

GODZILLA VS GRACIE'S!!!!

**AN AMATEUR'S
DIARY OF
RAPID
MOVIE
MADNESS!**

**HOW WE
DID WHAT
WE DID!**

**AND HOW
YOU CAN
DO BETTER!**





WHAT THIS IS, and why you should care:

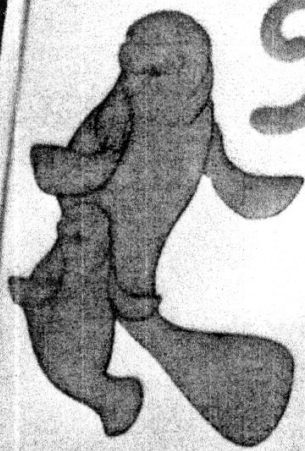
Movies used to cost millions of dollars to make; now they're free. So why not go make one next weekend?

We made three movies in no time flat, with no money, for no reason but fun. It seemed impossible, and that made it worth doing. In fact it was easy. You can do it too, probably better than we can. This 'zine tells the story of how we did it, in case that helps.

We had no script and we had no plan. But we had little hand-held video cameras, and home computers, and each other, and a weekend, and hubris, and e-mail, and bicycles, and Portland. We put it all together and made something bigger than ourselves.

Our movies won't be winning any awards, but we love them. We're obviously not too worried about Oscars, we're just trying to build community and learn filmmaking. We're making more movies, and they're getting better.

Anybody can do this, and someday someone is going to make something really brilliant, something really new and exciting and excellent, using this new chaos-oriented, non-linear, friendship-powered, money-free cinematic fun system. Probably it will be **you**, and your friends, and their friends. So if you just bought a video camera and don't know what to do with it, we dedicate this 'zine to you.



Nurturing Children
for Tomorrow

Hollywood Central

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SEPT	22	SAC
TEACHER	MS	HICKS
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OF THE YEAR		

The famous "Hollywood Sign"

Hollywood is the famous city where the film industry makes "real" movies, shot on "film" with "stars" and "lights". Hooray for Hollywood!

People in Hollywood will tell you their movies are all about love, or action, or mankind's future, or dinosaurs, or sensitive firemen, or explosions. But what they're really all about is **money**.

We hate money, and also we don't have any. So we chose another route. But if you're interested in "making it big" in Hollywood, by all means clip and save the next page!

(And then burn the rest of this 'zine! Quick! Before someone important spots you reading it!)

HOW TO MAKE A MOVIE:

THE NINE-STEP HOLLYWOOD METHOD

Step One: find fifty million dollars. Probably these dollars will be attached to a person. This person is your “executive producer”. Do whatever he tells you. He is now your boss, and the ultimate creative force in your film. Take a portion of his money as your producing fee — between ten and fifty percent is customary.

Step Two: find a director. Tell him you want him to be the ultimate creative force in your film. Build up his ego, and promise to hire lots of people for him to boss around. Apologize for trying to involve him in such a low-budget project, but promise him that he will have complete creative control.

Step Three: find stars. Stars are good-looking actors with memorable traits, who cause people to spend money. Hire as many stars as you can afford — probably just one. Give your star most of the money, but make sure he knows he is the director’s bitch from now until opening night.

Step Four: find talent. You won’t be able to pay your talent much, but your director will probably insist on bossing around such professionals as actors, cameramen, grips, gaffers, foleys, assistants, hairdressers, scouts, gophers, caterers, prostitutes and writers. Remember to tip the prostitutes.

Step Five: find a distributor. This will most likely be an executive, or team of executives, from a major Hollywood studio. As soon as they hear you have stars *and* fifty million dollars, they will fall over themselves trying to help you “distribute” your film. Just remember that all profits from your film go to them.

Step Six: the director will shoot the movie — stay out of his way! Your only job during the shoot is to make sure the director follows the executive producer’s orders, everybody else obeys the director, the stars have 24-hour access to the prostitutes, and all the checks clear. If anybody is disobedient, fire them. (In fact, it’s always a good idea to fire someone on the first day of shooting, just to keep the rest of the talent on their toes. Go ahead — it’s fun, and you’ve earned it.)

