）一字之差的方舟（ark）做标题。

历史往往如此教导我们，说，历史就是时代和纪元的规整叠加——文明的衰落或政府的终结，都是可以盖棺论定的。在我看来，索库罗夫旨在否定这点。他否定线性叙事，所以才会在电影结束一幕望向外面波涛汹涌的大海——试想，若在一扇扇门后出现的是摄像机的滑轨，我们对这部片会不会有不同的看法？

给你写信的部分原因是出于好奇。你在看过俄罗斯方舟之后，看待事物的观点有没有发生变化？在方舟之后，你还用一样的方式来看电影或电视节目吗？不得不说，它改变了我对电影业的愚昧，电视业甚至是广告业的看法。

我大学的时候，一个室友 Heather 非常迷一档叫欢乐酒店的电视剧。我俩都不爱交际，但她甚至比我更宅。（我想她在大一之后就退学了。）她总是在宿舍的电视上放她那几卷欢乐酒店精选集的 VHS，仿佛宗教般虔诚。这让我很烦，烦到我总得要飞叶子才可以平静下来。（尽管她没说，但也看得出来她很烦我抽这个。）我记得我总会就着我的小烟袋，和她一起每晚就在放着不停的片子前直到睡着。

无论如何，飞叶子前后的天壤之别，让我联想到最近看俄罗斯方舟的改变。

在还没抽叶子的时候，我总是习惯性接受节目给定的现实和剧情；这些**酒吧里的人**就是影片角色，他们口中说的话就是他们之间**自然发生的生活对话**；飞叶子之后，发生了一件怪事（现在想起来也是心有余悸）：我无法不去意识到那些角色都只是**演员**，他们身着**戏服**站在**影棚**中，嘴里讲的全是由专业**编剧**团队写好的**对话台词**。我看着剧中的特德·丹森或伍迪·哈里森，总会泛起一种古怪的想法，仿佛可以直接读到他们的内心在说什么，而且跟嘴上讲的台词大相径庭，即便演技再好，也无法掩盖这些死记硬背的台词跟他们的个人特质完全搭不上边，我总是暗揣揣地想，他们就像是被自己的潜意识给蒙住眼睛，关在地窖。这种想法有点让人害怕，而且很丧，甚至可以说是恐怖。就算我尽可能让自己不要往这个角度去想，但每次看到节目请君入瓮的手法时，我却已经不能再打断心中的疑问。

同样的，当我现在看片，即便是看一部好电影，我也无法摆脱这种把“剪辑”或“编辑”看作是一种无聊的状态——或是对人们感到无聊的一种直接反应，像是在面对观众丧失注意力却要纵身一试，而又注定徒劳无功。这种曾经完全浑然不知的事情突然盘踞在我的认知中，很是让人崩溃。每一次画面出现一次跳接，似乎都在提醒我：看呀！看呀！看呀！不停介入，再加快时间。就像是用药的“永远不够”证明了瘾君子的依赖加剧，我在这里面看到的是人们的集体注意力被剪接本身给剪碎了。

抱歉打扰，知道你写信到杂志社是想了解更多关于索科洛夫和这部电影的事，但我很好奇，你会不会也想过我说的事？剪接到底意味着什么？对我们有什么影响？我不是希望要推出什么宣言，但可能你对我说的也有兴趣，也许也会想聊聊我最近开始称之为**反电影**的概念。

我还没有很确定要用什么形式，但我的目标或理想是提出一种**反对电影**的电影。我不知道为什么我会这样想，但感觉你也是做电影的，如果不是的话，你也可以略过这整封信，但如果你**是**的话，我会很想听听你的想法，看你会怎么解释这些！

