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Peeling Back the Layers: *Delusions in Modern Primitivism*

*Delusions in Modern Primitivism*, by auteur Daniel Loflin, is a mockumentary about a shocking endeavor--the art of scarification via gunshot. This short film is shot in a documentary style with the main focus on Jerome and why he feels this is the next step in his evolution of self-expressionism. At first viewing, it would appear to be a factual story, but a close examination of the *mise-en-scene* shows that not all is what it seems. Jerome claims to be a challenged individual; however, the facts presented in the form of *mise-en-scene* and Loflin's use of cinematography shed light on the film's true intentions: a delusion on numerous levels.

The first scene of the short is possibly the most revealing part of the film. Jerome is introduced exiting a nice house in a quiet neighborhood holding what could very well be a five-dollar cup of Starbucks coffee. Birds are chirping peacefully as he approaches his fully restored, vintage car. The use of medium close-up illustrates Jerome's demeanor and his assortment of cliché tattoos that he claims are all unique and individual. This is when he says he is from Euless, a quiet area just outside of Dallas, Texas. Once he arrives at Ray's garage, he readily pulls out five hundred dollars in cash to pay for his upcoming procedure. These details all denote a sense of privilege which Jerome constantly denies. He says one thing, but *mise-en-scene* shows us another.

Another important example of *mise-en-scene* begins with the introduction of Ray--the

"artist." Jerome pulls up to what could be mistaken for a simple mechanic's garage. Ray raises the door in a stereotypical mechanic's uniform shirt and proceeds to show Jerome the ins and outs of his art: scarification. His tools, with another tip-of-the-hat to a sense of reality, are stored in a large Craftsman toolbox, one of the standards of the field. While the setting comes across as logically realistic, the actions they discuss and their attitudes and motivations for doing this are both very self-centered and show each of them using one another for their own purposes. The "professionalism" that Ray exhibits with his setup and demeanor show Jerome as a pawn in this game he's playing. Once it's done, he even says that Jerome is all "part of what we're doing here," implying using (deluding) Jerome for his own purposes.

Through *mise-en-scene* Loflin also deludes viewers through utilizing the current popularity of the documentary format and playing on our knowledge of contemporary American culture. While we watch, we know that something like this could not be created and marketed, but we also face the ever-escalating ploys of media makers as they constantly up the ante. In addition, contemporary culture continues to come up with the next best thing to outdo whatever is the latest fashion—it is a *mise-en-scene* of ideas. By starting the film in a very familiar neighborhood, filming in a documentary format using close-ups and other tools of the style, the whole film becomes a delusion for the viewer who is left to more deeply ponder what is true.

Loflin achieved exactly what he intended with this mockumentary. The use of medium close-up shots and a realistic setting almost comes across as a factual representation of events. With the *mise-en-scene*—the more obvious details about Jerome's lack of hardship and his new acquaintance, Ray, and his ability to feed in to Jerome's ego, we see truth come to light. Jerome

is not as hard or disadvantaged as he would like us to believe. With Jerome's nice possessions and stereotypical tattoos, he is evidently held back only by himself. On top of that, Ray creates a scene of art and professionalism while still portraying a good-old-boy look with the garage and the Craftsman toolbox. In the end, Loflin creates three delusions: Jerome is deluded and deluding himself about his status and privilege, Ray deludes people like Jerome to become part of "what we're doing here"—his goal and aim, and we are deluded by the format of the film—watching it knowing that can't be real, but having to second-guess ourselves as we do. Instead of making use of the advantages he has, Jerome is chasing a more primitive road to success. Ray does this by creating a situation that is tempting to someone like Jerome. Overall, Loflin uses a primitive type of filming—documentary—to make us question not only the veracity of people like Jerome and Ray, but also role of the media in creating a desire to want to outdo the latest thing by presenting a film that does just that.

Work Cited

Loflin, Daniel. *Delusions in Modern Primitivism*. Youtube. 28 Jun. 2010, <https://youtu.be/W8-2a60ch5s> and <https://youtu.be/MmfkafeH24I>.