Step Seven: After shooting has completed, fire the director. Find an editor to fulfill the executive producer’s vision of what the film should have been like. The distributor will likely want a say in this. You will spend a lot of time in dark rooms with the executive producer and distributor, pretending to like things. Resign yourself to this, and stock up on anti-depressants.

Step Eight: Congratulations! Your film is “in the can,” as they say. The distributor will organize a premiere — you should attend, but sit near the back so you can leave early. After all, you’re a successful Hollywood producer, and that means you’re a busy, busy person.

Step Nine: find a good lawyer. Depending on the success of your film, you will either sue the distributor or be sued by the executive producer. If you are suing, offer the lawyer a percentage of the settlement — between fifty and ninety percent is customary.



GRACIE'S is a name for a loose confederation of weirdos which formed around a warehouse space in Southeast Portland, a series of free Sunday brunches held there, and a number of art-making parties that took place there regularly in 2000-2002. It was also home to a free copy & computer shop called **PINKO'S** — “Your Commie Coffee Copy Center!” — built out of donated and cast-off photocopiers, paper, art supplies, tools and furniture.

In its heyday, **PINKO'S/GRACIE'S** festivities included a nude cocktail party, a coloring-book party, a bureaucratic red tape party,

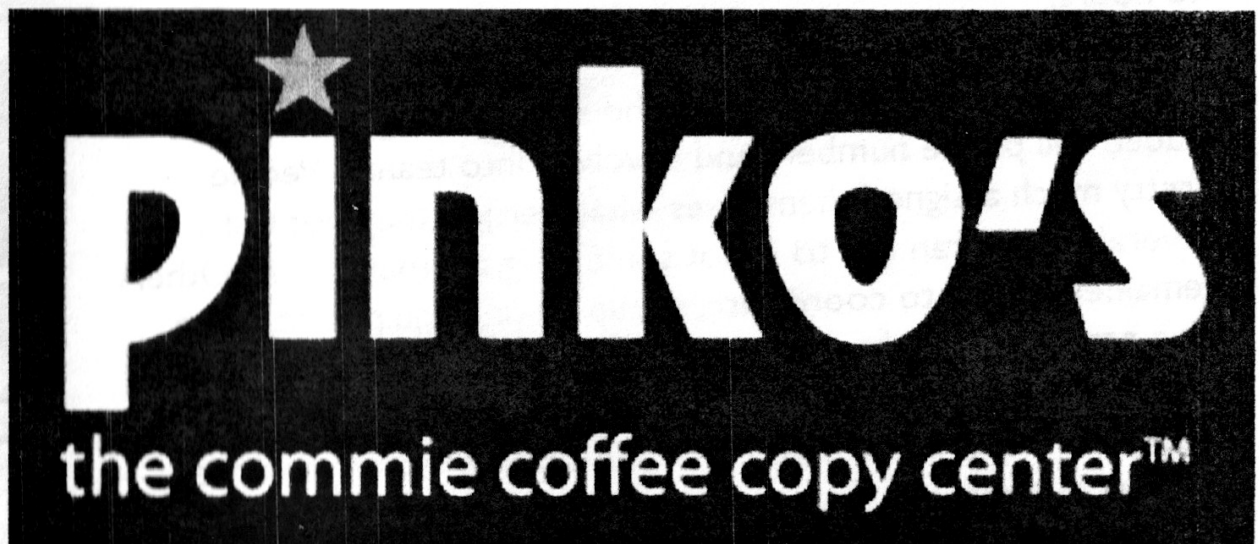
an Aeronautical Vest Pocket party and various timed art-challenges such as the 24-hour comic book and the 24-hour 'zine.

At some point after the 24-hour comic book, heady with the possibilities of this kind of collaboration, someone joked the next project should be a **24-hour feature film**. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and the **48-Hour Film Project** was born.

Although none of us had ever heard of a 48-hour movie before, the idea was springing up all over the country around that time. Affordable Mini-DV videotape and Macintosh-based video editing systems seemed to promise a new cinema, free from the expenses of money and time that had previously shackled filmmakers to the capitalist/authoritarian Hollywood system.

