

Driven by profit, the shrinking standards of the film industry include and exclude accordingly. There is an inbred inside track for the filmmakers who follow the rules: they graduate from shorts to the all-important first feature, calling cards that shoot the prodigious to fame or let the less successful play the game again. Success stories cast a long shadow. What happens to everybody else – ‘failure’ – is, by design, both much more common and far less discussed.

In alarming fire-engine-red font, IMDb (‘the world’s most popular and authoritative source for movie, TV and celebrity content’) declaratively defines Zia Anger’s first feature *Always All Ways, Anne Marie* as ‘abandoned’. Though the status is inaccurate, if not slanderous – Anger’s film was neither abandoned nor unfinished, but, rather, rejected from the 50 film festivals to which it was submitted – the stigma and serious insult remains, damning the artist as transgressive and untrustworthy, unreliable, incapable.

From this generative absence, Anger has since produced her most innovative work to date. In *My First Film*, a rescue mission the artist describes as an ‘interactive live cinema performance’, Anger reclaims and reappropriates, creating a new, unexpected and unburdened exhibition context for *Always All Ways, Anne Marie*, as she reconceives what is recognised as failure, and imagines a new artistic route for herself – one that moves both backwards and forwards. Narrating the film’s production history, Anger sits and types, sharing a screen split by application windows (media player, word processor) that put text and context side by side. In a form reminiscent of the diary film or desktop documentary, Anger’s interrogative, introspective performance proceeds in simultaneous first- and third-person. Spanning improvised iMessage exchanges, AirDropped Instagram stories and a revealing (self-)scrutiny of the ethical compromises of a crowd-funded, micro-budget labour of love, *My First Film* is always surprising: at first in the thematic, structural symmetries it finds with its predecessor – rebirth, revolution – and perhaps most of all in the tone of sorrow it strikes.

Anger’s shift from film to performance might not necessarily split her artistic practice in two. The audience’s view of *Always All Ways, Anne Marie* as a film may be highly controlled and limited, but Anger’s talent as a filmmaker is evident here, and even more undeniable elsewhere. Working in plain sight in a commercial mass medium, Anger has in her unrivalled music video filmography – subversive visuals often made with movement director Monica Mirabile, cinematographers Ashley Connor and Mia Cioffi Henry and musicians such as Jenny Hval and Mitski – formed a formidable and still-underappreciated body of work. Negotiating the public and private lives of the filmmaker in her *My First Film* performance, Anger has, with revivifying transparency, proven the system to be broken. In her filmmaking, she continues to demonstrate exactly why the art form is still worth saving.

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