

Henry Hills on Arcana

This project began with an invitation from composer John Zorn to make a short film based on a text he wrote in the 80's ("Treatment for a Film in Fifteen Scenes," *ARCANA*. New York: Granary Books/Hips Road, 2000). Lewis Klahr, as well as several younger filmmakers, are also making versions of this 'treatment'. Zorn and I have worked together frequently over the years (he starred in my film *MONEY* and suggested the musicians for the soundtrack of *SSS*; I made 3 music videos for his band *Naked City*, and worked closely with his arrangement score & his suggested visualizations of several sections in making the storyboard for *LITTLE LIEUTENANT*; he wrote a special soundtrack, released as a Tzadik CD, for *MECHANICS OF THE BRAIN*; and I recently made a 60 min. direct-to-DVD documentary/translation of his "opera" collaboration with playwright Richard Foreman, *ASTRONOME*; plus he wrote soundtracks, also Tzadik CD releases, for two Martina Kudláček documentary features which I edited). This text, a list of 254 'shots' (with blank spaces dividing the list into 15 groupings) which are described with varying degrees of specificity in usually one to five words, begins as if it were the cutaways only, i.e., no action or dialog shots or facial close-ups, from a classic film noir. Primarily ominous urban imagery, the apparent structure quickly becomes too complex, however, to readily interpret and seems an invitation for improvisation—certainly more of a musical than a traditional narrative structure. I was immediately attracted to this idea as it seemed to require the opposite approach from that which I have typically taken in my work. In my last two films, for instance, I composed from a set of 2 or 3 images which I filmed again and again to explore subtle variations in different lights & states-of-mind and over time. The list itself became such an item in my life that it seemed appropriate to include it as a physical element. In gathering imagery (mixing 16mm Bolex footage with many different kinds and qualities of video), I took advantage of my current living situation, rotating back and forth between Vienna and Prague, New York and North Georgia. When I decided to use Zorn music recorded in the same period the text was written as the soundtrack, it all came together. The resulting film is kind of a film noir cooking show with an alchemical twist, and includes a descent into the underworld, historical and autobiographical elements (including a long swim), and a subplot of the adventures of a charmingly bewildered Slovakian poet/philosopher.

Starring Robert Gal, Martina Kudláček, Henry Hills, and Eve Heller.