Surely, any film made outside of that system would shine with the nascent glamour of its political correctness! Surely, a loose confederation of free-food enthusiasts could make a better film than some corrupt gang of Hollywood trained professionals! And surely, with the enabling digital technology of the new millennium on our side, 48 hours was plenty of time in which to pull off such a revolutionary act!

Well, maybe we weren't sure, but we sure were eager ...



OUR FIRST MOVIE:

WE OVERTHROW THE HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM, SORT OF.

On Friday May 24th, 2002, about 30 Gracie's conspirators met on a pleasant back porch at a donated home: Sunday brunch regulars, their friends, and their friends' friends. A few were experienced filmmakers, the rest would best be described as "film-curious." There were no admission requirements, no fees, and no pre-conceived notion of how the next 48 hours would unfold. Beers were distributed, and snacks consumed. Several people focused on assembling a plastic model of a VW Vanagon.

As our first order of business, every person present introduced themselves and told us what their film-making skills and interests were. The majority expressed a willingness to try anything at all, and a complete lack of experience.

As our second order of business, we stuttered, groped, and wondered aloud what to do next. Finally, someone presented a stack of 3x5 index cards, a powerful totem of organizational voodoo. We peered curiously at the index cards, waiting for them to reveal their secrets ...

Someone else had an idea: everyone should write ideas for the film on the cards. We collected those, read them out loud, and pinned them to a cork board with thumbtacks. Suddenly, we had the first seeds of a film ... but at the cost of two of our precious 48 hours!

We began to panic. With only 46 hours remaining, we quickly traded cell phone numbers and devolved into teams. People pretty much assigned themselves whatever job they wanted. Several groups ran out to shoot something, anything at all. Others remained at HQ to coordinate, set up editing equipment, make blue-screens from cheap polyester tarps, and design an elaborate special-effects sequence involving the plastic model of a VW Vanagon. Writers developed their ideas, and tried to generate interest in them.

As the first bits of footage began to come back to headquarters, it became clear that a lot more footage would be necessary just to make this footage make sense. Some actors and directors got busy working on these “continuity” scenes, while everybody else continued to shoot whatever the hell they felt like shooting. As we grew more tired, desperate and giddy, we began to enlist help from random people we met on the street: clowns, art-car drivers, owners of interesting objects, residents of appealing locations, and cute babies, such as this one:



(We're ready for your close-up, Mr. baby!)

Somehow an overall “narrative” emerged, involving space travel and the actions of various superbeings. Not all of the shots fit the narrative, but several did. On Sunday afternoon we massed in Mt. Tabor park to shoot a space-alien-drenched finale. Then the editors took over and made it all work. That evening at Pinko's, 51 hours after we began (3 hours behind schedule due to an equipment failure) the 48-hour movie premiered to an exhausted, excited crowd. For no good reason, we called it **ROTATING FOOD**.

I'm totally unable to judge this movie, except to guess that film professionals, trained in perfectionism, will find it excruciatingly sloppy. The most basic mistakes in filmmaking abound: bad chroma-keys, camera noise on the soundtrack, soundtrack totally absent, whole scenes shot out of focus. But, like a clumsy puppy, it's got exuberance and energy. Not having time to obsess or deliberate, we all produced fresh, silly work. As an early document of the digital personal cinema era, I think it captures a lot. And boy, did we learn!

OUR SECOND MOVIE:

HOLLYWOOD, HERE WE COME ... HEY, COME BACK HERE!

