

Amboy / Fragments for a Screenplay

by
Frances Scholz & Mark von Schlegell

with help from
Chris Kraus and Leslie Allison



“BP,” land art by Karl Amboy, located near Amboy City. Susan Lichtenstein photograph taken from plane during location scouting, March 2014.

note:

To what extent are gender norms policed by culture and the arts? Accessing the violence Judith Butler and others speak of at the core of the cultural enforcement of gender, the artist Karl Amboy has made an infamous career by spoofing and embodying the male-ist fanaticism of Western American culture. He's gotten incredibly rich in the process. But the artist has retreated into silence long ago, into the creation of a perfectly real western horror movie town, Amboy, out in the desert.

Our filmmaker, German artist "Susan Lichtenstein," is making a film about Lydia van Vogt, German emigrant and widow of science fiction grandmaster A.E. van Vogt, when she's interrupted to make the first documentary about Amboy.

She's heard of Amboy. At age 19 in the '80s our filmmaker once published a short text in an art magazine where she herself had naively pointed to Amboy as a feminist.

She has not heard of the town. It's an incredibly secreted place, famously without any law, a symbol of art's removal from ordinary reality and laws. Was this the reason she was selected to make the film? As the film is being made, so it immediately seems, Susan glimpses a movie beyond the horror picture Amboy clearly intends her to make: where gender is itself a projection from outside onto the skin of the real and where the artist craves her/his transformation into a woman.

Meanwhile, back in Los Angeles, the serial killing of female artists has begun. . . .



"AMBOY/ in out /AMGIRL. . ."

1. Lydia Leaving. Alone.
2. Lydia Entering/Door.
3. Office. Time Machine.
4. Lydia Leaving.

Downtown Santa Monica, CA.

Susan is filming *Lydia* in a Bookstore, looking for copies of *Stan*. A *stranger* appears and buys the book out from under them.

Later, dinner with Mrs. van Vogt.

Discover: the *stranger* is the waiter.



"There's no such thing as a time machine..."

Ext. Los Angeles art gallery. Night

Susan stands among a group of artists and visitors to a gallery.

Int. Los Angeles art gallery. Night

Cont.

People saying awkward art world things together, including *Juliet*. *Juliet* sees *S.* through windows.

Ext. Los Angeles art gallery. Night

S. seems confused as people are saying things to her.

S.

What?? Oh yes. I plan on seeing that show tomorrow.

Juliet approaches now.

Juliet

Hi. I'm Juliet Romero. I'm a freelance curator! And a writer! I've got you now! Finally!

S.

Me?? But. . .

Juliet

Yes You.

Juliet points something at the camera. Is that a knife??

Juliet (whispers)

Karl Amboy wants you to make a film.

S.

No thanks. I'm already making films.

Juliet

Hey—where're you going? I was just—it's—but you can't say no!

Cut To:

(Continued)

(Continued)

Ext. Los Angeles street. Night.

S. is hurrying down the street, alone in the darkness. She hears footsteps behind her.

Cut To:

Ext. Los Angeles street. Night.

S. comes around a corner, running: a car almost hits her! But it's

Cut To:

Ext. Los Angeles street. Night.

A Taxi. With a friendly *Driver*.

Driver

Anything I can help with, ma'am??

Fade Out

Ext. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

Next day

Susan is entering the museum in the broad light of day. A *Protester* outside holds a sign: SURVEILLANCE ART IS STILL SURVEILLANCE!

Int. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

S. walks through an empty gallery room. On the wall there is a small video screen. She approaches it.

Close-up on TV Screen

As we look, TV shows *Juliet* and a rich *Collector* in another room. *Juliet* is turning—wide-eyed and pointing. *Collector* is nodding furiously.

Cut to:

Cont. Int. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

S. turns to her left and sees *Juliet* and the *Collector* on the far end of this room, approaching her rapidly. To her right a *Museum Guard* seems to block exit. *Juliet* greets *S.* with over-the-top intimacy.

Juliet

Sweetie! So great to see you! What a dream! I want you to meet Udo!

Udo

Yes yes I know who you are.

Juliet

She's the one doing the Amboy film.

S.

