A Constant Forge

By Charles Kiselyak
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 world so that they can patrol
certain streets, patrol their house...
and know their way home.
And when they cease to know
their way home, things go wrong.
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.
Mr. Sophistication...
and his De-Lovelies...
are not gonna take you to Asia.
They're not gonna take you to Europe.
They're not gonna take you
to South America.
We're gonna introduce
a new number tonight.
He's gonna take you
on a whole new trip.
And I know you're gonna enjoy it.
When I was 17,
I- I could do anything.
It was so easy. My emotions
were so close to the surface.
I'm finding it...
harder and harder
to stay in touch.
Do me a favor?
Don't be silly anymore.
Just be yourself.
But I am myself.
Who else would I be?
I'm serious.
Definition of "serious."
Blah, blah, blah, blah.
Tell me what you want me to -
how you want me to be.
I can be that.
I can be anything.
You tell me, Nicky.
John Cassavetes thought
that love was the primary emotion...
that determined almost everything
that happens in life.
He was attracted to man's need for love.
We need it like food, water and air,
but we don't know how to get it.
But that's our struggle.
And what gets in the way-
ignorance, superstition,
greed, fear, defensiveness-
Who the hell knows what it is?
But all these things get in the way
with the one thing that we all need.
And that interested him.
All John said was, "Find out
who you are and keep looking for that."
And the only way you can do that
is to take some chances...
and stretch yourself with people.
I don't know anyone that really
loved people as much as he did.
And with a real honest... passion
and a compassion.
As far as John was concerned,
each person was a jewel, you know.
Each person in the world, really,
that he met.
And I never saw anybody
not be a jewel around John...
because he had
this celebration going on...
with everybody that he dealt with.
He had an understanding
we were all a little crazy. He knew it.
And he was able to
get us to express it.
We should be respectful of that—
that we're all a little crazy.
We're all totally, uh, unique animals...
and full of majestic potential.
But all a little crazy.
And he showed us.
He told us that.
He had another look
at the human condition.
And not based on psychology, either.
Based on a whole other thing.
A love—A love for people.
His love of life, his love of emotion,
his love of feeling, his love of contradiction.
He was a force.
He was excited.
He was, uh—
He loved to laugh.
He enjoyed—He enjoyed people.
He enjoyed the way they made fools
of themselves. He enjoyed their struggle.
And he enjoyed trying to capture that.
That's what he wanted.
He wanted to get that on film.
So that there was very little distinction
between his life and his making of a film.
They were combined together.
When I show his films to my students...
I want them so badly to appreciate...
that it's not just incredible filmmaking
we're coming into contact with...
but a different mode
of experiencing life—
a mode that asks deeper questions
than traditional films do.
A mode that allows for the messy,
the complicated...
the embarrassing,
the unpredictable.
Those, to me, are values in life,
not just in film.
In any John Cassavetes movie,
I think every three or four minutes...
there's some lightning bolt of reality. 
Will you let me finish!
Because you're a man
who doesn't say what you mean very well.
What you meant was this was a wonderful evening,
and you enjoy my house and you ike me.
But like you said, you're crude.
All of his films, in one way or another,
are depictions of sleepwalkers...
who have to wake up.
And the film is the wake-up call.
It's about viewers who have to wake up
and encounter reality freshly.
Of course, a lot of viewers resist that,
just as a lot of characters resist it.
It's largely responsible for the neglect...
and even the downright abuse
of his work in his lifetime.
I'm sorry.
I'm a stupid woman, and I -
This is very embarrassing,
and I'm just sorry.
It's just that there's such a difference
between what you dream about...
and what's really there, isn't there?
The exploration of life
and what you possibly are doing here...
and trying to work out...
your problems and...
your differences and, uh -
Those were the things
that are fascinating to us.
And they were too embarrassing
for some people.
Um, but not for us.
I just don't love you.
I won't call my filmmaking entertainment.
It's asking questions of people—constantly.
"How much do you feel?"
"How much do you know?"
'Are you aware of this?"
"Can you cope with this?"
"What problems do you have
that I may have?"
What part of life are we interested in knowing more about?
I have a need for the characters to really analyze love—
discuss it, kill it, destroy it,
hurt each other.
Do all the stuff in that war—
in that word polemic
and film polemic of what life is.
I have a one-track mind.
That's all I'm interested in
love—and the lack of it.
My father came over to America
when he was 11 years old.
He was born in Piraeus, Greece...
and he heard about this country when
a missionary came through town one day...
saying there was
brotherhood in America.
That if you wanted to work and learn...
the American people would open
their arms and hearts to you.
My parents allowed their two sons
to be individuals.
My family was
a wild and wonderful place...
with lots of friends and neighbors
visiting and talking loud and eating loud.
And nobody telling their children
to be quiet or putting them down.
When we had money,
we went to the movies.
When we didn't, we sat around
the kitchen table and told stories.
I was a totally uninterested student
in high school.
I didn't want to
go to college because...
college in the '50s
was just a way of getting a diploma.
I hitchhiked down to Florida
for a few weeks, and when I got back home...
I bumped into some friends of mine—
funny, funny guys.
"Hey, John, we just signed up... at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts to become actors, man. Come with us. The school's packed with girls."
I'd get up on stage and shout. A couple of the teachers liked that because it showed a lot of enthusiasm. For a long time, that's all I thought acting was about— to show a lot of emotion. I attended the academy for a year and then spent two years making the rounds. There's something about the motivation of fear that makes you work terribly hard. But as an actor, you don't get the freedom to function the way you'd like to. I know I never got the lines I wanted under other directors. I wanted to direct... to find out everything I'm capable of and to make the most of it... whether people like it or not. I believe that when you're young... you should go to all the places you're uncomfortable in and prove yourself. Because someday you're gonna have to prove yourself. When I saw her, that was it. I said, "That's the girl I'm gonna marry." Well, it was a hard struggle to convince her. I kept Gena under constant scrutiny. I was enormously jealous, filled with suspicions about other men... and with the terror that those suspicions might be correct. She wouldn't put up with that, and finally I relaxed. In the beginning of our marriage, I made a bargain. Gena would fight me to the bitter end, and I would fight her to the bitter end. And the bargain never has been broken. Together we lead a magnificent,
unassembled, emotional and undisciplined life.
I can't think of anyone with whom
I would rather argue or love than my wife.
We fight and argue and kill each other off
every single day, Gena and me.
But that's only surface. Because we both have
the understanding that when we don't do that...

it's all over.
I took a loft in New York
on 48th Street.
I got about 19 young actors together
to form an acting class.
And everybody paid
two dollars a week, including me.
I started teaching one of the classes,
and I loved it.

Shadows began as an improvisation
the class was working on.
I dreamed up some characters
that were close to the people in the class...
and then I kept changing the situations
and ages of the characters...
until we all began to function
as those characters at any given moment.
During one class, I was so impressed
by a particular improvisation that I said...

"Hey, that would make a terrific movie."

Every scene in Shadows was very simple.
They were predicated on people having problems
that were overcome with other problems.
At the end of a scene,
another problem would come in and overlap.
This carried it forward
and built up a simple structure.
When we finished
the first version of the film...
we had two midnight screenings
at the Paris Theater in New York...
and they were both
absolutely disastrous.
It was filled with cinematic virtuosity—
with angles and fancy cutting...
and a lot of jazz going on
in the background.
It was a totally intellectual film, and therefore less than human.
I'd fallen in love with the camera, with technique...
with beautiful shots,
with experimentation for its own sake.
I saw all that and wanted to fix it up.
I thought if I could shoot for 10 more days...
I'd be able to make it into what I'd originally visualized.
Shadows will always be the film I love the best.
Simply because it was the first one, and we were all young...
and because it was impossible, and we were so ignorant...
and for three years we survived each other and everything.
In Too Late Blues, I was working under a studio system...
which I find just doesn't suit me.
It's a system based on departments and department heads and chiefs.
I'm not very good at dealing with department heads...
because I'm not concerned with their problems.
I'm only concerned with mine.
It was the story of an idealistic jazz musician...
who falls in love with a mediocre vocalist—an easy girl.
In turn, his ideals are shaken and his manhood challenged.
Despondent, he sells out to a cheap record label, becomes a gigolo...
loses his self-respect and finds determination to return to his ideals.
A Child is Waiting was strictly a commercial venture.
From my point of view, it was a painful experience.
Not because of the retarded children...
but from the fact that it's really hard to compromise a subject that shouldn't be compromised. I worked with Stanley Kramer as my producer for about four months. Kramer had me replaced and the picture reedited to suit himself. There is no way we could have gotten along together under any circumstances. I hate the son of a bitch. The philosophy of his film was that retarded children are separate and alone... and therefore should be in institutions with others of their kind. My film said that these children could be anywhere, anytime. One thing I learned about the big studios You can't please them and yourself at the same time. I will never make another commercial film. If I can, I will make films with nonprofessionals- people who can afford to dream of a much bigger reward... people who crave to take part in something creative and... don't know exactly what that is. At the end of 1964, Faces was born... out of friendships and mutual dissatisfactions. I was bugged about marriage- the millions of middle-class marriages in the United States that just... sort of glide along. Couples married 10 or 15 years... husbands and wives who seem to have everything. But all these creature comforts have made them passive. Underneath, there's this feeling of desperateness because they can't connect. What's worse is most couples aren't even aware they can't communicate.
The whole point of Faces is to show how few people really talk to each other. At the beginning, I had written a first draft that was 250 pages long. And that wasn't even half the film. Then we decided to film everything. Even if the film lasted 10 hours. We shot for six full months. So, Faces became more than a film. It became a way of life. We had only $10,000 when we started, and the film cost almost 200,000. To get the money, I played parts in five films during these three years. I became an actor in order to finance the films I wanted to make. The story of Husbands is very personal to me. My older brother died when he was 30 years old, so... I know very well the effect of the death of a loved one. From the very beginning, we made a pact... that we would try to find whatever truth was in ourselves and talk about that. Sometimes the scenes would reflect things that we wouldn't like to find out—how idiotic we were, how little we had to do with ourselves or how uptight we were. We made the picture as a feeling about men... and how they won't give in to the world they live in. These three men are 40-year-old kids. They're happy. They—They just do whatever they want to do. It's our night out. I wrote Minnie because I didn't think that two people can get married anymore. The characters in Minnie and Moskowitz... is like they have become invisible... and nobody can see or reach
their real selves anymore. A Minnie Moore with all the values in the world but no place to put them. An empty bed, a fixed-up apartment, a job... a boyfriend who is married who comes once in a while. Her affair is with Seymour Moskowitz. He's a footloose, practical, uncomplicated American dreamer. A Seymour Moskowitz has his own style. He's been tugged at and pushed like the rest of us and has emerged like we all wish to be. At the onset of A Woman Under the Influence... Gena and I were speaking about the pictures we were gonna make. We were talking about how difficult love was... and how totally, terribly without merit a love story would be in 1971. So, when I started writing the script, I kept all those things in mind... and didn't want the love story easy. This film deals with the serious problems of a man and woman... who are alienated from each other by their backgrounds. Ignorant of their problems, yet totally in love. This picture is one of the ones that interests me the most. Part of the fun was to imagine a self-contained world, different from the one I live in... to move into it and live in it. Cosmo Vittelli is a man who proclaims that he wants to live in style and comfort. But for Cosmo, comfort means living on the edge. For seven years, he has run and ruled a club he doesn't own. But his reign is a sham, sustained only by monthly meetings with a loan shark.
The picture says something to me—that we might sell anything mindlessly. Even our own lives.

Opening Night is about an actress on the edge of a breakdown. Someone who doesn't go along with the crowd... and accept every conceivable formula to life... that is fed to us 24 hours a day... on the radio and on television and in films. And this actress appealed to me.

I think in all of us there's a theatrical leaning where we have many selves... and one of the selves is full of duty and responsibility... and the other self is a personal self, which has to be fed also. And people who deny that are unhappy. And an actor is really representative of the conflict of those selves.

I wrote the story to sell—strictly to sell. It was no great shakes, but I liked it and Gena liked it. I wrote a very fast-moving, thoughtless piece about gangsters. And I don't even know any gangsters. Gloria has a wonderful actress... and a very nice kid who's neither sympathetic nor nonsympathetic. He's just a kid. He reminds me of me. Constantly in shock, reacting to this unfathomable environment. Many themes from the earlier films merge in Love Streams.

The photographic negative quality of the brother-sister relationship... was graphically portrayed in the interracial family of Shadows. The awful emotional isolation in which artists trap themselves...
was the subject of both Too Late Blues and Opening Night. We've seen Sarah and Jack fall in love and get married... as Minnie and Moskowitz. We saw the process of alienation of husband and wife—much like what Sarah and Jack speak of in the divorce hearing—in Faces. The freedom that the three friends dream of in Husbands... is the freedom that Robert Harmon has and finds empty. A female intensity bordering on madness... was explored in A Woman Under the Influence. With the exception that Mabel Longhetti's lunacy was accepted by her family... while Sarah Lawson's is rejected. The nightlife that Robert Harmon finds so fascinating... was the subject of The Killing of a Chinese Bookie. Even the combination of love and discomfort... that Robert Harmon feels towards his son... is not unlike the woman-child relationship in Gloria. The works build on each other until they have the prismatic effect of a vision... or a dream. John had a vision. And he wasn't afraid, in the name of that vision... in the name of his obsession... to make a fool of himself. And if someone said, "Man, is God in ruins!"... John saw the ruins, and he saw them with a clarity... that the rest of us would find unbearable.
But he was drawn to the God part.
Man's need for love.
And he was always
looking for a story that...
expressed the stupidities,
the weaknesses...
the foibles, the jealousies...
whatever got in the way of that need.
Extraordinary people
look at something and see three things.
The average person, he only sees one.
John could see 10.
And he was able, somehow,
to put 'em all together.
He housed within himself,
under one roof...
all the contradictions.
He was a man of action,
but he was also a dreamer.
He was teeming with feeling, emotion...
and yet he was extremely intelligent.
There are revolutionaries who want to
tear down and make something fresh...
and then there are the old-fashioned...
those who see the wisdom in the past.
John saw both.
He was both.
He was a complex man.
He had antennae like Proust,
but he was a competitor like Vince Lombardi.
He was a wild animal.
But at the same time,
the family was central to his universe.
John told me, the last time I saw him...
this story about his father.
I said to him,
"How is it that your father let you -
Didn't he fight you
about being an actor?"
And he said,
"Well, you know, it's funny you ask me...
"because I went to him, and I said...
'I don't want to go to college.
I want to be an actor. "'
And his father looked at him, and he said, "He gave me this very solemn look..."
"and I thought, 'Oh, my God. I'm really gonna get it.'"
'And he said, 'Well, that's a very noble thing to do."
"'But do you know what kind of responsibility that is?"
"'You are going to have to be truthful... to each of those characters' human natures. '"
And that's what he did. He listened to his daddy. His people were complex. They weren't heroic. They... had a lot of twists and turns in them. I'd say that the writing in his films is the closest to Eugene O'Neill's work... that I've ever seen on film. People are just hammering away at... saying what they mean or saying what they feel. And they don't always get there. Or it may take them a long time to get there. And the dialogue, therefore, is very, very oblique. I mean, you go eight, nine months, you don't see a kid. A couple years pass by, never see a kid. All of a sudden, I see a lot of baby carriages, a lot of babies. I think it's in the air. Suddenly there's a lot of babies around, there's somethin' in the air? I - I - Why did he say that at that time? I have no idea. I do remember being tickled... by the fact that a lot of the guys were looking at me... like they didn't understand what I was sayin And what I was tickled by was the fact
that I didn't know what I was saying.
But I made believe I did.
So that made it fun to play.
I never see a kid a couple of years...
all of a sudden I see a lot of baby carriages,
a lot of babies.
That's an approach
that is different than most movies...
where you decide,
"Oh, his attitude is this.
"This is his attitude...
and this is his motivation. "
No, I didn't know what
my motivation was. I had no idea.
And a lot of John's stuff
plays good that way.
I think it's in the air.
And he loved ambiguity.
Loved ambiguity.
Because people are ambiguous.
You killed the top Chinese dog.
Every one of his followers
from here to Canarsie and then some...
are on their way to tear your guts out.
Like he says,
the problem with most movies...
is everybody's perfect.
He said, "The leading man
is the perfect leading man...
and the bad guy
is a perfect bad guy.
Religion of the people.
I got news for him.
It's money.
Money.
That's -Jesus Christ.
My father was right.
John was really interested in...
that mixture that's in most of the people
that we know, at any rate.
I don't think he was interested in evil
as much as he was interested in weakness.
You're an amateur.
Take a walk.
John wrote characters that had to- Well... he's always looking for the weakness in the supposedly strong person... or the strength in the supposedly weak person. Men can be ridiculous. Men can be grown-up and still be children. Uh, women could be nutty and be right. You got embarrassed, and you made a jerk of yourself. That's all. Cassavetes' films are the greatest example of pattern-breaking in all of cinema. I make a jerk of myself every day. I'm - In fact, it's what drives some viewers up a wall... is they say, 'Just figure out what this character should be... and tell me and stay with it. " And he won't do that. He'll never do that. He'll have characters be amazing and awful... and comical and horrendous. Second by second by second, changing. I always understood you, and you always understood me... and that was always just... how it was, and that's it. You don't know what people are gonna do next, and people are not just - You know, you can't predict them. They aren't gonna be good all the time. They're not gonna be bad all the time. They're not gonna be sane all the time. They're not gonna be a lot of things any of the time. Ah, boy, what a life! And that was the pleasure of the discovery. Ah, what's the matter, Jeannie? Don't you like me? Hmm? Why not? Come on. I can take criticism. Hmm? What's the matter with me?
You don't want me to be crude?
All right, I won't be crude.
You're married.
Oh, Jeannie, am I married.
McCarthy is self-centered
and oblivious to Jeannie...
then he engages our sympathy.
Jeannie, do you know what it is
to be a promo man in a firm like mine, huh?
I'll tell ya.
You meet more millionaires
and more presidents...
than you dream could exist.
Then he's more boorish
than we could have ever imagined.
You don't want to
go in the bedroom all that time...
and not have made out, you know.
So, messed up my hair,
pulled down my tie...
pulled out my shirttail as though I was...
getting dressed or something, you know.
That I had just got out of bed with her.
Hey, Jeannie baby!
Hey. You're all right, Jeannie baby!
John wanted to get
his characters to that place...
of confusion, multiplicity,
that most of life is lived in.
I don't know anybody
who has an easy pattern of behavior.
I know people who are just sensational
one minute and absolute bastards the next.
And these moods come from specific things
that I can't put my finger on...
because I don't know their whole life.
So, I've gotta depend on that actor
to identify with his role enough...
that he can express those things.
And to get it on the screen
is something miraculous.
You know, you're a very strange man.
Well, you want me to leave, I'll leave.
There are explosions in his film
of revelation and then of pulling back.
His characters,
perhaps like aspects of himself...
are playing this delicate dance...
between a kind of
bursting forth of their instincts...
and fear keeping them bottled in
'cause they don't know what it could lead to.
I very often have likened his films to jazz...
because, much like jazz...
his movies have this improvised
and spontaneous feel.
They allow for occasional solo flights...
for uneven tempo...
and for moments that you just go,
"Where did that come from?"
Get out of this kitchen!
Look at - Look at your shoes, Eddie!
They're full of mud.
Get out ofhere.
Hey, Eddie, put me down. Come on.
And cut that out, Eddie!
You want spaghetti?
- Spaghetti again?
- Yes.
Now, it so happens that,
as we now know...
he scripted his films very carefully,
even if they feel so improvised.
Peter Piper picked a peck
of pickled peppers.
If Peter Piper picked
a peck of pickled peppers...
where's the peck of
pickled peppers Peter picked?
Huh?
Peter Piper picked a peck
of pickled peppers.
Everything that affects our lives...
is determined by the influence
that one sex has upon the other.
Sure, we're in the midst
of political decay and turmoil.
But that's not nearly as interesting.
That's more mental, based on how much information you have. The relationships between men and women... are permanently fixed in our instincts, not our minds. What I'm trying to say is that you're a... delicate, experienced... exciting woman... who I find attractive beyond comprehension... a woman who amazes me with her lack of belief in herself. Manny...