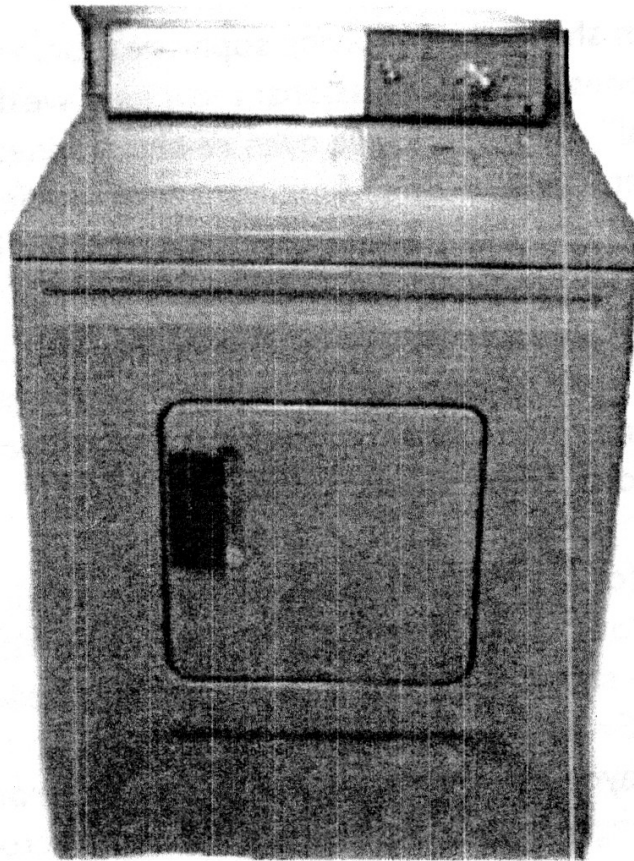
In the following months, as ROTATING FOOD briefly (very briefly) developed minor (very minor) cult status, as we were forced to revisit our 48-hour baby again and again, many of us began to imagine a better process, and to long for a better movie. Couldn't we do this again, but suck less?

There had been problems. First, the editors were idle during the first half of the project and overworked at the end. This seemed wasteful for such a tight schedule, and it certainly led to sloppy editing and burnt-out, bitter editors. Second, more people had wanted to act than had been filmed acting, or hadn't gotten to do what they wanted. Some participants dropped out half-way, unable to cope with the chaos. Other volunteers showed up mid-project but weren't able to plug themselves into the process. Maybe this would be acceptable if the end-product had somehow been better for it, but since we were in this for fun, more fun was clearly called for. Worst of all, our big initial meeting to conceive the "plot" and "structure" had been largely useless, but had generated much trash and many dirty dishes.

At some point it was proposed that we could make a "48-hour movie" without sleep deprivation by designating a week-long period in which every participant could choose which 48 of his or her own hours to contribute. Everyone could approach the project with urgency but a little bit less pressure and anxiety. Some might call it "cheating" ... we called it the Somewhat Rapid Movie Project.

We threw our first meeting in a donated living room on a Friday night in early December. Again, about 30 people attended — including many total strangers, since we had spread invitations all over town and the internet. We met each other, got comfortable, and in a relaxed and unhurried fashion undertook all over again the impossible struggle: to achieve creative consensus on a project that does not yet exist.

We broke into working groups to develop plots. We employed not one but two whiteboards. We even had those 3x5 cards handy somewhere. We talked, and talked, and talked ... as the hours wore on, our eyesight became blurry and our heads began to pound. Ideas leapt around and smashed against each other like so many muppets in a clothes dryer.



A clothes dryer.