Amboy film? I thought I—

Udo

Amboy? Again??? (he laughs) But do you think you'll really go all the way with him? All the way to Amboy my dear—aren't you afraid of the desert—

(Continued)

Juliet

Stop it Udo! Don't scare her—

S.

I told you no.

S. Pulls away forcefully. *S.* bumps past *Museum Guard*.

Close-Up on TV Screen

Juliet and *Udo* are laughing at *S.*

Fade Out

Int. French Publishers Office.

Hedi (Publisher) and *Noura* (translator) greet Lydia van Vogt.

Hedi

As you know, we French adore van Vogt. We want to translate everything new. So we were translating NULL-A 3 and Noura noticed irregularities.

Lydia

Irregularities?

Noura explains.

Not problems; differences. In how the earlier books were written, even improvements.

Hedi

I ask you point blank, Mrs. van Vogt. Did you write NULL-A 3?

Lydia

No!

They all look at each other.

Hedi

Mrs. van Vogt. It's only because I would like to discuss with you the possibility of a Null-A 4.

Lydia (beat)

I might have something in the garage.

Int. Los Angeles café. Afternoon.

S. is at a table with a laptop. Accessing information about *Karl Amboy*. *Documentary Footage/Headlines/etc.* information goes for sometime, demonstrating *Amboy* was a bad-boy '80s art star whose decadent lifestyle was inseparable from his extravagant career. At some point everything became secretive. There's something about an artificial volcano.

Email Text

Laptop

You've got mail!

It is an invitation to a lecture by writer *Chris Kraus* and shows her face and the title: *Amboy: American Artist*, a lecture.

Fade Out

Susan reads an old letter. Opened. Addressed to Mrs. Lydia van Vogt, Beechwood Canyon.

Dear Lydia,

This letter, witnessed and signed in the presence of Jeremy P. Koralski, notary public of Amboy, CA, April 23, 1953, testifies irrevocably to the following fact (as determined to be so by the undersigned members of the Los Angeles Society of Science and Fiction):

Alfred Elton van Vogt (your present husband) never owned a time machine. Nor will you. Ever.

Yours truly, in perpetuity,

A.E. van Vogt
Ron Hubbard
C. L. Moore
Harlan Ellison
Ray Bradbury

r/T JK

Camera discovers: The letter was postmarked 1789.

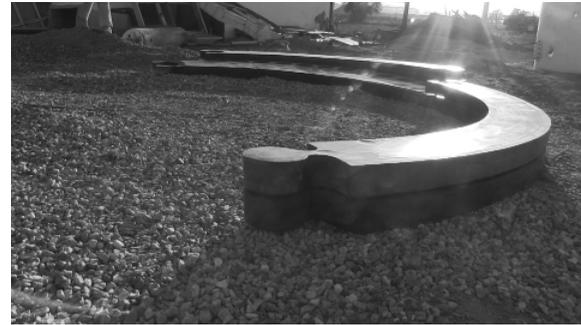
(01)

Chris Kraus Gives Lecture
Amboy, American Artist

Do you think of your work as a self-perpetuating machine?

Yeah, when it runs perfectly. My work has to have information to feed on. It doesn't feed on itself. It doesn't feed into some bathtub conception of art. I never sit in a bathtub and come up with ideas.

Amboy in conversation with
Bernard Elsemere & Mark Sanders
Dazed & Confused, August 1998



"I'd like to talk tonight about Amboy, American Artist..."

Int. Museum Lecture Hall.

People rising from their seats and beginning to chat, etc. Everyone's moving (*Udo* is visible and other friends from the Opening).

Cont.

Close-Up on Juliet.

She's looking for someone. Sees nothing. Stonefaced, she heads for exit. We follow. She is greeted etc. and ignores everyone, hurrying for the exit. As she exits *S.* grabs her and surprises her.

S.

I'll do it. But if there's a film it happens on my terms.

Juliet

Sweetie! I knew you'd come around!

Fade Out



"The woman artist must die. . ."

Scene

A party where all the groups are talking about Amboy. We overhear:

A

Amboy is concrete poetry, quite literally.

B

Amboy is to curating what Pound is to literature.

C

Amboy is performance.

D

Amboy is trash.

