

from CASSAVETES DIRECTS – John Cassavetes
and the Making of Love Streams

by Michael Ventura

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THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 1983 - *Trying to get it*

It's after 10 at night, the phone rings, I pick up, and the caller announces, "Michael! This is John!" Then he launches into a monologue I can barely follow, while I'm trying to figure who "John" might be. I don't know any Johns very well. It takes a few moments to realize that this is Cassavetes speaking. Surprised -- no, stunned -- I wish I'd listened harder to his initial barrage of sentences. The man is very enthusiastic about *something*. I'm trying to get my bearings while he's praising me for an interview we'd done six months before, the last time we'd spoken. During the interview he'd stopped suddenly and said, "This isn't going well," and I said, "Trust me, I see your words as printed sentences as you're saying them, and this is going very well." Now it seems he agrees, and that I know my business is something he respects. Of course this pleases me very much, but still his rap tonight doesn't compute -- my impression of the man is that it's not like him to make conversation, and, at the moment, that's what he's doing. The thought occurs: maybe he's drunk. In his circles, as in mine, people often are.

Now he's saying that he's gotten a deal to direct *Love Streams*. Do I remember the play?

Yes, but more vaguely than I admit. A year, no, it was two years ago, John produced a trilogy of plays written by himself and Ted Allan. *Love Streams* was Allan's, and what, if I am honest, do I retain of it? An airy Jon Voight never quite connecting with the material, while Gena Rowlands played with that same material as a child plays in fresh-fallen snow, totally involved, utterly captivating. What I remembered most painfully, however, was how after the play John took about twenty of us to Ma Maison, where I drank too much and made an ass of myself, *really* made an ass of myself, conversing with two famous women. I wasn't used to dining with stars and I proved it.

But the play... there was this dog... strangest dog I've ever seen, because it wasn't really a dog, it was a man. That is, the dog was played by a man. The man -- Neil Bell -- wore no doggy make-up, wore nothing on his well-molded body but shorts. He had reddish hair and beard, and serious, penetrating, dog-like eyes. But why did we believe he was a dog? It wasn't only because his physical imitation was perfect, he growled, leapt, flinched and panted so very like a dog. It was that Neil Bell found that place where dogs and people understand one another, rather than just imitating a canine, and he *played* that area of understanding. In what was otherwise a relentlessly realistic play, we accepted his dog-ness without question. I can't quote a line of the play but I will always remember that dog-man leaping over furniture, growling, backing Jon Voight up against a wall.

And, now that I think of it, I remember very well another play of the trilogy (though not its title), written by Cassavetes, where Peter Falk is being questioned on the witness stand about killing his wife. The lawyer asks, "Did you love your wife?" Falk looks at the lawyer, looks away, thinks, looks at him again, says: "On which day?"

Meanwhile, on the phone, Cassavetes is saying of *Love Streams*, "Every bit of it there's no melodrama, it's just misplaced sincerity all the way through."

He is in the midst of his thought while I'm faking my half of the call, trying to catch up. He describes what he thinks will be the last shot of the film: a dog barking in the rain. "So it's the dog's picture! He has the last word!"

Now Cassavetes comes round to why he's called. He's always thought it would be interesting to have a book written on the day-to-day making of a film. To his knowledge, it's never been done. He wants not a book about filmmaking but about "the play between the people who make the film and the ideas within the film."

"It would be a daring book and a tough book," he says. Would I be interested in writing it?

Quickly I say yes. And stammer about how honored I feel to be invited, a subject in which John is not much interested.

He talks on while I'm kind of weirded out, as we used to say. Cassavetes is an inclusive man, he'll talk and listen to anybody high or low; but he's also a deeply private man. It doesn't seem like Cassavetes to want somebody staring at him, taking down his

every word, making a book of the quicksilver ups and downs of his days. Yet he wants this book very much, he's talking now about its possibilities as enthusiastically as he's talked about his film, while I'm wondering if it's possible to catch what some people call "the creative process." Even if you watch its actions, can it truly be seen? Also... I suspect John Cassavetes is not the easiest man to be around on a daily basis.

I make the mistake of saying the word "genius." That is, calling him one. His response is sharp: "There are no geniuses. It's just a lot of fucking hard work and *trying to get it.*"

We get off the phone and I want to pour a drink, but -- doctor's orders -- I'm not drinking this year, nor smoking either, alas. My ticker's been on the fritz. It would have been good to toast the honor I've been bestowed -- before telling my wife (we've been married five months this day) that all our plans from now through August are cancelled.

Now-through-August is pre-production and shooting of *Love Streams*.

She takes the news gracefully, and has the generosity to be excited for me. She knows John and I go back a long way, longer than John knows.

In 1956, when I was an eleven year old streetkid in a Brooklyn slum, I'd play hooky from school and use my 25-cents-for-lunch to go to a movie, any movie, whatever was playing. For me, as a kid, movies didn't have titles, they weren't directed, and I cared for no actors whose names weren't John Wayne, Tony Curtis, or Marilyn Monroe. Rather, to me movies were another order of existence, a fascinating form of life that ran parallel to the cockroach realities of my streets. I'd see any picture, often sitting through a double-feature twice, to experience this strange enhanced cinematic "other world" -- very other, but somehow more real than ours. One day in 1956 I forgot very quickly (and didn't re-discover until decades later) the title of the picture I was seeing, *Edge of the City*. What struck me (and that is not a cliché, I was *struck*) was a black man such as I had never been exposed to (for I knew not one), a man of complexity, humor, strength, and grace -- my street-prejudices would never be the same, I was so impressed with this man. It wasn't until years later that I'd fasten to him the name Sidney Poitier. The white man he befriended struck me just as hard, for he was the first I'd seen on screen who was like *us* -- a person who embodied the street as I knew it. Edgy, contradictory, tense with

violence and a desperate grace. You wanted to like him, but there was something about him you didn't trust. You wanted to dislike him, but there was something about him you couldn't help liking. Years later I would see that John Cassavetes never played to be liked or disliked, but played for both at once. As a kid, all I saw was someone I recognized. A real street-guy, not (as with James Dean and Marlon Brando) an artist's concoction. At that age I couldn't articulate my impression, and I forgot or never registered John's name, but he revealed to me this: what I knew to be genuine could find its place on the screen.

Years later, still innocent of the mechanics of cinema, I got off work as a typist in Manhattan and wandered into a theater called the Little Carnegie, around the corner (or was it down the block?) from Carnegie Hall, to see a movie, any movie. The movie was *Faces*. I was 22 or 23. I left that movie frightened, wishing I'd never seen it, but wanting to see it again. Its people behaved as irrationally, as compulsively, as the people of my life -- as I did myself. *Faces* was a confirmation I did not desire: that craziness was normal, and that normal was insane. In a word, it helped me face growing up.

