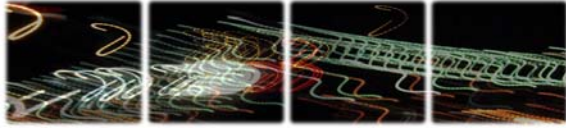


## CHAOTIC SEQUENCE, INC.



2611 28th St., Apt. #1, Astoria, NY 11102  
info@chaoticsequence.com  
<http://www.chaoticsequence.com>

Arthur Vincie, *Writer, Line Producer, Director*  
917-968-8138

### WORKING IMAGE FIRST

#### INTENTION:

Typically, we're told to write down an idea, develop it into some kind of outline/sketch, then expand it into a fully-fleshed-out text (in film, a screenplay). Even doc filmmakers, in order to secure grant money and tell people "what the project is about," have to put together a "vision statement" proposal, or synopsis.

When trying to find funds, entice actors and/or crewmembers to work on the project, and promote it to distributors, further effort goes into concretizing "what the project is about." As a line producer and screenwriter (and occasional computer programmer) I also work this way – starting out from the scaffolding of the text. This is not a bad method at all. It's necessary for many reasons. However, it's often inimical to creative thinking.

In truth, all written work starts with the *image* – a fragment from a dream, a magazine photograph, or something we caught out of the corner of our eye. But in our rush to write it down, we often impose an imprint on the image. What if the image were allowed freer reign – unencumbered by a need to explain itself or tie itself to any particular narrative? What would happen?

As an exercise, I wanted to try working backwards from a set of images, and make the story up as I went. In some ways, this is what happens in dreams – we recreate a narrative thread from discontinuous sensations. You could also argue that this is what happens in "reality" – we pick a narrative line out of the vast array of data coming at us through all our senses.

As a result, these pieces are in some ways *about* the nature of reality, dreams, and the construction of narrative.

#### CONSTRAINTS:

Experiments can easily get out of hand, so I imposed some restrictions on myself:

1. The pieces had to be short.
2. They had to be done cheaply, using whatever I had on hand or could buy at reasonable cost.

3. If something clearly wasn't working, I had to walk away from it until some later date when I could figure out how to fix it.

As a general rule, I'm a fan of *reasonable* creative constraints. Unlimited time and money is not a guarantee of quality results (look at the last three *Star Wars* films).

### **DETAILED PROCESS FOR WEID:**

Acquisition: I started by taking still photos with my digital camera (see below for a list of all my gear and software). In many cases (particularly with *Weid*), I experimented with various in-camera techniques, including:

1. **Long Exposure Times.** I would deliberately move the camera around (or take the shot from inside a car) while the shutter was open. I first discovered this by accident while crossing the Brooklyn Bridge on an equipment run (I wasn't driving). I switched the camera mode from automatic to slow-shutter by mistake while taking a picture of the Manhattan skyline.
2. **Changing the White Balance.** I set the camera for the "opposite" of the correct white balance, which brought out very different colors.
3. **Overexposing Daylight Shots.** Not too many of these made it into the final shorts, but I often tried to blow out the sky by overexposing by two or more stops.

Selection: After several months of shooting photos, I ended up with a library of over 1500 images. Out of these, I selected about 500-600 for *Weid* that struck me for one reason or another. I placed these in a separate folder.

Resampling: The images for *Weid* started out as 2592 x 1944, 180dpi images. I needed to resample them down to the HD resolution (I picked 1440x1080, 72dpi). This ensured that there wouldn't be any weirdness when importing them into the editing program. Why HD? Should these shorts ever be projected at a festival, I will be able to output them directly to an HD master without having to resort to a blow-up.