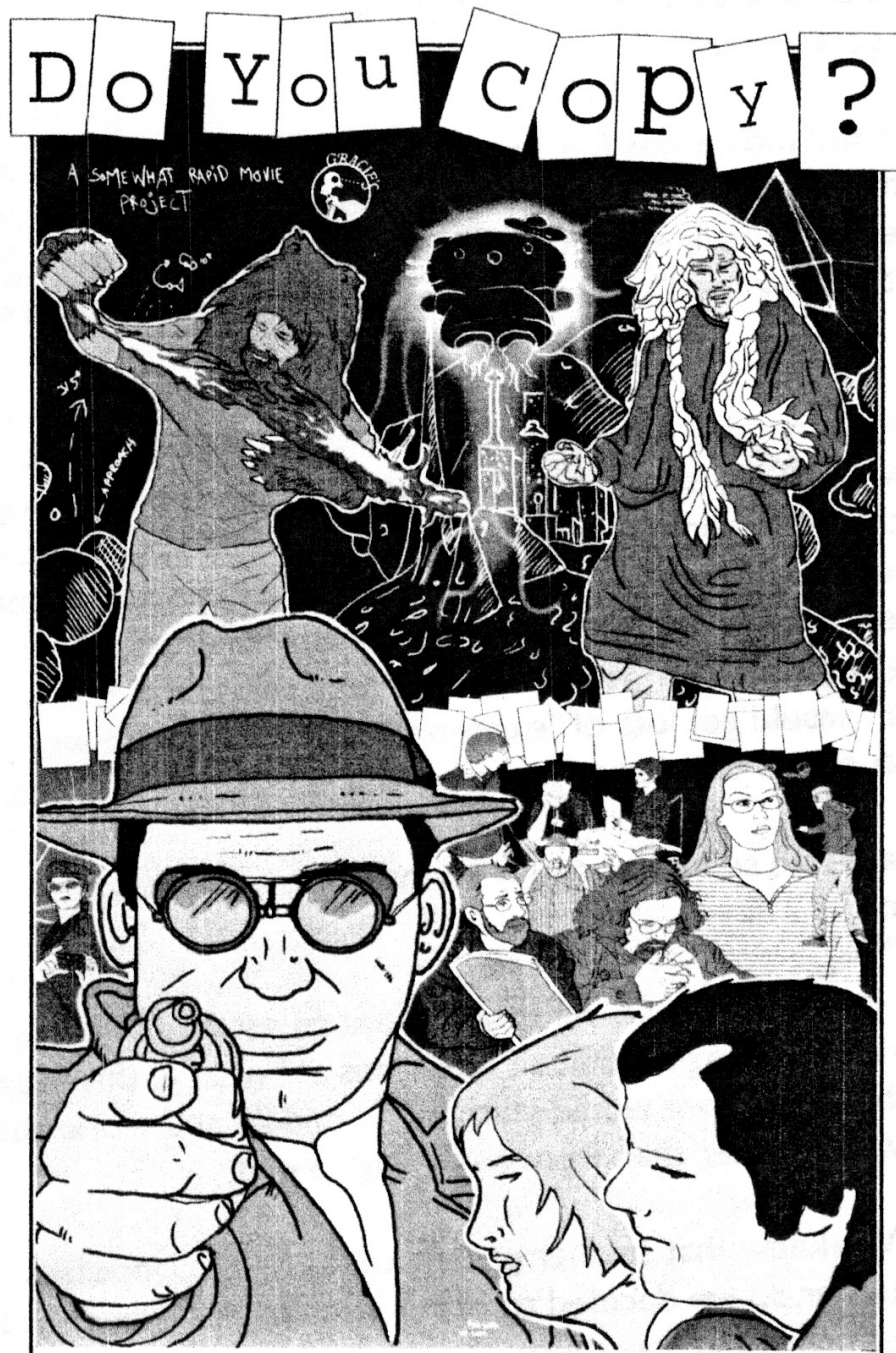
We went to great efforts to accommodate various peoples' requirements — there has to be a strong female lead, we have to have spaceships, there must be a "Trorb" (why?) — but that wasn't the same thing as a Story. Probably a Story is not something that a large group of people can create in a small amount of time, but we eventually at least conceived a Plan. Two films in one: a sprawling, ambitious space-opera spliced somehow onto an edgy, indie-style comedy about copy shop employees. And a "Trorb".

Unfortunately, we had no spacecraft, no copy shop, and no Trorb. Fortunately, we had the support of FREE GEEK, our local non-profit computer recycling facility, who lent us some back rooms for the entire week of shooting, and whose giant piles of discarded computers, photocopiers, cell phones and other digital garbage turned into our sets and costumes. For one week we spent evenings on two sets at FREE GEEK, and days shooting outside the building and along the banks of the Willamette River.

Our second film showed an evolving sophistication: we employed lights, microphones, and a professional technique we'd heard about called "rehearsal". Sometimes we even re-shot scenes if they didn't work right the first time. Ambitious special effects were undertaken. The light-saber scene on Monster Island involved a team of volunteers hand-coloring individual frames of video on the FREE GEEK recycled Linux systems. Petr Sorfa decided we should fly around in a spaceship shaped like Hello Kitty, and so he built us one. He also threw a Robot Party in order to get enough robots together to shoot a scene about robots.