反电影重新定义电影的时间绵延特质，不再视之为内在于电影形式本身，反而强调要放大时间的漫延效应。在**反电影**中，人们可以进入或穿越——由导演用任何工具或手段捕捉或创造的——时间。**反电影**对个人内在性的重视与外在性等量齐观。**反电影**颠覆好莱坞表演模式，否定那种倾向于让角色透过表演展现自身，而弃用文字讲解的主流模式（show-don't-tell）。**反电影**认为，即便情节有任何存在的意义，它也只是回溯性地存在，并且在形式结构范围外而存在——它抵制例如契诃夫手枪（或任何人的枪！）这样的歪理。**反电影**既不快也不慢，关键是要抵抗“剪接”如今被滥用的方式。**反电影**不使用剪接，反而是要参与进去。**反电影**，在其理想状态下，是要取消电影史的词汇：不再有正反拍，不再沿用180度角原则，不去调整视线高度，诸如此类。我还可以再继续举例，但我想你已经明白我的想法了，希望吧！

有时间再回信就好，不要有压力，但我确实很想听听您的看法！谢谢你那封发人深思的信，让我觉得德不孤必有邻！

祝好，
Julia

直到2008年9月我才再次打开这封信，我当时应该是在洛杉矶和女友同住的Miracle Mile公寓里乘着醉意寄出第二封信，也开启了一连串的信件往来。

这期间发生了很多变化。也许2003年没回信是因为当时太年轻，而且招架不住她强烈的语气——比如说倒数第二段那种疯疯的感觉——后来2005年第二次没有回复她的来信，则是因为当时经受几个月的抑郁，便决定要从蒙大拿州大电影学院休学，也算是放弃了拍电影的理想。

当时才读了第一个学期，我对电影最起码的兴趣却已经消耗殆尽——包括对电影的希望、信仰等等。不知何故，我从没想过拍电影必须与他人合作这件事，我当时觉得我的同学（唯一可以合作的对象）很迷，而且他们的品味和行为举止简直让我社恐发作到极点——优越感也顺带推着我更加疏远他们。我说话时总是脸色发红，喉咙发紧，但这没什么大不了的，我告诉自己，在我看来大家都是狗嘴吐不出象牙。

我的第二个学期开始没多久，就忙着申请转学到罗德岛设计学院——我当时觉得是姑且一试，要么就去罗德岛，要么就停学搬回家，跟家人同住，就这么简单。

在罗德岛的暑假衔接班上课的时候，也顾不上 Julia 的邮件，确实，之后在普罗维登斯上课的三年里，信的事也完全被我抛诸脑后。其实一直到我毕业后，刚搬到洛杉矶，被撞墙期搞得晕头转向（刚从体制的束缚中解放，世界马上变得仿佛无限广阔没有边界，却又像一条无尽的狭长通道，充满不确定性）才感觉是时候梳理一下我的 Gmail 邮箱了。

我女友当时已经在电影界工作，除了工时长，还需要刷新自己对工作的理解；正如我在好莱坞看到的那样：生活就是工作（这正是她的写照，后来在 2010 年便离职了）。如果这项工作有意义，这种牺牲也还行，甚至也算是某种理想状态，但她的大部分生活——也包括我俩的——都是围绕着电视台想要捧红哪个超级英雄的一档低级节目而转。总而言之，工作像是要吞没一切：周一放工可能是早上 6 点，但如果制作期间出了岔子——而且制作总是会出岔子——在周四可能就要上看到 11 点甚至通宵。这让我多出很多空闲时间，但在一座新的城市又不愿社交，空闲却等于孤独寂寞。

每次无聊，我会小酌一下——当时喝的应该是尊美醇与杰克丹尼——再在 Gmail 中随机搜索一些单词，一般会弹出几十封邮件，里面总有几封文情并茂或比较重要的长信，我便坐在床上，慎重之至的穿戴整齐，开始读信，任由一种只有年轻人能体验到的怀旧情绪所笼罩。

偶然瞥见 Julia 的邮件，我记得我当时一直盯着地址中的“76”。如果这是她的出生年份，那在她写信的时候，她已经 26、27 岁了。就算当时的我已经 22 岁（怎么说都还算年轻），我还是感觉她的成熟和经世有点遥不可及。也许这就是为什么我回信的语气如此生硬吧⁴。