I was working a typing job in Boston in 1970 when *Husbands* was released there. In the course of ten days I saw *Husbands* five times. After the first time I rounded up anyone I could find to go with me, and our friendships deepened or ended on whether or not, and to what degree, they *got* that film. For here were men like my father, like my uncles, heroic precisely to the degree that they were not heroes, trying and failing every day to live a normal life. They would always fail and, in some screwed up way, they would always try. And this film made that beautiful. Who else had ever honestly conferred the quality of beauty upon such men?

As for *A Woman Under the Influence*, by then I was writing for the *Austin Sun*, my first writing gig. *Woman* played Austin in the spring of 1975. Watching *Woman* I saw not only my own childhood but the family-life of all my relatives. My cousin Rocco visited me and his first act upon seeing me was to lift me off my feet (Rocco is strong), saying, "Did you see *that movie!*?" I knew he was speaking of *Woman*. "Isn't that the way it *was*?! I kept sayin', 'Ok, now he's gonna lie,' but he *never lied*."

Then... 1979, Los Angeles. Ginger Varney and I helmed the film section of *LA Weekly*. In those days before videos, Los Angeles boasted more "revival" theaters than any city in the world. A dozen at least. On Melrose Avenue, a block or so from

Paramount Studios, on the south side of the street, there was a revival house that I believe was called The Continental, where one night they featured a rare screening of *A Woman Under the Influence*. Ginger and I plugged it in our paper, thinking we'd draw crowds. There was almost no one. Then, just before the film screened, John Cassavetes entered with a gaggle of friends. His friends were dismayed -- they'd expected a full house, a kind of party. Cassavetes tried to appear undismayed, but his eyes were crazy. The picture began. The film broke. Was mended. Continued. Broke. Several times. It was excruciating. And every time it broke Cassavetes cackled. When it was all thankfully over, I went to him and asked to shake his hand. Names weren't exchanged. His eyes asked, "Friend or phony?" Mine tried to convey, "Friend." He shook my hand. I never expected to see him again.

John and I finally met professionally in 1981, through my function as a journalist. There was a screening of *Woman* at USC. I was asked to moderate a discussion with John and Gena after the film. I arrived early, saw him across a lobby, walked toward him, and while I was still several yards away he said, "Ventura, right? I know by the walk."

I never quite got that one.

Now this night, March 17, 1983... John calls *me*. He doesn't know he's calling the kid who saw him in '56, or all those other versions of me, to whom he's meant so much.

I tell my wife, "I've gotta be careful not to hero-worship this fucker."

"Well he *is* a hero."

"He is."

"Then recognize that. Just don't worship him."

THURSDAY, MARCH 24 - *No more room on the napkin*

We're to meet at John's production office and discuss the book. This morning over tea (no more coffee, doctor's orders), I re-read my interview of the summer before.

Cassavetes: "I'm a totally intuitive person. I mean, I think about things that human beings would do, but I just am guessing -- so I don't really have a preconceived vision of a way a performer should perform, or of 'the character.' I don't believe in 'the

character.’ Once the actor’s playing that part, *that’s* the person. And it’s up to that person to go in and do anything he can. If it takes the script this way and that, I let it do it. But that’s because I really am more an actor than a director. And I appreciate that there might be secrets in people. And that that might be more interesting than a ‘plot.’”

As I read I hear his voice. The page does no justice to the way he says *appreciate*. Spoken, he said: “And I apPREciate that there might be *secrets* in people -- and that -- that might be more interesting than a ‘*plot*.’” His eyebrows shot up on *secrets* and slammed down on *plot*.

“I like actors, and I depend on them a lot. I depend on them to think. And to be honest. And to say, ‘That never would happen to me, I don’t believe it.’ And to try to decipher what is defense and what is a real irregularity in someone’s behavioral pattern. And then I try to find some kind of positive way to make a world exist like a family -- make a family, not of us, behind the camera, not of the actors but of the characters.”

“A shared world?” I’d asked.

“That they can patrol certain streets, patrol their house, and -- that’s what I feel people do, they know their way home. And when they cease to know the way home, things go wrong.”

“How do you mean, know the way home?”

“You somehow, drunk or sober or any other way, you always find your way back to where you live. And then you get detoured. And when you can’t find your way home, that’s when I consider it’s worth it to make a film. ‘Cause *that’s* interesting.”

I notice this morning what I didn’t during the interview. In those last sentences, Cassavetes shifted from talking about characters to talking in a kind of first-person “you,” then shifting from “you” to “I.” Had *he* lost his way home, and could nothing but making another film get him home again?

It’s not the kind of question I ask people because I feel it’s none of my business. Still, it feels like a question that won’t go away. And it occurs to me, uncomfortably, that what is and isn’t my business could become a sticky issue during the course of this book.

The offices of Cannon Films are in a building near Sunset and Vine. Seventy years ago on that corner, where a bank now stands, there was a big old barn. Cecil B.

DeMille set up production offices in that barn when he directed *The Squaw Man*, the first feature-length movie shot in Hollywood. D.W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Mack Sennett were in town by then, so were Fatty Arbuckle and Mabel Normand, making one- and two-reelers. Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks would arrive soon. The hills were green and flowered, there were many farms, and they say you could smell the sea all the way into the city. Now, what with the smog, you have to stand on the beach to smell the sea. But would-be filmmakers flock here for the same reasons that brought DeMille 75 years ago and Cassavetes 25 years ago. Movies can be made anywhere, but you still can't be part of the filmmaking community anywhere else.

So an Israeli director-producer named Menahem Golan and his cousin, producer Yorum Globus, successful filmmakers in their native land, moved here, bought a soft-porn outfit called Cannon Films, and financed a string of low-budget thrillers and comedies. They've captivated local media attention because their style goes back to the days of DeMille and Sennett -- making deals on the impulse of a moment, writing binding contracts on a napkin in a bar. Which, according to John, is what he and Golan did. (The final negotiations, I'm sure, were as complex as always.)

John would tell me later, "He wanted to give me points in the picture but I said, 'Why? I'll never see them anyway.' I shouldn't have said it, I hurt his feelings. He said, 'I don't steal.' I said, 'If I don't have points I don't get mad about the points -- anyway, there's no more room on the napkin!'"

So the *Love Streams* production offices are at Cannon. The company occupies two floors at 6464 Sunset Boulevard. On the 11th floor, in almost every room there's a typewriter. On the 10th floor, a Steenbeck (the editing console that's replaced the classic Movieolas). I am to meet Cassavetes to discuss this book.