- Jesus Christ.
- I'm in trouble.

I'm not acting. John has given us so many extraordinary female depictions... it's very easy to forget that he was a deep, deep student of male psychology as well. And figures like Robert Harmon in Love Streams... Cosmo Vittelli in Killing of a Chinese Bookie... are deep meditations... on some emotional deficiency... that John perceived in men. They were afraid to express emotion. They kept things bottled up. What makes up for the nonexpression... is a kind of fake public expression. Well, that's it. One of our girls left. No longer with us. Uh, Rachel, as a matter of fact. Gone on to bigger and better things. The most emotional and expressive Cosmo gets... are actually in these unimportant, trivial, impersonal ways. Will somebody please tell me what's going on?
Don't worry, Rach.
I got a lot of insurance.
And when it comes time
to interact with his girlfriend...
he has nothing to say to her.
Mabel.
Nick, played by Peter Falk-
He's a well-meaning but rather dumb guy.
The way he deals with Mabel. I mean, the way
he acknowledges that she must not be crazy.
Mabel's not crazy.
She's unusual.
She's not crazy, so don't say she's crazy.
This woman cooks, sews,
makes the bed, washes the bathroom.
What the hell is crazy about that?
I don't understand what she's doing.
I admit that.
Nick.
When he hits her, he says,
"See what you made me do?"
See what you made me do? Huh?
Having a party?
Then, when she tries to
slit her wrist with a razor...
he puts a Band-Aid on it.
I mean, Nick's way of dealing
with things is purely surface.
Nick is a construction
worker, a guy who goes out and works with his hands.
Don't discuss my affairs!
Well, all right, then. Okay.
I'm sorry.
He is a conservative,
and all of a sudden, he marries a girl.
He takes the one little
act of danger in his life-
She's a little kooky, she's a little crazy,
she loves him intensely-
It is a little embarrassing to him.
- What are you bananas doin'?
- Hey, Nick. What's with you and Mabel? What happened?
It is very embarrassing to him
to display emotion.
He doesn't want to display that emotion to the world.
He doesn't want to have that closeness and rapport with people.
He wants distance in his public life.
And the only thing that can throw him off is this woman.
Lots of people!
Come on, darling. Come on.
Come on there.
There we go.
Go right in. Go on.
How are ya?
Who would think that if your wife, whom you love...
is coming back from the nuthouse, that you're gonna invite a hundred people to the house?
Like it's some celebration of I don't know what.
Like she's just won something.
And you gotta have everybody over there to greet her.
You think this is all right?
All these people here?
- Yes.
- You don't think it's too much?
You really want to know what I think?
You're a shit.
You sent her away.
You could have picked her up.
It is too much.
But that concept, that idea that he...
wanted everything to be normal...
he wanted it to be the way he thought it should be-
People should have a good time.
You have food and drinks.
That's really accurate, I think.
I think that's really accurate for a guy that is dealing with something that's way over his head.
But there's something funny about it.
Okay, Tony. That's enough.
Can I have some, Pop?
All right. Just a sip.
Not like your brother.
Can I have some, Dad?
All right.
He loved his fallible,
ridiculous characters—male and female.
But the deeper sympathy, I think,
was always with the female ones.
- We love you.
- I like that very much.
You think we're kidding you?
We love you.
- No, I -
- We love you.
- Sing it to you— to us like you love us.
- I forgot the words now.
- Good.
- It was just
Just a little love affair
I never thought you'd grow to care
That's good.
We were such pals
- I wonder how
- You're beautiful.
He seemed more interested
in celebrating them...
and critiquing the worst parts
of the male nature that he was aware of.
You're not gonna drink this?
Too bad.
Look how wonderful he did women.
Breathtaking, the things he's done...
parts he's written for Gena
that really got inside 'em.
Into the crazy side of'em.
The deep, dark inside of'em.
He felt that a woman's mystery was...
very important and had to be
respected and nurtured and...
um, have the proper setting.
I'm very concerned about
the depiction of women on the screen.
It has gotten worse than ever.
It's related to their being
either high- or low-class concubines.
And the only question is
when or where they will go to bed...
and with whom or how many.
There's nothing to do with
the dreams of women...
or of woman as the dream-
nothing to do with the quirky part of her...
the wonder of her.
Many of the parts that I played
were women who loved too much.
This is what I call
a really handsome face.
- That's enough.
- Okay. Come on. Let's dance.
All of them are expressing love...
and sometimes making a very...
big mess of things because of their love.
Come on. Let's dance, Aldo. Come on.
That's, to me, the basis of everything he does.
- Vito Grimaldi.
- Get your ass down.!
He found the humor in insanity.
He found the saneness in insanity.
Almost as though the insane person...
was more valuable, or valid,
than the sane ones.
It was the sane ones
that had a difficulty with sensitivity.
The insane one had a difficulty
because she had too much of it.
I love anybody
you bring in the house, Nick.
- I know that!
- I want 'em to feel comfortable.
I want 'em to feel -They just sit there like
a bunch of- I want to -
What the hell are you talking about?
You didn't do anything wrong.
- It was just the way he was lookin'-
- "Sit down, Mabel!"
- "Sit down!"
- Billy was looking at you this way.
He don't know you don't do any harm.
Women, they really try to be perfect.
Somehow -
I don't know if it's 'cause guys
play sports earlier or something.
They find out sooner than we do
that you can't be perfect.
And they seem to be easier with it.
But women keep throwing themselves
on this wall of perfection.
And I think Mabel tried... very hard...
to be a perfect wife,
a perfect mother and a perfect lover.
Hey, Tony, bring another sweater too.
A heavier sweater.
- Maria, have you got your pajamas?
- I've got the pajamas.
Okay. Oh, Tony, get Angelo's bicycle
from in back too, will ya?
- I don't think he heard ya.
- Okay. I'll get it.
John has an extraordinary
understanding of women.
What happens now?
The scene after the loss
of their virginity is extraordinary.
What do you mean,
"What happens now"?
"Do I stay with you?
"I mean, now that I've done this, am I -
What am I supposed to do?
I really don't know."
And this is - I mean, it's a time of,
you know, incredible amount of confusion.
How does he know that?
"I didn't know it could be so awful,"
is the opening line of dialogue.
Really, if I'd known
this was the first time for you...
I wouldn't have touched you.
I didn't know it could be so awful.
Well, that is completely contrary...
to any piece of film-
not that you ever saw
that kind of scene of intimacy...
and exchange of some kind of truth
in films prior to that.
But that was simply...
unheard of.
I'm sorry if I disappointed you.
The idea of love
as a mysterious, undiscovered world...
has come to have no place
in our innermost imagination.
Men seem to be the real victims.
Confusion keeps 'em goin
Dashing around, the business lunch,
a little hanky-panky with a prostitute...
getting drunk with some buddies.
Adventurous, daring, huh?
Meaningless. Empty, meaningless
little actions that fill up a day.
With a woman it's simpler.
She can exist if there's some order
and if her fantasies are at least partially fulfilled.
If you know what a woman's emotional
needs are, you're half the way home.
The first time that I had a Cassavetes epiphany...
was when I was a college student
in the 1970s...
and saw Faces for the first time.
There was a particular scene in that film...
that presented something
I had never before seen on film...
and have never since experienced
in a motion picture.
And that is the raw need...
of an older woman
for sexual attention.
It was a very embarrassing scene
that really marked me.
And it's the least traditionally attractive
of the four women, Florence-
the oldest of them,
the dumpiest in a certain sense-
who asks him to dance with her
and to kiss her.
I sat there devastated...
because the notion that even a grandmother
might need to be touched in a sexual way-
I had never before seen that in life
or on-screen.
He's a guy in his late 20s.
He doesn't have to go to war yet.
He doesn't even care about that.
He loves women,
and he loves life.
And he can look at
somebody like Florence.
She's fun.
Why can't she be fun?
Chettie...
would you kiss me?
Before we did that scene, we rehearsed it...
and John just whispered one thing to me.
He said, "Sey, be gentle."
I took the moment
within the time and...
I gave her a nice kiss.
And it was so right, you know.
It just paid off so well.
Chettie...
will you drive me home?
Sure.
Dorothy was probably more
the epitome of that picture...
than any of the ladies there
at that time.
She might have been 55, 56...
and very unhappy.
She'd been a big silent movie star.
And he really got her vulnerability.
Chettie! Chettie!
You said you'd drive me home.
I will. I will.
That's why you'd shoot a 10-minute
magazine on Florence- Dorothy Gulliver-
listening and watching...
and looking at Lynn talk to me
in the way- and to -
and that reassured her character.
So, when she- "Chettie, I'll dance with you.
I want to dance with you."
That made her character...
to feel that she was that important
in the scene, and John knew that.
All right.
Let me get the keys.
Here's this beat-up broad out
to seduce a young guy she picked up at a discotheque...
and she tries everything and doesn't care
how ridiculous or pathetic she looks.
She wants this guy,
and she wants to get him in the sack.
I think she might have succeeded
if Maria, that younger chick...
hadn't been there too,
all cool and available.
The point is Florence tried.
She fought, she struggled,
she wouldn't give up.
Isn't it better to fight to see
your fantasies realized-
fight and lose-
than to suffer
and dream away in silence?
In Opening Night, he goes into
an even more complex emotional territory...
which is the internal landscape
of a complex woman like Myrtle.
Oh, my God.
What are you doing?
Don't worry, Sarah.
I'm doing this to myself.
She was a tremendous fighter...
and not that concerned
with what people thought of her personally.
As an actress, yes...
what the audience thought of her
was everything.
But she would make a fool of herself
in any number of ways...
to fight it through.
Myrtle is left in conflict...
but she fights the terrifying battle
to recapture hope.
Stand still!
In and out of life,
the theme of the play haunts the actress... 
until she kills the young girl in herself.
You can defeat fear through humor...
through pain, through honesty...
bravery, intuition...
and through love
in the truest sense.
There's a sense
in all of Cassavetes' films...
that women are victims.
But one of the things I love
about his cinema...
is that men are no less victims.
Is she dead?
If ever one were to use
the term "feminist" about him...
I think you'd then have to turn around
and say, "No, it's humanist."
John wasn't a feminist.
He wasn't a masculinist either.
He was no "ists."
There's a view in Cassavetes' work,
very deeply grained in it...
that the world is made up of individuals.
Each character,
each figure in the films...
is respected and cherished
for their own uniqueness.
Cassavetes goes inside to understand...
so that when you watch any of
the characters in a Cassavetes' work...
you feel that
it's an ultimate act of empathy-
that he is entering into
their point of view.
That is the greatest genius
of Cassavetes' work...
is that capacity to identify...
with characters,
no matter how different they are.
I've never had any
difficulty defining the differences between people.
The difference between people
is what they want, what they come from...
how much money they have-
all those problems.
But they're not groups of people.
The groups can go fuck themselves-
all of them.
To me, there's a name for each person.
I think it's marvelous to have a name.
And a woman is not a woman.
It's either Gena or my mother...
or some other person.
What he does in films like Faces -
They're dissections.
Dissections of, say,
middle-class marriage, of suburban life...
and yet with tremendous sympathy...
for the individuals
at the center of the frame...
even ifhe's critiquing, I think,
the structures into which we've become slaves.
Yeah, well, I'm all wet.
You know you have
a beautiful body?
Yeah, well -
I - I've been told that, yes.
He never wrote anything
about somebody...
that he didn't have
some kind of sympathy or affection...
or respect for in some way,
as low as they may be.
Even the moment that this character we've only
heard about in Chinese Bookie gets killed.
At first you see him as this pathetic, old
Chinese guy in a hot tub with a hooker.
And yet, at the moment
of recognizing what's about to happen-
He's looking at this man in the darkness.
The stillness of that guy-
There's an enormous dignity to that character.
John decided that he was
gonna be killed in this swimming pool...
which at the deep end
was rather deep.
Now, not only was
this fellow nearsighted...
he couldn't swim,
and he was frightened of the water.
So, we built parallels out, but unfortunately,
they didn't go all the way across.
And he was scared to death.
And so we came to that pivotal moment
and broke for lunch...
which was about midnight.
We go down –
On the Strip somewhere we had dinner.
And an hour passes,
and we're drinking wine.
An hour and a half passes,
John turns to me and said –
says...
"Ben. " "Yeah, John. "
"You think we should kill him?"
Now, he was serious.
And for another hour...
he thought about this
very carefully, you know.
And Al Ruban had to come down.
"John, the crew is waiting. "
"Wait a minute. "
So, going back and forth,
back and forth.
Now, you see, I knew what was at issue.
John hated guns. He hated violent people.
He hated gangsters.
He hated them.
I mean, on a real level.
These were the interferers in the dream.
- What are we doin' anyway?
- Just take it easy.
This guy is into us for a lot of money.
He could get so emotional.
"I really love that old Chinese guy. "
Al says, 'John, the crew's waiting.
What are you gonna do?
Kill him or let him live? Whatever.
Let's make up our mind. "
"Look, time's up, Benny.
Do you think you wanna kill him?"
"I like him, John. I think he's a great guy."
"What do you think, Sey?"
"Shit, that guy's great. Let's let him live if you want to."
"Ah, I just really hate to kill him."
And he finally turned to me and said, "What do you think, Al?"
I said, 'John, the picture is called The Killing of a Chinese Bookie."
"You wrote it that way. Everything has led to this moment. How can you not kill him?"
He was upset that he had brought himself to a point in the story... where the taking of a human life... seemed an affront to him, even though he had written it that way. So, he was thinking of a way to save - to call this picture The Killing of a Chinese Bookie... and not kill the Chinese bookie, you see. But finally he said, 'All right. Let's go up and kill him."
Real bad.
I'm so sorry.
At the beginning, if someone just told you what these characters were... you wouldn't have any sympathy for them at all- or understanding. And somehow the - It just - He just worked that magic that - that by the end you were very involved with people you didn't know at all... and probably wouldn't ever know.
Anybody that would let a - a guy- a wom - slap her and not be mad at him or- - You're supposed to be saving my life. - Hasn't got much to say. I've got lots to say.
You wanna try me?
Lynn Carlin's character, Maria... who, for me, is one of the most fascinating
creatures in a film of the late '60s-
This is someone who really doesn't quite
know how to live her life.
And to learn that Lynn Carlin had never
acted in a film before Faces...
to me, that was incredible.
It makes the intensity of her performance
that much more remarkable.
It's the first, best acting class
available is to see his movies.
Cassavetes was perhaps
the greatest director of actors...
in the history of cinema.
There's a lot of actors
in search of a John, you know.
I don't even think of myself as a director.
As a matter of fact, I think I'm probably
one of the worst directors around.
But I do have an interest in, uh...
my fellow man.
Orson Welles once said, "The terrible thing
about movies is they're canned."
And I said, "What?"
He says, "You know, they're canned."
I said, "What do you mean?"
"Well, they come in cans."
"Oh, yeah, right. I see. Well?"
He said,
"Anything that comes in cans...
isn't exactly fresh, is it?"
And I said,
"Right. You know. I get it."
Um, so, obviously, when do we can things?
Well, when they're at their freshest.
John has a way of making
these performances- these moments-
They all kind of look like
they're captured accidentally.
- Give me a better "ba-ba."
- Ba-ba.
No! A real "ba-ba."
Come on.
That's hard to do.
In the theater you get this incredible,
visceral excitement of live theater. Film, because it's celluloid,
is always - kind of puts you off a bit.
You're kind of not really as excited.
Because it's film.
But John was able to get you excited.
You could have your pulse
and your heart beating...
because of some of the performances
that he was able to get.
I'm a great believer in spontaneity...
because I think planning
is the most destructive thing in the world...
because it kills the human spirit.
So does too much discipline, because then
you can't get caught up in the moment.
And if you can't get caught up
in the moment, life has no magic.
Without the magic,
we might as well all give up...
and admit we're gonna be dead
in a few years.
He achieved this -
this incredible spontaneity...
that you really feel like you're watching
something happen for the first time.
Don't help her, Leo.
I said don't help her, goddamn it!
- Manny-
- Leave her alone!
Oh, horseshit!
- Get up.
- Leave her, goddamn it!
- You stay away!
- I don't wanna hear it.!
When I started working with John, I said-
It's like... a wind from -
a trade wind from the islands.
I just started feeling clean again.
I missed working that way so long.
So, what I mean is that, yes...
I missed carrying the character
with me day in and day out...
morning, noon and night,
thinking what I could do with it...
how I could dare -
how I could - how I could -
That's work.
That's where your life is full.
- Like that.
- Oh, terrific.
With John,your life was full.
That's terrific.
John was a true original.
And...
he really wanted to strip you...
of everything that you knew.
He wanted to strip you
of your technique.
He wanted to strip you of your ideas...
as to what is dramatic -
fast then slow...
loud then soft.
No matter what position
you were in...
John was always the one to remind you
that you were just full of it.
You were laced with convention. And he would
do whatever it took to break you out of it.
And I often wondered why it is
that somebody as articulate as John...
would be so confusing
when he would tell you...
what -what you were doing.
This is one man against the world.
These are three guys against the world.
And the minute they join the world -
You know? That's fine. You'll join it,
but you want what you want, when you want it.
So you're there right in the middle
of all this going on.
It's terrific.
John was not
a complicated person in his dialogue.
And he'd be talking,
and he'd use the word "thing"a lot.
He says,
"Now, when you move the thing -"
"Remember the thing we talked about last night? I want you to have more of that inner thing going that -You know?"
John never gave direction — direct. He would never say "Sit there."
He would say,
"Now, listen. If, uh — I don't know. You came in, you're tired and you're — you're hungry."
He wants you to sit there, you understand.
But he'd talk—And Peter would turn to me.
He said, "Do you understand what this man is saying?"
I said, "Yeah, he wants you to sit there."
He said, "Well, if he wants me to sit there, why doesn't he tell me to sit there?"
I said, "I don't know, Peter. Ask him why he doesn't tell you to sit there."
He might tell you in about another half hour why he doesn't tell you to sit there."
Ah, we had a lot of fun.
A lot of fun.
He was capable of telling you... but he didn't want to because he was afraid of the cliches... and he wanted you to respond in some way that was you.
I became increasingly more comfortable with it.
And then, in the end, I became a great, great admirer of it.
But I didn't embrace it right away.
No. It took a little time.
But I'm slow.
Ready! Action!
During the actual filming, I'm not really listening to dialogue. I'm watching to see if the actors are communicating something... and expressing something.
I'm just watching a conversation.
You're not aware of exactly what people are saying.
You are aware of what they are intending and what kind of feeling is going on in that scene.
John was not a person who gave you a lot of direction.
Even if you asked sometimes.
He would say,
"I wrote this, and I gave it to you...
"and now it belongs to you...
and you know more about this character than I know or anybody else in the world knows."
There's no way that you could play this scene wrong—
That you, Jenny Runacre, could play this scene wrong, except by rushing it—
and not listening.
And not feeling the pressure that surrounds you.
He would just say,
"Let's rehearse. Let's rehearse."
And we would do that for a couple of weeks before we'd start shooting.
Or even during the shooting, we'd break off and rehearse certain scenes...
until the actors became comfortable in what they were doing.
When we first started doing this—
It had no chance if we started right on the set.
But now we know what our pitfalls are, and we know where we are.
- Right. Right. Right.
- We'd be a lot better off.
- Right. - And we know what we individually do wrong without anybody having to tell -
- We know when we're pushing too hard and when we're going too hard.
- Right.
This generated a kind of competition between the actors...
and really got them interested...
not only in their characters but what the story was.
And by that I mean
by what was happening at the moment. Because something would develop that would be not in the script. And quite often we'd take that on a trip. One of the reasons we've been trying to develop that game aspect, Ben... is every time we get in trouble - Ta-da!
We have a real excuse to... get in and enjoy ourselves. It's a feeling of fearlessness on the set. I mean, you have a director who's fearless. That means he's not in a hurry. John was more interested in the surprise moment... than he was in the planned moment. There are things done not only by us, but by extras... who come in just to be background, and all of a sudden John is working with them... and they give performances that'll stun you. Better than any actor could. They're free of all pre-preplanning that actors do... kind of setting themselves.
- Oh, Doc.
- Oh. No, it's - He wanted you off-balance. He didn't want you on two feet, knowing what you were doin'. Sometimes you feel that he invited a bunch of actors to dinner... and halfway through the second bottle of wine said, 'Action'... and there was the camera and they said, "Oh, what the fuck," and just kept going. You were less aware of the camera... in John's pictures than in any other pictures I'd ever been in. He wanted it that way. And I was less aware of the director. I didn't know where he was. And he would suddenly-
"Oh, are we rolling?"
Oh. Oh, goodness."
You know, on most movie sets,
they give you two minutes...
in which to tighten up.
They make sure
you have those two minutes.
"Quiet!
Quiet, everybody."
There's another advantage,
though, of John's directing.
They don't say, "All right.
Now we're gonna go to the close-up."
He starts at the beginning every time.
The beginning of the scene.
Not midway.
Even though he has
what he wants perfectly...
he never shortchanges the actor.
So you have your emotional...
mathematics, really, in a way.
And - So that at a certain point
something will happen.
It doesn't happen
'cause you planned it to happen.
It happens because
emotionally it had to happen.
And at that time...
she just had
all of that pent-up frustration...
and -
You know, I have no idea.
I've never done it before,
never done it since.
But that is part of the thing
of working with John.
What's the matter with you?
What's the -
You would never get that
on another set -
to go every single time.
And that's not just for the main actors.
That's for every actor.
Oh, my God, Dickie! You're getting old
and gray, and I'm getting fat and gray.
John loves to do 10-minute takes.
He'd shoot until the film ran out. He'd never cut.
John would say, "Let's do it again."
I dream
And by the end of the day,
we had done 52 takes on two cameras...
10 minutes each of this particular scene...
until the actors were punch-drunk...
because it was not John's style
to tell an actor what to do.
He kept saying,
"Let's do another take..
in hopes that something
would have come out of that scene...
was more than what he saw.
John had a great passion...
and that was for trying to see
something happen in front of his eyes.
Oh, he tortures you.
He - He hates to say "cut."
He goes on and on and on.
When he sees something you're doing,
he keeps you going...
and you're wondering,
"When is this guy gonna say 'cut'?"
I kept telling them, "Listen,
we've gotta go further, and we've gotta go underneath."
I was giving these
absolutely amateurish directions.
I would stand there like some tyrant...
to the point that everybody
would want to quit...
waiting with great faith and apprehension
for this miracle to take place.
If you're doing less than you can do, he's mad.
He's mad.
He won't accept it...
and he'll just, like -
Cut in there.
It just would never work.
He told me about an actor-
I won't mention his name. A star-
a star, star, star-
he was directing.