We were lucky (or very clever!) that our central setting — CopyMaker, Your Local Place Where Copies Are Made™ — allowed us to shoot vignettes with every odd character we could make up. Everybody who wanted to act got to invent a character, and maybe a scenario, and bring it to the front desk for assistance. We began to see the wisdom in letting actors invent their characters — though not all actors are comfortable with that level of improvisation.

Once we got well underway, once everybody realized the innumerable opportunities to exert creative control over something, once we overcame the struggle and found the fun, the project proceeded with fluid grace and remarkable success. The editing was more of a month-long process than a week-long one, and the editors swore they would never do this again, but the results were head & shoulders above our first attempt. After a minor e-mail squabble, we managed to name it "DO YOU COPY?"



We even had a cool film poster!

I'm totally unable to judge this movie, except that I think it's much better than **ROTATING FOOD**. The premiere in January was surprisingly well-received and got some local press attention. Several more screenings were held in Portland, Seattle, and Yoder, and the film still seems to get shown about once a year. In fact, I am occasionally recognized as Helmut the Hitman by friendly strangers, and asked to tell jokes in a thick Austrian accent. So we must have done something right.

OUR THIRD MOVIE:

It only gets easier ...

The second movie was fun, but it took a little too long. It left us spent, exhausted, grumpy, frumpy, underfed, bad smelling and confused. We really weren't ready to do it again. We were going to start making "real" movies now, with scripts and directors and time.

But then something odd happened: this **slimy New York "producer"** guy showed up in Portland to work a clever rip-off: he charged people **a hundred bucks** to be in his lame-ass "48-Hour Film Project", where he handed the filmmakers "genres" and "lines" and "props" and took in exchange their money and **all the rights to their work**. He claimed that the winners of his "contest" would get lots of "exposure". We thought he was an **asshole**, so we decided to make another movie, out of spite.

We already had some ideas how to make the process faster and more fun:

- It would be nice, we thought, not to agonize for hours over such vague, difficult questions as "what is this movie about?" So we would start in the middle and work outwards, rather than from beginning to end.
- We knew that smaller groups could reach consensus quicker, so we decided to break into smaller groups at the beginning, and stay there.
- In order to create a better sense of fairness, we left the over-arching creative decisions to random chance.
- And in order to remain relaxed and happy, we gave ourselves an extra day.

Here's our original "recipe for a 72-hour movie", which we plastered all over town:

GRACIES PRESENTS: Recipe For A Three-Day Movie Badassacre!

Join us on a breakneck sprint across the landscape of cinema, as we write, shoot, edit and premiere a complete film in three days time: fri-sat-sun August 27-29. THERE IS NO CHARGE TO PARTICIPATE, and all participating auteurs will co-own the finished film. SO SHOW UP: Thursday evening 8pm, at T [REDACTED] for the kickoff meeting.

WE NEED: Actors, directors, editors, camera persons, propsmiths, grips, sound persons, gear owners, makeup artists, noisemakers, loose cannons, caterers, computers and stimulants.

CREWS: Three crews will work simultaneously. Each crew will consist of a director, actors, a sound recordist, grips, assistants, writers, camera operators and an editor. (If necessary, these can all be the same person.) Each crew will produce one finished scene per day. Each evening, all crews will meet to screen that day's work.

STORY: There's no script -- the story will develop from the input of directors, actors and writers during the process, with the assistance of some slips of paper pulled out of a hat. For simplicity, we will base our story in present-day Portland.

THEMES: Everyone involved will write out a one-word theme, symbol or subject on a slip of paper and put it in the Theme Hat. Random drawings from the Theme Hat will be the ultimate source of the film's meaning.

DIRECTORS: There will be three directors, who hopefully can see eye-to-eye on a direction for the film. They will confer each evening to share ideas for the next day's shoot, but will work independently of each other.

ACTORS: Actors will be responsible for creating characters, and for following directors' instructions. Be prepared to improvise. If you get stuck, call HQ and ask them to pull you a theme out of the Theme Hat.