Pre-production offices are surly by nature, and their surliness comes in two flavors. An uptight director will have an office of people working at tremendous speed who are, at one and the same time, artificially formal and artificially jovial. Suspicion lurks in every glance, and nobody makes the most minor decision without consulting somebody else. Everybody tries to cover their ass. And this usually shows up on screen.

In the pre-production offices of a vital director, a natural leader who relishes

every decision he makes, the same phones constantly ring and everyone's job consists of the same relentless series of interruptions. But the surliness is the kind you find in a neighborhood bar. Rough humor, sudden verbal explosions of abuse mixed with laughter, no-nonsense shouting, bleak depressions, and occasional cries of triumph. Under it all, the constant hum of work, each person accumulating the hundreds of bits and pieces that will soon be a motion picture. In Cassavetes' office, there is an additional source of noise: friends dropping in. The fat-ish, gangster-ish guy John partied with in Boston sometime last year -- or was it ten years ago? -- who's so happy Cassavetes is making another film that he had to visit and wish him well. Or someone vaguely recognizable to a watcher of Cassavetes' films -- John Finnegan, as I find out later, a gangster in *Gloria*, a cabbie in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, a stagehand in *Opening Night*, and one of Peter Falk's work-gang in *A Woman Under the Influence*. He's signing on again for two or three days of a bit part. Not for fame or fortune -- there will be neither -- but for the hell of it, for Cassavetes. This crew has a kind of mantra that I'm in the process of buying into: *Anything for John*.

Whatever else he is, John Cassavetes is a man, an artist, a leader, to whom people give everything they can. You might expect such devotion of fellow-artists, actors, would-be filmmakers, but you don't expect it of secretaries, production go-fers, gaffers, techs, Teamsters. Composer and sound-mixer Bo Harwood would later give me a reason that felt true. They do it so that someday they can say, as Bo explained, "I rode with Billy the Kid."

It is always a surprise to see Cassavetes, because he is never quite the way you left him, especially these days -- at 53, the intensity of his life is catching up with him.

To be honest: Half the time he looks awful. As though the skin of his face has lost all life of its own and only his eyes are keeping him alive. No one has eyes like him. Everything fierce, everything street-wise, every mockery and irony, everything that makes men laugh or long for tenderness, every anger, everything that cannot lie and everything that wants to, everything angelic or demonic in his soul -- at one time or another in the course of a day, his eyes give it all away. Like any man he tries to protect himself, but his eyes don't participate in that. Yet, for all their frankness, you sense in

John's eyes the presence of a terrible secret. Terrible, I mean, to him. I doubt anyone, except perhaps Gena, knows what that secret may be. He himself may not know. Whatever it is, you sense that it's driving him and that, through his eyes, it's looking at you. Some find him difficult to talk to, because even the gentlest of his looks can be uncomfortably direct. When Cassavetes looks at you, he looks at *you* -- not your function, not your salary, not your contract, not your credits, and certainly not your pose. You. And he's interested. In the midst of his most hectic days he'll take the time to talk a little with -- anybody. If he wasn't sincerely interested, it would be difficult for the timid to bear those eyes at all. In fact, considering how volatile he can be, if John didn't have a profound respect for human beings just because they're human beings, he might be, well, hard to take. His enormous charm isn't quite enough to overcome the impression that he's kind of scary -- not in a sinister way, but in the sense that even at his most relaxed you feel he might at any moment quite literally blow up. I don't mean blow up emotionally. I mean blow like he does at the end of *The Fury*, when his whole body explodes and his head flies through the air. I am not being hyperbolic. There's that much concentrated energy in the man. And it all streams out of his eyes.

Those eyes don't change. The eyes of 26-year-old John Cassavetes in *Edge of the City* and his eyes today have the same force, frankness, and strange secrecy. But the rest of him changes drastically -- partly because so many images of Cassavetes live in one's mind. The skinny maddened streetkid of *Crime in the Streets*... the incredibly handsome and svelt piano-playing detective of *Johnny Staccato*... the ugly wiry cackling soldier of *The Dirty Dozen*, sporting the first punk haircut... the unctuous sinister husband of *Rosemary's Baby*... puffy, happy, good-hearted Gus of *Husbands*... the doomed low-life hustler of *Mikey and Nicky*... the merciless conniver of that ludicrous picture, *The Fury*, which at least gave us the strangely believable image of John exploding... the intellectual, mystic, spookily frail Prospero of *Tempest*... too many Johns to keep track of. But all have the same eyes. All of which is to venture the hypothesis that John Cassavetes is not a man who can be known. I'd better just try to *see* him, clear, and hope for the best.

So today, walking into the neighborhood-bar-like atmosphere of *Love Stream's* production offices at Cannon, I have no notion of what to expect. I'm waved in,

introduced around, quickly and casually, to Cassavetes' rough-and-ready staff -- my first blurred impression is of an office staffed by male and female old-school Manhattan cabdrivers. Which is homey for me, since my father was such a cabdriver. Cassavetes offers me a vodka, a Coke, a coffee, in the same breath that he's saying two or three other things, and asks Helen Caldwell to get them -- a lovely lady in her twenties with very wide-lensed glasses. She raises an eyebrow. He raises a more formidable eyebrow: "Didn't I get you *your* coffee this morning? I did, right?"

"As a matter of fact, you did."

Helen Caldwell rises from her chair to get me a Coke. (Doctor's orders, I shouldn't be drinking Coke any more than I should be drinking coffee. But it was tough enough to turn down the vodka. Especially when he's drinking vodka. Early in the afternoon.)

Physically, he's changed again. The face more drawn, the skin more wan, and he's gained weight in the oddest way. His face, arms, legs, and butt are skinny, but his stomach -- his stomach has ballooned. He looks three months' pregnant. His belly is huge and tight as a drum, as though his shirt has been buttoned with difficulty over a basketball.

Cassavetes is a man of immense ego but little vanity. He either won't or can't get that stomach down, but he does nothing (like wear looser shirts) to hide it. He intends to play the belly as part of his *Love Streams* costume. The film's Robert Harmon will be weighed down with Cassavetes' belly, and on Robert Harmon it will be an emblem of the dead weight of his life. Cassavetes is about to enact a scathing portrayal of the weaknesses and needs of men, a portrait of desperation and longing, culminating in a most unlikely vision of redemption. But for dying his gray hair dark brown, he will use what is most ravaged in his appearance to convey the reality of Robert Harmon.

Cassavetes and I sit in his office speaking of the possibilities of this book. But Cassavetes rarely speaks of one thing at a time, or even on one level at a time. The silly and serious, the sacred and profane, the intimate and impersonal, interweave from sentence to sentence. What holds his conversation together isn't any sense of narrative but his intense presence, the style of the man.

