



PRESS KIT

Canada, 2024
English, 77 minutes
Digital, Color, Stereo

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pUNK FILMS PRESENTS

crocodile eyes

TAG LINE

what is obvious to some, is invisible to others

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

crocodile eyes is a portrait of a four-generation family as they navigate death and birth, and life in between. Guided by the rules of Dogme95, the film unfolds a dual purpose: as a meditation on the cycles of life and as a deconstruction of the art and artifice of filmmaking.

Content Note: There is real death and real birth in this film.

This film has been made for film festivals (to be in dialogue with audiences, in person). This project will not be streamed online. It is not for sale.

ONE PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS:

crocodile eyes is a portrait of a close-knit four-generation family. Captured in a series of chronologically unhinged vignettes, through the impulsive lens of its main filmmaker. The film unfolds a dual purpose: as a meditation on the cycles of life through death and birth - and as a deconstruction of the art and artifice of film. Like a postmodern Ten Commandments, each section of the film is punctuated with the rules of Dogme95. Through its 77-minute running time, moments shift between narrative and document, engaging us in an ultra-meta experience, which aims to be both innocent and self-aware.



LONG SYNOPSIS: (Written by Simon Reynolds)

crocodile eyes is a poignant and unflinching portrait of a close-knit four-generation family as they navigate the death of their eldest father. Captured in a series of chronologically unhinged vignettes, told through the impulsive lens of its maker, the film gradually unfolds a dual purpose: as a meditation on the cycles of life through death and birth - and as a deconstruction of the art and artifice of filmmaking. Like a postmodern Ten Commandments, each section of the film is punctuated with cutaways to the rules of Dogme95, anchoring our experience in the Danish film Collective's infamous manifesto. Moments shift effortlessly between narrative and document, engaging us in an ultra-meta experience, which is both innocent and self-aware.

In the opening shot, a dead mink lies in the middle of a road, day-old blood blooming around its corpse like a halo. A woman struggles with the dubious task of lifting it, raising a pertinent question: How do we deal with the dead? Very carefully, as it turns out, especially if we don't want to get our hands dirty. And we better throw our whole body and ingenuity into it, for death isn't something easily lifted. And even if we succeed, where then do we *put* death, to give it dignity?

From the death of the opening, we plunge into birth – conception, in fact - of the very film we now watch. A casual glance through a cell phone reveals candid moments of the central characters. Ruby White (Ingrid Veninger) encourages a living room wall to surrender itself to a hundred sticky notes, small pink placeholders to serve as the scenes for a film she has yet to make – but which we're somehow already watching.

crocodile eyes is a new entry to the Dogme95 canon, the infamous film Collective which arguably dragged the cinematic world into the future with breakthrough feature films. Despite its prodigious cinematic results, in 2000, Lars von Trier declared, "Dogme is dead". If that's true, this film is an invitation for resurrection.

The first rule reminds us that "the camera must be hand-held", as we are introduced to the family's youngest member, four-year-old Freya (played by Laska Sauder). As she builds a sandcastle at the beach, Freya confides to us her fear of being "alone", a resonant reminder of the pandemic years, of her entire life. What she really wants, however,



is to be a “mom” and “have babies”, perhaps intuiting her place in the cycle of things, of birth, life and death, beginnings, and endings.

The fresh-eyed clarity of Freya’s mind is soon contrasted with the murky perceptions of adulthood, as Freya’s Uncle Jake (Jacob Switzer) and Grandfather Doug (Simon Reynolds) gush over a stash of antique coins, bequeathed through inheritance. The scene is tinged with the irony that while ancient things grow in value, people don’t. Value is a function of perception; an old coin is practically useless, but its rarity can make it priceless.

crocodile eyes is not simply following the 10 Dogme rules – it is in dialogue with “the vow of chastity”, while igniting the uncanny feeling that what we are watching is not altogether *fiction* – or at least a fiction so densely entangled with *actuality*, that the line between has dissolved. Shall we call it: Actuality-drama? Narrative non-fiction? Creative autobiography?

As scenes shift effortlessly between scripted and unscripted, fact and fiction are blurred, and we are reminded of the arbitrary fragility of the distinction. Characters – or is it the actors *playing* them? - discuss future scenes and shots, then appear as themselves in *real time* minutes later. While Dogme95 presides like a provocateur anarchist over the narrative proceedings, one also feels the experimentation of Jean-Luc Godard, and the humanity of Agnes Varda; it brims with a passion and humor reminiscent of John Cassavetes, and the kinetic energy of Miranda July. The aesthetic is both pioneering and timeless, cut from the same cloth as the earliest works of cinema vérité, sharing language with such films as “Chronicle of a Summer” (1961) by Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch.

