

SEEING RED

by Su Friedrich

Script Notes:

Most segments fade out as the music comes up, so I've just cut the text at the point where it starts to become inaudible.

The headings in italics indicate which segment of "The Goldberg Variations," by Johann Sebastian Bach, is being heard and what image(s) accompany it but none of that text appears in the film.

Variation #1—Theme (with opening montage)

The fact is that I'm fifty years old and I don't seem to have any much more control over my feelings and my behavior towards other people than I did thirty years ago. I mean, I do have a little more control-- sometimes I can stop and remind myself that I shouldn't be doing a certain something, or I should go out and have fun instead of driving myself crazy sitting at my desk working...but I just seem to be a control freak.

You know, I live in this big house with her and a couple of roommates and, you know, if I walk down the hallway, I see a piece of paper and I think, "Well, I wonder if anybody's going to notice that paper and pick it up," and after three days nobody, of course, nobody has bothered to pick it up because why should people be worrying about shit like that? But I go and I pick it up and I think, "You see, nobody noticed that piece of paper!" And I go away to school and I put a note on the door saying "Please get the mail" and sometimes people don't get the mail but most of the times they do because they also want their mail, so why do I think I'm the only one who gets the mail? And I've just worked myself up over the years into this, like, hideous, maniacal person who feels like everything has to be in its place and if things are out of their place then, you know, far better that I should go launder the napkins and pick up that piece of paper in the hall than, you know, sit....

Variation #7 (baseball catcher)

And boy oh boy, when I was seventeen and eighteen and nineteen I thought, "Fuck that, man, I am *never* gonna to do that!" And I spent a lot of years not having kids and

doing...you know, eating out at shitty restaurants and doing my own work 'cause I thought I'll be *goddamned* if I'm going to be a fucking housewife...and I have turned into a fucking housewife and I can't *stand* it! (cries)...And then, you know, the things you can't stand, you start finding a way that they're good for you, so, you know, I bake! I bake all the fucking time and I then think, "Oh, the roommates will like it." Or I bring it to school and everybody at school is totally thrilled and meanwhile what the fuck am I doing baking all the time, why am I doing this? I just don't understand it! [*cries*]

Variation #3 (*pink ribbons flapping on sticks*)

I've probably said "should" about ten times already in the last three minutes, and this is a lot about "should," and on the train here this morning I was talking to a friend of mine and we were both talking about how, when you get to this age, you can know what you're supposed to do...and never do it. And what the fuck is it that makes you get up and do the thing instead of constantly talking to your friends on the phone and to your girlfriend and to yourself and writing in your journal about, like, "I should remember not to get too tired" and "I should remember not to be too angry," and I should...should, should, should, should, should...all the time! And then it's this constant feeling of failure. And...I don't know...I don't know what to say about that. Words of wisdom don't come, don't come.

Variation #15 (*construction site, pipes and plastic*)

It's like we keep trying to understand what it is that we do that fucks us up and keep trying to change it, and it just seems like that is nearly impossible. And I must say there is something deeply unfair about that. There's something...I mean, I don't believe in god, but whoever figured this out really had a bad sense of humor, because...Here we all are, there are six billion of us now in the world, most of whom have jobs that don't pay enough, that make them miserable, that are boring, whatever...Um...have trouble in their families either because they have trouble with their spouses, or their kids are a wreck, or whatever, and it's like, okay, I was saying this to my roommate the other night and I said, "Probably ninety-nine percent of the six billion are like that." and he said, "Well, maybe it's more like ninety." So even if it's ninety percent, what is that? I can't do that math that fast, but that's a hell of a lot of people on this planet who, you know, invoke god every day, several times a day, that their life will be better, or play the lottery, or take drugs, or drink, or smoke, or ...you know, cheat on their spouses....

Variation #22 (man selling ices and counting dollars)

There's an Emily Dickinson poem that I've always loved. I think it goes like this:

To make a prairie, it takes a clover, a bee and reverie.

The reverie alone will do if bees are few.

So, reverie ...that seems to be a very hard thing to do. I don't know why...I guess a thought of a beautiful place leads to thinking about not being able to go there because I don't have money which leads to thinking about how I'm earning my money which leads to worrying about the students and worrying about how I'm going to grade them and worrying about whether they like me or not and then suddenly I'm worrying instead of thinking about this nice place that I could go to. And instead of using the thought of it as a restful moment, it just turns into this panic attack!

So I think I have to stop because I'm going to go see a movie and dinner as part of my plan to do things that are fun...and hopefully I'll enjoy myself...