He is speaking of the book: “Everybody just refers to their own experiences and they call that truth.”

Then of the character he will play in *Love Streams*: “I think that a man is composed of two things: confusion and pride.”

Then of the film: “They’re going to be ready for us maybe five minutes a day.”

I’d like to stop and unpack those sentences with him. In the first is his declaration that all art, all vision, is relative. In the second he is either stripping men of any possible nobility or emphasizing how impossible and beautiful it is when such creatures rise to anything noble. In the third he’s sized up his chance with his audience and dismissed that chance -- a chance upon which he is willing to stake his entire effort.

Or so you may be thinking, but he’s left you to think what you want and has gone on to the necessity of trying to persuade his producers that the picture needs a first-class caterer. A film crew, like an army, marches on its stomach. “All these things that they call luxuries are really the cheapest things,” he says, “compared to what it costs for one day’s fuck-up if people don’t feel that they’re *making a movie*.”

The production designer, Phedon Papamichael, arrives with pieces of cloth and artificial flowers. He is Cassavetes’ cousin, Greek by birth and rearing, and he’s worked with Cassavetes since *Faces*, as well as doing art direction and production design for directors like Jules Dassin and Michael Cocoyannis. Phedon is years older than Cassavetes, tells even more stories, and smokes just as much. (Have I neglected to mention that John’s offices are always thick with smoke? Temporarily a non-smoker, I’m a rarity here.) A difference between Phedon and John is that Phedon tends to light each cigarette precisely, as though to prove a point, whereas John can light a match and not notice it’s burning down to his fingers while he talks on. Phedon always knows where his cigarettes are and carries elegant lighters, while John’s constant “Does anyone have a cigarette?” is a joke on his sets, he rarely has a match, and he’s capable of leaving his innumerable packs of Marlboros anywhere and everywhere. (Well into the *Love Streams* shoot a pack he left on the dashboard of my car will remain there in anticipation of the next time I give John a lift.)

When they want to be, Papamichael and Cassavetes are two of the most stubborn men in town, which is perhaps why they so much patience with each other. They need it.

Phedon's scraps of clothe and artificial flowers are cause for an argument that would leave most people not speaking for days, if ever again. They hiss, yell, and curse. Phedon passionately argues for *this* clothe and *this* flower, but John wants this *other* clothe and *other* flower, and maybe not even them, maybe none of it's right, goddamn all such scraps and plastics to hell. Phedon storms out of the office, Phedon storms back, they argue more until suddenly John says quietly:

"You may be right." Phedon stares in surprise. John smiles grimly, "After all my bullshit, you may be right."

And the matter is settled. For today.

I will learn that this scene is typical of a Cassavetes production. He expects you to fight him for what you want, really *fight*. As often as not, he'll wind up agreeing with you -- and, in his way, he'll apologize for "all my bullshit."

After this argument there is, to the surprise of this observer, no residue of tension whatever. Phedon asks after the health of John's mother. She is in the hospital and seems to be doing well. Cassavetes speaks whimsically of how, the other day, a nurse came in while he was visiting and said to his mother, "Oh, is this your husband?" He mimes how his mother was embarrassed and flattered, and how she looked shyly away from the nurse toward him.

Then suddenly, somehow, they're arguing about Socrates. (I will learn they often argue about Socrates.) The argument begins so suddenly that I don't catch its trigger, but I sense it's been going on for the better part of 20 years. Then Socrates evaporates as quickly as he materialized, and just as suddenly these two are speaking of love. Sooner or later, if you speak with Cassavetes, you'll speak of love. Something in the ringing phones, or the poster of *A Woman Under the Influence* above Helen Caldwell's desk, or the argument about Socrates, which (now I get it) sprang out of a reference to Aristophanes, which in turn was a reference to the comedic elements of *Love Streams* -- something, in short, hard to put your finger on, but present in the room, now has John thinking:

"That was the biggest discovery I ever made -- that love stops. Just like a clock. Or a watch. Or anything. Then you wind it up and it goes again. 'Cause if it stops forever, then you die."

What kind of love, love for whom, and who stopped loving whom, who stopped loving what? -- are questions that are none of my business.

“Love,” says Phedon, as though about to say something further, but John interrupts with:

“I know what love is.”

“You don’t,” Phedon says quietly.

“You know I know.”

“And, if you know?”

“Love -- is the ability of not knowing.”

That sentence will buzz in my head for a long time. For a while I’ll conclude it means: love is having faith.

No. Faith is a kind of knowing.

Now I think John means: Unless you realize that there exist aspects, depths, topologies of your beloved that you’ll never know, touch, or even guess at -- unless you realize this, you’re not really loving, you’re merely filling in the blanks with what you imagine and prefer. *Not* to do so takes what John calls “ability” -- learned capacities cultivated with difficulty over time. Yes, it takes a cultivated strength, and a humble admission, to learn *not to know*, and yet to love.

Not a half hour after I leave his office Cassavetes receives word that his mother has had a massive heart attack.

Several days later...

John’s mother, Katherine Cassavetes, dies.

While waiting beside her deathbed, he thinks to tell Helen Caldwell to call me and assure me that the picture and the book are still on, still being attended to.

It’s not unusual in this business to wait days or weeks for a call from a director, or from anyone else. As a journalist, I’ve been guilty of such delays with no more excuse than the confusion of being too busy. But at his mother’s deathbed, John thinks to have Helen call me. Cassavetes hates politeness -- he’s always saying, “You *can’t* be polite, it just gets used against you.” Polite or not, he is considerate, in the big things. For all his volatility, that fundamental sense of consideration is a signature of the man.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25 - *I don't understand where all this light is coming from*

A production note, concerning both *Love Streams* and this book:

Most films are shot according to when it's most economical to shoot a given location. Thus an actor might play a scene from the beginning of his film in the morning, then a scene from his film's end in the afternoon -- then the company moves on and that location is never used again. Obviously if you shoot scenes from the middle of your picture during the first week, and scenes from its climax during the second, you're locked in. Everything else you shoot must be consistent with what you've shot already.

