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### **A Life Videotaping Life Has Become a Movie**

by NATHAN LEE

Michel Auder has been making videos longer than almost anyone, and that alone makes the work of this underappreciated artist and filmmaker worth attending to. Largely shown in galleries, his immense oeuvre — memoirs, travelogues, portraits, ingenious television montages — hasn't been easy to see. But a new feature, cheekily called "The Feature," opens his world to a new audience, his aesthetic to a more conventional form and his achievement to the wider recognition it deserves. It's a beautiful, beguiling movie.

Emerging from the Parisian bohemia of the 1960s, Mr. Auder fell into the Warhol scene and fell in love with one of its superstars, the ethereal, acid-tongued Viva. They married and had a child without relinquishing their bond to bohemia: a room in the Chelsea Hotel, jaunts to Paris and Morocco, sex, drugs and bonhomie with members of the avant-garde, the jet set and the demimonde.

Mr. Auder, now 65, kept his camera running throughout, as he would for much of the following 40 years, amassing a vast archive of his life and times: 5,000 hours' worth, by his own estimate. "The Feature" plunges into this memory bank, chasing down fleeting emotions, privileged moments, traces of faded experience. Supplementary footage directed by Andrew Neel, shot on crisp high-definition video, frames this aching autobiography with a fictionalized portrait of Mr. Auder's present-day existence.

"This narrative is not a true account," heralds the opening title card, acknowledging both the manufacture of Mr. Auder's contemporary persona as well as the inescapable subjectivity of his documentary narrative. Though it touches on all aspects of his personal and professional life, "The Feature" is primarily the story of Mr. Auder's marriages, first to the irrepressible Viva, later to the introverted Cindy Sherman, whose reluctance to be a subject of his omnivorous, gregarious work opens up a rift in their relationship. Or that's how Mr. Auder, who narrates in his seductive, half-mumbled French accent, remembers things.

While indebted, like all his videos, to Warhol's let-the-camera-roll aesthetic, "The Feature" is closer in tone to the limpid diary films of Jonas Mekas and the plangent memoir-poems of the filmmaker Philippe Garrel, both of whom Mr. Auder counts among his many friends. His voice, however, is eminently his own: charismatic yet self-effacing, tenderhearted but compelled by uncontrollable appetites (for sex, heroin and subjects for the camera).

Mr. Auder's obsessive videomaking prefigures the relentless narcissism of our current self-publishing mania, but there's artfulness to his seemingly unmediated recording. He's a subtle and canny editor (abetted here by Luke Meyer), with a keen sense of rhythm and duration. The nearly three-hour running time of "The Feature" feels exactly right, as does the unforced, organic development of his themes — fatherhood, relationships, the egoism and freedom of a bohemian life.

Ubiquitous as video has become, we still don't have a well-developed sense of (or perhaps consensus on) what constitutes beauty in the medium. Mr. Auder's videos belong to any discussion of these evolving criteria. Now that high definition is de rigueur, there's great pleasure to be had in contemplating his early, bleary, low-resolution black-and-white images, which now look less like disposable doodling than choice examples of video primitivism. They are as elusive and tantalizing as the photo-based paintings of Gerhard Richter or the recent low-fi video experiments of David Lynch.