原信已大幅删减，但我留下来的这些还是多少有点难为情，在今天看起来感觉太放不开又措辞不当的句子，也留下一些……这有点难表达……就情或就理而言的违心之论。我也不敢相信自己曾经用过马尔克斯的句子用作信尾的签名，还做作地在句号后加双倍行距。

来自：Joseph Yaeger [josephyaeger@gmail.com]

主旨：反电影

亲爱的 Julia，

不知道你是否还在用这个邮箱，希望如此。长时间没有回信，对此我很抱歉，你在 2003 年来信说俄罗斯方舟的事，现在补上一份迟来的回应，非常不好意思。

[...]

第三，你不晓得你给我写信的时候，但那时我还在上高中，老实说，我不知道我应该如何回应你的信。[...] 总而言之，这让我开始想：反电影的想法是怎么来的？不知道你后来有没有发展运用这个理论，或是在哪里用这个提法做些什么呢？

当初收到信的时候，我不确定我那会儿有没有完全理解反电影的概念。老实说，即便在今天，我还是觉得这个概念有点摸不透的地方，但我

想我第一个问题还是在于技术面。有意思的是，我好多年没看俄罗斯方舟了，但我还是记得我第一次看这部片的时候，花了好久才适应数字化的“胶卷”。还是那句老话，我现在是全凭印象在回忆，但我特别记得就在刚开场的时候，一些盛装女子从马车里走出来，离镜头非常近的时候，突然出现掉帧的状况。我要说的是，就算是我当时才十几岁，我都感觉可能当时的电影技术还是没成熟到足以赶上索库罗夫的野心（有点像库布里克心心念念人工智能吧。）无论如何，不知道你的反电影是否和今天的技术仍旧不善于处理你所认知的时间绵延特质有关？

[…]

我希望你不会介意我这么问，我很好奇你信里面没有交待很清楚的一些小细节。我在想——还是请你不要介意——你还住在纽约吗？你老公还在纽约大学教书吗？[…]你还说到大学，我很好奇，你在哪里读书？我的天，你现在做什么？你是电影导演吗？

抱歉问了这么多问题，就像我说的，我刚搬到洛杉矶，最近想到了你的信，而且老实说，我很想知道自己的生活该怎么办。

[…]

不要觉得有回信的压力（你也知道我隔了多久才回信）。见鬼了，你甚至可能连信都收不到。但愿并非如此。

保重，
Joe

PS 顺便说一句，我有过你说的那种感觉，但是我在看宋飞正传的时候。而且仅此一次。但我完全明白你说的感受。诡异吧。

“他必须要走到很近才能看清那位老态龙钟的长者，脸埋在泥泞里，有他巨大的翅膀掣肘，无论怎么挣扎都爬不起来。”——加夫列尔·加西亚·马尔克斯

之后的夏天，当我收到她的回信时，我都快忘了 j.whitting 这个名字，乍看之下我还想，这是不是罗德岛的哪个同学？我有无数次趁着醉意发出电邮的经验，但对方几乎都是熟友。次日清晨醒来或难为情，或觉得后悔，但从来不会放在心上。可能因为我不算认识 Julia，所有关于写过信给她的记忆总是一下就忘了。当我的目光落在邮件主旨的“回复：”字样

的时候，身体突然泛起一股做呕般的慌乱感。

多少因为感觉怕被谴责，我迟了一两天才点开邮件，但事实证明我多虑了，完全是蠢人之心度君子之腹。Julia 何止是不介意我的醉意，她被逗得可乐了。她回信的思绪非常混沌、

活泼、有趣——逻辑跳跃也无法预测。而且格式也变了：以前的信总是段落整齐，断句标点清晰，你等一下就会读到她现在的信，看起来更像自由诗歌体，没想到这样读起来其实更平易近人，也更吸引人。这种感觉的邮件我是第一次见到。

