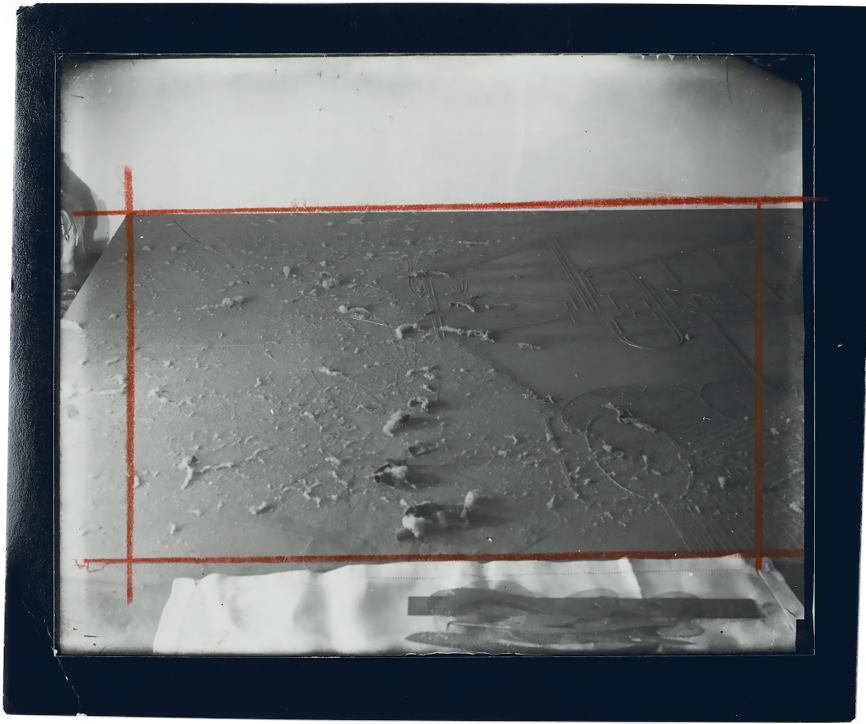


## NOTES ON AN EXPERTISE: LOCKING UP ANTHOLOGY

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Essay writing is a bit like playing solitaire in the company of a friend, a bit rude to begin with, but when asked by your friend if they can turn a card or two, because they ‘see something,’ it’s the least you can do, and for me at least, it’s a welcome inclusion to the relatively closed system of solitaire/essay once cards are dealt and the shuffle takes the onus of dominate variable. In the spirit of inviting another in, I would like to explore a solitary layout that I know very well, as an auto-da-fé to lonesome solitaire hands everywhere. A solitary series of tasks that I’ve performed in different permutations over seven hundred times... I’m going to start sort of at the end here. I’m going to assume that it’s the end of the night, and I preemptively turned off the main overhead lobby light, so there’s just the pale light on the gray bulletin board of forthcoming pictures and flyers on the ledge that I’ve kept tidy. It’s a bit dark now, unwelcoming, because when people get out of the theater, say it’s the Maya Deren theater on the first floor, the smaller theater. It’s that when they get out of the

theater, we want them to leave. That’s the joke, so I turn off the main lobby light in the last minutes of the picture. I open the double doors to the theater as the credits come up, leaving on the red light to bleed in the hallway. So people have the red light, and they have the bulletin board light to sort of guide them out, with the bathroom hallway lights on the other side of the lobby to assist. But this reduction in illumination is signal for them to either go outside and continue their lives, so I can continue mine, or go to the bathroom and then continue on with the same. We’re going to assume that’s all been done, and the last person is leaving the bathroom or picking up a flyer from the tidy ledge, and everyone’s collected on the outside, deciding which direction they’ll go, which means the front door is locked, I’ve already locked it, because I had to lock it after 30 minutes into the last picture of the night. That’s because that’s when I start counting the money, and the box office person has left. I’m checking their work, counting cash, and I’m the last person left in the movie theater aside from the projectionist

up in the booth, who never answers the phone. The money is counted, and let’s say everything works out with that. Or if there’s a discrepancy, I’ve made a note of it. I’ve already sent off the managers email that says what went awry, as things often do, or if any weirder patrons made an appearance how it was handled. And the theater is now ready for the last walk-through. The last walk-through means that I check the bathroom stalls for stowaways and turn off the two bathroom lights on the first floor and prop their doors open. And now that hallway is dark, except for the red exit light at the end of the hallway, which leads to a door with an emergency alarm bar that actually works because this goes into the alley, a very protected place at Anthology, where old equipment lives and is a passageway to three doors that lead to other protected places, but we won’t be exploring these tonight. We’re trying to get out of this building, so we can go have a drink. As is customary for anyone getting off work at midnight Friday night in the East Village. I can disarm that emergency door with the red emergency bar now, and