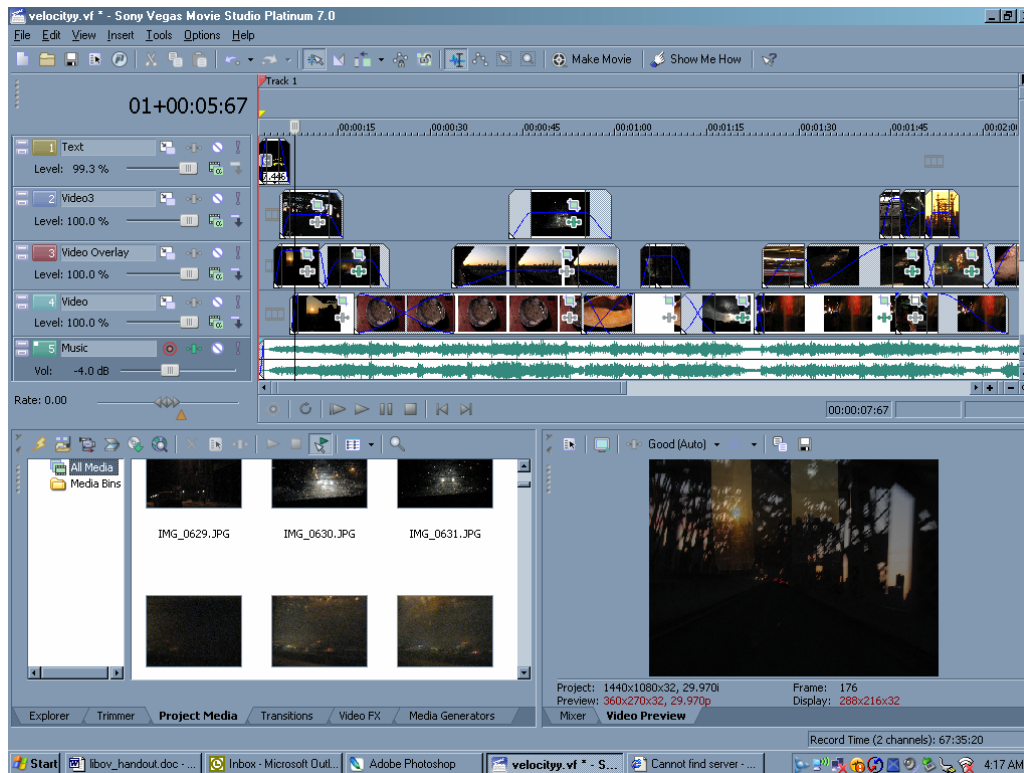
I downloaded a utility called Image Resizer.Net and fed it my folder of images, specifying an output resolution and DPI setting.

Photoshop: I used Photoshop on some of the images, to give them a different texture, color balance/saturation, or to zoom into them a bit. For *Weid*, I think I did this to about 10-15% of the images. I managed to snag my copy of Photoshop for free; but if you have budget issues, I recommend GIMP (free AND cross-platform) and ArtRage (\$30). GIMP is a fully-featured photo-editing app, and ArtRage is a really neat "natural media" paint program.

Editing: As part of my mandate to not spend a lot of money, I decided to edit the project on my laptop, a PC. After looking at Premiere and Avid DVExpress, I went

with Sony Video Vegas. The bundle that included a DVD maker (DVD Studio Pro) set me back just under \$100.

Vegas is a very simple video editing application. It's a little different from a typical NLE, but it closely resembles its music-editing cousin, Acid (which I've used before).



*Video Vegas in Action*

Importing the photos into Vegas was very simple: I told Vegas where to look for them, and that was it.

Editing Process: At first I tried to structure the editing process by creating a narrative. I went through several failed attempts at writing a voiceover that would tie everything together. I gave this up and started picking photos at random and putting them on the timeline, one after the other. After doing this for a while, I saw some clear themes emerge. I deleted a few, added others to fill in the gaps, and started adding effects (usually dissolves or superimpositions). I added more daring effects as I went along.

After doing a first cut (which came in at 8 minutes), I realized I needed some music to cut to. I borrowed a temp track — a practice I usually discourage because it's tempting to fall in love with unlicensed music. I borrowed a track from a belly dancer/performer named Anath, called "Red Layam." It's a very sinuous, slow track, with great rhythm.

