Q: On to 27. I feel that there are a few narrative engines that you set in motion in this piece that intersect with one another in unexpected ways throughout the film. The documentary you are making about the contemporary artist, the documentary you are making about your family, and the fictional recordings of the actors making their own movies. These narrative engines try to deal with certain assumptions about ourselves as individuals and your own reflections about yourself. Do you use this technique frequently? Is it improvised or scripted? What can be said about the ways we document our memories, sensations, and personal stories through these way of making films?

A: All *technē,* all forms of recording produce as much as they constrain meaning. Just think of Twitter, it’s what, 140 characters, or Instagram, which is social photography—the photo you take is made already to be seen—each of these forms and formats have particular constraints and possibilities. In this film, various narratives lines are taken up in multiple directions by multiple authors in the registers of various narrative regimes, which at any time and the same time can move between each other or even be one and the same, including documentary, fiction, documenting a fiction, family movie, confessional, social media, all of this in a context or culture of ubiquitous recording, texting, blogging, taking pictures, e-mailing, photo manipulation—such recordings have to come together in the poetry of form, not the didacticism of modalities.

Q: I see what you’re saying. You are not foregrounding these things, but work from the cultural condition and literacy they produce.

A: Exactly. Our memories, sensations, and personal stories are all the time distributed, experienced, and authored in these multiple ways, and each of them have certain kinds of intensities due to their properties. So in the recordings that make up the film, there is a continual scale shift between these modalities of recording and performing. Any possible moment or place is the “film set.” There is also a seamless mixing of actors, artists, academics, myself, ordinary people.

Q: Your narrative is nonlinear. What are you hoping to achieve by doing that?

A: There are so many things happening in parallel today, the idea of linearity is a fiction. I am looking for something that comes together with its own sense, that internally coheres, that is more than the sum of its parts, to give a picture of the relations between varied feelings and senses as they pass through different characters and things—so yes, it’s a mise-en-scène of affect and how these take possession of us, how it multiplies.
Q: Why do your actors have movement exercises? Is it a matter of aesthetics or does it echo the theme of this movie?
A: In the film, one of the characters, Divina, wants to find a new way to have sex that is not specific to the bodily organs. So how could we do this? What do we want in sex? Closeness, intensity, release, sensation—she wants to explore what might be possible, she wants to imagine this brave new world, this otherworldly creature, this other creatureliness in us that might afford a new experience of intimacy. The movement exercises move the exploration of this possibility into the nonlinguistic.

Q: You like to switch roles with the actors. You repeat some of the scenes on the ferry with you in front of the camera. Were you influenced by Fassbinder’s Beware of A Holy Whore when you made that film?
A: I had seen that film a long time ago, so I don’t know. Inside the film is a film documenting a young Mexican director making a film about a brave new world that is promised by liberty, this pluralism we talked about, and in this film appears a double of Divina, a new creature perhaps for her or for James, whom she has left. So yes, I try there to have myself interchangeable with Andrew, the director.

Q: Why 27?
A: At some point I thought the focus of the project, the film and other projects around the film, would be this generation of twenty-seven-year-olds. I was sitting with a young actor who’s been in many of my films, when in the very beginning I had set out to make a film about Dash Snow, a New York artist who died at twenty-seven, and the more we talked about it and did some readings and meetings, I came to know more people twenty-seven or somewhere near that age. I had already been filming James Leary, so then I thought I would have James make a film with a group of twenty-seven-year-olds. But as I heard them talk and documented this and then had them act in some of the story lines, I thought that layering this story with someone half their age and twice their age would give context to how the concerns and urgency of the twenty-seven-year-old continue to pass through us as we get older and are already there when we are thirteen. So 27 then, as a title, became this middle, this zone, this place that we pass through, that we inhabit, that we may never get to, nor remember, and I liked this, twenty-seven not in a literal or definitional sense, but as an assemblage of states and affects, all relational.

