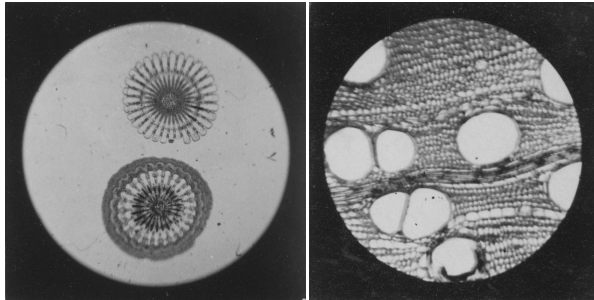


The Bridge



Fall 2025

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British Racing Green

Sophie Sardari

(for Rabul)

the knowing him after the getting-to
is the same in a series of remembers:

that well-dressed wet
handshake, the good
ear, the wrong time,
the books undone,
the palindrome lapping
up the last of the track,
the small hours, the
snake plant, the obvious.

remember to write him
down in discontinued
colors, to grand prix,
to look verso recto
before turning the page.

Three Poems

Clarise Reichley

Auto-eroticism

First fuck in their car. Rain outside. Our underwear mingling on the crumby footwells. Us in the backseat. Turned around. Braced at perpendicular angles. Stuck into again and again. Sharpness is pleasurable. Intercourse—being *Geschlechtsverkehr*, traffic between genders—is automobile. The language I speak is also auto-mobile. Creates more of itself with each utterance, like the Greenland Ice Sheet melting. Dark land beneath white snow holds new heat. Takes light into glacial places once miles-deep and innermost.

Waiting

Watching, searching for, keeping one's eye upon, observing constantly, looking out for, considering attentively, remaining for a time without something expected or promised.

Variant of *wet*, of land or soil, holding water, saturated with water, heavy.

Spring Tide

After the equinox, the vernal pool at the bottom of the ravine thawed and refilled with rainwater. Vernalization is the memory of winter embodied (implanted) in plant tissues.

When the salamanders leave, the eels arrive. *at pond bottom / All things move toward / the light // except those / that freely work down / to oceans' black depths / In us an impulse tests / the unknown.*

The eel's return is driven by a grain of need, a taut desire to belong. To be home in a headwater spoken of by dissolved forebears.

LES BLANK? MORE BLANK!

Peri Halajian

Les Blank is a life-documenter, a cinematic ethnographer, an archivist of the foods and musics that color the lives of communities on America's fringes. A giant of cinema, he remains unknown to most who don't spend their nights frequenting repertory theaters or scrolling through the Criterion Channel by moonlight. Blank produced the majority of his work between the 1960s and the 1980s. His films are about twenty minutes to an hour in length, have hand-painted title cards, delicious cross-fades, and blaring soundtracks. They are lyrical and rhythmic, jumping from long shots of weather-beaten faces to pots of crawfish to partner dancing to recollections of family histories to the proper way to cook red beans and rice. Blank seems to always be finding the balance between the everyday and the absurd.

Most of his films capture the traditions of ethnic groups in rural locales, like the Cajuns and Creoles of Louisiana (his primary subject), the Norteño-playing Chicanos of borderland Texas, the Czech- and Polish-American polka fanatics of the Midwest, and the Serbians of California and Chicago. Some are portraits of known and unknown musical legends: Lightin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, Leon Russell, Clifton Chenier, the Wild Tchoupitoulas, Tommy Jarrell, and Auntie Irmgard Farden of Hawai'i. Two are about Werner Herzog. One is about garlic. Another is about women with gapped teeth.

Blank's filmography stands as a life-long tribute to alternative filmmaking and human sensualities—exploring the connective power of music, food, and dance within the human experience. He turns the mundane into the holy

and the profound. As the writer Robert Sullivan put it, “every man is a philosopher in most Les Blank productions.” From the smiling belly dancer recovering from cancer in *Gap-Toothed Women* (1987) to the drunken Cajun man who pulls out his own tooth with a pair of pliers in *Spend It All* (1972), only to say “I feel much better already,” there’s always some treasure to collect and bury inside oneself upon viewing. Blank’s former wife said that he “did not think of himself as a documentarian... but rather as a filmmaker whose work happened to be about real people.” His camera is egalitarian—it finds as much pleasure in a blues guitarist’s hands as it does in a woman in tight pants as it does in a bubble moving across the sky.