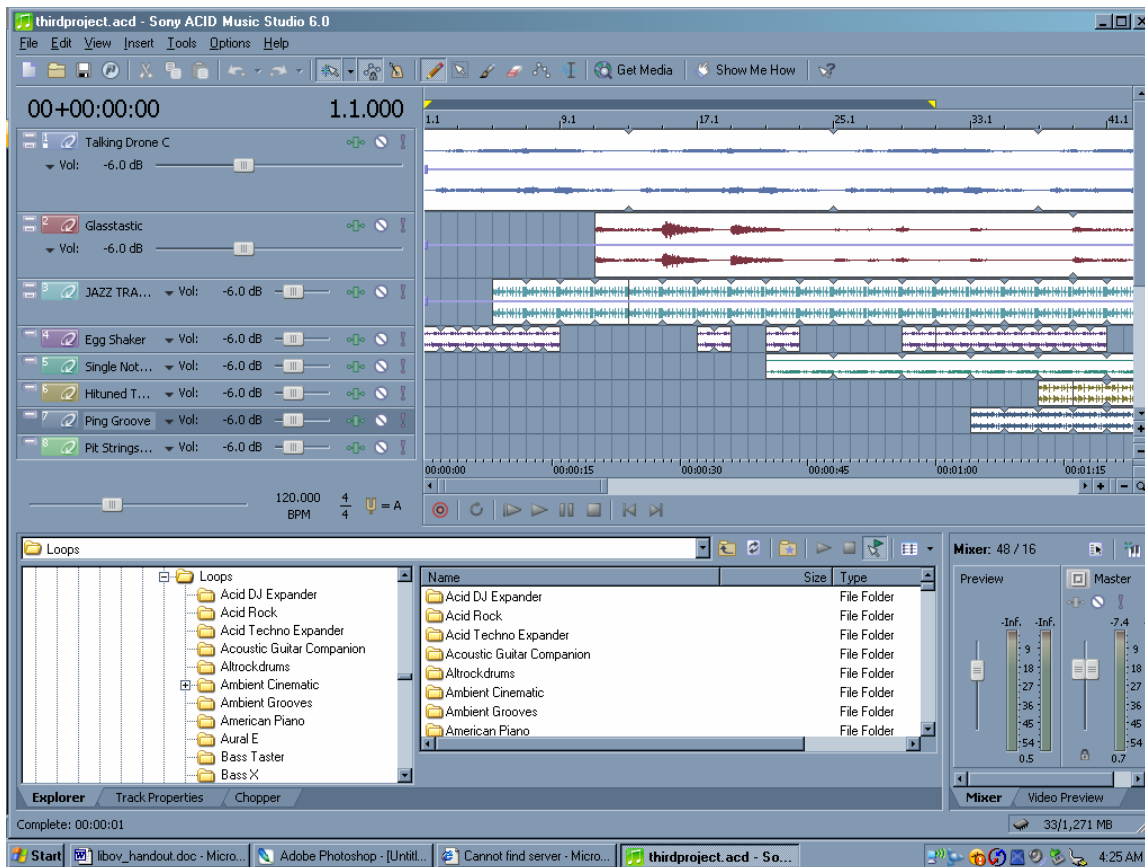
After two more cuts (which came in at 7, then 6 minutes), I realized I had to create an original track, or I was never going to get the length down.

Music: Typically, a composer doesn't score a film until it's "picture-locked." She might supply temp tracks to the editor as a guide but won't go full-out until there's no chance the picture will change. To do otherwise risks the possibility that you'll end up having to re-do big chunks of score, as the picture changes.

In my case, I figured I could get around this problem by creating a simple loop-based score, which could be shortened or lengthened as needed.

I used Acid Pro, another cheap piece of software (\$69 from Sony). Acid is a loop-based music editor. You select pre-made loops of music (ranging from a single beat to several measures), place each one on its own track, and then adjust volume, tempo, effects, etc. The loop repeats itself on each track, as often as you "draw" it in. You can also change characteristics of the loop, chop it up, or extend it.