E

Amboy makes no sense without neo-feminism.

F

Amboy is music.

G

Don't buy into the Amboy persona.

H

Amboy had his own tuning.

I

Amboy reinvented the folk blues.

J

Why publish without Amboy?

K

Amboy is the _____ of so-called neo-conceptual art.

Later *S.* catches *Norman M. Klein* with the camera.

Klein

So you wanna know the truth about Amboy? Well OK. But I don't want to say it on camera—

Fade Out

Ext. Neighborhood

Susan and Assistant approach the door of what might be Amboy's father's house.

Int.

Father in boxers and t-shirt is reading poems of Francois Villon. After knock he's running around and hides. There's another knock.

Father (D. Devito)
What da fuck has she—

He goes up the peep-hole. Sees

Ext.

Susan camera and assistant.

Father ctd.
What the fuck?

Susan
Hello? Mr. Amboy?

He opens the door. She steps back. He sticks his head out.

Susan
Mr. Amboy?

Father
You're calling me that for satirical purposes?

Susan
I am making a film about your son.

Father
Son! Son!

He looks at camera then. Steps forward in bathrobe.

Father ctd.
You ask for some little testament. To him of whom you ask, I leave—no, not my van. That big-city bastard—no better player ever lived. I leave him three straw trusses! To spread as his mattress on the ground ... For on it his living must be found—(he smiles) the only trade or skill he ever knew. That's my item. Good day to you, too.

He slams the door.

Later

S. discovers a tape of father dressed in priest costume going through what appears to be a ritual.

Still Later

We discover Amboy's father was an actor who did bit parts in Hollywood.



"I'm on a stake-out. You better keep walking..."



"MUSICIANS WANTED Ask 4 'AMBOY'..."

Uncle Charlie is a well-known western musician with head in the clouds. We come upon him playing a song in a canyon in the desert. Later we find him playing another song. In mid-song he stops and sees a poster across from him fixed into a tree. He reads the poster, tears it from the tree and keeps it. Starts walking. He's walking with the guitar down the road feeling good. Sees another Stranger.

Uncle Charlie
Pardon me, are you Amboy by any chance?

Stranger
Amboy is not a personage. Amboy's a whole town. (He points). That way.

Uncle Charlie
Well, all right. . . (he walks)

EXT. Near Amboy.

A car is zooming through desert. From inside Sister and Nieces see Uncle Charlie walking in distance.

Nieces
There he is! There he is! Uncle Charlie!

The car comes squealing to halt next to him on the road. The kids open the door for him, as Sister leans out.

Nieces
Uncle Charlie!

He leans in the open window.

Sister
Are you crazy? You've got a show tonight in Hollywood!

Uncle Charlie
You said "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

Sister
No. I said Museum of Contemporary Art.

Charlie (takes it in slowly)
AH. O.K. sorry.

Sister
If I wasn't your sister. . .

Niece 1
She's your manager too!

Niece 2
Fear no evil, Uncle Charlie! We'll protect you!

Sister
Get in already!

Charlie
Well, all right. It's cool. . .

He gets in. They drive off.

The *Woman Artist* is dying, sees a vision.

Priest (giving a weird sermon)

Sanskrit, Aramaic, Hebrew, they lead to the same place. Each letter is in fact hand gestures. There is a real code.

He is moving his hands to make weird shadow animals.

Priest cont.

The only book that knows this is the *Nible*. . .

Priest cont.

The letter aleph is the hanged man reborn born again. Its number is the one of the eye and so Christ is the node, the maleficence, the booty.

S. dying, the Priest finally looks at her, acknowledging he is real, beyond death.

Priest

All right. I confess! she left you a message. She is a he. You belong to him. To Amboy for all time. Welcome to Hell. You're home.



“FLOWER POWER FAILED /
DON'T CLOCK IN UNTIL FULLY TUNED. . .”