我现在已经记不大清楚我是在哪和在什么时候具体细读了第二封信，但在隐约记得的时间线中，我们各忙各的，我大概记得我在离家不远的面包店上几乎是全职的班，有空就画一些厚涂抽象几何作品。总体而言，2009 年是很快活的一年：青春、自由、新的友谊和心满意足的同居，整体上头脑非常清醒——还有一种现在想起来很蠢的感觉，就是所有事情都已经捋顺了。

可能因为这样，我拖了一年才回复 Julia 的信。尽管不算是很闷，但 2010 年对我来说是变动的一年：女友搬到伦敦，繁琐的依亲签证，9 到 12 月搬回我蒙大拿的父母家住，还有我放弃绘画开始写小说的决定，有那么点之前放弃电影的即视感。

发件人：Julia Whitting [j.whitting76@aol.com]

主旨：回复：反电影

我的天，我完全没想到会收到你的邮件，但我刚好在几个月前也重点标注了给你的信，你来得真是时候分秒不差

很多事要讨论

第一封信是谁写的，我现在根本认不出来是谁

忽略我那封信吧

把它当作婴儿晾在边上就好 哈

（可能我也还认得，但你知道就好）

一件一件来

对，我还在纽约（现在在布鲁克林）

没，我单身，但他应该还在纽约大学教书

本科在华盛顿大学

我在圣路易斯长大

研究生在亨特

不是电影导演，但也不是真的**不是**电影导演，做的类似是复合媒体

你的回信很搞笑，你现在搞定你的生活了吗？哈！

我真的不敢相信我写那封电子邮件才是六年前，天哪，感觉就像十辈子。

让我烦你一下，可能你听了就会觉得你的**生活还行**，相信你已经很清楚了

以下就是多年前写信给你的那个我

我在圣路易斯的一家广告公司做了好几年，一直到 1999 年底才离开父母，到了纽约

我当时跟一个从高中就迷恋的对象用酒精度过那段低潮，我们床上合拍，但没什么可聊的，你懂的

这段真的是又臭又长

分手 + 升迁 + 工作机会 + 一个在东村有套公寓和沙发的大学朋友 = 再见第 27 城（顺带一句去他妈的法兰岑）

所以我到了纽约，不到**一个月**就遇见了这个大我很多岁的家伙。**大心**现在回想起来，当时的我与精神病没有区别

爱情让人盲目

开始和朋友吵架

然后我开始认识他的朋友，很老套啦，就是他年纪比较大，我也告诉自己我很 * 成熟 *

所以我也有点乐意跟我自己的朋友闹翻吧？

住进他的房子

二十四岁结婚

父母是给了一点眼色，但他才 41 岁，不是真的那么老，而且他们还算喜欢他，或者至少没有不喜欢。

然后就是 911 了，我们突然意识到，如果随时可能会死，那还他妈的还做什么广告

（有差吗！）

回想起来，他总是赞美我，但其实是在控制我。当时无论是我的绘画还有现在看起来非常庸俗粗糙的 Trecartin 风格的影像作品他都**非常**买单。反正让我感觉我很独立自主，但其实完全被他 PUA 了