Ruby discusses with her son, Jake, her idea to *film* him reacting to a (VHS) recording of his birth. Ever deadpan, Jake describes his newborn self as a ‘little fucking bloody nugget.’ Now Jake - and by default, *we* - observe the birth for ourselves. But even Jake’s cynical exterior is chinked with the emotion of raw experience. In his own words, “It’s pretty crazy to see your own birth.”

In another scene, prefaced by the Dogme rule forbidding “Superficial Action” (aka no murders or weapons), we witness how Freya becomes



convinced that “crocodile eyes” are lurking beneath the beach water, and Ruby must prove to her they are only *rocks*. The sequence is a potent revelation of the relativity of perception, and a reminder that this subject is nowhere more appropriately examined than under the magnifying lens of a camera. Freya doesn’t seem all that interested in “superficial action” and when she wonders aloud “what’s a weapon?”, we realize she’s able to extract edge-of-your-seat tension and drama merely from the power of her imagination.

Then, we are thrust into the heart of the film, the sickness and death of Ruby’s father, Dedo (Frank Veninger), the eldest member of this four-generation family. (Note: These scenes may be difficult to watch). As Dedo lies like a deposed monarch in semi-conscious oblivion, his pillow lovingly wreathed in cedar and pine, we witness human dying and death in its starkest poignancies, punctuated rattled breaths. Finally, an unflinching moment of a last gasp and the death mask itself, a visage filled with more meaning than a thousand words could evoke.

While the impact of Dedo’s death touches each member of the family; no one is more poignantly affected than his wife, Baba (Helen Veninger). After nearly 60 years together, her grief spills out like an open wound, and we’re left with the nagging suspicion that there’ll be no easy way out. How do we lift the dead, and where do we put them?

From the ashes of death, we find ourselves reveling in the birth of Freya’s new baby brother, delivered to us in the same unflinching terms as Dedo’s death. As Ruby teaches a York University screenwriting class over Zoom, her daughter, Sara (Hallie Switzer), labors in the next room. As the contractions intensify, Ruby is prompted to move to her daughter’s side – in a single hand-held shot - just in time to capture her daughter’s final push and birth of her grandson, Charlie. With new birth and new life, death’s finalities are dissolved and renewed. The ultimate termination is re-framed as a station along the circle rather than the end of a line.

While Charlie is being born, the filmmaker pulls our attention once again to her adult son, Jake, and his egg sandwich. It seems we’re now *talking* about gripping moments, instead of being inside of one. But this egg sandwich is no accident; it sizzles in the pan like a birth already dying and our awareness is steered to an army of ants devouring a snail.



What *are* gripping moments? We are watching cycles of life and death feeding on each other - and Jake reflects, “People get maybe one or two big moments in their entire lifetime”. Indeed, life may be all the messy, mundane stuff stuck between the slices we call birth and death. And this film is full of messy, mundane stuff.

In prologue to conclusion, we make one final stop to birth and burial, as Freya prepares to bury her placenta along with her brother. Unbeknownst to her, it’s been replaced with frozen beets. But that doesn’t matter. Freya’s belief is what’s important. “It’s a big red dot”. Yes, and it will be buried to grow a sunflower for Freya, and a cedar tree for her new little brother, Charlie.

In the final resolution, the story shifts its gaze to Baba and new beginnings... We follow Baba, Ruby, and Jake – as they embark on a road trip to a retreat in upstate New York to lay Dedo’s ashes. And as we are ushered into the film’s ultra-meta moment, we witness the actors/participants watching the finished film for the first time. Melodic threads of what sounds like a film score punctuate the rushing waters of Niagara Falls. Score is *forbidden* in Dogme, but it turns out to be Sara’s husband (Braden Sauder) playing a diegetically-sanctioned guitar.

The actors/non-actors are invited to react, honestly, to the experience of seeing their most personal moments laid bare to the world. As we watch the actors watch themselves, we feel the weight of this meta deepening, its subtle labyrinth evolving beyond the screen. Like an eerie celluloid counterpart to a Borges dream, we ourselves are mirrored in this new reality, which now breaks the line between fact and fiction. And Dedo, the founder of these lives and fulcrum of this film – he’s watching, too. He watches from a hallway filled with his prodigious collection of posters featuring cinema, art, theatre, dance, music... just as the artistic treasure of his legacy echoes through the *frames* of this film.