Leslie Allison

Why the female artist must die

In this film, female artists die. Woolf says the future is dark. It is not that the future is female, but that the future is death.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

Thousands of years ago

When we wandered out of Alexandria we padded into the desert. And now we wander out of the desert into the dark. Lifting into darkness powered by pearls.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

On being a pearl

Woolf says the shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central pearl of perceptiveness, an enormous eye.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

On death

You can't be mortal if you're dead. Woolf says why are the women artists dying? Death increases perception, in the same way darkness, moreover uncertainty and ambiguity, transforms you into a giant pearl, rounded in slippery non-binary gleaming.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

On being a pearl

This lack of a side, of any anatomical determination, rolls time, that is to say the planet, forward.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

Stein says, Can women have wishes? Can women have wishes?

Lifted from our invented bodies, we can. It has already begun with the women artists in this film and now their moonstruck eyes swallow everything. There is resonance of a bell, of a bottle, wind sucking into or out of.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

Why the female artist must die

When we left Alexandria we found caves to fuck in and sought to establish a separatist matriarchal artist-run society but it was flawed by necessity of our being alive, and over time it crumbled. The hope is now in dying, thousands of years later.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

On death

Women are dying everywhere because men kill them. How do we escape the authoritarian control of the patriarchy over our bodies but to go for death. Joyfully.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

Kill me

Am I getting too heavy with this lecture? Because I feel heavy.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

Kill me

I feel generations of sand and rocks blocking my third eye and every other orifice. My fantasy kill me. My fantasy kill me.

Third eye breast, breast third eye

STOP/THE/BUS productions
presents
AMBOY (a two alien situation)
a Frances Scholz film

starring
Paul Giamatti
Lydia van Vogt
and
Leslie Allison
Eleanor Antin
Penny Arcade
Lily Benson
Colin C. Blodorn
Sol Blodorn
Kath Bloom
Connor Boettger
Matthew Chambers
Gracie DeVito
Jake DeVito
Ruben Diaz
Travis Diehl
Hedi El Kholti
Claire L. Evans
Alaina Claire Feldman
Matt Fishbeck
Andrea Fraser
Jeff Hassay
Nikolaus Hirsch
Bettina Hubby
Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Keenan Jay
Sergej Jensen
Robert Kinberg
Chris Kraus
Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer
Barry Levin
Lottie Jackson Malkmus
Stephen Malkmus
Sunday Malkmus
Brian Mann
Juliet McIver
Kimberli Meyer
Douglas Messerli
Kim Mitseff
Warren Neidich
Annie O'Malley
Laura Owens
Tom Peters
George Porcari
Ralf Rosar
Magnus Schäfer
Frances Scholz
Tif Sigfrids
Joe Sola
Andy Stewart
Colm Tóibín
Bec Ullrich
Sophie von Olfers
Mark von Schlegell
Tom Watson
Noura Wedell

directed by
Frances Scholz

screenplay by
Mark von Schlegell
Frances Scholz

with lectures by
Chris Kraus
Leslie Allison

production
Frances Scholz
Mark von Schlegell
Tif Sigfrids

production assistance
Evamaria Schaller

camera
Frances Scholz

additional camera
Mark von Schlegell
LeRoy Stevens
Lily Benson

editing
Frances Scholz

editing assistance
Jan Höhe

miniatures
Dieter Bähr

swan costume
Bec Ulrich

songs by
Bill
"Country"
Kath Bloom
"Something to Tell you"
"Fall Again"
Cross
"Cry"
"Horoscopes"
E-Rock
"Beneath The Lake"
"Damp Cave"
"The Temple of Fine"
Holy Shit
"Labradors"
"Who am I"
"7 Audiosur"
"11 Audiospur"
"Anything Else"
Milkblood
"You Forgot"
"A.M.B.O.Y."
"Bad Union"
"When a Cat"
"High In the Morning"
"Irish Lily"
"A.M.G.I.R.L."
Stephen Malkmus
instru-mentals
Stefan Müller
"Poisoned Tea"
"Tissues"

with additional music by
Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks
Barry Sallaberry
Andy Stewart

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Jason Rhoades
Julia Scher
Sensation X
Sprith Magers London Berlin
Jamie Stevens
The Jicks
Philip Valdez
Lydia & Alfred Elton van Vogt
Scott Zwiezen

shot on location in
Los Angeles
Malibu
Amboy City
Mojave Desert
Brooklyn
and Route 66



"I'll be your ghost. Forever."

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