



Winter Hof, 2012 looping 4K video, installation, Dan Hudson

Dan Hudson

Winter Hof is a 24-hour cycle of observations in a Berlin apartment complex. During the short days of winter, indoor lights are often turned on allowing everyone to see into each other's apartments and by extension, into each other's lives.

This video project explores cycles of time and daily ritual. It also plays on our natural voyeuristic tendencies.

On another level, Winter Hof reflects on some darker aspects of human nature. Throughout history various totalitarian regimes and organized religions have coerced people to spy and report on each other as a way of tightening control over all aspects of public and private life. This is called lateral surveillance. Germany has two infamous examples with the Nazi and the Stasi (which was the impetus for this project) but we can also think of McCarthyism in America, the Spanish Inquisition, Salem Witch Hunt, along with countless other examples.

I am fascinated by the psychological aspect of these situations. By implementing various fear tactics people are pushed into a moral dilemma. Not participating in lateral surveillance makes a person suspect which might result in severe consequences. On the other hand, participation would likely lead to the interrogation, personal ruin and possibly death of another person. Each person must individually decide where they draw the line between self preservation and self sacrifice.

As the ever present fear of terrorism creeps into our everyday lives we are once again becoming a culture of surveillance. But now it has expanded beyond our immediate neighbors and has spread onto the internet and social media. Lateral or participatory surveillance is now becoming an online pastime. We no longer need to have our lights on for other people to see into our lives. There is an emerging culture of democratized digital surveillance in which security and entertainment have blurred into voyeurism.

An interview with

Dan Hudson

The ritual nature of everyday life is the main theme of your work: through a 24-hour cycle of observations you are able to explore dark aspects of the human beings as well as the hidden mythopoetic value of common gestures, reminding us of Thomas Eliot's Waste Land. How did you come up with the idea for Winter Hof?

Most of my projects involve methodical processes that verge on ritual. I develop procedures that are based on the earth's planetary motions and investigate how those motions affect our understanding of time within the context of everyday life.

For example, I did a series of projects that were based on the earth's orbit around the sun. One such project, News Weather & Sports (2010), involved filming the exact same scene at a public park for an entire year. This footage was distilled into a yearlong time-lapse. During that same year, I also gathered audio clips from newscasts recounting various wars, crimes, disasters and other newsworthy events. These clips were collaged into a soundtrack to create a socio-political context for the picturesque park setting.

Winter Hof can be seen as a natural progression along this line of inquiry. In the case of Winter Hof, one rotation of the earth (24 hours) is used as a framework to examine how historical events relate to our current state of affairs.

We have quoted T.S. Eliot in our previous question: we find your art rich of references, for example, your shooting style is very close to Chantal Akerman's early works. Can you tell us your biggest influences in art and how they have affected your work?

The stylistic similarities my work has with Akerman can be traced back to a source of inspiration we both have in common: Canadian artist and avant-garde filmmaker Michael Snow.

I think of artistic influences like a boiling pot of soup made up of all the things that capture my



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interest. This could be a bird, a cloud, a TV commercial, a painting, an article in a science journal, or almost anything. All the various ingredients of the soup are in constant motion with different ingredients bubbling to the surface at different times.

This makes it hard for me to pinpoint how specific influences affect individual works especially considering that most of my projects take years to complete.

However, I can say that while I was working on Winter Hof certain films did come to my mind: The Tenant by Polanski, Rear Window by Hitchcock and Lives of Others by von Donner-Smarck.

Apart from your cinematographic background, we have found your approach to art really multi-disciplinary: the influence of painting and photography on your artistic vision is no doubt remarkable....

My videos are related more closely to photo-



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graphy or painting than they are to film. I create non-narrative, looping videos that have no scene changes. They are like photographs that slowly change.

I developed a technique to create real-time "time-lapse" videos that suspend the viewer between the altered timescale conveyed by the video and the spatial, moment-to-moment experience of the work itself. They operate on the level that separates the subjective world inside our heads from objective reality.