And, uh, "Can we do it again, John?"
"Sure. Do it again."
"Can we do it again, John?"
"Sure. Do it again."
Did it about 20 times.

John said it was never, ever different.
Always the same.
You fall back on something
that feels like...
you know, something
because you saw it before.
Or that's the way people behave
when they're in love or something.

Whoa, I mean.
Um, won't do.

But when he had actors that brought surprises,
he could watch you all day long.

He'd shoot all day long.

When there was a contribution
by an actor that seemed...
more sensitive, more revealing...
he would develop that
with that actor.

Take down your pants
Take down your drawers
Gonna show your daddy
what his balls are for

He gave actors a lot of freedom...
to bring more to it
than what he gave them on the page.
When you realize
how well he's written a character...
and that you can have that freedom
to just add something here and there...
that's really special.

Then you really feel
that you're really collaborating, uh...
with the writer-director of the piece.

When he first started giving me
directions, he would never direct me as an actor.
He would just say,
"Okay, hold it.
"Now, Jon, go over to a phone...
"and, uh -Take this down.
"Uh, you pick up the phone.
You pick up the phone.
"Uh - Uh, it's ringing.
You pick up the phone.
No, you go -You dial it.
Dial it. Dial it. "
A quick number.
And they get on the phone and says...
"Who is this I'm speaking to?
"Yeah, well, I need to
speak to somebody because...
"I, uh - I live alone.
"Do you live alone? Do you live -
"Oh, you have friends?
Isn't that nice.
Uh, well, I'm more of
a loner kind of person. "
And as we got into it,
he would improvise this.
Then I started improvising too.
I said, "I'll come up with this. "
We just had a great, fun time.
He did want you to collaborate,
but he did have a focus...
of where he wanted it to go.
And if you went beyond that -
You could do anything you wanted
in those parameters that he set.
You break that parameter,
and he'll say, "No.
No. This is where it has to be. "
There was this tremendous freedom...
but there was a painter, you know...
behind the brush.
You were the brush,
and there was the painter.
The brush didn't just go -whoosh -
all over the canvas, you know.
You were incredibly supported
and incredibly well guided.
You always felt free
to do whatever you wanted to do.
If you have that freedom,
you're going to use that freedom.
- You wanna fight or not?
- You wanna go through with it?
- What are you, yellow?
- And it got to be a game after a while.
You know, you'd do something,
and then somebody would try to top you.
And then somebody would try to top him.
It would go back and forth,
like passing a ball around.
- We would bet that we would shoot the best shot.
- Yeah?
- I won all the time.
- He won all the time...
but, uh, only because...
uh, he's stronger or something.
He would tell you, you know,
"This is a game.
"It's, you know —
It's the ninth inning, you're up at bat,
it's the last strike. Surprise me."
- About our wives and kids.
- And you can usually find something...
that might knock
the person off-balance.
Yeah.
We never used marks...
and the actors didn't have to hit
a specific spot.
So, if sometimes when you see our films,
and it goes soft, out-of-focus...
it's because we're trying to catch up.
So there's the focus puller just going —
madly trying to keep you —
sometimes —
in focus as you're dancing and twirling.
I dream of Jeannie
with the light brown hair
You know, our films are not
necessarily photography.
It's feeling. And if we can capture
a feeling of a people...
of a way of life,
then we've made a good picture.
That's all we want to do. We want to capture a feeling. Our film, per se, the way they make films, is a terrible film. They say it's European photography, you know. Which is a dirty word. And "art" is a very bad word here in this country. "Art" is a very bad word. Of Jeannie with the light brown hair John was always a believer that if the take was good... and there was part of it that went soft, he'd still use it... because he wanted that continuity of character, the emotions... to keep that thread going without interrupting it. I think the focus pullers are the heroes on our picture. It's true. It's true. Because John didn't give them any room at all. He said, 'Just do it. I don't care how you do it. Just do it. " As far as a technical director, I'm a very difficult director... 'cause I have no truck with anyone that doesn't watch the scene. Uh, I have no regard for anyone that isn't with it... and isn't trying to make it the best that they can. Now, as far as their eye is concerned, I want them to be as creative... with their own eye- not with my eye- as the actors are being on the floor. To tell you the truth, it's getting to be murder in here. I'm gonna kick everybody out that isn't working. Now, just - Anybody that isn't working, don't talk.
- Why don't we do it now? Kick everybody out that isn't working.
- No, no.
- I - I like an audience.
- Without a warning.
John was a great cameraman.
There's nobody could handle
a handheld camera like John.
He somehow had an instinct to anticipate.
There was no blocking.
So, if I'm on the bed
with the Chinese girl...
and she suddenly sinks down-
How did he know?
Something told him...
so that the camera wasn't late.
It got down there.
And something just told him...
"I'll bet you Peter's doing something now.
I'll come up and get him."
You know.
He had a great instinct for that...
and he was strong as a bull...
holding that thing.
Didn't shake.
He was wonderful.
John said that he almost fainted...
when Peter Falk is so engrossed...
in the emotional moment...
and is so irritated that his mother
is, at this very moment-
She's about to reveal, "My son tells me things,
that you've had a man in the house"-
that he starts mocking her
and trying to shush her.
The insecurity.
- Mabel.
- Go ahead. Go ahead.
Tell me what your son says.
John said that wasn't in the script.
What happened is that Peter
had found some moment of humor...
at this moment of high tragedy.
But that's precisely where an actor
bends the scene emotionally...
in a direction that John could have never imagined. 