他让我感觉我像是个明星

他甚至在我申请学校的时候还帮我**写**我的推荐信，天啊

而我基本上跟婴儿没区别，完全是仰望他

而且他很周到，在这一点上他真的超级聪明

我有点把他当我的人生导师，还觉得很走运，这么刚好就是个爱我的人

然后我就入学了，**立马**感到特别爱这些课程，特别**全力以赴**

然后就有点情况了

我老公的脾气开始变了

他变得暴躁，不耐烦

我一开始觉得是我自己的问题，觉得自己投入太少了。他是我的引路

人，所有一切都是我欠他的

我想，要嘛是他终于看透了真正的我，要嘛就是我堕落了，没有奉献精神，反正就是一切自我厌恶的东西。不管什么都是我的错。对这个巨婴感到万分抱歉

但每当我到了工作室，所有烦恼就都消失了，非常神奇

我遇到了我最好的朋友，人超好

现在还是我最好的朋友

所以，我当然就把所有的时间都耗在工作室里

可能要等到我毕业一年后，我才意识到他变得没那么重要了，这让他完全无法接受。

所以我出局了，毕业了，然后我就领悟了

领悟是动词吧？

渐渐地，然后一下就明白了

我不想再爱他胜于我自己

然后就爆炸了

多了不起的领悟啊

我有种想要自由的感觉

当你觉得你需要自由，那这段婚姻就有问题

你说你为了女朋友而搬到洛杉矶，记住，在关系中你不必一直屈就
好吧 这是我的建议专栏

我**真的**很认真上我的 MFA 课程（去读个 MFA 吧！）但讲真，看到一个你曾经敬佩的人突然开始变得像婴儿真是非常奇怪的感觉。

我开始讨厌回家 讨厌 讨厌 讨厌

永远不知道他会挑剔啥

哈 其实不好笑 但我记得有一次我在工作室，已经很晚了，外面有个汽车喇叭按个**没**停。我就走到窗边看，结果是他

我特丢脸

他妈的也很怒 肯定的 但也很丢脸

无论如何，**反电影**是我的理论。我不记得给你写过那封电子邮件，但我记得我和老公因为俄罗斯方舟而吵架。我们过去基本上看每部电影都会吵。就像我切开来给你看的那样，这场针对俄罗斯方舟上的意见分歧一发不可收拾。就一部电影诶！从回家途中一路吵到床上，然后就是哭啊诸如此类的

回想起来，我想那封信一定是我最早开始抵制这段婚姻的一次行动
这封信的语气像是在接纳自己

哼

这不是虐待什么的，就是单纯的愚蠢、痛苦、幼稚

而且他还偷吃
或者这样说吧，他 * 才 * 签完字，下一任妻子就出现了

如果你愿意，结婚还是可以的，但说真的，永远不要离婚

我真的应该开个建议专栏

随信附上我毕业论文里面的“宣言”扫描档。随意读吧。就几页。剩下的都在我某个硬盘上，可能也找不到了。生活就是这样。回想起那段时间还真不是滋味，所以我就不细说了，但还是欢迎你读读。肯定比我的邮件更有意义

所以关于我的工作和看电影，答案是肯定的

如果你想看的话 我待会发你一些

如果有机会 你应该把你的画发给我看看 你有网站吗？

归档的活忙得如何？我查了一下 他那些棺材很壮观
我不认识什么“白人非洲艺术代理商” 但

保持联系吧，如果你在纽约跟我说一声，我们可以像是真正的智者那样当面聊聊一镜到底的长镜头

保重，
Julia

我虽然仔细阅读了几遍，但我不敢说 I 看懂了她的宣言。跟最开始读她的第一封邮件不太一样，我有点被一种柏拉图式的关系吸引了，所以我仔细阅读了她的宣言，大部分内容都超出了我的想象。她不只是感觉成熟，现在更感觉到她很有洞察力、机灵，也很酷。很聪明。我没有感觉挫折，更多的是崇敬的心情，并将她的所有这些事情——研究所、论文、工作室、多媒体实践等——都记在了我脑海中叫做“未来愿望”的档案区。

读着这些文字，我心中时而泛起一种问题在闷烧般的感觉：为什么？为什么对她来说这很重要？她为什么写这篇文字？干嘛这么**在意**深奥却又平庸的现象？（多年后，我自己也进了硕士班，写起论文，我就明白了，但在洛杉矶的青涩时光，这些想法就像无头苍蝇，不断从我的脑海中浮现。）