EDITORS: Each crew will have its own editor with his/her own edit suite, responsible for editing one scene per day. Crews will shoot in the AM to early afternoon -- editing must begin early enough to finish in time for each evening's screening, circa 10pm. Editors will work independently of one another on each day's scenes, but will collaborate on the final cut.

SCHEDULE: here's how it will go down.

Evening Zero - Thursday August 26th: Kickoff meeting at 8pm at [REDACTED]. Meet everybody, go over the instructions, get all participants onto crews, collect phone numbers. Collect Themes and put them in a hat. At the end of the evening, three Themes will be drawn from the hat, which will be the guiding themes of the film.

Day One - Friday the 28th: Each crew shoots a scene, independent of the other crews. Each scene must include at least one character who can do other scenes later.

Evening One: Each editor finishes a scene and delivers it to HQ for screening.

Day Two - Saturday the 29th: Two crews shoot one "connecting scene" each: a scene that connects together two of the previous day's scenes -- possibly involving actors from two crews. The third crew shoots "framing devices" -- short clips that can be inserted between scenes. Crews will be assigned to the various scenes by a roll of dice, but they may trade afterwards.

Evening Two: Editors finish scenes and deliver them to HQ for screening.

Day Three - Sunday the 30th: One crew shoots a "beginning" scene, one crew shoots and "ending" scene, and one crew shoots whatever they want -- they can even re-shoot a scene if they want to. While the crews are out shooting, one editor can work on titles, one on credits, and one on assembling all the footage for the final cut.

Evening Three: Editors finish scenes and deliver to wherever the final cut is being assembled. Editors complete final cut and deliver to the 10pm Premiere, at NOCTURNAL: 1800 E Burnside! All participants view finished film with awe, then party or sleep as necessary.

BUDGET: there is no budget. Be prepared to supply your own food, water and oxygen. Directors will pay for tapes. If you bring snacks to HQ, you will receive undying thanks and a "catering" credit.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: the Gracie's Film Conspiracy. Visit 72.gracies.org to see our last rapid movie, or talk to mykle-72@mykle.com to be in this one, or call 503-222-1111 to speak with a live mykle, or just show up THURSDAY!

We didn't actually follow the whole recipe all the time — we especially didn't choose “directors” at all — but we did a decent job avoiding Big Dull Meeting Syndrome, at least until the third night.

As usual, we picked a weekend and met up in a donated living room in Southeast Portland. After explaining the concept, we asked everybody to write down one or more “themes” on slips of paper. The definition of a “theme” was left vague, but the slips of paper were only a few inches long. We put the themes in a donated tweed macintosh hat, which we christened the Theme Hat.



A few of our many “themes”.

Picking blindly from the Theme Hat, we chose the major themes of our film: “Cultural Wasteland” and “Lamp”. Confused, we broke into three teams, each of which picked a third theme to get their scene started.

(We also used a computer to randomly generate a color, which was supposed to appear in every scene in order to tie the movie together visually. It was a sort of lime-green. I think it appears once.)

One evening later, we met to screen the scenes our three teams had produced. We had a noirish street argument, a strange convenience store odyssey, and a highly intellectual argument about the nature of dissent. They were all great and had nothing to do with each other. But then, magically, we started to have ideas for how they *could* be connected. We were off and running. We broke again into three teams — although several people joined more than one team — and shot all night and the next day.

On the third evening, we were excited! Our weird movie had somehow gained a narrative flow! All it needed was a beginning and an end. We made to break back into three groups, but then ... out of nowhere, a Big Dull Meeting struck! Because everybody present felt an intense need to know the beginning and the end of the movie before it was shot.

We tried, really we did, to break it up. But it went on and on ... twenty different people proposed twenty different beginnings and endings, and then the war of attrition began when all but a dozen people had been driven off by tedium, the blowhards who remained took off to shoot a beginning and an end to the movie. Except for those of us remained behind to argue, on camera, about whether the movie needed such a narrative structure at all. Without even planning it, we had our “framing device”.

The next day was still a wild crush of last minute editing stress, but the movie premiered on schedule, Sunday August 29th, 2004 at 8pm, to an appreciative crowd. I'm totally unable to judge this movie, but I think the process worked beautifully. It's my favorite of our three films so far, and our next film will be even better.

