

ARGOT PICTURES
PRESENTS



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THE INSTITUTE

Welcome to the Jejune Institute, a mind-bending San Francisco phenomenon where 10,000 people became "inducted" without ever quite realizing what they'd signed up for. Was it a cult? Was it an elaborate game? Told from the participants' perspectives, this film looks over the precipice at an emergent new art form where real world and fictional narratives collide, creating unforeseen and often unsettling consequences. Fusing elements of counter-culture, new religious movements and street art, this film invites viewers into a secret underground world teeming just beneath the surface of everyday life.

CREATIVE TEAM

DIRECTOR Spencer McCall PRODUCER Spencer McCall
CO-PRODUCER Uriah Findley ARCHIVIST Mark Ellis
EDITOR Spencer McCall COLOR CORRECTION Rudy Lopez
GRAPHICS Eric Neff CINEMATOGRAPHY Paul Encinas
HISTORICAL CONSULTANT Ted Peters
CREW Jenny McCall John Murtaugh Nick Echols Joshua Shaw Tyler MacNiven
SOUND EDITING/MIXING Brendon Harry Uriah Findley
ORIGINAL MUSIC Anthony Cardenas
RE-RECORDING MIXER & SOUND DESIGN Kyrsten Mate
PRESENTED BY Pen & Banjo Films and Nonchalance

92 MIN. COLOR, STEREO/SURROUND
ENGLISH, USA, 2012
WWW.THEINSTITUTEMOVIE.COM



SYNOPSIS

"To those dark horses with the spirit to look up and see... a recondite family awaits." Welcome to the Jejune Institute, a mind-bending San Francisco phenomenon where 10,000 people became "inducted" without ever quite realizing what they'd signed up for. Was it a cult? Was it an elaborate game? Told from the participants' perspectives, this film looks over the precipice at an emergent new art form where real world and fictional narratives collide, creating unforeseen and often unsettling consequences. Fusing elements of counter-culture, new religious movements and street art, this film invites viewers into a secret underground world teeming just beneath the surface of everyday life.

Starting in 2008, enigmatic fliers began to appear on San Francisco street corners, urging unsuspecting citizens to visit the 16th floor of a skyscraper in the Financial District. Once there, a video would begin playing, with a charismatic older gentleman in a turtleneck and sport coat addressing the audience. This man was Octavio Coleman Esq., and his organization, The Jejune Institute, was ready to "induct" these people into a new life. This film chronicles the 3 year existence of this mysterious group, which towed the line between cult, art piece, and elaborate game, and brought its over 10,000 participants into an alternative reality wherein the line between fiction and fact became irrevocably blurred. Participants engaged in city-wide scavenger hunts, mass protests, and daring search-and-rescue missions, all the while unraveling a narrative whose disparate parts eventually coalesced into a greater, touching story - of loss, grief and remembrance.



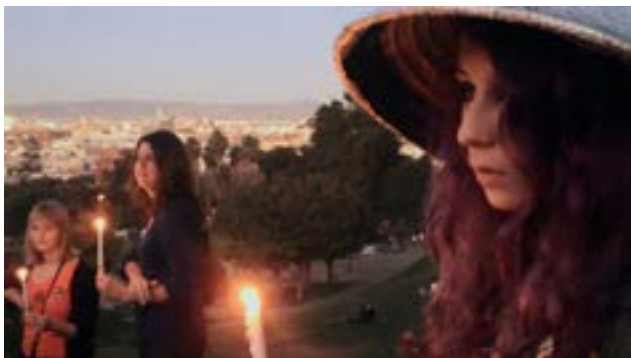
FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

Spencer McCall (Director):

In 2008, I was laid off from my first job out of college. I was a young videographer traveling around the world, documenting and editing videos of cloned puppies for a now defunct pet cloning company called BioArts Int. Unsure where to turn with an unusual and often not believed skill set, I consulted Craigslist. It was here that I found a cryptic and mysterious post requesting the need for a series of videos to be produced on a very fringe and completely ambiguous facet of Bay Area history. That being the history of a new age facility called The Jejune Institute, which had apparently existed in San Francisco since 1962.

What came next was an off-and-on one year gig editing propaganda-like pieces for this dubious organization. All business was conducted through email. I never met anyone in person and was never told what my work was to be used for, let alone did I ever see where it ended up. Each month a new script and link to footage would appear in my inbox and I would edit these historical/educational pieces on the significance of The Jejune Institute in The Bay Area. Topics ranged from technological advances like Poly Water, Time Cameras, and Vital orbit Human Force Fields to the importance of deciphering hidden street art imagery and message. Confusion was abounding.