Last night you brought a man in the house! If he had told the doctor, "Get out of here"- "Mom, good-bye. Out. " "Doc, out. " He didn't do that. He waited too long. And she was looking for a sign. She wanted some sign. And I couldn't give it to her... because I still had something inside of me that said that... what she did was wrong. Here is a man who has an incredible wife... whom he doesn't really want to share with anyone... because she stirs his imagination. He says he's not comin' in. Tell 'em I'm not Superman! What the hell do they think I am? Superman? He says he's not Superman. What the heck do you think he is? Superman? She's everything that he wants... physically, spiritually, mentally... but he's ashamed because she doesn't conform. You gonna be all right? Why do you keep asking me that? Think there's something wrong with me or something? Think I'm wacko or something? She couldn't entice him if she conformed. It is only by interacting with others that Mabel feels alive. Hey, that's it. Come on. Let's have a little fun. So he double-crosses her... when it becomes a pain in the ass to him. Boy. Phew.
Mabel. You look fine.
Rested.
I'm so happy to see you, darling.
He says that when Mabel comes back...
from being in the institution-
And again, John told this in the vein of
being astonished by what he saw happening.
He said that Gena
hardly looked at Peter in this scene.
She glances at Peter
a couple times...
but she mainly is
incredibly vulnerable...
and shy...
and she seems incredibly withdrawn
into her own need to see her kids.
- Could I see the children?
- They go about eating like birds.
Why don't you wait a minute?
You go in there, they're gonna start to cry...
and you're gonna start to cry,
and everybody's gonna get so emotional.
- I think it's better. Sweetie.
- I've gotta see the children now.
Yes. You can see them.
John said
when Gena did not look at Peter...
and in fact seemed distracted,
as if she was thinking about other things...
he at first wanted to call "cut"
and stop the scene...
because he had no idea
what that could mean.
Hi, Mom.
- Hi, Mom.
- Hi, Mom.
I love you, Mom.
But of course he let it run...
because he said he suddenly realized
that Gena was bringing this maternal need...
and also this wounded quality...
to the moment
of reentering the house...
that John himself had never
associated with that moment.
He, in fact, said that he thought... maybe when Mabel came back from this institution she'd be a little hostile... she'd be a little upset that her husband had sent her away... and maybe she'd kind of bristle as she came in.
But Gena saw it in an entirely more vulnerable way... that, in fact, is probably a deeper reading of the character.
Maria, come on over here and see me.
You want me to come over to you?
  - If you want to.
  - You want me?
If you want to.
All right.
I'll just stay here then.
Mabel's just been sent away for six months.
She knows it's stacked against her.
She's got enough sawy to know that she hasn't changed...
and that she's never gonna change.
She wants to be able to see her children.
She wants to hold it together...
and look as if she's just normal with everybody...
so nobody can possibly attack her...
and send her back... for the children's good.
Okay.
No emotions now.
I really want to be calm.
I really did miss-
That's enough now.
It's not that it doesn't cost her not to say something to Nick.
But he broke that bond... so she ignores him, almost as if he's not in the room.
It seemed a perfectly reasonable reaction to me. John was very surprised with it. He was delighted with it, though, too. He never—He never got, uh, his nose out of joint... because it wasn't what he expected. He loved things he didn't expect. The only way a director can create an environment... in which actors will take the kind of emotional risks that they did in John's movies... is if you are an extraordinarily open, loving, giving... and receptive audience. I like it when it's better. I hate it when it's lousy. There's often a picture of John standing in back of the camera... and he almost always has his hands clasped like this... and his head way back, laughing silently. Now, you would think that he's laughing at a funny scene... but that is not necessarily true. It could be a very serious scene. His laughter was just the joy that it was working... and that the actors were doing it. And it just filled him... with ecstasy, practically. He would just—Wonderful pictures of him doing that. He went through every bit of it with you. I could see John by the camera, if he wasn't shooting, going—You know, trying not to laugh and blow the scene. Or you could look over there and he'd have tears in his eyes... because he was a terrific audience. That's what we perform for.
You got the sense
that he'll go as far as -
As far as he'd ask you to go,
he'd be right there with you.
You know, that's pretty infectious.
We had been shooting quite a long time...
when I break down and they take me
to the mental institution.
It takes quite a lot to get there.
I belong to you.
That's it.
Those are my five points.
That's what I -
And to still keep your point of view...
as - as an actor.
I mean, you aren't becoming this person.
You're representing this person.
And John loved to shoot
with a handheld camera...
as well as the other cameras going.
So it's right in the front
of the fireplace where I was saying...
"If they wouldn't send me,
I wouldn't want anything.
I would just like to - I would just be home,
and I would never be unhappy."
Then it escalated.
Get him away from -
- You must go to the hospital.
- Hospital!
Don't, baby. Stop that!
Nick! Nick! Don't let him! Please!
I - I promise. I won't want anything.
Just let me stay in my house, please.
Then John was filming it.
He dropped the camera, said "She's gone,"
and he rushed into the scene.
I think he thought he'd pushed me...
just a step too far.
Or else maybe he always
basically thought I was crazy.
I was so mad
'cause I was gonna have to do it again.
But actually, it was a funny moment.
And I realized then, 'cause that isn't something we had talked about before... that he was a little afraid of it.
I love you!
I love you. I'll lay down on the railroad track for you.
If I made a mistake, which I did, I'm sorry.
But so what?
What's the difference? I love you.
- Now relax. Come back to me.
- Nick.
- Relax and come back to me.
- Nick.
- Get out of here!
- Get out of here!
I'll kill ya! Don't touch me. You're not gonna make me.
He knew this woman very well.
He knew her capacities as an actor and as a human being...
and there are moments in that film that are so frightening...
'cause you don't know to what extent it's Mabel...
and to what extent it's Gena Rowlands...
under the influence of...
anything from the camera...
to family, conditioning, lack of privacy.
Gena was in back of me...
and I was there, and Gena's -
John's mother was here, and, um -
and Gena was over there by the fireplace and the camera was shooting...
and all of a sudden there she was - she was doing this.
I said -
And I hadn't studied the scene or anything like that ahead of time.
All of a sudden this woman, right in front of my eyes, was doing this.
Jesus. It was...
amazing-amazing to see that.
It's changing your energy...
and allowing another person
to haunt your house, so to speak.
Sort of like being a medium,
you know...
when they come in
with the crystal ball...
and they're all sitting around
the thing and -
and the medium says,
"I am in contact with the soul.
The jewels are in the closet
in the attic."
And then they fall over, exhausted,
as if they'd been drained by this character.
- Take a deep breath!
- It's very exhausting.
And a sort of dangerous feeling...
especially if you're playing someone
with mental problems.
- Nick. Nick, I need -
- Sit down!
I'll knock you right on your ass!
Some of the time you're walking out there
where the air is kind of thin...
and you hope that you'll walk back.
But it's very much easier
in a community of actors...
who know each other
and love each other...
and trust the other ones
to take care of us too, you know.
- Please, children. Children.
- Mabel.
His...
investment in the actors...
was something
they trusted so much...
that they could - that you could
kind of, you know...
cut that wire
and cut that wire...
and go
and know that you wouldn't...
hit concrete.
And, um -
Until he says, "Wrap."
Then maybe.
The thing that John never did
was lie to anybody.
It's really important to do that,
especially with actors...
because they gotta
take some chances...
to be vulnerable,
to make themselves look like a jerk...
to show emotions that they have to mean,
that are honest.
And if you don't trust the director-
Our instinct is to protect our own butt,
even to our own detriment.
You want me to make an ass of myself
on that stage.
Well, they don't pay me enough to make
an ass of myself. Do you understand?
It took me a long time...
to realize...
that it's all right to make a fool of yourself
in some of these takes.
Didn't make any difference,
'cause he wasn't gonna use it.
But it's hard to reach that point...
because you wanna protect yourself,
you wanna look good.
You know.
You don't wanna look like an ass.
It wasn't decisively important...
how beautiful the photography was.
The question was,
what are we working for?
And the obvious answer was
that we were working for these people.
We're not dealing with objects and walls
to look better.
Now, it doesn't really make any difference
whether the wall behind them...
is white, dark, black.
I don't think it means anything to anybody.
It's what these people are thinking, what they're feeling—
that's the drama of the piece.
We were slaves to the actors.
All we were there to do was record what they were doing.
- Let him go, let him go.
- You're crazy, baby.
- Let me go. Let me go.
- Hugh, come on.
Let me go!
What the hell is wrong with that guy?
What's wrong with you?
You don't have to get carried away.
He's always messing up the damn thing!
What's wrong with him?
This is a party! Stop it!
I felt totally safe.
And for an actor to feel safe...
is astonishing.
But it also allows you such freedom—
freedom to do and freedom not to do.
It's over.
And willingness to fail.
I know that much about life.
There is no such thing as failure.
It's only an opportunity to learn.
His gut is always involved in what he's done.
He's exposed himself to the limit...
so everybody else exposes themself.
You just want so much to know...
what's that little secret he's holding behind those really rascally eyes.
And I think the only way that actors were gonna find out...
were if they actually went there too.
With John, you could do no wrong.
The only wrong you could do was to not bring something to the floor, to be lazy.
That's the only wrong you could do.
You could stand on your head
when you're not supposed to.
He'd laugh. He'd love it that you took a chance.
You could do no wrong.
Hey! Hey! Hey!
Wait! Get that damn curtain up
right this minute! Get it up!
Get that curtain up right now.!
No argument..! Get it up.!
Up.! Up.!
Up!
Humiliating!
Oh,yeah,yeah,yeah,yeah
On Faces
I was so anxious to act...
that John wrapped right away.
We rehearsed it once, he says,
"I don't feel like working. Al, let's wrap it. "
And I went - I'm panicking.
Wh-What?
John just said, "Wrap.
Get serious, Seymour.
Go home."
And walked away with him.
The next day I came in -
I come in, I do the scene, I jump up
and grab the beam and everything -
John said, "Wrap.
I don't care.
We're not shooting this crap."
Now I'm beginning to panic
and I'm thinking, "Oh, Jesus, I'm terrible."
And the problem was
that I wasn't relaxed.
I was so anxious to act
after two and a half months...
of everybody else acting
and being so great -
Marley and Lynn, you know.
And I'm going - I came out like,
"Oh! I love you! I wanna -"
I was so terrible that, uh -
that John, rather than saying,
"You suck, you stink"...

he said, "Screw it. Let's wrap."

But we had the luxury of doing that.

So, on the fourth day we came in...

and you could tell there was

a sea change in Seymour.

He just suddenly had a grip

on his character...

that fit into the scene

with the other players.

I just got a little loose with it

and we just started to roll.

It was fun from then on...

once I stopped trying to do it

and just have fun with it and be it.

Oh! Come on, now. Cry.

That's it. That's life, honey.

Tears - Tears are happiness, man.

Just do it.

Come on, now. Ohh.

You silly nut.

He knew how deep

he could go inside you...

and had the ability to bring it

out of each person differently.

I don't know how he did that, but he knew

when it was false, when it wasn't ringing true...

and somehow he could,

without really saying it to you-

maybe by changing something,

maybe by...

giving Dorothy that kiss...

trigger something or bring it out.

It was his genius that allowed people

to take risks, to be better.

He just had that way.

You just didn't want to hurt him

in any way...

by being less

than he thought of you.

You must go all the way

all the time.

Don't give up at all.

Don't pull back at all.
If you pull back one second, you'll start to disappoint yourself. I think he worked with people like a chemistry set. You know? And when he got the mixture... that - went and bubbled in the test tube - And that was very painstaking and took - However long it took is what it took, and that's the way he wanted it to work. However long it needed to take is what it took. John played lots of little games with his actors... to get them into this very special place where... life and art overlapped. There's a famous line in Opening Night where Sarah Goode... the writer in the film... gives advice to Myrtle Gordon. You see, there's Act I, Act II, Act III. All you have to do is say the lines clearly... and with a degree of feeling. And then the - Virginia will appear. Oh. Now the goddamn tears. Anyone who has any familiarity with John's methods- has thought about the films deeply- realizes that there could be nothing further from John's own beliefs. We were at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium on Opening Night. There was a scene in the movie that was a stage play in rehearsal. There were six actors onstage. John just wasn't getting what he wanted from them, and they couldn't break out of it. We did take after take after take.
I was mixing the sound
at that point on the show...
and I was re - I had to reload.
I was out of tape.
And he went ballistic.
He went absolutely ballistic, like I had just
thrown a baseball bat through the camera lens.
But he went so over the top
that it scared everybody.
I mean, he turned purple.
The audience -
You could have heard a pin drop.
And then he finally stopped raging
on the stage.
He was just fed up with it all.
You know?
"Get your technical shit together.!!"
Then he walks over to the actors,
puts his arm around 'em and apologizes.
"I'm really sorry. I can't -
"All this technical -
Do you have another one?
Can we try it again?"
And he had 'em.
Within the next take or two, it was
a done deal. We were on to the next thing.
He had ways to shake
the very ground you were standing on.
He got you to do
exactly what he wanted you to do...
but he made you think it was your idea
and, of course, you enjoyed it.
Things that he would give you...
as you would work through scenes
and things like that...
would actually get you going somewhat
where you'd surprise yourself.
It's when you're really
saying something that people can hurt you.
When you're not saying anything,
no one can hurt you.
I'll just show you something.
And you don't have any responsibility, love.
I just want you to see this.
A quick crash study. Right?
"So you got married again."
Just laugh at it.
Just laugh for 30 seconds and then do the whole thing. See if you can carry it through.
"Found love to be a painful experience. " All right.
I've found love to be a painful experience.
So you got married again.
- You're damn right I got married again.
- Thirty seconds, now.
- No, no.
- Yes, yes, yes.
- No, no, no, no, no.
- Yes, yes.
Seymour and I kiss.
I remember he...
said something -
"No, no, no, don't eat him alive.
Just -" You know.
And he said...
"Have you ever kissed a black man?"
1960- "Of course not.
No. Of course not. "
And he said,
"Well, pretend Seymour's black...
"and this is the first time you've ever been that close...
"to a black person.
"Look at his skin and feel him and touch him.
Touch his hair and look at his eyes and -"
And it made a difference.
A great difference.
In Shadows,
Tony's coming on to Lelia...
and Lelia's flirting and half resisting.
Lelia told me that John had scripted that scene...
but for some reason provided the script to her...
only that very morning
that they were filming.
In other words, more or less
handed it to her and said...
"I'm sorry it's late, but we'll just have to
film it right now. Glance at your lines. "
A month or two later,
I was talking to Tony and Tony said...
"That's interesting. I had my lines
a week or two in advance for that scene. "
John deliberately gave Lelia her lines
at the last minute...
so there would be a hesitancy,
an uncertainty in her delivery.
You actually see Tony helping her out,
cuing her in.
I have the feeling that
I'll never, you know, be smart...
and I'm never going
to get the things that I want.
And, uh - Oh -
What do you feel like?
Tell me what you feel like.
- I feel like I'm in a -
- In a cocoon and you can't get out?
That's right.
John had the wisdom
to foster that carryover...
between what you really feel and what
you're able to play in your character.
Let me give you an example...
of real meat-and-potatoes direction.
Gena has just tried
to cut her wrist.
Mommy! Mommy!
I've just rassled the razor blade
away from her.
The kids are a problem.
I don't want them to be around.
It's not something they should see.
I gotta get rid of 'em.
And when I came out of the kitchen...
I went up these three steps
and down three steps...
and into the living room...
and I started to play the scene.
It was terrible.
Terrible!
I did it a couple of times...
each time worse than the other.
This is something
that John very rarely did.
He came to me and he said,
"See these three steps?"
I say, "Yeah."
He said, "You're going up these three steps,
and then there's a little platform...
and then you go down three steps
and go in the living room."
I say, "Yeah."
"Yes, that's right."
He said, "When you go up
these three steps...
"before you go
down these three steps...
"stop...
"and take a deep breath...
and then play the scene."
- Mom. What's the matter, Mom?
- I don't understand.
Well, I was amazed
what an effect that had on me.
Because by stopping
and taking that breath...
somehow, all the wildness...
the desperation...
uncontrolled...
in taking that razor blade
away from her...
that was put at rest...
and now I had a clear purpose...
in mind.
I was going to do something.
And instead of screaming...
I came out and I said -
- Stop what you're doin'.
- Mom?
Stop what you're doin'.
That made a big difference...
in terms of the thrust...
of what I wanted at that moment.
If you don't get down off the couch,
I'm gonna knock you down.
And then, of course,
the writing of the scene -
John would never have you
just walk into a room...
and decide that,
out of love and desperation...
to stop this woman
from descending into madness...
you were gonna go up and whack her.
I'll kill you!
I'll kill ya!
There had to be another element.
I'll kill those sons-of-bitchin' kids!
That other element is the struggle.
And what's the struggle?
You got three kids.
So you gotta pick up one
like a loaf of bread under your arm...
you got another one
you grab by the hand...
and you gotta take 'em upstairs.
The third one then runs back down.
You gotta let one go
to run and get the other one.
There's an absurd comic element...
in the midst
of the wife losing it.
Those are the kind of human obstacles
that have to be overcome.
They want to know
if you're all right.
I said, 'John...
we're tripping over these kids. '
He said,
"Gena, do you really believe...
"the children living in this house...
"knowing what's happening...
"between their mother and father...
"are gonna stay in their rooms
and listen?
Of course they aren't."
And I said - I just had it in my mind
that it seemed like too much.
But when I looked at it,
it was so real.
Of course.
Of course they're gonna be there.
Up the stairs, down, back,
down through the rooms, right after you.
I often thought
how easily he saw that.
You know you look just like your father?
You're Daddy's girl.
I love you.
When Peter looks at the one child...
and the child turns towards him
and makes that fist...
as if to say, "You stupid bastard,
I love you, but you can be a jerk" -
There's something to be gained from
all these moments of the film about life.
The mistakes that you make in your own life...
in your own personality...
are assets on the film.
People expect
too much from themselves.
They wanna look great.
We always look for great causes,
for clear answers.
I know it doesn't make any sense,
but that's what you should be doing.
I work hard to have the actors
not be better than they are.
The strange thing is that in this way
they reveal themselves as human beings.
Whatever his method was...
he was always gonna get to
the place that he wanted to get.
But he was going to allow the actors
that thing of...
"This time I'm gonna go left, this time right,
depending on what I get from this guy...
or depending on
the mood I'm in this take. "
- Hey, do you need any help, boss?
- No!
No! No, I don't need any help!
It may have been without changing lines,
or it might have changed the lines a little bit.
There may have been an emphasis.
But you could not lose sight
of that person who was in front of you...
or they were gonna just blow by you-
you were gonna get lost.
That risk was always in the movies.
He let you go.
If he had to bring you back, he did.
You just did that with John.
Somehow, you just opened everything up.
If you didn't do it for yourself,
he would set the scene so it happened.
When he'd take Dorothy home,
Maria's left at the window.
And I couldn't do it.
Whatever it was he wanted,
he wasn't getting...
and so, um...
he quietly walked up to me,
I turned to speak to him.
He slapped me across the face.
And he said,
"Don't you dare cry.
Don't you dare cry."
And what do you do
when somebody says don't cry?
You try not to cry very hard...
but the hurt and embarrassment-
And it does come across.
He did get that moment.
He'd have been a great
football coach too, you know.
He'd have been a -
These guys would've thrown their bodies
into action for a guy like that.
He had a, you know -
And sometimes you look at his face -
there's almost a Lombardi grin.
You know?
He was - He was a contact guy.
Everybody wanted to be in his class.
It was all terribly mysterious to me.
I'd watch and watch and watch
and finally he said...
"You've got to do a scene.
Do a monologue. Do something. "
So I did this monologue
from Oscar Wilde's Salome.
And they applauded afterwards,
and I said, "Yeah! Okay!"
The next thing that happens
is that he said...
"Well, you know, uh,
there are things you missed. "
"Moi, miss something?"
I said, "Well, what? I mean,
what could I have missed? What was it?"
He said,
"Do the improv with me.
"I'm John the Baptist and you're Salome,
and you want my head.
And do the monologue. "
Well, he was ferocious.
And the more ferocious he got,
the crazier I got.
I was grabbing his hair
and pulling his head and doing lines...
and I was in a rage-in a rage
that this guy insulted my best work.!
It finally was all over with.
He was spent, I was spent.
I learned more
in that little period of time-
And I can't put it into words...
but the fact of the matter is,
I was body kinetic from dance...
and the whole training
is about physicality.
And he figured that out.
Telling me what was wrong
with the scene was irrelevant.
There was no other way
to approach me.
And what did I learn?
I can't tell you, because it's not mental.
It's molecular.
That's who he was.
He says for her to do it to him.
- That's funny.
- When he gets -
John did take a lot of takes...
and he did get to tickling
at a certain point.
You know, grab-ass - ass-grabbing
or something, I don't know what -
after so long
to keep it going.
But under the table.
I'm wondering if I knew
I had that laugh.
I don't know.
Maybe we found that together.
Lynn went totally with it.
I mean, what a trouper she was,
'cause I put my fingers in her throat...
to make her really gag.
John egged Seymour on.
I don't think Seymour instinctively
would have grabbed some actress...
and shoved his finger
down her throat.
John made you- He allowed you,
he gave you permission...
to do the things
that Seymour probably wanted to do.
Or if I wanted to do it.
He allowed you to do it.
I throw her in the shower.
She's half naked- doesn't matter.
Come on, now.
Don't go back out.
It's just the drama of what we're doing
and the honesty of that.
There was this guy-
the guy who hassles me, Nico Papatakis-
who is the most
sinister-looking person.
And all of a sudden there he was.
I slipped and fell down...
and that's when John came in
and started hassling him away.
It was really because Nico was gonna try
and pick me up because he's a gentleman.
But Cassavetes recognized
that if he picked me up concerned...
it would have destroyed the whole thing.
So he then took over and started pushing him
out of the picture entirely.
I remember once, in Husbands,
we were doing a take -
I don't remember
what the scene was -
and he suddenly came running in
in front of the camera.
He started talking, he'd run out,
he'd come back again.
He'd put a banana up his behind.
He'd do anything.
- I think you're beautiful.
- I'm under the table.
I really think you're beautiful.
You wanna go?
- Mmm.
- Vice versa.
Let's go. Wanna go?
Okay.
She's terrific!
I really mean it!
He had this idea for my character.
He said, "This character doesn't like people.
He doesn't wanna be too close to people.
"Even if it's a close person...
"there's still that instinct
to put barriers.
"So this table that you have...
"there's a dead chicken there
that has been there for a while.
I tell you what - do the scene again,
and I'll be the dead chicken."
And he gets on the table...
and he's just like this and he says...
"Go ahead. Go ahead, act.
You can start now."
He's on the table,
and he stays on the table...
while Gena and I
act the whole scene.
And we're looking at each other-
We're looking at each other like this -
We start the words
and we're doing it...
and John is completely into
trying to be a dead chicken.
He's not listening. Nothing's happening.
But I'll tell you something
I never forgot that.
When I was onstage doing that scene, I never
forgot John on the table as the dead chicken.
I'm telling you,
that scene took life because of it.
I had this secret giggle that I had in every
performance when that scene came up.
But he was really trying to get to
this madness of this character...
and express it in logical terms.
When I finally caught it,
all of this stuff was released in me...
that is my kind of crazy, funny side.
I got into that energy with the piece,
and it became the character.
It's just... magical.
There was a line in the truck...
when I was talking to the Indian
where I said...
"I don't know what she's gonna do.
"You remember.
"Remember, once she went out in the street,
she had nothing on...
and she was selling lottery tickets?"
To this day...
I don't know whether John...
ever thought of using that.
Maybe he never said,
"I will never use that."
"It's too on the nose. It's too exact."
But maybe he put it in there just to give me some idea.
Or maybe he put it in there because he knew it would tickle me to say it...
and maybe that would help the next line.
I don't know.
I really don't know.
You see, there's something wrong with her, Eddie.
She's not like a normal person.
This woman, you know, she could get hit by a car... burn down the house.
Jesus Christ.
I don't know what she can do.
He's been shooting pool upstairs. Just a minute of that was in there.
But after he leaves, John had me throwing pool balls all over the table.
I'm totally crazed. Totally mad.
He didn't use it, and he brought it back...
but part of the catharsis of doing it and being allowed to do it...
works for the other scenes.
Yesterday's shooting affected next day's shooting... because he would get new impulses, new responses.
It wasn't something dead and in concrete.
It was in the course of making it... that you could find new things.
A lot of people know what they're doing.
I don't know till the next day. You know, if our films are supposed to, uh... be something like life is... some -you know, some vague thing that life has maybe films can contain...
then how can you determine
what's gonna happen tomorrow?
You were anxious
to come to work the next day...
- because you wanted to see what was going to happen.
- I just got carried away!
I think that was the great thrill of it.
After you say "cut" of the first take
and to influence the second take...
you say, "Hold on,"
and you scribble something...
which I know he did a lot of..
because you adjust to things that are
going on on that day with those actors.
He was a great writer.
Gena would say, "This speech
isn't working for me, "and he'd say, 'All right. "
He'd say, "Take a five-minute break. "
And he'd start writing and writing.
"All right, try this. "
And I was amazed.
I mean, the speech was better,
and it was clearer, and it was precise.
And I'd say, "How do you do that?
I don't understand how you can do that. "
That shocked me into realizing
what a talent this man was.
The great telephone call to the club...
about, "Is the Paris number on?"
He wrote that in - with me, we -
He said, "Let's go across the street. "
It was the daytime.
He said, "I think we gotta have
a telephone call. "
It wasn't in the script.
"You gotta stop, call the club. "
He wrote that in five minutes.
- P-A-R-
- It's so funny. I think it's terrific.
The Paris number. Are there letters
on the wall that say P-A-R-
There's another card that says "moon. "
- Well, what's he singing?
- Here's the guy going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Paris number. "
"I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby"?
Then he sings it.
I can't give you Anything but love
Baby
Here's a guy going to kill the Chinese bookie,
and he's worried about -
That's John, you see.
I can't stand all this nonsense about sex not being dirty.
If it's not dirty, what is it?
I even like it sloppy.
I like it sloppy. I like it clean.
Sloppy. Clean.
I can't stand all this nonsense about sex not being dirty.
I like it dirty. I like it sloppy.
I like it clean, dirty, sloppy, happy.
I love it clean.
I love it dirty.
I love it sloppy.
I love it clean, dirty, sloppy.
I just love it!
What do you want, dirty or sloppy?
Sloppy or dirty?
They always talk about what you can bring to the character.
But if they only knew what the character can bring to you for the rest of your life...
when you understand something that you didn't before -
You never look at things again quite the same way.
Babies, come on.
Come on, babies.
Come on, sweethearts.
Come on.
Come on. Come on.
That's it.
Come on.
Vroom!
I loved Mabel.
I can't see a woman...
waiting for children at a bus stop
to this day...
without thinking of Mabel
and what's she's doing.
Whoo-hoo!
Look who won.
Maybe Maria didn't learn it in Faces...
but I learned it a little bit
about my own life.
I thought you just had problems.
So each actor takes something
away with them...
that's enriched their own life...
having been with John.
This is a, uh -
a room we built ourselves.
This is part of the set.
You know?
And this is, uh,
a chandelier palace.
That's a hallway, a staircase.
And I'll show you where...
the most important part of our work
is accomplished.
Not in the house, but in here.
John pioneered
another view of filmmaking.
I would just call it
family filmmaking.
He would have these readings
at his house, and he would make pasta...
and everybody was invited.
The uncles and the mothers, you know -
everybody was there.
And if anybody had
a little difficulty...
or a child was in the room
needing attention...
there was no question -
the reading took very much last place.
Anybody would be interrupted
to take care of the baby.
It was a very great lesson for me.
Great lesson.
When I was a kid, we used to play a game called... "Your mother wears army shoes."