Variation #8 (cherry tree)

Um...I suppose it would be great if I could think that I have a certain number of mannerisms and devices and, you know, values, uh... interests, whatever and I can just, you know, do variations on them, so it's not just a matter of like, you know, being a bad person and then trying to turn into a different person but instead think, well, you're a very...a very enthusiastic person and so sometimes that means you're manic and excessive and other times it means you're incredibly focused and appreciative and whatever...

So it's just like this personality and then the different moments are variations on this personality all of which hold a certain interest or a...the way the Goldberg variations do, um...but it seems instead it's like....

Variation #9 (robin)

I've written on the frontispiece: "Nestled in the crook of my arm where the sweat creeps on a summer day." I guess I carried this in the crook of my arm where the sweat crept on a summer day [*laughs*]...Oh goodness...Oh, he's so direct...Here's one, in a section

called “By the Roadside,” called “O me, O Life!” ...So much the sentiment of a twenty year old! I mean, I can imagine being twenty and reading this and of course, when you’re twenty, you’re, like, “Oh me, oh life!” I seem to be doing the same thing at fifty, but anyway [*starts to read poem*]:

Variation #29 (*while poem is being read*)

O Me, O Life

*O me, O life! Of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,
Of myself, forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more
faithless?)*

It’s really scary, it’s really scary...And what really is fucked about making a diary [film] is that, you know, I come in here thinking, “Oh, I’m gonna do that,” and then it takes me a good seven minutes or more to set up the equipment and I’ve gotten so preoccupied with the equipment that I’ve kind of forgotten my upsetness.

Then I start talking and I feel like, “Well, now I have to get back in touch with my upsetness so that this will be an interesting performance,” and this is *not* about a performance. And then I get worked up to the point where I feel really upset, like now I’m saying it’s really scary and it actually is incredibly scary and I feel like crying but then I think, “Well, now, if you cry that’ll be good ‘cause you’ll be crying and that’ll be really emotional and, you know, moving.” But then I’m just doing it like a fucking *performance!*

And part of the problem...part of what is so fucked up is that I feel like most of life is about performing for people--it’s like, being the nice teacher, being the good child, being the good parent, being the good lover, being the good neighbor, being the good citizen, you know, and probably a lot of, like, being bad is also performance, and my god, my god, I’m *sick* of it!

Variation #6 (*red wall*)

Shit...Somebody’s here and I don’t want them to overhear me...What am I going to do?...Oh...I think I have to wait a minute...

Variation #19 (*boys, woman in park*)

So it's, uh, ten to ten, and a little more...a little less than twelve hours ago I was sitting at the therapist's and I had the same feeling I had yesterday, which is that I just keep saying the same thing over and over again. And it just seems that there really must be a point that you reach where you can no longer say and do the same things again...

But I don't know when that point is, and I don't know if I'm there, but it seems that the alternative is really grim, 'cause when you get to be fifty, you don't have that much time left, so if you don't do it as soon as you can, you might be fucked.

Variation #20 (Staples)

I wonder what it's like, you know, with parents 'cause they're always telling their kids what to do and what not to do...I'm sure it comes back to haunt them, um, or it comes back as a joke on them, and...I think when you're a teacher you get into the same position because you're constantly having to repeat what you supposedly know...My cat is like tearing up the couch...What you supposedly know, and uh...She totally, she distracted me...

So you're always having to tell the students what you supposedly know—I mean, that's why you got the job--because you know something like red doesn't look good on video or metaphors have to be handled carefully...And I really, you know, I get to the point where I just hate saying "Well, this is the way it's done," because I'm at the point where I think I don't *really* know how it's done.

I mean I'm not...I'm not saying I feel like a complete *idiot* or I'm going to jump off a bridge, but why can't I use red? You know, why can't I? Like, **red!** Blinding, mushy, hideous red, bleeding all over the screen, you don't wanna watch it, you don't get any information...You know, why the fuck *not*? I don't know, but chances are when I'm...

Variation #14 (undressing scene)

(In the last segment, the voices become layered, overlapping, can't be clearly discerned, so I've only included the very first and last bits.)

The daily labor...and, you know, I'm a woman, and I don't overlook the fact that I think of doing all these things in light of being a woman, who...And we were both talking about...I don't know if I'm there...And part of what is so fucked up is that I feel like most of life is *performing* for other people!

Tail credits:

Camera and editing by Su Friedrich

Sound mix by Bill Seery at Mercer Media

“O Me, O Life!”

From “Leaves of Grass”

by Walt Whitman

“To Make a Prairie...”

F1779

by Emily Dickinson

The Goldberg Variations

BWV988

by Johann Sebastian Bach

Performed by Glenn Gould

1982

CBS Records

Funded by a grant from the Princeton University Committee on Research in the
Humanities and Social Sciences

For Martina

© 2005 Downstream Productions, Inc.

(and here is the correct version of the poem)

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,--

One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.

---Emily Dickinson (1830–86).