Q: You presented at the beginning of the film the artist’s point of view about pluralism and art. He stated that only in years to come will we know what pluralism really means. What is your take on that? And did you answer that question in your film?
A: We try to explore it, yes, but not in any head-on or definitive way; yes, the film moves along it, both narratively as an approach and thematically.
Q: Your actors are doing different things in this film. Sometimes they are playing themselves, sometimes they play a character, and sometimes they are wearing an elephant nose mask… What are you trying to achieve by this? Also, what is the meaning of the elephant nose?
A: In the register of documentation about a group twenty-seven-year-olds, I ask them to act in a fictional film. The fiction format gives them a chance to express thoughts and feelings in a different register than simply describing verbally their real experiences. In placing them in a fiction film, something more happens, they have a chance to enact, playact feelings and thoughts that are their “real experiences.” The elephant nose does that as well, it estranges them from themselves, making a double or another of them.

Q: The actors, like Hamlet, can only deal with their realities through the absurd, unreal, the fiction. But I think you author it all. The only thing I see as real, if you want to call it real, or nonscripted, is your interview with the artist at the beginning and some of the conversations you recorded. I think it fools your actors because they don’t know which parts they are playing most of the time, so they start to unfold their true selves, in a way. It seems to me that this is a documentary about an artist who creates a fictional world for his subjects in order to fool them to explore their true identity and along the way, he finds his.
A: That’s a good way to describe what’s going on, yes. But I am not sure anyone is being fooled. Not at all. They are quite savvy, and in fact use the cinematic form and time to perform, not as in performance, but to put forward statements, a set of statements or propositions. Perhaps not all of them, but many of them, used the time together to productively get at some real questions with their peers. And in that sense you are right, the fictional world propels them, seduces them, “fools” them in a sense to explore themselves.

Q: I like the idea of having this young man, the artist, as the narrator of this film. I like the fact that his ideas mirror your footage with your family and the actors in the film. The film is shaped like a crystal. You, the artist, his art, your art, his life, your life, the film within the film, and then you also acting within that film, which I see as a dreamlike sequence. Gorgeous. You play with the footage (black and white to color, audio running over the next scene) as if it is self-reflective—like only you can be!
A: Thanks. Self-reflective, I suppose, perhaps means here knowingly presenting a film, knowing something more than others in the film, and sharing that knowledge with the audience. That’s the role of the author. The author shares a relationship through knowledge with the audience. In this film I wanted to make a work that performatively distributed authorship to the characters in the film, a film where characters are in a search of scripting themselves and each other. They want to know the script they are in, the role they are playing not in the film, they are so very comfortable being on film, filming. The film is simply that place that allows them to speak, to enact.

Q: Is the film about the connection between intimacy, relationships, and sex?
A: Desire and fear negotiated through this great unknowable of intimacy. Maybe the intimacy that can become love, the fear of intimacy that might create hate, the abjection to the intimacy of death that pushes life or living away from us because of that fear. How to be close and intimate with ourselves. So I think you say it well, yes, intimacy and that closeness to being alive, what defines our intimacy, or rather how to find it, where is the place of intimacy that allows an opening, a wounding, a being touched not just physically but in a way that allows for an encounter with ourselves and others, yes, we give it a go.

Q: You are an integral part of all your films. I see all of them in one way or the other as self-portraits. When you look back at your work from the moment you begin to record these intimate films, in what way has your relationship with people and nature changed?
A: You mean in terms of recording or interacting with them? Can you explain further?

Q: Let me try it this way. In many ways making a movie with video as opposed to film is no longer a continuous process; it is an ongoing process whose beginning you can’t really pinpoint. Do you agree, and if so, in what way does it affect the ways we tell stories? Do we need to take different approaches to the medium altogether?
A: This absolute everydayness of our social media creates a recording environment that is very much alive, wherein recording is always right next to us, with us all the time. That’s this sense that you are talking about, of it being a continuous and ongoing process such that it’s already already begun. And like life, it has this element of the unknown, not in the sense of suspension of disbelief in traditional narrative, but in the way that things can happen and only happen as in a continued conversation, wherein uncanny things step in. This with our ease of multiple modes of address and recording, posting, texting, and picture taking, being here and there—there being on the network, being in both places, contiguously and simultaneously creates a new condition of being.

So yes, this affects the way we tell stories of ourselves and how we see ourselves, how we see and produce the recordings of ourselves and create cinema.