When Faces was being put together... John had scripted out some material... and he basically just rounded up... all of the unemployed actors and friends... people who basically were willing to work for nothing... work for the love of it. He used his own house as the set. It required six months of filming. There was always food. There was always something to drink. There was always stories. It was like a picnic... every day on that set. It was tiring. It was frustrating at times. But it was - it was fun. Sit down. We'll just have a couple drinks. Faces was all hard for me. It's the first time John and I had worked in this manner. I was pregnant and not feeling very well. What I really remember is going around and around in that dance... and being so sick. Fa, la, la, la, la la, la, la, la

- What are you doing?
- 'Tis the season to be jolly Fa, la, la, la, la la, la, la, la

She was trying to live in that house... with all of these people in her house all the time. Sometimes she'd come down to get something to eat out of the refrigerator... and she'd be in a mink coat,
barefooted...
just coming in and just -
"The baby needs something to eat."
She's about out to here
with this big mink coat around her.
With our movies
we'd all go see the dailies...
and if we wanted to, we could go in
with the editing and watch that anytime.
Then we'd all sit around
and talk about the posters - all of us...
so you didn't have that drop-off.
And then we'd go out
and put the posters up too.
In Faces, I can honestly say...
that the film
would never have been completed -
and it took three years to complete -
if it wasn't for everyone's, uh...
total interest
in the human problem...
not in the film problem.
Film is, to me, just unimportant.
But people are very important.
- Arrivederci! Ciao.!
- Go on. Beat it.
- So long, sucker.
Faces dissects the money culture...
and what business values do to life.
But...
one level below that...
the making of Faces-
the way the movie was made...
dissects the money culture
and the business values of life by saying...
friends together
helping friends do things for free...
and working in the evenings,
eating supper together...
and doing it for nothing...
can be the ultimate
artistic expression.
So, in a sense his work is of a piece-
how it was made and what it's about
is the same thing.
So we are saying -
with your business!
We're trying to make it
some kind of an art.
Art, meaning that we will enjoy ourselves
and express ourselves freely.
The struggle to make Husbands...
was the beginning of our friendship.
Because it was a struggle, you know.
The money pulled out.
We stuck together.
If we hadn't stuck together,
that picture would never have been made.
The picture was made
with so much love, passion...
and a lot of duress.
Now, listen to this.
About six weeks, seven weeks into the making
of Opening Night - had to close it down.
He had no money.
And he said to me, "I understand if you -
You gotta work, you gotta work."
And nobody took another job.
We waited for him to get the money.
And in three weeks,
he got the money.
Of course, John, being in a struggle
to make his films...
he also wanted to be in a struggle,
'cause if it's too easy it won't be as good.
He believed in limitation
being inspiration to quality and art.
He worked under constant limitation-
money, time, resources, everything.
And yet look at what he did.
He didn't need a penny more.
One time he said -
We used to steal shots in New York.
I had a friend who had a taxicab...
and I'd go down in my car...
and we'd stop and we'd photograph
some pedestrians on the street...
some buildings off the sidewalk...
and the cops would come,
and we'd throw the camera into the cab...
and the cab would take off.
Go around the block and the cops
would say, "What are you doing?"
"We're just sightseeing, Officer."
"Well, move along."
You know, so -
That's how they would steal their shots.
Money has nothing to do with a film...
and I think it really, in the end...
kills you from being creative...
and from inventing.
You know? Finding a way to do it
makes you think.
It was about what he wanted
to say, and he didn't care about the money.
It's very hard, in today's world,
for people to really get that point.
John Cassavetes
was not motivated by money.
Where's Sam?
Good going, Sammy.!
Not on his films.
He was motivated on money on other films
to take the money and put it into his films.
Everybody got a piece of
the action— the baker, the milkman.
Because he couldn't pay his bills,
so he'd just give 'em a point.
And he was honest.
We all made money.
I signed a cocktail napkin one night...
saying I'll allow you to do anything
with me that you want to...
and I'll never—
In front of my husband!
He should have been smarter than that.
But John never reneged.
I mean, he saw that
everybody got something...
aside from a career
and a nomination.
He was a totally honest man.
He hated liars,
he hated guys that were like this...
and studio people
that would lie to you.
He had no qualm about that.
And he would tell them.
The big argument with Stanley Kramer-
I don't know if you know that story.
I won't go in too deeply about it, but-
You have to realize, we were really young.
We really didn't know
the traditions of Hollywood.
I'll tell it. Fuck him.
He's having Thanksgiving dinner
at John's house.
The phone rings. It's the cutter saying,
"John, Stanley's cutting behind your back."
And there he was. Imagine!
I don't think we had any idea...
that someone else
might have the final cut.
You just thought the director did it
and that was it.
And Stanley stepped in
to cut it his way.
John had these really sick kids...
telling jokes...
full of life, full of humor...
and Kramer wanted to make it
this dour fuckin' picture about illness.
John just went crazy.
He just couldn't believe it.
And they did have
a terrible knock-down, drag-out.
And that hurt John, by the way.
The phone didn't ring
for a couple of years because...
he pushed Stanley against the wall
in the screening room.
I have to say, just even talking about John
is a great honor for me.
To have known the man and to have had
these intimacies with him is a great honor.
I had great regard for him. He could have been tremendously useful... in the - in politics, in Congress and the Senate. To have this kind of honesty... and intolerance for bad behavior... the way he had it... would have served us so well. I am amazing. I was alone that day in the limousine... and he was sitting with the handheld camera... on the floor, shooting up at me. Then he put it down, started discussing the film. I never heard him discuss the film. And he started discussing... the petty people... who eat at you. And he started crying. And I said, "Oh... there's something here." And that was the beginning of my really starting to dig... inside... for this guy. 'Cause he's John, you see. There is a compromise made... if you work on a commercial film... and the compromise really isn't how or what you do... the techniques you use, or even the content... but really, the compromise is beginning to feel a lack of confidence... in your innermost thoughts. These innermost thoughts become less and less a part of you... and once you lose them, you don't have anything else. Cosmo very clearly
is a self-portrait...
of the struggling
repertory theater manager...
who makes sure the show
must go on at all costs.
And in fact, John, at certain moments,
declared that he was abandoning filmmaking...
and went off and worked with
theater companies of his own creation.
He did three plays here...
and he did 'em simultaneously.
We're gonna rehearse all three
at the same time...
and then we're gonna run all three of 'em
on alternate nights.
We started driving around
looking at old theaters...
rehearsal halls, big houses...
anything that might convert into...
something that we could put
three completely different plays on.
We found this little rehearsal hall on Citrus,
right above Santa Monica Boulevard...
kind of near Highland,
and it wasn't much of anything.
He was gonna translate it with a fellow
by the name of Jim Eric, who's a designer...
into a little space...
maybe 50 seats...
and then this runway in the front
that had several layers...
and it could go deep...
so you could just knock down
wall after wall in the space.
Small ceiling, though.
Couldn't fly anything away.
When you went there the first day,
there was a hundred people there.
Thirty-three, maybe, for each play.
Set designers, painting...
scripts, all this clerical staff,
the whole thing—
and nobody was getting paid.
While the theater was being built...
we had a back room,
a very large room...
with an L-shaped table...
a huge thing with anywhere from
15 to 40 people sitting, reading the plays...
and rewriting and reading,
rewriting and changing parts...
while the hammering was going on
and the stage was going up.
It was like a convention. Everybody there
was so into it and so happy to be there.
And if anybody showed up that could do
a little something, they'd put 'em to work.
It was like somebody showing up at your
house and you say, "We'll use them in the play."
John didn't want any titles.
He didn't want you
to be the stage manager or something.
People would come and say, "I've been
a stage manager. " He'd say, "See what you think."
John was down there
with hammers and nails and paint and stuff..
doing the set.
It was like making a piece of art
being inside it.
He made it like a piece of artwork-
"We should open up that wall.
Let's knock down that wall.
Then we can use that for this -"
You know, great stuff, just -
Nothing was sacrosanct.
You know what I mean?
"We can't do -"
"Sure, we can do that.
We just have to put the electricity back
after we do it."
You know what I mean? "Let's have fun.
Let's do this, let's do that. You do it!"
I think we prepped for it for four, five months.
Readings, building the thing,
painting it...
bringing in artists to put
their artwork up in the lobby.
Joan Almond's photographs...
Steve Reisch's photographs of the making of the theater went on the walls. And then we opened. The tickets were $4.00 at night and 2.50 for matinees. Anybody could come and see Peter Falk or Jon Voight... or Gena Rowlands or Michael McGuire... in a full three-act play. No comps, no giveaways for agents or studio people. They had to stand in line. He loved that. And we could only run for five weeks. We knew that going into it. One of the plays was actually Love Streams. Jon Voight and Gena were in it, and it was a fantastic play. And I was in a thing called Knives. My wife Shera was in it. But I left my wallet— Must've been about 100 in the morning. "Where the hell is my wallet? I must have left it in the theater. Geez, I'm gonna go back there. " And I got in. I don't know how. Through a window or something. But I heard some noise... in one of the toilets. And I went in there. There was John. He was fixing the toilet. He had a wrench... and he was replacing the pipes. It took all of us working together, and we had to be a family right away. He threw us all in together to be a family, and we became a family very quickly. We all cared for each other, and we all— It was wonderful to have that person at the head of the family creating the example. So we all became more generous,
we all became more loving...
we all became more funny...
and we all became more creative too.
And it was brilliant!
It is high among the greatest
theatrical experiences I've ever had...
and I saw a lot of great
Broadway productions in the '50s...
from Kazan's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
or Jerome Guthrie's Matchmaker.
And right up there is John Cassavetes'
stage production of Love Streams.
Right before we started running...
a lot of money was offered to John
to videotape each of the plays for cable...
which was in the very early stages then-
a lot of money.
But he had that integrity
and that conviction...
like a bull...
to just say, "No, this is
what we're doing. Remember?"
He turned it down.
He knew that money changed
the intention of everything.
Now I know he was right.
John spent about $70,000...
to put on these three plays...
'cause he wanted to see 'em.
He was interested.
Imagination
Is funny
It makes a cloudy day
Sunny
Hollywood is not failing—it has failed.
Filmmaking cannot survive
without individual expression.
Motion pictures cannot be made to please
the producer's image of the public.
Without individual creative expression...
we are left with a medium
of irrelevant fantasies...
that can add nothing
to an already diversified world.
The answer cannot be left in the hands of the moneymen... for their desire to accumulate material success... is probably the reason they entered filmmaking in the first place. The answer must come from the artist himself. He must become aware that the fault is his own... that art and the respect due his vocation as an artist... is his own responsibility.