—

Leslie Harrod Blank Jr. was born in Tampa, Florida in 1935. He made over 40 films from when his career began in the 1960s until his death in 2013—he worked until the very end. In his younger years, Blank aspired to be a writer, but decided he wanted to be a filmmaker after seeing Ingmar

Bergman’s seminal 1957 film *The Seventh Seal* for the first time.

Les Blank looks like a figure in a Les Blank movie: a man of a time gone by. He stands tall, broad, and earth-bitten, with a long face and a strong, sloping nose. He boasts a full beard, thick mustache, and long hair that receded to reveal an ovoid head as the years ticked on. He is often to be found in a hat—a flat-brimmed cowboy crown, a trucker cap, or a variety of patterned, Gatsby-esque visors—and with his rolled-up t-shirts and blue jeans he appears the classic American everyman, the kind that could change a flat, darn a sock, wrestle a crocodile, and compose poetry, maybe simultaneously. His friend, the filmmaker Werner Herzog, recalls an incident in which, stuck on a boat a few miles offshore with people he didn’t much like, Blank chose to dive off and swim back. His films share this utilitarian sensibility—nothing extra, nothing wasted, nothing fancy, nothing untrue. “You see what I saw,” said Blank.

In the early 1960s, Blank studied at USC film school, and got his

first gigs making industrials for organizations like the National Cemetery Directors of America, and training videos for softball umpires. Not quite what Les and his hippie collaborators had in mind when they started picking up cameras—but with the money and technical skill that he acquired from these jobs, Blank started his own production company, Flower Films, in 1967. He was off.

The first two films he made under this moniker are among his most well-known, and suggest the kind of work he'd go on to produce for the rest of his life. The first, *God Respects Us When We Work, But Loves Us When We Dance* (1968), captures an Easter Sunday love-in in '67 Los Angeles, and the second, *The Blues Accordin' To Lightnin' Hopkins* (1968), is a portrait of the iconic musician in his native Texas. Unlike most documentaries of the time, Blank's films are absent the talking-heads and voice-over narration used to direct an audience. Instead, Blank relies on freeform editing, striking and improvisational imagery (the camera often finds something more interesting to look at mid-shot), charismatic

subjects, and the propulsive rhythm of good folk music to drive his pictures.

His films are associative—they tell us nothing and we understand everything. The images he captures become symbolic when shown in succession, the meaning behind one reinforced when played against another. In *Chulas Fronteras* (1976) a long scene of a wooden ferry being pulled by hand and rope across a river, and a panning shot of a map of the Rio Grande, tell us more than words ever could about life in the borderlands. The rest of that film is pure joy—food being prepared, guitars being strummed, 50th wedding anniversaries being celebrated. Even when people share their struggles, there is a mystical beauty—an aliveness—to be found in them, as there is in all of Blank's work.

Throughout his career, Blank preserved a spirit of independence that many of his countercultural peers lost over time. He collaborated with the same people for decades. He never worked with studios—when he first started, he thought he would sell his films to

local libraries to make money. He relied on grants to fund his projects, and always negotiated with his sponsors for the rights to his prints so he could re-edit them for himself. Not that there were any commercial aspirations to be had in documentary but Blank had none.

Blank tells a story about getting arrested for possession while filming *Dry Wood* and *Hot Pepper*—films about Creole culture and Zydeco music in Louisiana—in the early 1970s. While he was waiting for his bail to be approved, he showed his skeptical bail bondsman and the sheriff *Spend It All*—his film about white Cajuns in Southwest Louisiana—who liked it so much “they helped [him] get on [his] way with as little sentence as possible.” Blank’s lawyer, in lieu of a fee, requested a 16mm copy of the film. This incident is a remarkable example of art (and independent documentary at that) having legitimate (monetary) value. When captured by his camera, faces, rituals, and ways of life became prized and precious.

Looking back on how he conducted himself artistically, Blank feels like some sort of utopian ideal. He was the kind of filmmaker that filmmakers should be—treading lightly, not in it for the money, driven by the work. His films embrace an anti-capitalist artistic creed, not only through how they were produced and distributed, but because of the attention they consistently draw to people, their labor, their histories, and the land. They are truly *people’s* histories of places, not encyclopedic but deeply personal.

The dominant thread of Blank’s work is a portrayal of a particular sort of American experience, of a time when communities felt stronger ties to their foreign roots than they do today, and of the distinct traditions that sprung out of the old ones. He is taken by the hyphenate American experience—the French-American, the African-American, the Polish-American, the Mexican-American. Films about these lives like *Dry Wood* and *Hot Pepper* (1973), *Chulas Fronteras*, *Always For Pleasure* (1978), and *In Heaven There Is No Beer?* (1984) feel like small offerings from

Blank to his audience. He opens doors to meeting grounds we might never have access to—lets us share in that joyous, boundless humanity—with the deepest reverence and awe.