There are several other good loop-based editors (Garageband for Mac, Freedom for both platforms, etc.)



*Acid Music Studio in action.*

Acid comes with a library of loops and "grooves" (groups of loops that fit into a musical genre). I picked about nine loops for *Weird*, and experimented with them for a few days until I felt I had the right "mix."

When I was finished, I exported the finished piece to a stereo AIFF file (lossless sound file).

Editing, Part Two: I took the finished music and lined it up with the opening image, then futzed around some more with the tempo of the film. When I was finished, I added some simple titles and exported the project to an uncompressed full-frame QuickTime file. From this uncompressed file I created a low-resolution, web-ready file. I uploaded this file to my website “unofficially,” so friends and trusted colleagues could watch it and give me feedback.

### TIMELINE:

The acquisition of photos took several months; the editing took about two weeks, and creating the music and finishing off the piece took about another two weeks.

### LESSONS LEARNED:

Resampling the images turned out not to be necessary, and also resulted in some image quality loss. The film is still about ten-to-twenty seconds too long, and there is not enough movement in the film.

### SHORT PROCESS: SECRET LANGUAGE

By the time I tackled *Secret Language*, I was more comfortable with the software, and had a surer sense of what I was looking to achieve. *Secret Language* took only about two weeks to create (not counting the acquisition phase). The process was very similar to that described above for *Weid*.

The main difference was that I experimented more with filters, zooming and panning, and I didn't use a temp track.

### SHORT PROCESS: MOURNIR/MOURNEN

For *Mournir/Mournen* I decided to use one image. There was something very elegiac sad about this photo, which I took outside my apartment. For some reason the completely average cityscape makes the clouds look even more majestic.



I also wanted to use a water tank, which is an old-fashioned filmmaking trick. You take a glass or plastic tank, fill it with water, let it settle, then place your model or (in my case) matte behind it. Then you can add things in the water — milk, sand, bits of confetti. It's a great, cheap way to make snow or weather effects.

For *Mournir* I bought a pyrex tub in Chinatown, caulked the seams with silicone to ensure it was waterproof, then filled it with water. I put it atop some books on a desk, put up the still photo on my OLD laptop and put the screen against the outside of the tank.

From the side opposite the laptop, I mounted my still camera and set it to video mode, tried to focus it the proper distance, and hit record. Then I poured watercolors, coffee and cardboard bits into the water. Shooting took several hours.

In Vegas, I transcoded the footage to uncompressed SD video, imported it into the timeline, then slowed it down to about 50% normal speed. I ended up having to do some cuts (I used long dissolves) instead of using all the footage.

Arvo Part's music perfectly captures the sense of sadness I was after, so it was easy to match up the score to the image. When I was done I knew something was missing, so I wrote down different short verses and placed them in the timeline, replacing them until one verse kept sticking with me.

## SHORT PROCESS: THE PRAYER TREE

This project took over a year to complete. All I knew when I started was that I wanted to do something with drawings and the water tank.

Water Tank: First I set up the watertank, filled it with water, then plastered a piece of thick paper inside the tank. I then drew abstract shapes with pastels while running the camera. Over time the water caused the pastels to run and streak. Most of this footage didn't turn out too well, but some of it looked interesting.

For this round of water tank work I stepped up my game and borrowed my friend's Sony Z1 (shoots HDV footage). I imported the footage into Vegas but playback was choppy due to my laptop's less-than-premium specs.

Stills: I snapped the central image – the woman standing in front of the tree – while I was out in the Bronx Botanical Gardens. I used some filters in Photoshop. There are many traditions that involve prayers and trees. Two recent examples on film would be *Lord Of The Rings* (the ents are simultaneously trees and the life force of the forest), and *In the Mood For Love* (the main character whispers his secret love into a tree and seals it up forever). But I mostly just liked the way the phrase sounded.