- Fabulous place.
- Thanks.

He was the first real independent since Orson. People say they're independent, they're mavericks. That's bullshit. John was the real thing. He used his own money. He didn't take shit from anybody. The independent movement owes a lot to John Cassavetes. He gave a lot to me, as far as what I do - the courage to make a movie and not worry about whether anybody ever saw it... or that actually the shooting of it and the making of it is why you did it. You didn't do it for any other reason.

What happens to artists is that, uh - It's not that somebody's standing in their way. It's that their own selves are standing in their ways. And the whole idea, to me, and to the people that we work with... is to find some kind of, um, personal truth... some kind of, uh, revelation. That's why when we try to work on a story...
we work on a story that, uh -
that has some kind of a meaning
that we don't quite understand.
I always say to people trying
to raise money for independent films...
it's very much like hitchhiking,
and I hitchhiked throughout the '60s and '70s.
It can be the first ride that comes along
or the 3,000th ride that comes along...
but you have to know
when not to get in the car.
It's the tragedy
of the American filmmaker...
that some of our best
become our worst.
That wasn't the case with John
because he never sold the farm.
Truth is something
you need to work for...
'cause otherwise
you don't appreciate it.
In life, John told me-
He said, "You see this house?"
I said, "Yeah. It's a nice house. "
He said, "You know when I bought it?"
"Yeah, when you were doing Johnny Staccato. "
He said,
"Right. It cost $50,000. "
"It's, uh, worth a lot more than that. "
He said, "No. Every time I made a movie,
I got a second mortgage. I refinanced.
I still owe $50,000."
He couldn't be anything
other than what he was...
because he was on a journey.
People who owe money.
That's the worst sin in the world.
Here's to the biggest sin in the world -
people that owe money.
Money is the last
refuge of people who've been scared by life...
whose only way to survive is to acquire
as much money and power as they can...
to protect themselves.
But from what?
The more you have, the more difficult it is
to find out what really matters...
and to get it for yourself.
When John said,
"I'd rather work in a sewer...
than make a picture that I didn't like, "
that was true.
I mean, I can see John
going up in the morning...
and having to go make a film...
that he thought —
"I don't like this picture.
Got a lot of plot in it. "
I can see him getting up and saying,
"Oh, I'm gonna go work in a sewer today.
There'll be a lot of guys down there—"
That's true.
He would much rather do that.
He was excited about
being the way he was.
Even if it meant hardships
here and there...
I don't think he was ever
tempted to trade it out.
We'll put a year in for no money,
for no anything...
simply because there's an expression
that has to be said.
Now, we don't have
any reverence for this expression.
We don't believe it's a church.
We have to have a good time,
otherwise we die.
John's excitement
was palpable and contagious.
I mean, in life and on the set.
He was like that about everything.
- I love you!
- Just so much fun...
and so exciting and so dear,
you know.
He was like a force of nature.
I am so strong, you can't believe it!!
Unstoppable.
Aaah! Aaah! I am Superman!
Cassavetes was unique in many ways. It's obviously what he was as a human being... that makes his films so alive and so interesting. He dealt with such heavy, emotional subjects and things... that sometimes I find now, for people who didn't know him... that they think he would be kind of a moody... um, you know, unhappy sort of thing. On the contrary, he had the most energy-positive energy-of anyone you've ever known... and he was a very happy person. That's all! That's the end of the show! We have no more to say! Have a good time! Enjoy yourselves! Joyful. Absolutely joyful. I mean, people think this is an intense, gloomy guy. Not at all. If you went up to John's house, he'd be playing backgammon... or one-on-one basketball... or arguing how tall Cassius Clay was. He insisted he was 5'11". Oh, yeah! He said, "I was in London, I stood next to him. He's 5'11 "." I said, "No, John, he's 6'3"." He loved that. He loved mischief. - But that's what Socrates said. - No - That's the kind of stupid thinking that I can't stand. Socrates didn't say that. That's why I told you to read about him.
He did say that.
Because you know nothing about him.
You make any assumption you want...
and every damn lawyer in the world
has made that assumption forever.
Whatever you do is right
as long as you can get off.
Who said that?
That's Socrates.
Socrates said that?
Yeah.
You see? You're ignorant.
I am ignorant, but I have feelings.
Nobody says you don't.
I'm not a dead man like all the rest
of the people that believe...
that everything
that benefits them is right.
John would constantly be trying
to get something going...
between anybody in the room
he could get going.
There's actually
a witty little line in Faces...
where the women all agree with Chettie
once they're all gathered together...
in Maria Forst's living room.
Chettie says, "Great.
Now we all agree. What next?"
Then everybody agrees with me.
Christ. So what do you do?
He loved people.
That's why his films are about people
and the difficulties that people have...
in communicating honestly
to each other.
I worked with John on and off
for about a year...
on what was originally titled
She's De Lovely.
We were talking about
where we might shoot the movie.
It seemed he'd written it very Brooklynese-
that kind of tempo of the speech.
So I sort of meekly suggested...
"Well, perhaps we should shoot it in Brooklyn."
And he says - No, he says...
"What we do is, we pick the town with the best restaurants."
He had this idea -
You should be alive while you're making a movie, I think was the idea of that...
and know that when you finish the day, you're gonna have a good meal.
We can't stop, because if we stop, we'll never get done.
We have shot 250,000 feet of film...
and 250,000 feet of film to sync.
Everything that's out of sync takes a long time.
We average about two reels a day.
We have about a hundred reels to go.
But, uh, such is the price of not having any money...
and not being able to - to do it professionally.
We prefer to do it this way because it's better.
Besides, we all like each other.
At the end of the day we have a little aperitif and we have a good time.
And we have dinner, right, George?
Aw, you bums!
You bums. That's all.
I did a play with him called Thorn Hill.
It was in New York. Ben Gazzara was in it.
And not infrequently John said, "Let's meet at the Plaza."
And we would go to the Oak Room and have some fabulous breakfast.
This would be before rehearsal... and we would just talk and talk and talk and talk about the work and the play.
But it was never-
It was this kind of thing... where you just did not wanna get up to go to the bathroom...
or do anything else in your life
except be at the table...
because you couldn't miss
a second of it.
It was all just the most nourishing,
most exciting, most romantic...
most vivid experience-
more vivid than anything else
I can imagine in life.
He was an impulsive man.
In some ways, people considered him
this untamed revolutionary.
But the fact is,
at the same time...
the family was at
the very center of his universe.
His marriage and his children-
that was right at the center.
He was, uh, a brother I never had...
and he was about six years older
than I was, or seven.
And so he had
a tremendous influence with me.
It was someone to play with.
No one liked to play more than John did,
and we had that fun with each other.
Do you believe in me?
Rupert, do you believe in me?
I don't mean what
those other people think of me.
I mean what we give each other.
You know, what comes out of both of us.
Do you believe this?
Because, Rupert...
I believe that you're
the greatest manager in the world.
And we're together.
Rupe, you're the greatest
manager in the world.
George, who you've seen –
seen me with... over here...
he is an actor...
he's a - he's a cinematographer...
lighting man, grip, bartender, uh...
editor, mechanic...
fool, genius -
He's everything and all things to us.
He's the best. The best there is.
Right, George? Are you the best?
He was a very infectious guy.
We're out of sound!
I would come up to the house...
and I wouldn't know what we were going to do,
if we were gonna read through the script...
or just talk through it -
or talk about the deal of the thing.
Are we gonna get -Who are we gonna get
to give us the money to make this movie?
Or whatever it was.
And I just, you know,
my biggest memory is starting to laugh...
when I got in there, you know.
He'd be talking about something with
a certain energy in whatever it was.
Wait. Let's just see
what the hell happens here.
And very excited by
the whole process, the doing of it.
First line of the script.
Jesus, this is terrific.
Wait a minute.
Here's the desk. I don't know how this works.
We'll go up there. We'll take a look.
Every week, a fruit and vegetable
truck would come up to the house...
and I remember going out
to the truck with John...
for him to pick
the vegetables he wanted.
It was just the most extraordinary
experience, you know.
Him and the guy-
It was like this dance, you know,
where he celebrated the guy...
and celebrated the guy's
fruit and vegetables.
The beautiful ones.
What did the guy have to say, you know...
about the asparagus,
or the tomatoes or-
I- It was as creative
as - as anything I've ever seen.
He brought this enthusiasm...
to the set and to the actors...
and we all felt enormously elated...
all of the time we were working.
Aaah!
Even sometimes he'd be asking us
to do something impossible...
and I'd say,
"You hold him, I'll hit him, "you know.
It was a madhouse,
but a wonderful madhouse.
And we all loved it very much.
Ahh. Oh, boy.
When we were
doing Faces, I worked on a crew...
and I took that week off..
while they were shooting
at Gena's mother's house.
Come on, Stella. Let's go.
Shake it up.
And I'd call John up,
and John said, "I can't talk. "
I said, "Let me talk to Al.
Al, what's going on?"
He said, "Val's tired. He wants
to go home. He doesn't feel well. "
I said, "Bullshit. Benny's in town.
He probably wants to meet Benny
at some bar and get drunk with him. "
By the time, you know,
12 hours, 13 hours...
you know, you're -you're exhausted.
- I said, "I'm leaving. "
- Come on. Let's go. Let's go.
I went over there,
and I said, "What's going on?"
And Val says, "John, why can't we do it -
Nobody's getting paid. " And this and that.
He had all this energy, and he expected you
to have the same thing.
And I go out, and I go back home.
I go out to my car
and my tires are flat.
I call up about a halfhour later,
and I said...
"How's it going? Val didn't leave?"
He said, "No."
I said, "Why do you think
he didn't leave?"
He said, "You son of a bitch,"
and he hung up.
I had taken a knife and I'd...
punctured both Val's rear tires.
I come back. I'm furious.
John said something,
and I said something.
We went back and forth.
And I said - I said, "I'll tear your head off."
I'll kill him! Let go!
Take it easy, will ya?
Oh, God!
I'll kill that bum. I'll take him apart
and put him together again.
Val accused John of doing it,
and he started screaming at him...
"You Greek son of a bitch. I'll kill you.
"You- What kind of a director is that...
that would stab my tires?"
And John said, "What are you talking about?
I'm here arguing with you.
How could I have done that?"
He said, "I know you did it,
you Greek son of a bitch."
"Come on out to the yard."
So we went out in the yard.
I was ready to throttle him.
He says,
"Can you fight in the dark?"
I just broke up.
You son of a -
I never told Val that
until maybe a few years ago...
that I had done it.
Seymour was always full of pranks.
He was always, you know –
He was - He still is. He's a devil.
He's the devil.
You've been acting a little strange.
Uh, I - I wonder if you've been
aware of that or not.

Mario Gallo
played that part. Very intense actor.
I loved him.
He always thought that something might
be happening he didn't know about.
Take off your coats.
That day, when he came in
with his child...
to visit my child...
and I was hiding underneath
the door with the glass in it...
'cause we were gonna surprise him.
But we'd been working
quite a long time then...
and I guess I was more exhausted
than I realized.
So I opened the door
and yelled "surprise, "and I fainted.
Because my blood pressure was low,
and I was just tired.
And Mario told me - and Mario -
John cut, of course.
He said, "Mario, pick her up,
at least, you know. "
Mario said, "I didn't know whether
she was planning to do that...
because she didn't like my kid,
her kid didn't like -"
I mean, he was very into it,
very into the thing.
He wasn't - He thought maybe
I was trying to trick him.
The jump alone
had to be 12 feet.
So we shot it the first time,
and said we had to do it again.
Okay. "Seymour, come on back. "