今天再次读这篇文章——我附上了 [julwhitanticinema1.jpg](#) 供你们参考——我感觉她的思维更稳健；每次提到“电影”这个词，隐含的“反”字像是幽灵一般徘徊在其中。这是一个意在用负空间绘制的宣言，正如电影对她来说充其量就是在运用观者的心灵机制来填补影像空缺的部分。我能想到的蹩脚批评就是她的大部分结论，虽然合乎逻辑，但略显重复。不过也许这也是她要的效果。

如前所述，我在2010年再度回信。那时我已经搬进了一间破到长蚂蚁的单间公寓，离我女友和我以前的公寓不远，当时困扰我的是种走错人生岔路的焦虑感。女友搬到了伦敦，我决定在申请签证期间待在洛杉矶。公寓又小又热，空调散发出一股烧焦的味道——面条、塑料、毛皮屑之类的。我以前从来没有自己一个人住。绝望感无情地袭来。

我的电邮（我就不附了）就反映了这种状态。厌世，充满各种无厘头，非常渴望娱乐效果——几年之后重新读到这样的文字，老实说有种对自己感到失望的尴尬。

但出乎我意料的是 Julia 非常喜欢这封信，也让我松一口气。她觉得我的痛苦和歇斯底里很好笑，我现在也认同她这种想法（我的信简直不知道在演哪一出戏），但当时的我觉得她很无情，而且有点刻薄。在我生命中没有过哪个人待我会像这样不当一回事，这种感觉就像吞了一嘴苦药。

说真的，要不是她顺带称赞了我那篇附件中的短篇小说，我很可能就不会回信了。小说是关于男孩的母亲得了癌症过世的故事，但这些事实在故事中只是杯弓蛇影，需要人们去推敲。这是我的写作第一次得到正面的称赞。现在想起她说的话还是非常感动；她不仅读了这个故事，而且还很仔细，她欣赏我的主题，还读得很深——特别是对癌症和死亡的处理方式——即使是作为作者的我也没有完全意识到。

故事中，这个男孩当时在屋外剃头，突然感觉到有人在看他。他从劈开的木块上起身，走到秋千处（我现在的口味会觉得整个故事有点像福克纳；我最近还读过 C.E. 摩根的《生活之歌》，可能模仿了她的口吻）俯瞰着在他家底下的整片小山谷。远处，他感觉看到了草丛中的一个人影，仿佛在动，也可能是一只耳朵在抽动。他有想过要往后逃跑，但却呆住了，僵在原地。黄昏时分，眼睛的视杆和视锥细胞趁着最后一丝晚霞进行交接，他无法看清眼前生物的轮廓和形态，只能夹着恐惧走下山谷。他觉得自己仿佛被催眠了；一面走着，还想起了总是严禁他在天黑后离家这么远的妈妈。她不在了，让他感觉被背叛，还对这条禁令发脾气。转身便在窗中看见在准备晚饭的父亲，这也让他生气。现在很明显，那是一头鹿，母的，但就在他意识到的同时，母鹿也吓着了，模模糊糊地穿入灌木丛，下山进到空地边缘的树林。现在，夜幕已降临——他看见头顶的繁星和残月——尽管男孩知道这样不好，但他还是决定跟着母鹿。尽管害怕，但他也很坚决——他站在空地尽头，过去一直不敢进去一探究竟的地方，他先是定了定神，便进到黑暗里去。

事后回顾，她的那封邮件代表我们成了真正的朋友。这是礼尚往来形式的最后试探，再来就进到亲密的互开玩笑的阶段——比起来，我们之间她更占便宜，但我也一直很感念这样的关系。我想我是喜欢她的这种大姐大但又不落入姐妹情谊的感觉吧。

在接下来的几年里，我们经常互相写信，最久两三个月不到总要写一封信。我们

的生活一直在变——经历其中感觉很慢，但写下来总感觉飞快：我到了伦敦，结了婚，工作，搬进越来越好的公寓住所；她的房从 Greenpoint 搬到 Ditmus Park，兼职地狱，第一次和女生约会的乐趣。我总是期待读她的邮件，让我很开心，但也因为 Julia 并不真的认识我，所以我说要决定成为作家，或要卖奶酪，或重新开始画画，在她来看都是很自然的，就好像她告诉我她在研究古生物学一样——我们用现在式来看彼此，对方说什么就是什么。