Video: The video was from a vacation that I took in Virginia Beach. I shot some fairly nondescript footage looking out the passenger side window of the car. When I played the footage back it reminded me of day trips I'd taken with my parents as a child. I usually found the trips quite boring, so I would build up an entire fantasy – we were in a spaceship, or a spy car, or an airplane, and we were chasing after something/running away from something/doing something momentous.

I placed the trip footage, water tank material, and the stills on different video layers, slowed them down, sped them up, and tried a number of different filters. After a while I realized I had too much going on so I deleted many of the effects.

Sound: I had a couple of half-finished Acid compositions sitting around, and combined two of them together, then altered the beat and key to match the mood of the piece. Unfortunately, the composition was too short, so I ended up looping it twice in the film.

Text: I didn't have any text for the film. I knew it needed some other element, but couldn't figure out what. I put the film aside for several months to write the first draft of what would become my second feature, and then I realized that I did, finally, need some text. First I tried writing a voice-over. I got as far as recording it. It sounded awful – there was no passion to it. I tried some title cards, and that worked a lot better. Once I decided on title cards the flow of them came very quickly. I had to recut the picture a little bit to match the titles.

**GEAR:**

Type	Name	Cost	Comments
<b>Camera</b>	Canon A95	\$175 + \$30 for 512MB card	For <i>Weid</i> I used a 5 MP digital still camera. It has enough manual controls to be useful but is still pretty small and unobtrusive.
	Canon A540	\$169 + \$20 for 512MB card	For <i>Secret Language</i> I used Canon's 6MP successor to the A95. It's smaller, with a 4x zoom and with a few more nifty controls.
	Canon A590IS	\$169 + \$40 for 8GIG card	After losing the A540 I used its successor, the Canon A590IS. I also discovered CHDK, which allows for more manual control of the camera.
<b>Editing Hardware</b>	Dell Inspiron 1525	About \$650	I bought the laptop in 2008 with 2GIG of RAM and a 320GIG hard drive. It's my main computer.
<b>Resampling</b>	Multiple Image Resizer.NET	Free	Fast and easy way to resize/resample images <a href="http://www.multipleimageresizer.net/">http://www.multipleimageresizer.net/</a>
<b>Retouching</b>	Photoshop	~\$650	I recommend learning Photoshop because it's an industry standard, but if you can't afford it (or don't know anyone who has it) you can use GIMP (free) or Corel Paintshop Pro Photo (about \$70).
<b>NLE</b>	Sony Video Vegas 7.0 Platinum	\$100	Comes with DVD Studio Pro. A very straightforward editing program, perfect for small-scale projects.
<b>Music</b>	Sony Acid Pro	\$60	A simple, loop-based music scoring program. A loop is a repeating riff or note.
<b>DVD Authoring</b>	Sony DVD Architect	Included w/Vegas	Friendly, easy-to-use DVD authoring program.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION OF IMAGES/SOUND VS. TEXT

This is a tension that has existed in films since before sound was invented, hence “text” instead of “dialog.” Silent films featured title cards, whose placement either aided in the storytelling or impeded it. At best, however, title cards were fairly clumsy. Because filmmakers couldn’t rely on dialog, they developed a language that was more poetic. *Nosferatu*, *J’Accuse*, Chaplin’s early films, *Potemkin*, *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (and most of D.W. Griffith’s work, for that matter)... watch these films and you’ll find a very individual sensibility displayed in each one.

Sound changed this by focusing attention on people’s faces, specifically on what people were saying. This meant that (in my opinion) films become more standardized in their language, at least at first. Ultimately, it enlarged the universe of film, but it created a sharper tension between images, non-dialog sound, and dialog.

In Hollywood films, images are often used *in place* of storytelling — *X-Men 3* and the *Transformers* films (and, I dare say, *Avatar*) are recent examples, where the meager stories are “bolstered” by special effects. On the other hand, there are a number of Hollywood directors — Scorsese, Spielberg, Peter Jackson, David Fincher, Michael Mann — who use images and sound as *a means of storytelling*.