Finally, it’s little Freya - the new future - who owns the final image, casting all our big ideas about life and birth and death aside, in the simple joy of a runaway beach ball.

BIOS:

INGRID VENINGER – Writer/Producer/Camera/Actor (Ruby)

Born in Bratislava, raised in Canada. This is Ingrid's 18th feature film as producer. She is head of screenwriting, and tenured faculty at York University, in the department of Cinema and Media Arts.



HALLIE SWITZER –Actor (Sara)

Born in Toronto, Hallie has played lead roles in many pUNK films projects, MODRA (2010), i am a good person/i am a bad person (2011), PORCUPINE LAKE (2017), WISH (2021). She actively engages with community causes @goodmammaries @parent.well.fed



LASKA SWITZER SAUDER – Actor (Freya)

This is not Laska's first pUNK film, she starred in WISH (2021), on her 1st birthday. She likes school, drawing, dancing and dragons.





JACOB SWITZER –Actor (Jake)

Born in Toronto, Jacob has played lead roles in previous pUNK films projects including, ONLY (2008), THE ANIMAL PROJECT (2013), IF YOU WERE ME (2022). He makes art and music @jayfeelbender @enter_themirror



SIMON REYNOLDS – Actor (Doug)

Simon reprises his role as Doug from the pUNK Films project, ‘i am a good person/i am a bad person’. Simon and Ingrid first met on the set of “Friday the 13” (the series) and have been friends ever since. Currently, Simon divides his time between Canada and India. He is a filmmaker and adventurer.



BABA and DEDO aka Helen and Frank Veninger

Helen and Frank have been part of every pUNK Film project ever made (in sets, props, costumes, craft service), this is the first time they have appeared on-camera. Dedo passed away on January 23, 2023. He loved film festivals. Baba loves film festivals too.



JOHN SWITZER (Camera)

John was volunteered to shoot this film with Ingrid by virtue of them living together (over 30 years and counting). John is a musician and teaches music production at Seneca Polytechnic. He loves to cook, which is brilliant, because Ingrid doesn't.



MIKE LOBEL (Editor)

Mike has worked in many facets of the film and TV industry. He responded to a post from Ingrid in May 2023 – seeking an editor for a new project. They were sure they had never previously met, but soon discovered they shared a scene (as actors) on *DEGRASSI: THE NEXT GENERATION*. In addition to editing, Mike is a musician and composer. Current passions include, folklore and meditation.





FULL CREDITS

CAST

Ruby – Ingrid Veninger

Freya – Laska Switzer Sauder

Sara – Hallie Switzer

Doug – Simon Reynolds

Jake – Jacob Switzer

Frantisek (Dedo)– himself

Helenka (Baba) – herself

Braden Sauder – himself

Charlie – Leon Switzer Sauder

WRITER and PRODUCER

Ingrid Veninger

DIRECTOR

(Not Credited)

MAIN CAMERA

John Switzer

Ingrid Veninger

EDITOR

Mike Lobel

ADDITIONAL CAMERA

Jacob Switzer

Hallie Switzer

Laska Switzer Sauder



Helen Veninger

Jane Siberry (the filming of Jake's birth)

Braden Sauder

Simon Reynolds

Mike Lobel

RE-RECORDING MIXER

Eric Apps

COLOURIST

Ryan Ruskay

TITLES

Sabrina Papas

Dena Salami

SHOT ON LOCATION

Toronto, Canada

Big Bay Point

Manitoulin Island

Psychic Clinic

Burdock Brewery

(Thanks to the crowd at the live Jay Feelbender show)

Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema

Kripalu Center

Tanglewood Forest

Niagara Falls

York University Motion Media Studio

MUSIC

MODRA RUZA

Written by Gejza Dusik



Performed by Gejza Dusik

DEDINKA V UDOLI

Written by Gejza Dusik

Performed by Gejza Dusik

BIG LEAGUE CHEW

Written by Jacob Switzer

Performed live by Jay Feelbender

MAKE YOU MINE

Written by Goodbye Honolulu

Performed live by Jay Feelbender

FOREVER YOU

Written by Jacob Switzer

Performed by Jay Feelbender

Produced by Braden Sauder

BIG GAME

Written Jacob Switzer

Performed by Jay Feelbender

Produced by Braden Sauder

NIAGARA FALLS IMPROVISATION

Performed live by Braden Sauder

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