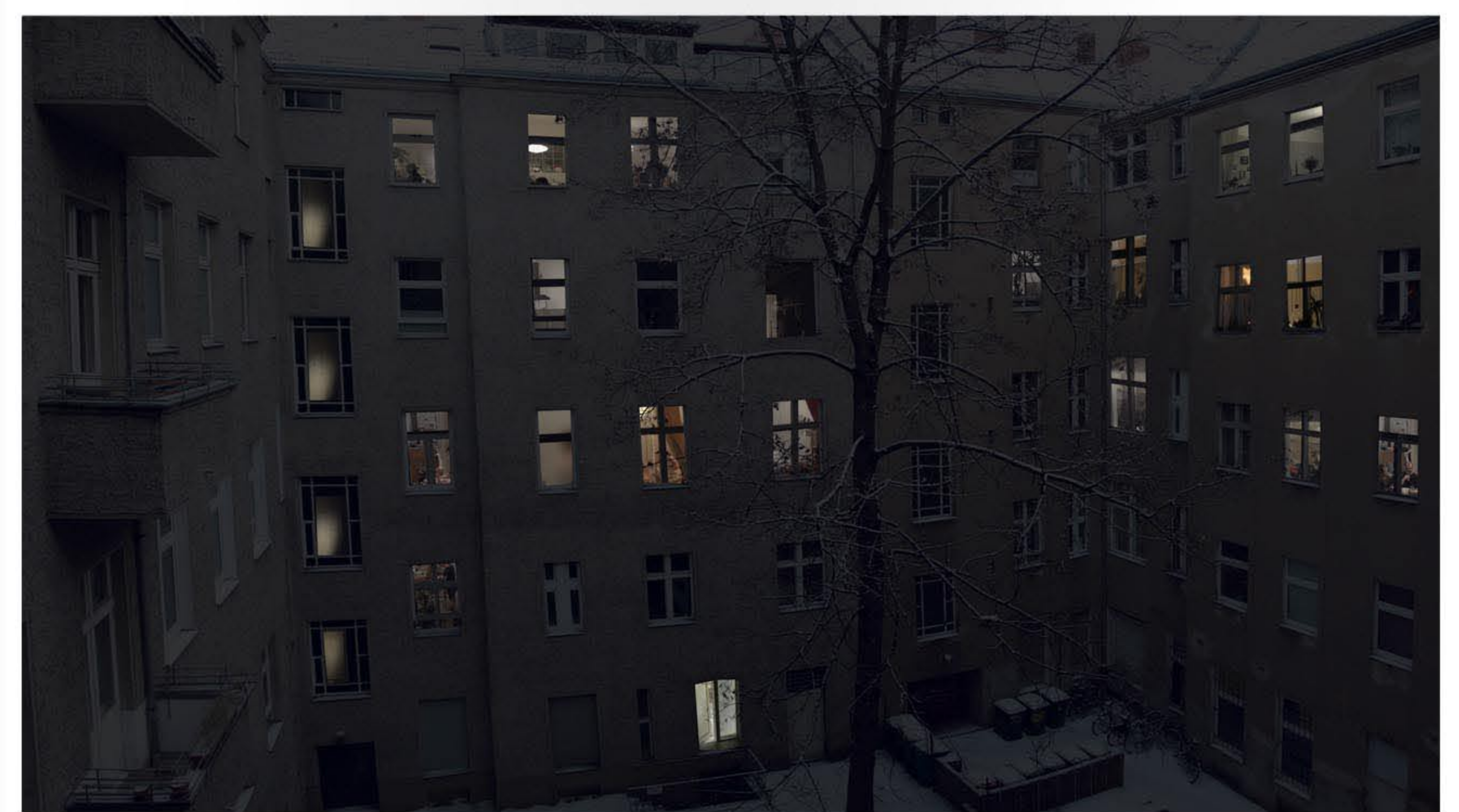
Why have you chosen Berlin as observation point for Winter Hof?

It was more like the project resulted as a consequence of living in Berlin rather than me choosing Berlin for the project. For me, working on any project is a journey of discovery. First, I endeavor to find a compelling location to begin an investigation and then excavate layers of meaning as the project unfolds. For Winter Hof, it was the view from my kitchen window into the apartment building's courtyard (Hof).

During the short days of winter, indoor lights are often turned on allowing everyone to see into each other's apartments and by extension, into each other's lives. One day I was looking out the window while making dinner and thinking how different this same situation would have been at other points of Berlin's history.

More specifically, I was thinking of the lateral surveillance techniques employed by both the Stasi and the Nazis whereby neighbors were coerced into spying on each other. It is a technique used by totalitarian regimes to tighten control over all aspects of public and private life. This led me to also consider our current political atmosphere. As the ever present fear of terrorism creeps into our everyday lives we are once again becoming a culture of surveillance.

Voyeurism is another crucial theme in Winter Hof. The act of allowing everyone to see into each other's apartments reminds us of the TV-formats becoming so popular in the last decade. In this sense, Winter Hof is a powerful reflection on the nature of social



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media today. Could you better introduce our readers to this fundamental aspect of your work?