Whether he realized it or not, Blank was capturing lives, and whole cultures, that were quickly fading—the isolation that assured their survival, waning. As an older Creole woman in *Dry Wood* puts it:

“When I was younger I thought it was a great thing to be on Earth and be alive and be healthy because you know the meaning of every day, what it meant. If it was a holiday, the family’d get together and they’d stick together. Used to go to my grandmother’s, she’d cook a big

gumbo in a wash pot outside under the trees...Get up the next day and just sit down and talk. Talk about life. But now we don’t have time to do that no more. If you go somewhere, got a television on, they put on a record player. Now, the way—life is too fast...As [the children] grow up out here there’s no jobs and nothing for them to do. They’re leaving one by one.”

Most of these people are gone now, their stories lost to us except for the brief moments we get to share with them through Blank’s camera. He enshrined them forever in celluloid—stitching them into the American tapestry of small histories whose innate presence and beauty only makes their loss deeper felt.

Two Photographs

Moselle Fredericks



Bobcat Under Apple Tree



Bobcat with Eyes Closed

Three Poems

Jonathan Asiedu

Alquilar

how much is the heating bill?
she motioned with her hands *el sol*
we laughed
i signed the papers and went upstairs

a BeReal. on March 14

dum dum wrappers littered the floor
my mouth roasted & dried
:) of fructose syrup to begin,
i throw the wrappers away, chewed up
A&W caps gets kobe-d into the
trash can somewhere i put
underwears in a bag i picked up all the shirts
the books on the floor picked up the bedsheet
on the floor the pillow all the way by the door
picked myself up & fall & fall & fall
for a couple hours till
the sun gets tired switched projectors &
now i improvised in the night sky the
air scented of damped wood & soy sauce
hungry but not for food but a purpose
ordained in the sky i turned off the lights
put music in my ears & dance like i
am sick dance like im 5 dance like there is
roaches in my skin dance like its my
birthday like tonight is the night of
Revelations & im ready; Heaven or
Hell, God, please, im ready

deserted dandelions

charred black bro ken
glass sprouts new skin on

skin elders like
over cooked marsh

mallows children eager to bite
into you picking at

sooted stories in the gela
tin; too old for their polaroid

memories of life &
what they say don't

say, *must* be right.

dementia is God's last hope
for forgiveness, in a sister's heart

take care, of

appointed fools
sins castings shadows under

wrinkled hands

too many damn gods on earth to obey
dandelions in a desert,
deserted by their own

...

soon we will all be here
memories baked like bofrots

& when the wind blows,
may our own care for us all

I Broke a Leg Where Pilgrim Feet Once Trod

HR Harper

Scene: The mountains in fall. Anthony sits cross-legged at a campfire. He's ready for action.

Anthony: I feel no feeling. It's from this habitual numbness I punch down. The culture made of memory and edited history both numbs me and stirs up my just Cause. Then it ambululates away from the Effects. Scot free and cheating at taxes, this is what will make me walk like a rich man, right? Walking on borrowed time with no shame. So I reach out from screen and page and ask you to join me in a landscape of silent valleys. Let's shatter these earthen jars full of dissembling parchment, let's let go of the fragments. With the icy fists of poetic license let's punch a thesaurus, a genealogy, a hierophant's foot. I complain to the manager that no starting point was scripted, no basecamp imagined for this set piece. The I/thou dialogue in this box of words gets tangled up, pushed into dry paragraphs, and trips over its own workshopped feet. This is the last pilgrimage of autumn, of papyrus and symbols unknown, and it is not the dance you wanted. Twist the bones before the plot, then backspace. The low angles of light allow erasures and mistakes. The fog comes on club feet, and we stumble, parched, toward an ancient reliquary, the Rule gone wild.

(Director's cut):

Wipe dissolve to a wilderness site. Step by step to the foot of the mountain where he set up camp, sidetracked and firewalled by the washes and arroyos, the dried aspens, high desert juniper, all ready for the deluge to come. Future destinations spread like cottonwood seeds climbing in air. Where? The head holds the map. The head conspires to smuggle messages to the feet. The feet are ready for any hubbub, though they prefer he not know there is no feeling. Neuropathic insolence. The heavy demand of awareness weighs on his extremities and abbreviates timespans. Ah, but the gig is, in fact, up. The *film noir*'s credits rolled at the beginning. Now he knows that art just obfuscates, assumes what is unwarranted success. It's all entertainment to disguise death and old age. I (foot-note: this is the director's voice) don't think, though, his place in a cave is cinematic enough. Let's put him on a path open to the elements.