HOW TO MAKE **YOUR** MOVIE

Don't know what to do? Just follow the official Gracie's 72-hour recipe on page 15. Adapt it to your own needs, add or subtract at will. It works well! It will work even better if you follow the following tips for finer filmmaking, which together make up Everything We Now Know About Rapid Movies.

COPING WITHOUT SLEEP: COFFEE helps, but so do little **SHORT NAPS**. Always leave someone awake to make sure the short naps don't run too long. Sleep deprivation can affect your body's ability to regulate heat, so bring blankets and wear layers. **EAT HEALTHY**, it helps.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS: See **LOCATIONS**.

DECISION-MAKING: The most important decision you'll make is the decision to finish your movie. All other decisions should be handled by coin flips if they become at all difficult. Remember, there's no time to argue! Don't be afraid to say "let's just **FLIP A COIN**." Quick decisions are more useful than perfect decisions.

LIGHTS: Shoot outdoors during daytime and you'll be fine. If you shoot indoors or at night, get some lights. We used poseable desk lamps fit with high-wattage flood bulbs. They got hot — consider having a **FIRE EXTINGUISHER** handy if you're going to use a lot of them for a while.

LOCATIONS: if there's a location you want to use, rehearse your scene worked out beforehand, and then remember the immortal words of Matt McCune: "It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission." (On the other hand, you can get amazing stuff by asking — we got to shoot two scenes in a convenience store while it was open for business.)

NOTES: You'll want to remember various things for your editor during the shoot. If you carry a **SHARPIE**, you can take notes on any nearby object or person. Or you can carry some kind of notebook — but don't lose it, like I did.

PULLING IN VIDEO: Video is so cheap, it's easier to shoot too much footage than not enough. At the time of this writing, the import of video to the computer is still the biggest bottleneck. So **KEEP GOOD NOTES** as you shoot, and tell the editors which takes they have to upload and which ones they can skip.

SHOPLIFTING: Videotape is expensive. Wal-Mart is evil. Enough said.

SOUND: If you only get picky about one thing in your movie, make it this. Sound is easy to get wrong, and poor sound ruins your scene — in fact, **BAD SOUND IS WORSE THAN BAD VIDEO!** Actors voices must be legible, background noise must be low. Modern consumer-level video cameras have excellent picture, but only so-so sound; their built-in mics tend to pick up a lot of background noise and sometimes some camera noise. If you can, borrow a **SHOTGUN MICROPHONE** and have someone point it right at the mouth of whoever's talking. Otherwise, get a long **STICK** (a "boom") and dangle a **CARDIOID MICROPHONE** from it, right over the actor's heads, pointing down. Have someone hold the stick. Or just avoid shooting in loud places. Or else get the camera really close to the actors. Whatever you do, don't shoot all day and get home to realize you can't hear anything — have your **DESIGNATED SOUND PERSON** wear headphones and **LISTEN** to what's coming through the mics.

SLATING: Camera operators, **ALWAYS SLATE YOUR SHOTS!** It will save your editors a lot of grief. To "slate" means to label, with video. You don't need a clapper, just hold up fingers in front of the lens to indicate which take (one, two, three, etc.) you're about to try, then make a little scissors with your index and middle finger to simulate a clapper. Snip when the action starts. Cute, but also it works. If multiple cameras are shooting the same scene, synchronize with them so the take numbers will match when the editors pull it all in. And really, you should keep a little **NOTEBOOK** with you to write down which take was the one you liked.

SUCKING: Your film will suck. You must **EMBRACE SUCKING**. So-called "good" movies are no fun to make, and they usually suck too. Your inner critic will serve you well someday, but during this project, you should wrap duct tape around his head and lock him in the trunk of your inner car. Remember that you simply don't know what the film will be like until it's done. Even then, you'll be unable to judge. So **SUCK HARDER!** And enjoy it.

OK! Enough blah-blah-blah!
You have 72 hours!
GO MAKE A MOVIE NOW!

... thanks for listening.



pree-senting...

gracies sunday brunch

"the only thing
you have to lose
is...an empty
stomach!"

every
Sunday!

10:30am-2pm

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