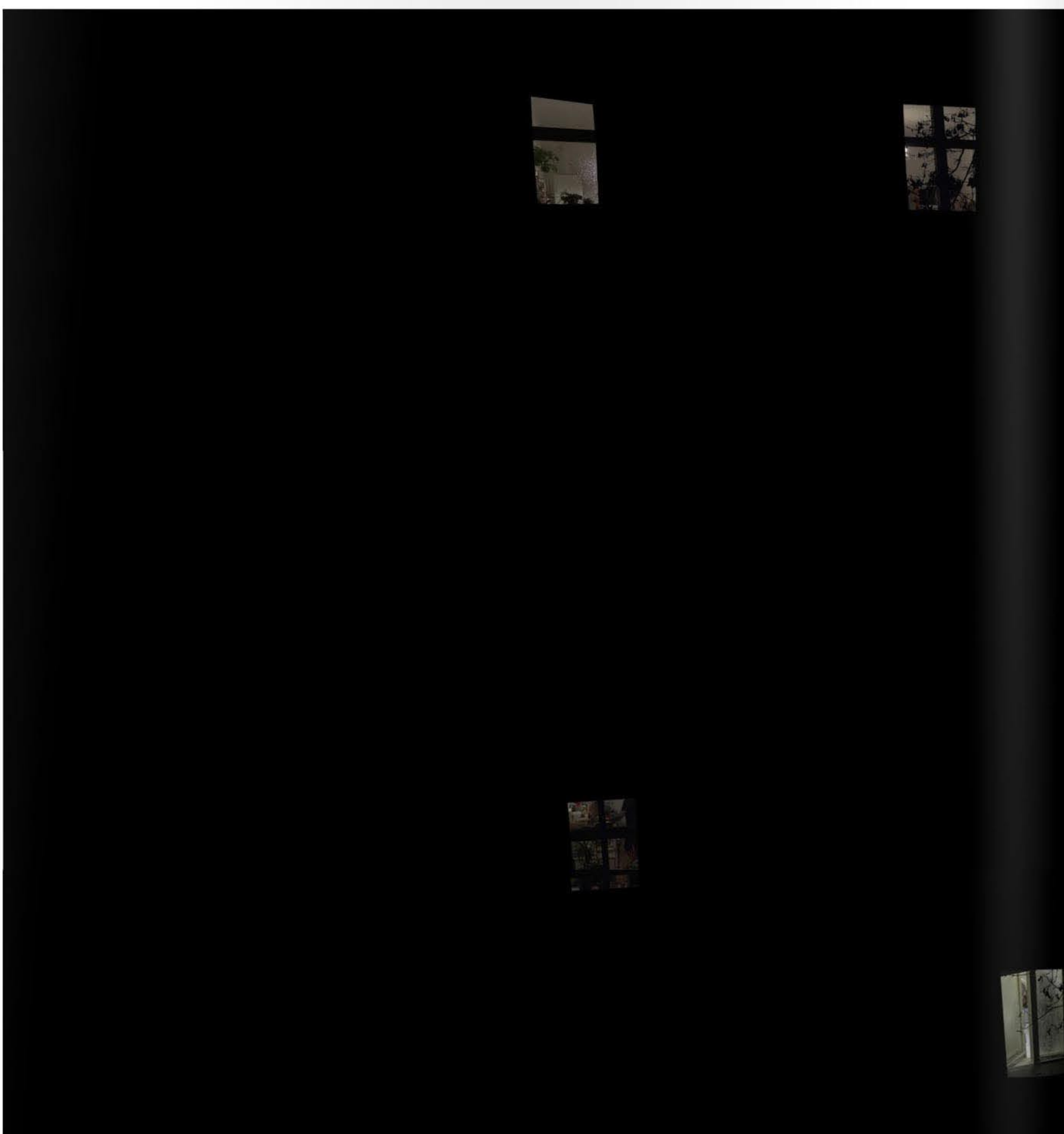
A fascination with the others people's lives is part of human nature and this has been evident in art throughout history. I am thinking of paintings of domestic scenes by painters like Bruegel, Vermeer, Hokusai and Van Gogh.

These days we have new avenues to see into other people's lives through internet culture and various forms of social media. Winter Hof eludes to this aspect of our culture by reminding us how our day to day social interactions has shifted from proximity based relationships such as neighbors to an emphasis on relationships with our "friends" regardless of their physical location. In the contemporary urban situation, there is very little need to interact with the people who live near us or even in the same building. This constitutes a fundamental shift in how we perceive our immediate environment and how we relate to other people.

It could be considered a specious question indeed, nonetheless we have to ask you: does your art change people's behavior? Do you aim to create a sort of "micropolitical" artistic act reawaking in the spectator the awareness of his perception mechanisms and models?

I am more like a visual anthropologist observing human behavior from a blind position. For the most part, my subjects are completely unaware they are being recorded. Of course, filming people without their knowledge or permission brings up other types of moral issues.

I see my work as an extension of street photography or photo journalism but it could be argued that my approach is really no loftier than the dubious justifications that were used by the Nazis or Stasi. At best, I am operating in a grey zone. Interestingly though, it is not the people being filmed but rather the viewers of this video that become co-conspirators, and thereby part of a "micropolitical" artistic act.



The Canadian scene is often under rated; nonetheless we have found it very interesting and rich of young experimental filmmakers and video artists, often working with low budget, but with stunning results. What do you think of the Canadian artistic scene, from a filmmaker's point of view?

It is interesting that you mention experimental

film and video as one of Canada's creative strengths. This might be attributed to the fact that most Canadians grew up seeing the work of Norman McLaren who is a giant among the pioneers of experimental film. His legacy has had a lingering influence across all artistic disciplines in Canada.

Thanks for sharing your thoughts and time,

Dan. What's next for Dan Hudson? Are there any new projects on the horizon?

I always have a few different projects on the go.

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