John Cassavetes refuses those constrictions. Insofar as humanly possible, John shoots in sequence, from page one to the end. Thus his actors can build a role in front of the camera as they might built a performance on stage. But, say an actor performs a scene differently from how John imagined it (though the spoken lines are the same); if John likes what he sees he'll stick with that performance, even if he must re-write later scenes to accommodate it. As he says, he'll let a performance "take the script this way and that." Thus his films evolve out of the actors' performances, rather than from a pre-conceived idea. He *begins* with the idea, an idea he's worked on for a long time -- the idea is the foundation; but he'll often re-write along the way as the performances enhance and even change the original idea. This is not "improvisation," this is like jazz: composition-in-the-moment. In *Love Streams* he will do this more than in any film but *Shadows* and *Husbands*. Nearly every word spoken in *Love Streams* will be scripted, but often the script was written in the wee hours of the morning that it was shot. Yet in its final edit *Love Streams* will be, of all Cassavetes' films, his most formally structured.

In *Love Streams* he departs from shooting-in-sequence slightly, a departure necessitated by the story. This film shifts between Robert Harmon's life (John's character) and Sarah Lawson's (Gena Rowlands). Their paths don't intersect until 57 minutes into the picture. During that time we're given no clue as to what, if anything, these two have to do with each other. Cassavetes will film Robert's incidents first, in sequence; then Sarah's, also in sequence. After they meet, he proceeds in sequence as much as is feasible.

His method allows me to give this book a particular shape, blending the story the

film tells with a journal of its making. My account of each day will begin with a summary, in italics, of the script-pages John intends to shoot; then I'll relate what happened to those intentions; finally I'll note what, of the footage shot, was used in the final cut.

Love Streams has been in production six days before I can get there. What's been shot are Robert Harmon's segments of the shooting-script's first 22 pages. The script opens in a bar where elegant men in tuxedos buy drinks for elegant men in dresses. Exclusive and (according to some people) decadent, the club's mood is that of a polite prelude to a serious orgy. There is one man desperate beyond politeness: Robert Harmon [Cassavetes]. We discover in these scenes that he's a well-known writer who makes lots of money writing trash-laced bestsellers about people who live on the edge. A heterosexual unintimidated at being in a gay club, he's there to gather material for his next book. In his tux he looks like a ravaged, depressed, disgusted Mephistopheles. His expression makes clear that his disgust is directed at himself. His weariness is boredom with his own company. All he's interested in is the club's singer, Susan [Diahnne Abbott]), who's singing "Kinky Reggae" with two young female back-up singers [one played by daughter Xan Cassavetes].

The script shifts to Sarah, a scene not yet shot. From that scene we cut back to the bar, a month later. Robert Harmon is determined to bed Susan. He drinks and drinks (he's always drinking) and perseveres through a miserably awkward situation until Susan finally sits with him. She volunteers that she's seen him on TV but doesn't have time to read his books. He can be charming, but the more he drinks the more she's seen it all before. In the shooting-script this is the first time we hear Robert's idea that "all beautiful women, they have a secret -- and the interesting thing -- is to get that secret out, you know, if they volunteer that secret, you know?" Susan greets this with a bored, "Yeah, I guess so." When she abruptly rises to leave he drunkenly runs after her, pushes himself into her car, insists on driving, and has a minor fender-bender with a parked car. She struggles to get him out of the driver's seat, wrestling him, hitting him, but he will not give up his grip on the wheel, and they drive on. Can a man behave more boorishly? They park in front of her house in Silver Lake, one of LA's cheaper neighborhoods. More

struggle ensues. There's a concrete stairway up a slope to her home; when Robert reaches the top, running after the fleeing Susan, he's so drunk he falls backwards and bloodies his head. She looks at him with the resigned disgust that a beautiful woman soon learns to feel for many men. But she can't bring herself to leave him on the street in that condition, so she helps him up and takes him inside, where he passes out.

In the morning, at her place, Robert's been cleaned and bandaged by Susan's mother Margarita. [Margarita is played Margaret Abbott, Diahnne Abbott's mother; Susan's little boy is played by Diahnne's son, Raphael DeNiro. As much as possible, Cassavetes likes his films to be family affairs.] Robert is effusively thankful. He flirts with the mother, she flirts with him, and we see when he says goodbye to Susan that, in spite of everything, Susan likes this guy.

Robert Harmon seems to have no filters on his behavior, he acts out every wisp of feeling as it passes, as though he's desperate to feel something, anything. When he's sober he's usually stiff; when he's drunk, or hung over, he exaggerates and acts out. But we're watching a man who seems to have nothing genuine left within.

*All this work (edited, of course) will be used in the final cut of *Love Streams*, though Cassavetes will choose to begin the film with scenes shot later.*

On the day I arrive they're to shoot Robert Harmon returning to his home in the Hollywood Hills, where he's hired a gaggle of young pretty women-on-the-edge to live in his house. He's observing and interviewing them for his next book.

Robert Harmon lives in Cassavetes' house. The Cassavetes family has moved out. Through July, this house will be *Love Streams*' central set.

John's home is something of a unifying metaphor for his work. Here is the kitchen where Lynn Carlin and John Marley fight in *Faces*, and at this breakfast-nook they go into giggle-fits about fellatio. In the dining room, *Opening Night*'s Gena consults a crafty psychic played by the late Katherine Cassavetes, John's mother. Here too, in *Minnie and Moskowitz*, John comes home to tell his wife (Judith Roberts) of his affair with Gena (Minnie), and his wife runs into this bathroom to slit her wrists. In the bar, there hangs the same painting we saw in *Faces*: a young Cassavetes playing chess with a blond whose face is turned from us but who is obviously Gena. In the living room, where

Seymour parties with the ladies of *Faces*, the furniture seems not to have changed or even been moved, except that there's a piano, and a large-screen TV (the first I've seen). The staircase to the second floor is the staircase in the last moments of *Faces*. Upstairs, John's and Gena's bedroom is where *Faces*' Lynn Carlin and Seymour Cassel make love, face death, and face each other. For *Love Streams*, all that's been done to make this home a set is to line the downstairs walls with photographs of young lovely women. Gena will tell me later, "Of all the things about making this movie, this is the strangest to me, that suddenly all the pictures are of people I don't know."

Not quite all. The photos that hang crowded on the walls of the hall and bar include some of the "permanent exhibit": John, Gena, and their children, parents, friends, from every era of their lives. Gena as a stunning young actress in the 50s, beside Gena in a housedress at breakfast not too long ago. John twenty years ago, smooth-faced, hugging his little son Nick. John getting punched in a Western. John's father, old and frail, looking wise, kindly, and a bit bewildered. And stills from all the films, from *Shadows* to *Gloria*. The lighting for most of *Love Streams* is so dark that these photos never register on film; when they might, the crew gets them out of the scene. John wants them up, he wants them looking over his shoulder as he creates *Love Streams*. He shoots in his home because it's a place where he knows what's true.