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By this time, you know, he's about 800 yards away. So, he had to run back up the hill, in the house - "Action. " Go out the window, run across the roof... leap down this 12 feet, run down a hill, run up a road. And so we did that about four times. And by this time, he'd come back, and he's really panting. And he was in good shape in those days... but he was exhausted. And he said, "Do we have to do this?" He says, "I -" "One more time, Seymour. " So we made him do it again. And he came back and he said, "You sons of bitches. " He says, "I can't do this anymore. " I said, "That's okay. We've got it. In fact, we didn't even run the camera the last three takes. " That's their story, 'cause that was so much fun for them. I don't know. I think we did seven. After about the seventh take... I'm coming back up the hill, and I'm saying... "You got to have one out of the seven, John. "I don't give a shit, Al. You guys, you can kiss my rear end. I'm not gonna do it again. " And I'm talkin' away. And I- He said, "Come up, " and I don't see them. And I hear this giggling and laughing. They're lying on the roof. They're laughing their ass off. They thought it was so funny that I had done seven of those, see. It's healthy to laugh at somebody.
Do you know why people don't laugh at people? Because they are too high-and-mighty to laugh. They don't like them enough to invest their time to laugh. Because if you laugh at somebody... you know you're going to have to be connected with them. You're going to have to put some time in with them. You know that you're going to have to truly like those people. The truth of the matter is that nobody can afford to laugh at anybody. When friends get together, they laugh at each other. When enemies get together, no chance, baby. No laughter. No!
I did something terrible to John with the slapping... 'cause he always does have somebody being slapped. Oh!
We were in Minnie and Moskowitz, and he just whaps me. Now, he didn't come this close to me. Because he - of the angle - You're shooting that way, you pull your hand back hard enough and go like that. It looks like you're making contact. What I did that - that - when he did it, I went - Down here. None of the guys saw me do this. They jumped on him. They were furious. - I didn't hit her. - Walk away. He said, "Gena, tell them. " And I said, "I don't know what you're talking about."
Whoa!
He said, "Gena, I didn't come within that-"
I said, "Of course not."
But I made it look like I was lying.
And, uh, 'cause I thought it was funny.
Oh, they were all mad at him.
Then, he said, "Look at her face. If I had hit her, there would be a mark on her face."
And I kept him going for about a half an hour.
- Leola -
- Golly. What do I do now?
All you have to do is not pretend.
- How can I not pretend if I -
- Shove it on a line, Leola.
- How can I not pretend -
- Give it that old pelvic twist.
I said to him, "What? What?
What -What the hell is goin' on here?
What -Wh-What -What -What?"
I even used the word "motivation."
Motivation.
Very good.
Let's just try another.
I feel - I feel we could do it better.
I feel something could happen that isn't happening. I feel -
We're anticipating the end of it, you know, before it happens, okay?
And he said, "Well,your motivation is not to be left out."
- So on the next take-
- I never knew you
I went over, and I started talking to her.
I said, "If you don't do it right, I'm gonna take off my pants."
- Move me. Who are you? Move me.
- I -
- Move me. Come over here. Move me.
- Mmm.
That's it.
- It's nothing.
- Very good.
I'm not gonna be left out.
Let them top this.
I'll drop my pants.
And the scene kept going,
and I had to do it.
Now I'm taking the belt off,
I'm unbuttoning the fly.
Now I'm pulling down my pants.
At that moment...
just before the camera would get
to the critical portion of your body...
John is right there.
He pulls me out of the shot.
He drags me down to the floor,
so he could use it.
When an actress gets drunk
in a John picture, she gets falling-down drunk.
Now, in reality, no actress would be
allowed to go onstage in that condition.
But not in a Cassavetes film.
He believed that an actress...
could get off her knees
and sober up in 10 minutes...
and give a great performance, you know.
That was his idea - the magic of film.
I've seen a lot of drunks in my day...
but I never seen anybody as drunk as you
and still be able to walk.
You're fantastic.
Thank you, Bobby.
When we were about to start
Woman Under the Influence...
we had no money on the film.
A few days before we were gonna start
shooting, we had a production meeting...
and Michael Alley, Jr., our production manager,
was conducting the meeting.
He says, 'John, we're gonna have to
push back a little bit...
because we don't have any film.
We don't have any money. "
And John just got up,
and he was irate.
He says, "I don't care
if we don't have any money.
"I don't care if we don't have
any food. We'll cook.
"On November 1,
we're gonna be on that set...
"the actors are gonna be in front of
the camera, we're gonna be behind the camera.
"And I don't care if there's
any film in there or not.
We're gonna be there."
And the night before, we got
10,000 feet of film somewhere...
and we started on time.
And, uh, the whole production
was like that.
The day that my character, Mabel...
comes back from the mental institution.
It was in the summertime...
and it was in California
that we were shooting...
and there's not a cloud
in the sky.
It's just one of those really
beautiful, beautiful days...
that you find in California.
And John said, "Oh, God."
He said, "I wish -"
He said, "Let's sell a piano or something."
I said, "What do we want?"
And he said, "I want the fire department
to come over and have rain."
He said, "If there ever is a scene
that should have rain...
it's that scene."
So we figured out any way
we could do it...
and that we just didn't have
the funds for it.
And the next day we went in,
and it rained.
It actually rained.
Just that day. Then it went away for the rest of the summer. And something spooky is happening when that happens. It was just the right kind of rain too, just that real gloomy kind of— It was wonderful. When you have that kind of energy and that kind of love... and that kind of honesty and faith going on... you don't have to believe in magic — it just happens. Hey, you hear that? You don't believe in miracles? That's Swan Lake. That's perfect. That's perfect! — Hey, kids. — He believed in miracles. You know who his favorite director was? Frank Capra. He believed in miracles. Come on, guys. We'll be the chorus. Come on. You take Tony's hand. Here. Come on. Come on. Come on. Tony. Come on. We'll go around this way, and we'll be the chorus for 'em. That's why I loved him. He really never gave up on people. Films have been miracles in my life. Gena has been a miracle. My children have been miracles. Finding tears coming into my eyes during stupid conversations is a miracle. And after so much of my life has been difficult and repellent... I find that still being able to love is a miracle. Bravo! Come on! They just died for you. Come on. I'm so sorry. Do we emasculate you? Poor little boy losing his virility.
Well, I don't have it anymore!
- What happened to it, huh?
- I just don't appeal to you.
Oh, you appeal to me all right.
When I come home,
you appeal to me.
- When I'm at the office, you appeal to me.
- I am not a sex machine!
- No, you want to go to the movies!
- Because I'm bored.
That's how you get your jollies!
- Don't be crude!
- Crude, schmude. I'm crude!
- The minute you get home, you wanna jump into bed.
- That's the general idea.
His films are very offensive
in the best sense of the word.
They shake up our assumptions,
our complacency.
I cannot, after watching
a film like Faces-
really engaged in the film -
go back to life normally and say...
"Oh, people are basically happy.
Women are basically fulfilled
as wives and mothers. Suburbia's good. "
- Normal conversation.
- What normal conversation?
- Stay out of this.
- I will not.
- Let her tell jokes. She's good.
- "How are you?" "Where you been?" "Hello. "
- Let her tell stories.
When I saw Woman Under the Influence...
I, at one point, remembered
that I was identifying so much...
with Mabel that I had pains
in my stomach.
It's like I was having
a physical empathy with her...
because his cinematic technique
was so raw.
It was one that so engaged me
inside the frame...
that I didn't have
the traditional distance...
that other films give me.
Dad -
That performance
in that movie was the only time...
when I wanted to be
out of the room.
I was embarrassed for this woman, and kind
of rooting for her to get her shit together.
And then, when she'd go off,
you'd just say, "Oh, my God."
You know, "I hope this scene ends soon,
because this is so embarrassing..."
and I want to get out of here."
Now, that's also something that I think
that audiences aren't used to.
And -And that amount of involvement,
where you don't know where it's gonna go...
is a little upsetting
to a lot of audiences.
Will you please stand up for me?
Mabel, I don't, uh,
know what you want me to do.
Honey, I - I don't understand this game.
Will you just stand up for me?
People are very, very naked.
John Cassavetes doesn't
give 'em a break...
and there's nowhere
for them to evade anymore.
Don't you understand
what she's trying to tell us?
They just have to stand and deliver.
And they don't necessarily
have anything glib to say.
- Sit down.
- Oh, Geor-
- Sit down. Sit down.
- Oh.
He's asking us to look
at the deeper levels of need...
frustration, anxiety...
and how hard it is
to articulate these things...
'cause we're scared
of alienating the people closest to us.
Cassavetes was not scared of that...
in terms of relationship
of film to viewer...
in terms of the way
he dealt with others.
That's what was always
brave about his movies...
and brave about his actors.
Okay, let's break it up.
That's more like it.
How you been?
I'm fine. Uh, Tony Russell,
this is my brother, Hugh.
- Hi.
- And this is Rupert Crosse.
Glad to know you.
John was about breaking patterns...
about pushing people
out of their places of comfort...
about dislodging our sophistications
throughout his work.
The most radical way
he does it is for the viewer.
I have an appointment.
I have to go.
So that every time
the viewer gets a little comfortable...
every time the viewer
starts to sit back and say...
"Oh, okay. Been there. Done this.
I understand this narrative.
I understand this character"
John will open the trapdoor.
If you look at the shooting script
for Woman Under the Influence...
John had some other moments
in the film that he cut out...
that were actually softer
and a little more consoling.
There was a scene
in Woman Under the Influence... that wasn't in the picture... where what we used to do when we wanted to have fun together... we used to tell each other our dreams.

And, uh, I remember the dream that I told -
This was a dream that John actually had.
He was, uh, in the sky... and he was flying on the New York News-
the newspaper.
And he was going up high in the clouds and coming down...
and he was on his way to Europe.
I don't know what the hell the dream was.
But, I mean, it was fun to talk about it.
And then she had a dream.
So, Nick, at times, alone with Mabel... showed a side of himself that he wouldn't show...
to his mother or the guys that he worked with.
There's another moment where they walk in the rain together...
sort of arm-in-arm, and they talk and chat.
For every viewer who ever wanted to storm out of Woman Under the Influence... because it's too demanding, it's too painful...
it's just too excruciating... John could have left those scenes in...
but, in fact, he said no. To have romance was another kind of evasion.
The common criticism of John was that the films... were not structured, that they seemed - that they seemed loose...
that they seemed repetitive,  
that they seemed to ramble...  
and that they had great things in them,  
but that they seemed excessive...  
in terms of length  
and the duration of certain scenes.  
And the lack of a plot line.  
Will you get out of here.  
I felt that there was  
some merit to that criticism...  
when I saw something  
like Husbands.  
Listen to this. You're gonna hear  
something beautiful.  
And you listen too, and you'll find out  
what life's about, sweetheart. Go ahead.  
Dressed in khaki suits  
Gee, we looked swell  
We hummed that  
yankee doodle dee dum  
And a half a million boots  
got slugging through hell  
And I  
I was a kid with a drum  
Oh, say, say  
don't you remember  
They called me Al  
Then it was Al all the time  
Say, don't you remember  
I'm your pal  
But when I saw it again,  
10 or 12 years later...  
Brother, can you spare a dime  
Turns out, I was wrong.  
I had grown up to understand the picture.  
Cassavetes makes adult films, uh,  
with the subtlety and complexity...  
and multivalence of adult emotions...  
films about people and relationships...  
that won't be reduced down  
to the teenage immaturity...  
these adolescent simplicities  
of Hollywood films.  
I somehow -
I seem to have lost
the, uh, the reality of-
of the, uh -
reality.
People feel very isolated
and very frightened...
and the idea of going to see one of
John's films is, like, even more frightening.
And -And they just want to -
And it's never been -
People just don't learn
that by going through something...
you do feel a peace
and an integrity afterwards.
And it just doesn't seem like
it's part of the culture at all.
In this country, people die at 21.
They die emotionally at 21,
maybe even younger now.
For those of us who are lucky
not to die at 20, we keep on going.
And my responsibility as an artist...
is to help people get over 21.
The films are a road map through
emotional and intellectual terrains...
that provide a solution
to how one can save pain.
As people, we know
that we are petty, vicious...
vicious and horrible.
But my films make an effort
to contain the depression within us...
and to limit the depression
to those areas that we can actually solve.
The resolution of the films...
is the assertion of a human spirit.
You are told from the very first shot...
that you can't settle back into your seat
and just have an easy time...
that movies can also be
to energize you...
to stimulate you, to provoke you...
into something beyond
what you were prepared...
to feel before the film began. That's good. It's a shake-up kind of American cinema. Nick! No, uh, Garson. Garson Cross. I'm the one that brought you home last night. I'm interested in shaking people up... not making them happy by soothing them. I don't care if people like our films or not. To dig deeply into the way things are... through people is what I like... and what the people who work with me like also. To find out the delicate balance between living and dying. I mean, I think that's the only subject there is. Are you in there? John had his office right above the theater where Woman was playing. And he'd say, "Come here. Want to see our audience?" And I'd say, "Sure. " And we'd look down, and the people would be lining up. It was very personal with us. Sometimes we'd be up there, and we'd be talking about something... and the picture would be playing, and you'd the hear the doors go 'poom.!' Open. And somebody would come out really mad, really mad. And then they'd stay there a few minutes. And then sometimes they'd like - light a cigarette - Sometimes they'd walk. Most often, they would just take a breather and then go, "Okay. " They'd go back in. And I'd - "Well -"
If you're not watching and listening carefully, you miss it all. And people would come out and say, "I don't know what the fuck that was about." You know. "It's confusing, and it's idiotic and -" But the French understood it. I mean, they just, "Yeah!" He was, you know, he was hot in France. But then, so was Joan of Arc. When things are original... obviously they're a little more difficult. That's why the viewers usually come out angry. When they're angry, I don't get angry. I kind of like it. It's never easy. I think that it's only in the movies that it's easy. I don't think that people want their lives to be easy. I think it's a United States sickness. In the end, it becomes more difficult. I like things to be difficult so that my life will be easier. To be able to have that pressure... and have that control and having integrity in his movies— This is ridiculous. — Is— Is not easy to do. John was a really great technical filmmaker... and I don't think people give him credit for that. I think they think he's just this kind of maverick wild man who shot whatever happened. I don't think you can do that and end up with the movies like he made. He was really talented and very skilled... and had spent years and years learning how to write and edit and shoot. I mean, it wasn't like he just — You can't just turn a camera on and let people go crazy. It doesn't work.
His work is structurally, maybe, you know, all over the place. But there's some — someplace he's getting... that nobody else can get to. People who imitated John don't know how to do it. Because he had a rigorous editorial mind. And there's no fat in those pictures. It just seems to be... because it meanders in comparison to the average commercial, slick Hollywood movie. He's not like that. He's watching people. And you watch people, it takes time to see what they're like. He took middle-class life, he put it on the screen... and he said, "Here. Become involved. "Because if you're not involved, you won't like these films. "You can't sit there as a passive audience. You got to experience what we're going through. That's why we're doing this way. " There were several times in the course of the films where I'd say... "Boy. That's enough. " And he'd say to me, 'Al, no. That's not enough. " His work inspires us to take chances, to take risks... to not be afraid to push the envelope... whether it's a character or a situation... or even a shot, your filmmaking technique, your editing. Cassavetes cuts out of a scene in the middle of a sentence. I have a piece of paper here that says — A traditional motion picture
completes the sentence...
before you start the next scene.
He starts scenes before
the thought is - is completed.
He cuts away from music
in the middle of a phrase.
And, uh -And that's life.
Just the same way one
is interrupted in - in real life.
His films didn't end.
They weren't tied up at the end.
They just stopped.
It was never neat.
And-And that's the way it is in life.
What you doin'
standin' way over there
- Excuse me.
- I want you to come stand over here
But that's life.
That's what he- That was again...
so breathtaking, for him to finish
on that note, because that's how it is.
You don't go out with a bang,
you go out with a whimper.
They just -
And they just went on.
- You know, I'm really nuts.
- Oh.
Tell me about it.
I don't even know
how this whole thing got started.
Don't worry about it. Let me see that hand.
They'd gone through...
probably as bad as it's gonna get...
and they were still together.
And there was a gentleness...
that I hadn't seen before...
in the relationship.
And just that depth of feeling
that you have for someone...
that you've gone through
a lot of things with.
That wonderful,
unspoken connection between two people...
where words are not necessary...
and where you're comfortable and content
with each other without talking.
In the course of the final sequence...
when the storms of emotion clear...
everything appears to be calm.
Nothing that has taken place
seems to have any importance...
except that Mabel has been set free...
the children accept their parents...
and Nick and Mabel have
in some way...
discovered they can accept the difference
between commitment and emotional needs.
We end with the ritual
of preparing for sleep...
reestablishing, without conversation...
the need to make room
for the dilemmas of love.
Cosmo, I think what happened...
was wrong.
And you won't go to the doctor...
because you think you're gonna live...
with the bullet in you.
And I don't want you
in my house no more.
He's shot.
Does he die? I don't know.
Is the wound, uh -
I mean, it's here.
Why would he die? Why would he die?
Unless he's not gonna go
and get any help.
Possible that he'll bleed to death, yes.
And just let it go,
because he's lost the club.
Grovel for it. Grovel.
Scheme awhile
- You're sure to find
- Take it off.
Happiness
great success
All the things you always whined for
So much of Cassavetes' work is about...
stripping away the masks that we put on for our daily interactions. 
Myrtle is the most capable one in Opening Night... of stripping them all off... until this raw human being... engages the audience. 
It's very scary, by the way, not just for the performer but for the audience too. And, yes, there is enormous courage... on the part of Gena Rowlands... on the part of Myrtle, and on the part of Cassavetes. How about if you stand over here? All right. 
Okay, then I'm standing over here, right? - Now, could you do me a favor? - Certainly. - I didn't know he was gonna do that. - Could you raise your right leg? I had no idea. That whole last scene is heavily improvised. 
He said, "Put your leg in the air. " Whatever I did with it, it was not what I knew he expected. No, seriously- 
He said, "Put it back. " And this was all on camera. I had no idea. 
We will walk to each other... - we will try to clasp hands... - Yes? and we will grab each other's leg as we pass. - Oh, that's wonderful.! - This is an athlete's trick. - Okay. - Instead of doing, "Hey, baby! Damn!" Now?
Whenever you say. Ready? Hey, baby! What do you say!
Ohh! Ohh!
Yo! Yes! Ohh!
Okay!

But it was all just
happening just as it happened.
We'd have to know each other
for those physical moves.
You'd have to know someone
so very, very, very well...
that you would do that.

It's wonderful how, after moving
through so many dark, emotional realms...
in Opening Night, Cassavetes does end
with that glimmer of hope.
It's the possibility that a man
and a woman can have fun again.

I'm interested
in how people fool themselves...
not how they fool others.
My films strip characters
of some of their illusions...
bring them to a little bit of self-realization.

I don't know why we do this, man.
- I mean, go around, try to pick up girls.
- Stupid broads.

You'd think we'd have girls of our own
like every normal type guy.

So?
So I'm not gonna do it anymore.
Want me to be corny and say
this has taught me a lesson?
- Well, it's taught me a lesson.
- Aw, just forget about it.

Okay, forget about it.

If you take his films seriously...
you have to think a lot differently
about human beings afterwards.

Why do men act like babies?
Why do women seem to go crazy?
Why do people try to kill themselves?

