

body under duress, and the comprehensive breakdown of domesticity and public life, takes on a more direct valence in this film because, in a sense, the air is quite different in the COVID era. One tried to protect oneself and one's family by wearing protective gear outside, keeping the body to itself, because one has no idea where the toxicity lay. Are you infecting the outside world, or does it threaten to infect you?

The eight-note rhythm of Solondz's loop editing once again provokes agitation for the viewer, suggesting hyperventilation. The face masks (some leather and latex, therefore airtight, others nylon and lace, thus breathable) will affect the performer's respiration to some extent, but more generally, *We Don't Talk Like We Used To* speaks directly to the clash of bodies, whether casual or intimate. Towards the end of the film, we see a black outfit smoldering on the ground, perhaps a visual nod to the late Ana Mendieta, but also a signal that no protection is absolute. The film concludes with a staggering, stuttering shot of two black-masked bodies outside on a rock, being jostled to and fro as they attempt to embrace and kiss. Talk is breath, and Solondz's title, which may in some way be the personal lament it seems to be, is also a much greater statement. Wearing masks, of course, became a flashpoint for the fanatical right wing, a movement that insists upon the complete autonomy of the self. But Solondz displays exactly what is at stake, philosophically and interpersonally, in the age of COVID. Unfettered intimacy, even if such a thing were ever possible, is entirely off the table. The body in space is potentially a vector for destruction, and only by acknowledging and maybe even embracing this fact can we ever move towards another. By ritualizing danger, as well as our feeble prophylaxes against it, perhaps we can reconceive the social bond. After all, failure to entertain the notion of death is animalistic, feral. Embracing death, performing it, exorcising it—that is the work of the savage. ♦

Coming soon to Acropolis:

- *The Human Surge 3* (Dir. Eduardo Williams, 2023)—Director in person, April 5 at 2220 Arts + Archives
- *Samsara* (Lois Patiño, 2023)—Los Angeles premiere, April 21 at 2220 Arts + Archives

Acropolis Cinema presents:



March 26, 2024 – Brain Dead Studios

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

One of world's most exciting and provocative young filmmakers, Joshua Gen Solondz has spent over a decade enacting trance-like rituals on both film and video that confront the viewer with an unsettling vision of domesticity and the human body. Picking up a mantle left by luminaries like Stan Brakhage and Luther Price, Solondz—who often appears in his work in various states of self-induced peril or subjugation—perverts his materials through a deft application of superimpositions, flicker effects, and montage editing, creating startling juxtapositions within and between frames. As physical and bracing as they are intimate, these one-of-a-kind films wrest a strangely poignant poetry from an at times unforgiving world.

Tonight's program, Solondz's first in Los Angeles, features a selection of his early video work, plus four more recent 35mm pieces, including the local premiere of his longest and most ambitious film to date, *We Don't Talk Like We Used To* (2023), which screened in TIFF's Wavelengths program as well as the Currents section at NYFF.

Pt 1: Videos

Videos with Mom: Breast (2007, 3 min)

BURNING STAR (2011, 4 min)

(it's not a prison if you never try the door) (2013, 7 min)

AGAINST LANDSCAPE (2014, 4 min)

Pt 2: 35mm

LUNA E SANTUR (2016, 10 min)

(tourism studies) (2019, 7 min)

NE CORRIDOR (2022, 6.5 min)

We Don't Talk Like We Used To (2023, 36 min)

TRT: 78 min

Savagery Begins at Home by Michael Sicinski

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published in Cinema Scope #96, Fall 2023

We Don't Talk Like We Used To is Solondz's longest film to date. Close attention to Solondz's previous work, in particular the shifting emphases he has placed on different aspects of his primary approach, shows that the new film isn't just a temporal extension, but a conceptual one as well. *We Don't Talk* is part travelogue and part diary film, a combination of the artist's bizarre version of domestic bonhomie and his resistance to reducing the larger world to consumptive tourism. Setting these two elements into dialectical action, Solondz produces an aggressive, throbbing film ritual that alludes to

common experiences—travel, physical affection, scenes from daily life—but thwarts the tendency to reduce them to mere spectacle.

The film begins with a dark-grey shot of a desk at a window. Audio and video equipment is laid out across the tabletop; we see a wooded area outside. The film is worn and the light is grainy, suggesting pinhole photography. Gradually, smoke billows up outside the window. The soundtrack contains a faint bell sound and the knocking of a woodpecker. The domestic workspace seals the filmmaker (and the viewer) from uncertain harm, but the inviolability is temporary, if not utterly fictitious. Solondz enters the frame and stares out the window.

Following a couple of quick images—a woman in a balaclava and a US flag unitard; a dog on a couch; a kid with a cat mask putting on glasses in a parking lot—the film's main visual motifs appear. We catch a glimpse of someone encased in leather strapping an N95 mask over their hidden face, followed by the sight of a woman in pigtails wearing a leather facemask with exaggerated eye- and mouth-holes. We also see photos of the same person, mask and all, posted on the wall behind her. A rather long shot taken from a ferry, a cityscape drifting out of sight, is presented with a scrawled text: “do you participate in money laundering.”

As *We Don't Talk* progresses, Solondz shows us a variety of travelling images, footage shot in the outside world, occasionally emblazoned with other cryptic phrases. When we return to the home space, we are given a casually perverse family portrait, the dog joined on the couch by two figures in eyeless black hoods. “We came back to the city, the sun turned black,” the image reads. Following another superimposed bit of writing (“failed in Paris, try Hong Kong”), we see footage from Hong Kong of people congregated around a horse-racing track. The drumming becomes more intense. This is travelogue footage that will soon be replaced with a looping edit of another ritualized performance, one pregnant with external meanings.

Solondz alternates between different moments of a singular action, with a sharp electronic burble heard in every other image. A figure in a black hood is placing the N95 over their face in one half of the edit, and is removing it in the other. In addition to being a potent image, one that creates a kind of circular pumping action onscreen, it also provides a new twist on Solondz's fixation on the body in space, as an interior that both threatens and is threatened by the outside. The figure is outside, in front of a corrugated building. But COVID-19 was a danger not only to the body itself—it also compromised the notion of private space as a safety zone. In public, we were required to keep our breath to ourselves, turning each public body into a moted castle, a self-contained envelope of viral possibility. After the N95 sequence concludes, we see Solondz wrapping his head in plastic, a dangerous gesture of self-containment that mimics a death that has already occurred.

Throughout much of the rest of *We Don't Talk*, Solondz toggles between distorted footage inside the home and material shot while moving out in the world. This concern with the