On this morning what's true is a thick air of tension. There are maybe sixty people milling about, in the dining room, bar, kitchen, living room, everywhere. The *Love Streams* crew, and a dozen or so pretty young women whom Robert Harmon is to interview. Nobody's working. Everybody's quiet. It costs a lot of money for nothing to happen on a film set. Something is very wrong.

And here comes John. He's wearing a tuxedo and he's a bloody mess.

Not real blood. Make-up. Robert Harmon took a bad fall the night before, bloodied his face and hands, the wounds are still fresh. John's skin glows younger than when I saw him last, and his hair is black -- in March, his skin was colorless, his hair gray. The difference: make-up and dye, of course, but also action. John's in his element, in the action, and he feels better, at least this morning. Cassavetes is plainly angry and he's had no sleep; he's garbed in the costume of Robert Harmon after a night's debauch and a morning's hangover. Both characters shake my hand.

“Michael! I’m glad you’re here. You should come to this meeting.”

I follow him into the living room where on-lookers are shoed away and several troubled, quiet men sit and smoke. Young David Gurfinkle, the cinematographer, is slight, bearded, his face set in anger. His gaffer, Avram Liebman, sits beside him, his only ally, stocky, contained, stoic. Eddie Donno, Assistant Director, ever-present on the set, an incredibly energetic Italian-American who’s John’s traffic cop as well as stuntman, stunt coordinator, and actor. And Al Ruban, Executive Producer, silver-haired, self-contained, John’s ally and collaborator since *Shadows*; among other things, Ruban was Cassavetes’ cinematographer for the beautifully photographed *Opening Night*.

I sit down, I’m not introduced, I pull my ever-present notebook from my back pocket to take notes. Everybody but John shoots me a look -- a stranger with a notebook is the last thing they want at this meeting. Which of course John knows; the more nervous everybody else is, in this situation, the better he likes it. They’re talking cinematography. Gurfinkle is tight-lipped while Al Ruban, calmly and with his natural air of authority, articulates Gurfinkle’s point of view to John, then explains John’s point of view to Gurfinkle: Gurfinkle is working in such-and-such a way because of this-and-that, and it’s a perfectly legitimate way to go about his business; John wants this-and-that because of such-and-such, and Gurfinkle needs to understand that this is not a normal production. You’ve got to feel for Gurfinkle. Until shooting began he was probably very excited at the prospect of working with that famous maverick, John Cassavetes.

Ruban’s calm explanations are done and it’s John’s turn.

“The lighting is too heavy,” he says to Gurfinkle, his voice tight, quiet, aggressive. “The crew is too small for this heavy stuff -- it’s takes a 70-man crew to do what you’re doing -- they’ll be exhausted in six weeks and in 13 weeks they’ll be dead.”

Young Gurfinkle holds his temper. Perhaps that is his nature. Even if it isn’t, there aren’t many who’ll go up against an angry Cassavetes.

Cassavetes moves the meeting into the hallway, which has already been lit for that day’s shot. Crew-members skeedaddle out of harm’s way but try to stay in earshot.

“This is a *dark* hallway,” says John, “I don’t understand where all this light is coming from.” Then, “If we don’t come in here and pre-light and have a pattern, it’s going to take forever to do this every day. It *has* to have a pattern.”

It is a dark hallway and John wants a dark hallway, but “pre-light” and “pattern” are bullshit jargon. Quick jabs at a guy who can’t fight back.

Cassavetes calls a wrap. No work today, no work until this problem is settled. The meeting breaks up.

John and I head for the kitchen to make some coffee.

In less than a minute Eddie Donno is standing in front of us. Eddie milks the moment, waiting a beat to say:

“He quit, you know?”

Quit? David Gurfinkle was marched to the edge of a cliff and left with no dignified option but to jump. A slick way to fire a guy.

I’m new on the set but not new to the business. David Gurfinkle is producer Menahem Golan’s man, the only Golan man on the crew with a significant job. John *can’t* fire him outright; the guy’s got to quit. And so he has. Now if Golan wants to know how the production is going, he’ll have to come see for himself. For John’s part: in a film in which he directs, acts, and re-writes as he goes, he hasn’t time to teach a young stranger how to shoot a Cassavetes picture. From the beginning John’s wanted Al Ruban to shoot his film. On a shot where the camera’s in motion John can say (as he will), “Al, you do this any way you want, any speed that you want, you know?” -- and John rightfully trusts Al to do it *a la* Cassavetes. But Ruban already has a 24-hour-a-day job: as Executive Producer, he makes almost as many decisions daily as John. Al didn’t want both jobs, but who else is left? Where is another first-rate cinematographer who knows how to shoot Cassavetes’ style and can start today? It’s got to be Al. To save the picture, Al can’t say no. (But Al tries. He says no at first. Al’s “no” doesn’t last the afternoon.)

This is John’s eleventh film, and all but one (*A Child Is Waiting*) have been completed his way. In this business that doesn’t happen unless you’re a savvy in-fighter and a first-rate puppeteer.

John and Al go off to what will certainly be an interesting emergency meeting with Golan at Cannon. Everybody’s discussing the firing, or the quitting, comparing versions, taking sides, savoring and sharing overheard scraps. Helen Caldwell says to me:

“I wonder if he did that because you were here.”

“I’m not that important,” I answer, while I hope I’m covering my shock that the question would even occur to her. I *know* I wasn’t part of John’s equation, but it’s interesting that she’d wonder. She’s worked closely with Cassavetes for months, and she’s learned that things can get so crazy Cassavetes might concoct all this drama to impress... a writer.

After the Cannon meeting -- which, not surprisingly, goes John’s way -- he and Al return and shoot some establishing interiors with Robert Harmon’s pretty young interviewees. Some of this footage will be in the final cut. “Al took a lot of chances,” John tells me happily, “he backlit Leslie [Leslie Hope] -- high contrasts!”

THURSDAY, MAY 26 - *We can’t tell them the answer unless they ask the question*

Not one of the beautiful girls in Robert Harmon’s house looks older than twenty. They’re hookers, b-girls, aspiring singers, models, actresses -- droplets upon the wave after wave of young women who’ve journeyed to Hollywood every day for seventy years now. Harmon pays these gals just to hang out. They have the run of the house, eat and drink what and when they like, make messes, take showers, sunbathe, dance. He watches, listens, occasionally interviews one. Gets drunk with them. They’re to be in his next book.

As the crew sets up the morning’s shot in John’s bar, everybody’s milling around and Al Ruban calls loudly across the room to Eddie Donno, “Hey Eddie! How long have you been married?”

“Eleven, twelve years.”

“Is your wife still happy?”

“We don’t want to start over. We have a mutual agreement, we don’t want to start over.”

A chuckle in recognition of marriage’s dilemmas.