Independent filmmakers are faced with a conundrum. Since most of them are writer/directors, their first instinct is to *tell* the story through dialog. Dialog is cheap. A producer’s wet dream is a two-character script that takes place in one location, where everyone talks throughout the film.

However, unless you’re Ingmar Bergman, Mike Nichols, or Sidney Lumet (all of whom had a deep understanding of their craft when they did their version of the one-room film), you’ll have a hard time crafting a *cinematic* experience out of the above scenario. *Clerks* is a fun, witty film, but it’s hard to call it cinematic. I faced this situation myself during the making of my first feature.

My first draft of *Caleb’s Door* was 94 pages long and very dialog heavy. Over the course of several rewrites, I was able to trim a good chunk of the dialog, so my shooting script was only 84 pages long. However, during the editing process, I fell in love with every bit of dialog that we shot, so my first cut of the film was 98 minutes. Adam Nadler, my editor, reworked the film and beat it back to 84 minutes, by composing entire scenes, dropping others, and taking out big chunks of dialog. In sound post, Georgia Hilton (sound designer) and Marek Kisiel (composer) put together a “worldscape” that enlarged the film and made it seem like a bigger movie than it actually is.

Learning from this experience, I built my latest film, *Found In Time*, around several key images — the objects that the main character collects, the field that he finds himself in, the tapestry that the heroine weaves. I wrote the script around those and other images. The dialog is elliptical. The characters often say something other than what they mean, and a good chunk of the film relies on images rather than dialog. This may in the end

not prove to be a completely successful strategy, but it's helped me through several periods of writer's block.

I believe now that the more you can *show* your story through visuals and sound, the more successful you can be as a filmmaker. Even films like *Sideways* and *Cold Weather*, which are essentially staged comedies with few moving shots and fairly traditional structures, show more than they tell. The dialog is relatively sparse. Much of the humor of the pieces come from reaction shots of the characters as they get caught or make bad decisions (think of the naked man chase scene in *Sideways*, or the characters eating gummi fish in *Cold Weather*).

Other filmmakers, such as Joe Carnahan and Darren Aronofsky, have had a harder time sticking to one strategy or another. Joe Carnahan's first feature, *Bloods, Guts, Bullets and Octane*, is very dialog-driven but includes enough action to keep you interested in the story. *Narc*, his best film, is very quiet, relying instead on key images (the chase scene at the beginning of the film; Jason Patric holding his child in the shower) to give you a sense of character and place.

Similarly, Aronofsky's *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Requiem for a Dream* work best when they're "quiet." *The Fountain*, however, is an uneasy mix of beautiful images and sounds and a rather hokey love story. *The Wrestler* may be his most "balanced" work, since the main "image" in the film is the main character, Mickey Rourke, and his body.

### **SOME FILMS THAT SHOW:**

*The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes* by the Quay Brothers. I also recommend their short puppet animation work. I'm not sure the film works completely, but it does feature some very strong visual/nonlinear storytelling.

*Gabbeh*, by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, merges mythology and naturalism, features some stunning imagery and – just as important – leaves gaps in the images, unknowns to be filled in by your brain.

*Inland Empire* and the rest of David Lynch's work is best appreciated at a non-textual level – it's not supposed to make literal/logistical sense, but it is coherent. I think of his films as being related to the narrative tradition in the same way that music is related to language – they are different but overlapping ways of understanding the world.

*Sarabande*, Ingmar Bergman's last film, succeeds in negotiating between image and text. Each scene is told in a very small series of shots – some are continuous takes – and the characters rarely leave the room they're in during a scene. It feels somewhat stagy – there is a LOT of dialog. But each *visual* counts for a lot more because of this. Bergman knows exactly when to stop talking and start showing.

*Songs from the Second Floor*, by Roy Andersson, is a fairly avante-garde Swedish film about the end of the world (as we know it, anyway). Almost every scene is shot in one

take, with very little camera movement. Andersson makes the most of each shot, however. Whether it succeeds or not as a film is very difficult to judge (I was entertained and only bored once), but it's certainly effective at telling its story visually.