that hallway is dark and slowly the whole theater is approaching black. I walk to the Maya Deren hallway and turn off that red light, now that's gone. People are probably still outside chatting and smoking at this point, because I work quick, it's time to go. I don't get paid overtime here. I walk past them upstairs to the Courthouse Theater, and halfway up on my right, I unlock the door to the Deren projection hallway. I go into the booth and the projectionist isn't there. I don't expect them to be, and they haven't said goodbye, either, they never do. I kill the breakers for the house lights in the Deren, as well as those for the booth, and it's pitch black in there now. I feel for the door, then return to the dim stairwell. I take care of the two mezzanine bathrooms next door. I prop their doors open, make sure that there's toilet paper, because I'll get in trouble if there isn't. There's a secret pushpin behind the john, if I need to add more. I make sure the bathroom windows are closed, turn off the light, and I continue upstairs, up to the Courthouse Booth. I do the same as before. No projectionist there. They never intend to say goodbye. I lock the door to the Courthouse Booth behind me. On my way down the spiral staircase – did you notice how many projection booths have spiral staircases? I just saw one the other day at the French Institute. Then I prop open the doors to the Courthouse Theater, this is the real creepy room, there's always some feeling lurking here. It's very, very dark. Not to mention on this second floor veranda, I know that's the wrong word, but there's something about the second floor that's not quite connected to its walls. There's a balcony that overlooks the stairs that brought us up here. There's also a water fountain and a sink that's said to be haunted. Now all the lights in the Anthology are off, except for the neon sign, which shines above the corner of 2nd Ave. and 2nd St. big, orange beacon, blue and red, a circular neon sign that is the glorious symbol of the reel to reel cinema reel. It lives in a large window, very, very large about 15 feet across, and you'd think that this window would be sticky and hard to open, but actually it's not. It's very, very easy to move up and down. If you look at it, you'll see that inside the brackets of the window are chains that help the window move up and down with ease, and often if it's a nice night, I'll open the window at this point with the neon light still on, because I like the way it looks on my skin, and I like the

way it makes me feel when everything in the theater is dark, except for that big, beautiful neon reel. And I'll look, leaning my head out of the large 15-foot second floor window, maybe with a little cup of old reception wine, and I'll watch the people come and go. It's Friday night in the East Village, and I think about how they seem, how they seem to feel, how loud they're talking, are they in groups, whose alone, what kind of Friday night is it, from above. Then I'll close the window, and I'll flip off the neon light switch, actually that switch is downstairs. I go back downstairs. When the neon reel goes dark, Anthology is officially closed. One last thing, if I haven't forgotten and usually I have by this point, is to post the signs for tomorrow's films in the glass case outside on 2nd St. It's nothing that fancy; it's not Rockefeller Center here. These are printed on that 8 ½ x 11 bleached white copy paper that is the ubiquitous symbol a culture that craves paper but isn't too fussy about it. They don't give us step stools or ladders here, one has to make do. I've seen my coworkers bring an Eames chair out on the street to stand on to reach the sign box that is mounted on the exterior brick wall about 10 feet above street level. These bricks, if you look at them, are carved with hounds chasing foxes and a garland of chains. We don't call it Courthouse for no reason. This used to be a jail. And there are still bars on the door. Since I'm limber enough and like to show off sometimes at this hour, also just make it as quick as possible, I scale the bricks and climb up to the glass case with no chair. It's fun to do, if there aren't too many shows the next day, that means not too many pieces of papers to pin up, which can be a clumsy affair for a full day of movies. Let's just say that the last thing I need to do is pin up a single sheet for an Essential Cinema program tomorrow, we're playing Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, twice, at 4 p.m. and then again at 7. It's going to be a great day. Maybe I'll see it twice. The box office is already locked up, that's very important to do, the lanyard is hanging where it should be, and everything is in its place. And I'm outside, and I have no chair to take back in. I have my bag with me. I can just jump down, grab it, and then I'm on my way. That would be the ideal. Of course, I have to check the calendar box to make sure it's stocked for Saturday morning, and let's just say I've done that, and we're good. And the building's all closed up and everything's secure,

and now it's just me and my time. No one's paying me anymore, and maybe I'll pay somebody else, and maybe I'll give them a good tip while I'm at it, more than I ever get. But that's OK, we're not in the avant-garde cinema game for money, that's what I've been told, and isn't it true. So when it's time for an after work drink for the lonely manager of Anthology Film Archives looking to get a little less lonely, a cheap drink. It's a good way to go. And I look down at my feet, as I often do, bathed in red light, from the outdoor lights that I've kept on. Sometimes they're white lights, sometimes they're red. Kolby is the one in charge of that. Red light makes everything look very sexy and dramatic. I notice there's a cigarette butt hanging around my feet. But there's only one. I've done a pretty good job of sweeping them up. You can't stop the inevitable. And like I said, I'm done for the night. And as it is night and nearly half past midnight, I turn to the right, to go deeper into the East Village, because the further east you go, the cheaper it gets in NYC. Crossing the street, as I do, to the Old Marble Cemetery across the street from Anthology. The cemetery is always locked, except for one day a year when people are allowed to wander around inside like ghosts. I'll let you in on a trick I have with the gates of this cemetery. I'm not sure how I found it, it was never trial and error, one day it just happened. I put my lips almost to the bars of the cemetery gate, and I gave a low whistle, roughly an F#. Why I did this one day, I cannot tell you. But it is just the right note to make the whole cemetery gate sing. Now I do this every time I pass the cemetery, and I do it tonight, too. The sound of the gate's reverberation up and down the block and in my head, sustains, drifts and sends me on my way. It is the final key to the night's labor and suggests there are still invisible freedoms to be found that I am still seeking.

■ *r. rahmé is the author of Count Thereof The Other's Limbs (2019) & Translator of 27 Poems On Death by Georges Bataille (2021) (Oblek Editions)*