Nobody but me seems to think their exchange odd. To me, it sounds not like

work-banter but like a private conversation in a bar. Then I see: we *are* in a bar. John's bar. (One of his first-floor rooms is a bar.) I can't shake the impression that this picture is being shot in the neighborhood bar that *is* the cinema of John Cassavetes -- and now that I think of it, only John's thwarted studio picture, *A Child Is Waiting*, features no scenes in bars and bathrooms.

John walks in, ready to act, wearing the clothing and severe expression of Robert Harmon -- wasted and depressed, a man at the end of his rope who doesn't seem really to like anything or anyone.

When an actor directs himself we enter a hall of mirrors, mirrors facing mirrors. One never gets the sense that Robert Harmon is John Cassavetes. Cassavetes can write a Robert Harmon; Robert Harmon could never reach deep enough to write a John Cassavetes. But on days when John directs himself one sometimes gets the sense that Robert Harmon is shooting this picture. Harmon is too difficult and desperate a character for John merely to step into at a moment's notice, especially when he's still getting used to this character, so John's attention is more inward than usual. In Harmon make-up and Harmon clothing, John carries the character with him all day. Sometimes a little more so, sometimes a little less so, but Harmon is always around. Sometimes, while John directs, you get the impression that Harmon and Cassavetes are two men trying to walk through the same door at the same time, bumping into each other, neither very happy about it.

They're to shoot a conversation between Robert Harmon and one of the girls, Joanie, played by Leslie Hope. Leslie is an 18-year-old Canadian with the creamiest, loveliest skin one is likely to see, and a face ripe for dreaming about. Her Joanie is a sometime-hooker with an expression already set in disillusioned boredom. Robert Harmon has gathered the girls together in his bar to tape interviews. Joanie's interview in the script runs 5 pages -- a long conversation for Harmon. (He'll talk at length with only four other characters.) In anyone else's picture, such a conversation would mark Joanie as someone to watch, someone to care about. In John's films you never know. A signature of Cassavetes since *Husbands* is that, usually early on, a central character has a long-ish important scene with someone who then disappears from the picture. John's characters meet people, become involved, some come and go, some come and stay. In *Love Streams*, will Susan of the early scenes be pivotal? Will Joanie? No clue is given.

Cassavetes quickly establishes that in his film, as in life, you have no way of knowing what will happen. The sense of not knowing is central to his vision; one way he embodies this in his film's form is never to signal the function of his supporting characters. While they're on-screen they have the film's full attention, as though they're co-stars; they may be there not for plot, as in most films, or to accent some aspect of life important to the story -- an aspect of, as John will tell me, "some vague thing that life has."

John's bar is not a large room. Into this room squeeze the actresses, John, Al, Eddie, the cameraman, camera-assistant, sound-mixer, sound-boom guy, dialogue coach, script girl, location manager (!), and anyone else who can squeeze in without getting barked at by Eddie or Al. Me, I'm scrunched against a wall. And just outside the room, in the hall, there's almost everybody else. I won't repeat this description for every shot filmed in this house, but you may assume a similar crowd every time. Studio sound-stages are enormous for a reason: it usually takes a lot of people to make a movie. Compared to a sound-stage, we're shooting in a closet. We're all over each other. There's something about John Cassavetes, in life as on the screen, that's going to bump you up against other people and make you deal.

Leslie Hope and John take position, facing each other across the bar. She sits on a barstool, he stands. There are six takes. In between takes John doesn't break character; it's the ravaged, self-disgusted Robert Harmon who commands us. The first take is incomplete -- he cuts because their energy is too flat. The second, they act all five pages of script precisely, but John thinks he stinks and doesn't want it printed. He cuts the third take because we can hear people talking in the backyard. Cuts the fourth -- the film-magazine rattles. Cuts the fifth -- a camera battery's gone dead. The battery is replaced. This takes longer than it should, which doesn't make Robert/John happy. The sixth take is complete. It's the only take he prints.

On the sixth take, he improvised -- again, not as in "off the cuff" but as in the disciplined soloing of jazz:

Into the interview he inserts a version of the "beautiful woman/secrets" speech that we heard when he spoke with Susan, the singer, a speech *written* (though not exactly this way) elsewhere in the script.

"See -- a beautiful woman -- has to offer the man her secrets. I mean, that is so

beautiful, I can't, I can't tell you. See, everyone in the world is -- very screwed up. Now, I know that *you're* not screwed up -- and I'm not. And I know the answer, and you know the answer, but -- we can't *tell* them the answer unless they ask us the question. You see?"

Of course she doesn't see. Who would? But we, the viewers of the film, are made aware of something. Robert Harmon's interest in Susan and Joanie is superficial at best, but he *is* interested in something. Whatever it is, he wants it -- badly. In his dead-end life it's the last and only thing he wants, though he can't articulate it even to himself. He calls it a "secret" and feels it's hidden in "a beautiful woman." He seems to think that if only he informs a beautiful woman that she possesses this secret, she'll know what he's talking about and she'll tell him!

Crazy? Maybe. No one would mistake Robert Harmon for an emotionally or mentally balanced person. But the repeated "beautiful woman/secret" speech indicates that underneath his compulsive acting-out something genuine and intense is going on. He doesn't know what it is, but he knows it's going on. He may be too wounded, and he may have ruined himself too deeply, ever to know what he's trying to find -- but he feels that if he finds it, it might free him. That feeling is the last thing left of the man he maybe once was, or the man he wanted to be.

Later John will speak to me about "inner life." He'll say, "We're making a picture about inner life. And nobody really believes that it can be put on the screen! Including me! I don't believe it either -- but -- screw it!" And, "I know this guy doesn't know what he's doing -- just like me... [Robert Harmon] has feelings but doesn't know how to express them." We watch Robert Harmon and we think, not always kindly, "What under Heaven and above Hell is this guy up to, what's driving him?" The tormented quest of his inner life is given to us, as it were, in outline. We will never know him, but in the course of the film he will grow toward us as we will toward him, and we will come to feel his depth.

More precisely, we will come to feel *depth*. The fact of it. The ever-presence of it. Its inchoate power in our lives. "We're making a film about inner life."

The entire constellation of Romanticism that hovers around "every beautiful

woman has a secret” has long haunted Cassavetes as an artist. (Is there a male artist whom it hasn’t haunted?) In *Shadows*, Leila Goldoni’s 18-year-old character believes in the secret as much as the men, and they’re all young enough to *really* believe it, which imparts to *Shadows* its hopeful spark. In *Faces* men hound Gena Rowlands mercilessly for this “secret,” though no one uses the word; she must fend off the illusions of every man who comes near. And Lynn Carlin and her girlfriends look for this very same Romantic secret from a young man, Seymour Cassel. *Faces* hinges on the moments when people collapse under the burden of their Romanticism and are forced to face each other.