What is it about the mechanics...
of both acting in
a stage performance situation...
and the way we act in daily life? What are those mechanics about? And these are some of the really good questions... that his films pose without ever giving us easy answers. There is a kind of emotional death when you stop asking questions. And the questions are always better than the answers. I won't make shorthand films... because I don't want to manipulate audiences... into assuming quick, manufactured truths. Other films depend on a shorthand, a shorthand for living... and people understand that shorthand. Other films are still predicated on incidents. Incidents are exciting. You recognize certain incidents, and you go with them. I get bored seeing two people that are supposed to be in love... who kiss, screw, or whatever they do. I get bored by that because they're only supposed to do those things. I don't really believe that they're doing that. And I couldn't care less. At the core of John's work... is some sense that most of the social ceremonies... and rituals we go through in life... are absolute hypocrisy... or certainly evasions of what we really are. And that he repeatedly pushes his characters to a place... more primitive, more raw, more intense... more distraught, more emotional... than any social situation can contain. In those extreme moments...
when all the little polite rituals are left behind...
I'm certain that he saw...
the truest expressions of what we are.
What he liked to do, I think...
was to scratch away
at the complacencies...
so that each of us does
have to examine her own life.
The way we make pictures is we make pictures
for people that are interested in specifics.
They're not gonna be interested in everything.
They're gonna be interested in that scene. "I love that scene!"
Somebody else will say, "I hate that scene!"
Because it has something to do with their life.
And in that sense, it's not like a movie.
It's, uh -A movie tries to pacify people...
by keeping it going for them
so that it's sheer entertainment.
Well, I hate entertainment.
We were walking one day...
and we went to a preview of Opening Night.
And the audience were laughing, they loved it...
and he walked out
and he said to me, "I failed.
"They got all the surface...
"and they didn't get any of the other stuff.
And that's why I failed."
And he went back
into the editing room and fixed it up.
He was gonna do it his way.
Studios spend millions of dollars in research.
They test.
They do everything they can...
because this is a very, very big expense-
to market a film,
to get the audience to like it.
John didn't like the audience to like it.
He wouldn't stand for that.
Whether it was Husbands
or Opening night...
film would screen,
audience would get excited as hell in previews.
He would go back and say,
"Damn it, this is not right.
"This is too easy.
I'm not making a shallow film.
I will not have an audience
enjoying themselves this much."
Now, you know, you think
that might be perverse.
I think it was courageous
because what he knew was...
he knew he could make
that kind of a film.
He did make it. He actually screened it.
But that was not enough.
He had to get people annoyed,
provoked, excited.
And, boy, you don't
see that these days.
I believe that if you put it out there truly-
frustration, fear, love, inner life-
people are capable of understanding...
and wanting to understand feelings.
When they're sure
that it's not a mistake...
and when they're sure that you're not
going to double-cross them...
midway in the picture
and go streaking back to plot...
I think they'll watch
with great fascination.
I don't think you go to a play
to forget, or go to a movie to be distracted.
I think life generally is a distraction...
and that going to a movie
is a way to get back, not go away.
Every time you watch his work...
there are so many layers that
just reveal themselves to you...
like a great novel, a - a great painting.
And that again is something
completely unique.
There are very few filmmakers
that have achieved that.
His films only get better. Like all good art...
it just keeps getting better
and richer and deeper...
and probably that's because
we keep getting older.
As we get older,
we understand them more.
John understood a lot
beyond his years.
He saw the dawn about
an hour before everybody else.
He was the most fertile man
that I've ever encountered.
And he didn't have
a copycat bone in his body.
You didn't score a Cassavetes film.
You did music for John.
And it scared me
because it had nothing to do...
with anything I'd ever heard before.
It wasn't film music. It was raw.
He fell in love with the innocence.
And that's why he tripped
everybody up all the time.
He didn't want you
to be on a familiar ground.
He didn't want you
to be comfortable.
That was dangerous.
It was death to him.
The lyrics on 'Almost"
are like everything else we did.
They weren't clever.
He'd come into the music room,
and he'd just sit down.
And he'd say, "You got any tape up?"
I'd go, "Yeah. "

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And we'd put out a couple of mikes.  
I'd be at the piano, or I'd have a guitar  
in my lap, and he'd pull a mike down.  
He just started spilling out lyric.  
"I'm almost in love with you."  
And it happened quickly.  
He wrote 95% of the lyric,  
maybe 100%...  
and we just shuffled it around  
a little bit.  
I've been pointed out by people  
My name is mud  
I've been dreaming all the dreams  
And dancing in the evening  
Singing in the shower  
But nothing seems  
To take your place  
I'm almost in love with you  
I nearly miss you  
I've hardly seen you  
When I do, I get a feeling that  
Something should be there  
They came right from his gut...  
put a smile on his face,  
and he walked out of the room.  
John, who had  
no musical sense at all.  
I mean, he was tone-deaf.  
He had no fear.  
He'd start... banging on the piano...  
with two fingers or something...  
to give me a sense of the rage.  
Or tinkle -  
and it was terrible music...  
but he'd - he'd communicate  
an idea to you.  
I didn't read or write music...  
so we worked on that plane.  
It was just an artistic bridge.  
I listened, he talked.  
I played, he listened.  
This is the, uh,  
first draft for Opening Night...  
Talk Thru.
It was quiet
Like the holy night
I was frightened
With the crowds in sight
They were noisy
All the work
Of my lifetime
Pushed into this one
And only moment
Every tear I've shed
Every laugh I've laughed
Every insight into woman
Every feeling of delight
Everything
Holy God Almighty
this was opening night
I've seen pain
I've seen it come again
Seen the road
And I've seen the light
Holy God Almighty
this is opening night
I wish I wasn't
so fucking tone-deaf.
I've had long conversations...
with so many people
about John's movies...
and when they talk
about John's movies...
it's with the same passion
that actors talk about acting...
when they're in acting class
in the beginning.
- I'm sorry. Okay, I'm sorry.
- There's an innocence in it.
The jadedness of the movie business
seems to beat it out of a lot of people.
It didn't beat it out of John.
Now, look at this cat.
But John probably was covered. I think
he had a gene that other people don't have.
You know? He had a kind of
cinematic courage gene...
that, you know, maybe we should be
tapping into that D.N.A.
Which gives me an idea.
I'm gonna have to get a shovel.
Well, East Coast girls are hip
I really dig those styles they wear
And the Southern girls
With the way they talk
You like jazz?
- Yeah, I like all music.
- Good.
Makes you feel like living.
Silence is death.
You feel like making a musical?
- Yeah.
- Yeah?
- With dance and orchestras and all?
- Yeah.
- Yeah. One musical. Only one.
- Only one?
- Yeah.
- You wrote the story already?
No, I didn't write it.
Dostoyevsky wrote it.
Crime and Punishment.
I would like to make that a musical.
He had a way of telling a story.
He had a way of talking to you.
There was always
a sense of mischief in it.
And there was always
some hidden depth.
Not too fast.
Aaah!
I remember one time he said to me—
- He was very sick at this time, very sick.
- Watch it now.
He's got that steep driveway...
and you've got to walk
down this steep, steep driveway...
to get the paper.
And he had a dog, Cosmos,
German Shepherd.
So he calls me up. He says,
"You know that goddamned dog—Jesus."
I never realized, that dog is really considerate. "
"What did he do, John?"
He said,
"Well, you know, it takes me an hour...
"to get down the hill
to pick up the paper.
'And this dog, he would always
run up the hill ahead of me.
"But you know what he did this morning?
"He walked behind me.
He didn't want to embarrass me...
"because I'm so slow
gettin' up the hill.
"Very considerate.
Then you know what he did?"
I said, "What?"
"He went way to the back
of the property...
"and he threw up and he died.
Peter, do you think he was
telling me something?"
Now this is -
This is - Man.
The first time he told me
how badly sick he was...
was one of the funniest
conversations we had.
It was so weird. Because...
he said,
"You know, I've got this cirrhosis thing,"
And he says, uh - He says,
"And, uh, you know, it's a little noticeable. "
And I hadn't seen John for a while.
And I didn't know that he - he was - his -
His stomach was distended
from water retention.
So he went in to see a movie doctor...
to get the insurance
on the last film he did.
So now he's telling me,
on the phone...
about this encounter between him
and the movie doctor.
And he's laughing on the phone as he's telling me this. Of course I'm laughing - it's pretty funny... the doctor would be so gauche. And, um, John thought that was hilarious. A remarkable guy. And he never showed you, uh, weakness, you know? Never heard the man lament about anything. Strong guy. Even facing his death, he faced it with such courage. He was writing scripts, laughing. He was that way right up until the last day of his life. And he was a very sick man for a long time... but he never changed. He didn't change this much. Still as interested. Still as excited. Still writing every day. I went off to Thailand to make a movie, and he had gotten very sick. And we had - He was - He and - and the other people involved were very determined... that we make She's De Lovely - "You know, like a real movie. Goddamn it. It's a - It's a good piece, and they should pay us for it and everything else."
And I felt that, uh, that it was a tough movie to make that way. And so then I got an offer to do something - I thought it would take a while to get it financed. And by that time, he felt too ill to direct it anyway...
so we were talking
to other directors.
And, uh, so I - I was in Thailand.
I called him just to check in.
And he says,
"What the hell you doing there?
"You want to make this goddamned movie
or not? If you do, you let me know. " Bang!
I think that's the last time
I talked to him.
I'd always, uh, felt that
he was very hidden.
He was a person who was
not really accessible.
I mean, what you saw was not, uh,
what there was there.
And you could always see
this other thing -
I - I didn't know what it was - lurking.
So I was always taking a step back...
to see if I could see what it was.
Because he was never
fully visible to me.
And then we had lunch
about six months before he died.
And it was a lovely meeting.
It was so...
sweet.
All the personality was gone.
And all there was
was that thing that was hiding...
which was his soul, his essence.
And it was beautiful.
He visits me once in a while.
When I accused him in my dreams -
I said -
You know, I would walk along,
and I'll say hello to somebody.
And I'll say,
"How come you don't say hello?"
And he says, "They can't see me. "
I said, "What do you mean they can't?
Only I can see you?" And he says, "Yeah. "
And I said, "Did you come for me?"
He said, "No, no. See, I just wanted to talk to you."
And this is a dream I'm having.
You know, it was great.
You know, I thought -
I called Al and told him about that.
He said, "Yeah. Yeah."
And it's nice when it happens.
Because he was so much a part of my life, and, uh...
contributed so much...
in affirming who I am...
and - and how important I am as a person...
which we all are.
And that's what he did to everybody he touched.
Everybody used to say,
"Oh, my God. John's high."
I mean, he's smokin' - What's he smokin'? He's always giggling. He's always laughing."
He didn't. He wasn't.
But that facade of...
"Don't get too close. Don't get down at me.
You want me, then go look at my films."
What is this "bring the girls on"?
What kind of a place are you running here?
Bring the girls on.
Bring them on out.
Call the girls, man.
Introduce the girls.
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
Often when I see his movies, it's-
the experience of watching them is very much like what it's like being with him.
In some ways that he would drive me crazy a little bit...
and as soon as I watched his movies, it would drive me crazy.
And then sometimes you would suddenly be crying, and you'd -
I mean, that would happen around him.
It was the experience of...
of spending a day with him
was really similar, or a night.
Which is like watching a movie.
I mean, it's - I mean -
To me -And that's a real credit
to - to the way he made a movie.
Hey.
It's not accidental that if you sort of..
take his films and line them up...
they start out
with people in their 20s...
and then they go
to people in their 30s...
and people in their 40s, and by his final film,
he's dealing with people who are older people.
In a sense, he is exploring...
the stages of his own life.
But it's the stages of our lives too.
His films will be around forever
because they're unique...
and they're totally honest.
They are him.
And spending time with any
of his films is spending time with him.
And it's a unique, uh, place.
Do you know I used to be
very funny?
Whoa!
When were you ever funny?
- When was I ever funny?
- I've never heard you tell one stinking joke!
- And you never laugh at anyone else's! Never! Never!
- I used to be funny.!
- I used to be very funny.
- When?
When I was a kid.
It's a geography. It's a place that -
Cassavetes is a place.
You know?
And, uh, when you're not there, you miss it.
I love my films.
They are everything that is in my children.
They're everything that is in my family.
They're everything that is in me.
They're everything that is in my wife, everything that is in my friends. Yes, I love them. And they're honest movies. Whether they are good or bad is another story. These are just straightforward movies... about things we don't know about. But they're questions I think people ask themselves all the time. His films are about all the things that are really important in life. Robert Graves once said that before he wrote a poem... he asked himself, "Is this poem necessary?" All that required for him to write a poem was... a pencil and a piece of paper. To make a film requires an enormous... equipage and personage... beyond a pencil and a paper. All the more reason we should ask ourselves, you know, before we make films... "Is this film necessary?" And there are mostly unnecessary films, particularly today. John's are all critically necessary. He never made one that wasn't. He talks about how what a movie- when it's really good- does... is it teaches you something about yourself.. that you didn't ever recognize before. That's what Cassavetes' films do. It isn't the mirror up to reality. It's a mirror up to your soul, your essence. It's a mirror up to your essence. He can see to the soul. And then he can bring people's souls... out for us to share. - Look at us. Look.
- Helpless. Helpless.
Hey, see this? This is my buddy.
- This is my buddy, you understand?
- This is my buddy.
We don't have — Look at these people.
They're beautiful people.
We're beautiful people.
You're beautiful people.
- Right. Right.
- Do you have to — to have —
- Drink this.
- Hey, here. Here.
Look at you! Look how much
prettier you are now.
Don't — Don't hurt this.
She'll need it later.
When he looked at you, you felt like
you were really being looked at, and really seen.
- And —
- No!
At times, it was very uncomfortable.
That's kind of what his movies
are about as well.
He would look at me differently
than anybody else looked at me.
You know, he would see different things
in me that he liked.
He would assess me differently.
And then he would provoke me
to be more of that.
He was a great mirror.
And we have to look at ourselves
and say, "Yuck."
I think John looked around him
and, you know, saw a lot of misery.
And that's what he made his films about,
about the human condition.
Well...
love moves at a hell of a rate
of speed, doesn't it?
Lay down on the bed with me.
In describing this kind of life...
in the films that he made...
"Okay, if you can't take the time... "
"to understand yourself like that..."
"I can take the time to put it on film.
"And if you can feel what I hope you can..."
"from the result of this work..."
"and talk about those characters
and those situations...
You goddamn Mexican Indian!
then it may have some
relationship to your own life. "
You got something
to say to me, say it!
But don't you walk away from me!
I'm interested in the idea of-
in a success-oriented country like America...
what do people do with their failures?
Do they admit them?
Do they crawl into a hole and die?
Do they roll up in a ball?
Do they become defensive and never risk again?
And I think it's one of the reasons
why in Cassavetes' movies...
so many people
are having breakdowns.
Their usual life, where they were
just kind of punching in every day...
and not really thinking emotionally,
not really feeling...
comes apart a little bit.
And then they have
to face the fact...
that maybe they've been
running on empty...
that they've been
on automatic pilot for so long...
and all of a sudden
there's that light in their faces...
and they have to kind of come clean,
and maybe start over again.
Hold on a minute.
I'll send for my clothes in the morning.
I'm not coming back.
I'm on the phone.
It's gonna be torture getting to the
point to admit that you have to start over again...
but that process of breaking down...
and just kind of coming clean
with each other...
is the only hope to have
an honest relationship.
There's something
about Cassavetes' characters...
that are always in flux,
always still searching for...
as opposed to having been
frozen into an identity.
Characters are asked
to flow in all of his work.
They're asked to become liquid,
to become anything they can imagine.
In Faces, the only two
that seem to have...
any degree of sensitivity
and responsiveness...
and mobility in their definitions
of themselves are Jeannie and Chettie.
And it's ironic that Cassavetes
tends to find possibility...
at the very bottom of the ladder.
I mean, it's a gigolo and a call girl.
It's not the proper housewives
and the successful businessmen...
who are able to flow
with the flow of life.
It's these two marginal characters...
who actually have all the possibility
in the world.
We actors are luckier than most people...
in that fear of
making a fool out of yourself..
because you do make a fool
out of yourself so often...
so we're not quite as afraid
of having people see us...
in - in foolish, vulnerable positions.
To be open and vulnerable
is not to be feared...
because through that vehicle
comes many things.
Nobody cares.
Nobody has the time...
to be vulnerable to each other.
So... we just go on.
I mean, right away our armor comes out
like a shield and goes around us...
and, uh, we become like
mechanical men.
Yeah. And I called you
a mechanical woman, huh?
I got news.
I'm so mechanical -
Honey, it's absolutely ludicrous
how mechanical a person can be.
I am the sexiest guy in the world.
I have blond hair.
I can get all the women I want.
You're waking up, aren't ya?
Uh-huh.
I feel the world is very chicken, you know.
Very chicken.
By chicken,
I mean that the world is too tight.
And, uh, people get all upset over
things that really don't matter...
like politics and, uh, religion...
and things like that.
They - They take offense at things
to - to such a great degree...
that they miss the good times.
And the good times are
probably more important...
than any bad time
that ever happened.
Yet we spend so much time
on bad times...
and so little time on the human behavior.
I want to put on the screen...
the way people can relate to each other...
the way people want love,
not money, not anything else...
and the chances
they will take to have it.
My films are certainly expressive of a culture... that has had the possibility of attaining material fulfillment... while at the same time finding itself unable to accomplish... the simple business of conducting human lives. We have been sold a bill of goods as a substitute for life. What is needed is a reassurance in human emotions... a reevaluation of our emotional capacities. I strongly believe that we are social animals... and that the nature of living is defined... not by money, political power and the like... but by virtue of the fact that we are social beings. In my opinion, these people and these small emotions... are the greatest political force there is. These small emotions, these character disagreements, are a vital necessity. I tell you what, give me a rhythm about like this. I can't reveal it There is no way You can see it Fading far away Slipping every day Before I die completely Wind sweeps your hair No more love there The race is run- won The race is run Go on back to Mama Go on back to Papa Go on back Falling from eternity Loving you eternally Warming up the ocean cold Repeating jokes we've always told
Steady now, we're growing old
There's some lines
forming here and there
And our walk is not as jaunty-jolly
And our hands don't clasp
so firmly anymore
Something's falling out
out of the middle of our lives
Falling from eternity
Love goes away
It can't stay
It's got things to do
Traveling
Other people to see
Life is the same
Tenderness contained
No two strangers can meet
And repeat
The love we knew
Let me introduce you
to the second woman
Don't be afraid
All your debts
are paid
This new person
Who looks like me
Is an impostor
Someone
you only see
Let me introduce you
to the second man
Who walks the same
And talks with reserve
Holding back love
Jangling your nerve
Let me clarify this game of life
This trick
This super magic show
We think we know
Let me introduce you to yourself