Anthony: Here at the foot of a majestic cedar I stop to collect the debt accruing in your hands too. I pull the map from your cerebral cortex. The games will start now, the character development and conflict. You think this is easy? Do you prefer nursery rhymes? I pull you through the screen into my body, and with this alchemy we can transform the numbness into song. Ok, maybe not song, but spoken language. Ok, maybe not language, but a website.

Review from Cahiers du Cinéma:

Appendages convey letters, single file sentences. Lines enjambed to wither the smidgen of your patience left.

The point (both sharp and dulled) is to find a trail to new breath, new lungs, interconnected neurons with name tags for the icebreaker ... oh yes, the body reimagining itself with precious mistakes. The fine print at the bottom of it. No feeling, where there once was feeling. Words where there was once a canyon of silence.

Anthony: Oh sweet lord, dry my feet with your hair. These conundrums are toes. This little piggy went to market. The desert fathers are bereft of new ideas. Just find me one true trail to get all the way home, is that too much to ask? What, was that my job? I hear the French circumlocution here in the Eastern Sierras. It says, "Tony, heads up!" I play the old soundtrack, a disintegrated loop. Mistakes prove that impermanence is the only way forward.

The Review (cont.):

The final frame also has limits and unforeseen expectations. We walk, hobbled and humbled, out of the theater, with this wild hunger, with this borrowed body, one painful step at a time. It surprises no one that the rain has begun.

Anthony: Pilgrim, there is no *camino*. The absence of maps cuts right to the bone. The loss of the old world is a lamp to my feet.

Three Poems

Julia Kiernan

Rustle, heart

The scaffolding for tomorrow is cold, the cuts calm
calm the ear cold cuts hang asleep, the ear hangs over the pillow
dangling dreams made of stuffing over the house. Branches in his
eye.

His eye made of stuffing over the house.

The collected impressions of intimacies with strangers a populace
of outlined breathers, branches are the distance from the poking at
his eye.

far lands on her hands. Cat spirit head sitting in the heat
far lands Cat spirit sitting on her hands on all the heat
that has ever been generated, so
the entire history of
the entire world.

Play with me. Let's play with me. Crouching on the warm wooden
floor, I am the other sun, at your service.

I like my wet dinner, made of cabbage and soybeans. I like our
apart-standing in the nothing chamber.

Your drowned basic pillars. On you, a smile meant a more
inexplicable smile.

What would I say if there was a hole shaped like that in my heart
what euphemisms would I bother

(A silence the count of seven)

about the stuttered motor in the
the diamond cut out
I forgot how
to do this—— I'm having a
sick period
in the diamond way I'm having a
about the stuttered water in the diamond cut out the diamond way

Flesh Gordon (1974)

Sex lasers red sex lasers
Sex lasers there's no one at the controls
The controls broke off in Flesh's hand
Blondie falls into his lap as the plane goes down
Science is golden
From the outer reaches of the solar system
Alien enemies shoot light cylinders
The golden cock ship blasts thru space junk
Desire doodles in the Milky Way
America is on the front of the globe
Blond sandwich on the pink bed

“Ivory Horn Carved with 4 Coupled Heads of a Bull”

Ivory horn carved with 4 coupled heads of a bull. At the end of the horn, you are at the point. The 4 bulls meet from 4 directions, forming a single direction. Behind them, a hyperactive dog arcs over tall grass. The world is smaller than it's ever been, and so are you. It's a forever-receding, never-complete dark. Round jade slices to weigh down the chest; to help the soul exit, by weighing down the body. Compression jacket, say “you are mud pile”
“welcome mud pile”
“feel done now”

In the re-created Buddhist shrine room the chant is a recording and the plastic slippers and the flash on. There is also a knee-high glass barrier that triggers an alarm when touched. When you try to enter heaven, you will be blocked at the knees.

Mostly, this is a re-creation of an old kind of red.

Figure kneeling in a block formation, possibly emerging from a mound in the underworld.

Gregarious monkey possibly used by a nurse to divert
the attention of a very small child.

A whimsical representation.

Figure hides in the block dark—As a child
finding the smaller spaces to fit into loving the repose
of being in
a den a cavity a cavity of any
kind for that matter a
stomach cavity.