从这个意义上说，有一次我半年没 Julia 的消息，却也不会让我沮丧，但我决定打破惯例，率先跟进——就是那种“嘿，没有收到你的消息”的信，关键在于必须积极表达关切，以免显得咄咄逼人或被嫌弃。那是 2016 年，我刚过完 30 岁生日。她的 40 岁生日就在 6 月，快到了。

她回复了，风格语气如旧，但仿佛有意遮掩些什么。她的癌症复发了，她轻描淡写的说——我甚至不知道她有癌症，老实说，在一段混沌的自由诗歌体里面读到癌症消息让人更是坐立难安。她回到圣路易斯切除乳房，做了一轮化疗。家人包括父母姐妹都一直在照顾她，她也记在心上。但她也说了一下她的姐妹，感觉她们已经没那么亲了，这还是我第一次听她说到兄弟姐妹，所以也可能是我想多了。

信末，她用一种像是公共服务那样的口气顺带说道，癌症扩散了，医生爱莫能助；不知道她是没被诊断消息击垮，还是根本不屑一顾。她趁着一系列疗程开始前的小空档写的信，说，如果我有一段时间没有收到她的消息，就是她在化疗，她写道，不必担心。

这封信没有签名，句子嘎然而止，只留下“从我的 iPhone 发送。”

从六年后的未来回头看，我当时的反应可能有点太严肃了。我也不知道。老实说，我换做在今天可能还是会写类似的东西——我不是很会表达深刻的感情——但这种感觉就像是在她临终病榻前讲的悄悄话。就算我当时下笔时确实是发自内心，但我其实很难想象 Julia 会要任何明的暗的表示。我着实后悔。

或者，我遗憾的可能是没找一些不那么严肃的话题代替回复，遗憾我自己从来没有多想一下。其实原来也可以不用写很多——一张祝她好运的小便条就够了。

最近，我开始想，当时一定是读到 Julia 写说“不必担心”就直觉认为是永别的意思。我半无意识的感觉之后我的回信就会是——应该就是——一切的句点。从这个意义上说，我认为我后悔的不是我发的邮件，不全是这么回事，而是写信时的形势，如果要我不说这些——正如 Julia 有一次说过，要罢免年代学的逻辑——那也就无异于将我们之间的事情一笔勾销，包括我们十多年来鱼雁往返的每一句话。让悲剧再加一剂悲剧，就像在剪辑。

尾注

- 1 其中包括我在加拿大网店错买的 PAL 制式版本。
- 2 《一镜到底：亚历山大·索库罗夫的俄罗斯方舟》（2003）
- 3 交流时间表

2003 年春：看了《俄罗斯方舟》，投稿读者来信给《24 FPS》

2003 年 11 月：Julia Whitting 寄给我第一封电邮

2004 年 9 月：入学蒙大拿州大电影学院

2005 年 1 月：申请转学到罗德岛设计学院

2005 年 5 月：停用 hotmail，把 Julia 的电邮转发到我的 gmail 帐户

2005 年 6 月：参加罗德岛转学生暑修课程

2005 年 9 月至 2008 年 6 月：就读罗德岛设计学院

2008 年 9 月：搬到洛杉矶，重新阅读 Julia 的电邮后回信

2009 年 8 月：收到 Julia 的第二封电邮

2010 年 8 月：发送第二封电邮

2010 年 10 月至 2015 年 10 月：定期通信

2016 年 4 月：写信，收到 Julia 的确诊消息 / 回信

2016 年 11 月 16 日：Julia 去世

2017 年 1 月：在 <https://www.legacy.com/> 读到讣文。

- 4 当然，那样的口气也是因为我是在给一封写在布什第一任期时代，并且一气呵成的电邮做回信。