The men of *Husbands* are haunted by the same notions, but frivolously, as a cover-up. What’s really bugging them are the burden of their responsibilities, the limitations of their freedom, and the imminence of death. “Every beautiful woman has a secret” is the very soul of *Minnie and Moskowitz* and *A Woman Under the Influence*, though *Woman’s* concerns range far wider. In each film, a goodhearted bewildered man (Seymour in *Minnie*, Peter Falk in *Woman*) tries to see into the soul of a woman (Gena in both). They fail. They end up with no choice but to accept her unconditionally. In *Woman*, Mabel doesn’t seek to know Nick’s nature -- she’s enthralled with her own. They love each other deeply, but both act as though he’s just a piece of her puzzle.

In *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* men are surrounded with beautiful nearly-naked women, but these guys have stopped looking, stopped questioning. It is the cruel world of men that Cosmo (Ben Gazzarra) must attempt to survive. Men buy and sell secrets but don’t know them. *Opening Night* strikes off into different territory: the inner life of a woman who is also a great actress. She quite consciously fears she has a secret, secret most of all from herself, and she puts herself through grueling confrontations to find it -- almost as though she’s wooing herself.

In *Gloria*, Cassavetes makes the beautiful woman’s secret a game. It’s a literal secret (a notebook), and gangsters are trying to kill her for it. Interesting symbolism: Gloria shoots men and protects a boy. The secret is dangerous to men and protective of boys. Men are trying to kill the bearer of the secret, and the secret will only nurture a boy who calls himself “the man”? Shrinks could wring quite a treatise on that one.

Now in *Love Streams* the man is ravaged, desperate, hopeless, alone. He’s still looking for that secret. He doesn’t even know what it might be anymore, but he’s

looking.

So I'm wondering what Ted Allan meant when he told me, "John's life is like a Cassavetes movie."

The next scene is in the upstairs bathroom. Robert Harmon, grim, in a tux, strolls through the house just looking at the girls, making occasional small-talk, while the girls do this and that, whatever they like. He goes into the bathroom, where two naked young women frolic in the shower. He looks at them and leaves. Two set-ups: shoot the girls reacting to Harmon, and his reaction to them. It takes forever.

The lights are rigged in the bathroom, then John delays the proceedings by closing the door and moving his bowels.

It's his house, isn't it?

Even Al Ruban can't quite believe this.

"Did he go to the bathroom?!" he asks Eddie Donno.

"I told him," Eddie shrugs.

"We're not gonna be able to use that bathroom for an hour now!"

"I did what I could do," Eddie shrugs.

"Does he think his shits don't stink?"

Then one of the actresses doesn't want to be photographed in the nude. Can she wear a bathing suit? Fine. Should she duck down so it looks like she's naked. "No," says Cassavetes, "if you're in a bathing suit I want to see you in a bathing suit." To no one or everyone he adds, "I'm a kinky guy, I got one in a bathing suit and one not in a bathing suit."

Five takes from one angle, with three complete and printed. Another take, the same angle with a different lens. Three takes of a medium shot, Harmon watching them; two printed. Another from Harmon's point of view, one take, printed. Another, hand-held, the girls playing in the shower. Printed.

Two, three, four hours? One loses track.

"I don't wanna make a big thing outa this," John tells Al. "It's just a normal thing in this guy's life. We can't hold on it because this scene isn't going anywhere. If we hold on it, it's just titillation."

After one take John's shaking his head. "I hope *I* never get into that. Al, let's do it again, that took 18 years." To me, "I've had it with this scene. I can't stand to see all that shit." He means the nudity. Except for *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, there's no skin in his pictures. Interesting that this houseful of nubile gals is nowhere suggested in Ted Allan's play. These scenes of sexual boredom and confusion are wholly Cassavetes'.

Eleven long takes in all, and when they're finally done John is glum -- unusual for him. He often says that he doesn't know what he's doing, but nobody who knows John or his work believes him. If he says it after this scene, we'll believe him.

He takes me aside, says, "I made a big mistake in not starting with Gena."

The next sequence is outdoors, on the hillside behind John's house. The heat is brutal. Everybody's short with each other.

"I don't know what they're doing," a woman says. She's answered by a woman in the wardrobe department: "I know what they're doing, they're doing what they're always doing, *they're changing their minds.*"

They are. John decides the hillside doesn't look right. They pull up weeds and water plants. Though a crew of about fifty is at his disposal, John takes a hose and sprays the hillside himself -- to give more color to the shot. They pick camera positions, change camera positions. Stage people. Change the staging. Shoot the girls sunbathing, dancing to radios, drinking. They shoot two more interviews. Hours and hours.

There's a screw-up, people who aren't supposed to be in a shot are in the shot, John loses it, screams, "Everybody get out of this shot, get your asses out of this shot! Anybody who's in this shot, you're all off the picture!"

One of the girls is Ted Allan's granddaughter. The written dialogue is only a page, but John plays with it, strings it out. Again he inserts, "It's always been my greatest hope to have a beautiful woman tell me her secrets. Willingly. That is so beautiful." This girl looks fourteen years old, so the speech feels especially pathetic.

Six set-ups, ten takes, and as it goes on the sequence seems more and more pointless. Murmurs of second-guessing. "What's he doing this for?" "Didn't we already do this scene inside?" Before one take a girl asks, "Should I be walking around?"

Cassavetes says flatly, with no interest, "You can do anything you want."

But to the actress with whom he has dialogue, Bronwen Bober, he is all attention. Her delivery is a little stiff and John tells her gently, "When you say that don't *know* exactly what you're gonna say. Let it go."

An "assembly" is a draft of the edited film, before the picture "locks" -- that is, before the final version, released in theaters, is decided upon. Sometimes, for preview purposes with test audiences, an assembly or draft will be printed and scored like a released movie, and there may even be credits. But not until the picture is locked is it, in effect, signed by the director and ready for release.

There will be many assemblies and private screenings of Love Streams. I'll see most of them. During five months of editing, and several drafts of Love Streams, the Joanie interview will be absent. But finally, in the last locked version, Cassavetes will restructure the beginning of his picture, deciding to open not with the nightclub scenes but with fragmentary scenes of the girls in the house. The Joanie interview will be the beginning's centerpiece.

In the final edit the shower scene will run for twelve seconds: two seconds on the girls, ten on Harmon watching the girls -- a powerful shot that establishes beyond doubt this man's utter disgust with himself and with life.

The hillside sequence will be discarded.

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