

*North By Current (2021) dir. Angelo Madsen Minax*

“In this world, most people think that who you are is a compilation of things that have happened to you —or the choices you make...”

*North By Current* (2021) is a documentary by director Angelo Madsen Minax about loss, pain, trauma, and healing through narratively capturing the director’s personal life. The film opens with the narrator, none other than Minax himself, with video-tape recorded footages of his childhood and family life before his transition, asking the question “How did you become who you became?” After coming back to his hometown in Michigan due to the death of his baby niece, he finds himself in an unescapable rut of personal traumas and decides to face the underlying ‘truth’ as they are.

The first ever Minax family gathering shown right after the opening sequence at the diner is painful to watch. For nearly a minute, the family (his mother, father, and sister Jess who lost her child) sits in awkward small-talk and occasional silence while the camera cuts to different angles of the members uncomfortably sitting down, not knowing what to do while the ever-so-delightful and bubbly diner music fills up the empty audio. The ambient noise of people chattering in the background is a powerful contrast to the visually obvious disconnection between the members of the family and it is soon cut off after Jess bluntly expresses her desire to not be in that space.

“Apparently God thinks I can handle it, and he’s wrong” is what Jess said before she tried to overdose. Jess is perhaps the most crucial element of this documentary; she has gone through more than one loss of a child, which is something beyond most people’s comprehension of pain. Her “line” is an authentic abbreviated representation of her unexplainable despair that is soon to be visualized in nothing but pitch black, but with frantic horror-filled screams and cries of her daughter and brother. Extremely raw and compelling, this is a mix of deliberate structural choice and accidental recording by the filmmaker, as he describes his film has “the nature of retelling” whilst explaining a guideline Angelo Madsen Minax made for himself during the shooting

process: “If something fucked up is happening, me filming it is really not that important”. This is somewhat the ‘climax’ of the film for me, hence the sequence of this happening derived a burst of emotion and resonated as a viewer.

The film closes with Minax narrating a poetic monologue of Motherhood and Life, concluding his six year journey as he leaves his hometown and drives into the sunshine. Life goes on.

-The elements of the film explores two opposing factors. For instance, there are two main elements that seem similar but not quite. Sex and death. Losses and gains. Sex is equivalent to gains, only in meaning that it also means ‘rebirth’. The deeper elements of loss are his young niece, and the child he used to be (according to his mother). I often think about sex and death being a set. How do you think making this film has affected your views on the subject and has it changed before, during, or after the production of your film? If you went into a project with the initial intent to depict these themes how would you do it, or has that already been fulfilled with *North By Current*?

-When you said “Being a good man is the same as being a good person” it felt like I hit my head.

-What component of the film in terms of exposing your personal life was challenging to put on screen? Were you hesitant to use some shots because of the sheer exposure and what others might think?