*We Don't Live Here Anymore*, by John Curran, does a great job of using sound to convey the story. Television and radio sounds often overlap scenes, creating an eerie counterpoint to the visuals. The voice-over is a real internal monologue, and not a "let's regurgitate what's onscreen." Its success as a film is even more interesting considering it's based on two novels.

*Stalker, Mirror, Solaris...* pretty much any film by Tarkovsky will surprise you. The text is constantly in dynamic tension with the images, and the results are never boring.

*Stray Dog* by Akira Kurosawa – a relatively early (1948) film that has a lot to *show you* about post-war Japan, class issues, justice, and the code of honor. It often does so in very surprising ways, with a lot left unsaid by the characters.

## **BOOKS**

*Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud. Kitchen Sink Press. An amazing and serious analysis of comics in particular and art in general – told in comic form.

*Icon and Idea*. Herbert Read. Difficult to find, but worth reading if you can. Artists, Read contends, explore the boundaries of consciousness and reality, expand both, and then move on while the priests and scientists and others come after. Includes some very interesting analyses of art from the cave paintings at Lescaux through the time of the publication of the book (1950s).

*Crossing Over: Where Art and Science Meet*, by Stephen Jay Gould (text) and Rosamond Wolff Purcell (photographs). A book of short essays, each tied to or inspired by a still photograph.

Photo books by Diane Arbus, Eugene Smith, or Joel-Peter Witkin. While Smith might seem like the odd man out, it's important to remember that he often started from images and built the photo-essays only after he'd shot an enormous amount of material.

## **MAGAZINES/ONLINE:**

*Indie Slate*. [www.indieslate.com](http://www.indieslate.com). A terrific nuts-and-bolts bimonthly. Features camera reviews, "how I did it" stories, articles on legal, screenwriting, and distribution issues, and festival guides.

*NY Shooting People*. [www.shootingpeople.org](http://www.shootingpeople.org). A low-cost listserv, that's become a very good source of information, event notifier, and networking tool.

*HD For Indies*. [www.hdforindies.com](http://www.hdforindies.com). A good technical blog on HD, targeted at indie filmmakers.

*CreativeCow*, [www.creativecow.com](http://www.creativecow.com). A video/film/creative magazine that also features a very active user forum, a host of great tips/tricks videos, and other really cool and useful information.

### **SOFTWARE TOOLS:**

I've tried to focus on cheap or free, cross-platform solutions wherever possible.

**ARTRAGE**. [www.artrage.com](http://www.artrage.com). About \$30 buys you a terrific paint program for Mac or PC.

**AUDACITY**. <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. A free multitrack audio editor. You don't get a ton of frills (it can't lay down MIDI tracks) but it's got enough truly useful tools for you.

**CHDK**. <http://chdk.wikia.com/wiki/CHDK>. Free. This is a nondestructive firmware replacement for most Canon cameras. It doesn't permanently erase your camera's native firmware, simply overrides it while the camera is on. You get a host of unlocked goodness with this thing – RAW shooting mode, an intervalometer (for time-lapse work), better exposure control (great for nighttime shots), remote support, and a lot of other features.

**GIMP**. [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org). A free, open-source, cross-platform, fully-featured photo editor.

**PROCESSING**. [www.processing.org](http://www.processing.org). A free, open-source platform-independent programming language (don't be scared) oriented towards creating visual work. Somewhat similar to Flash but with a different focus. I've just started playing with it and it has some amazing capabilities.

**VIDEO VEGAS**. [www.sonycreativesoftware.com](http://www.sonycreativesoftware.com). The read-headed stepchild of the NLEs, this (much cheaper) PC-only editor does a good job. It comes with a host of decent effects and a really good set of titler tools.

**YELLOW TOOLS INDEPENDENCE FREE**. <http://www.yellowtools.us/>. A multitrack sound editor/MIDI controller/loop-based tool. Free, for Mac and PC. Plus it comes with 2 GIGS of audio source files.