To say my interest was piqued would be tame. But never was I given an explanation as to the validity or utility of the work that I was creating. However, the more questions I asked the more answers I would get; and eventually, a story started to emerge. I began to learn about a concept known as the “Urban Playground Movement” and “Alternate Reality gaming” — projects aimed at reclaiming public spaces in urban environments. What I ended up learning was that I was involved in an elaborate, citywide, interactive art piece; intent on turning denizens of the city into explorers, creators, and street artists. It aimed to do so by inviting every day citizens into an elaborate narrative. In becoming part of the story, participants helped to reclaim public spaces for the purpose of bringing spontaneity and expression into our otherwise dense, fixed, and monotone civic spaces.



After nearly a year of helping to produce the video components for this project, I realized that I probably had enough footage of participants, installations, and archived material to create a feature film of the project; nearly 200 hours worth. With such an abstract concept, it was my hope to explain just what was going on in the streets and alleys of San Francisco from 2008 to the time of project's closure in 2011. During the project, nearly 10,000 people in San Francisco participated with the Jejune Institute; each person learning about it through word of mouth or the often less-than-legal street art itself. So I set about contacting many of the key participants to interview them and have them tell their story. I began shooting in September of 2011 and finished post-production in July of 2012.

Complications definitely ensued when I realized that the Jejune Institute not only attracted people interested in its game-like components, but that it also attracted less than-stable individuals who were especially drawn to the cult angle of the project. Being able to interview such people was perhaps the biggest challenge of the film. I had to develop relationships with many such people teetering on the edge of sanity. This process took months of social development before shooting could even begin.

This film explores a general theme of perception versus reality. The lesson that audiences should take from the film, and perhaps the Jejune Institute itself, is that if you take the time during the day to look up from your phone or insular world, there are amazing, beautiful and intriguing things going on just under the surface of everyday life. I hope that audiences see the film and begin to question the media that they are presented with. Too often we are quick to assume what is real and what is fake. But with the increasing interest in 'found footage films' and reality television, the medium of documentaries are assuming a unique position, where legitimacy is becoming more and more a relative concept. In this way, I believe documentaries to be a wonderful catalyst for education, but not the education itself.



Jeff Hull (Writer, Creator of the Jejune Institute):

I produced the Jejune Institute experience, which is the subject of The Institute documentary. As it turns out, the project has been a life changing experience for myself and many of the participants who chose to engage with it. The most compelling part of the documentary for me is not the story being told of our project, but the emergent meta-narrative that evolves through our relationship with the players. And like life, it is not always nice... these encounters can be unpredictable, unsettling, both challenging and rewarding, and in some cases unbelievably beautiful.

I really had no idea when we began building the Jejune Institute of the profound effect it would have on participants. It appeared to offer a new lens through which to view the world. The method of storytelling and situational design is both interactive and totally immersive, existing in the environment around you, where the borders are quite uncertain. I think this is what makes The Institute documentary so compelling; the notion that there are so many threads to unravel, and just when you think you know what the story is about, it shifts and changes in front of you, distorting your sense of reality.

I feel Spencer McCall did an incredible job of filtering through the thousands of hours of bizarre footage and finding the stories within. He was able to portray the whimsy, the intensity, and the great heart of the experience, and to translate it into an enjoyable and often hilarious film. The movie is very much like the game, in which your sensibilities are challenged, and you come out changed in some way. I also believe the film is an interesting commentary on the user backlash against social media, online gaming, and the proliferation of mobile technology. Audiences are hungry for a deeper more direct form of engagement. The Institute offers a glimpse into an imagined future of real-world entertainment.



SELECT PRESS

“The #1 film people will be talking about at Sundance.”

– LA Weekly

“Playfully subversive... Rarely have I felt so absorbed.”

– The Village Voice

“A brilliantly constructed film... a remarkable feat.” 5 Stars.

– Mike Scott, The Times-Picayune

“A must for performance-art students, latent Situationists, punks, hippies, radicals, cultural studies academics, the unconscionably bored, and any theater person who goes beyond Sam Shepard.”

– The Portland Phoenix

“Hull, his colleagues, their characters and the participants are constantly engaged in questions of engagement — about being awake to mystery around you, about surrogate families, about the clarifying eustress that solving a puzzle provides.”

– dane101.com

“Using a combination of interviews and film footage from the creators of the game and from participants, McCall puts together a well-spun story that takes viewers all the way down the rabbit hole.”

– Slug Magazine

“When a player says, without much irony, “Then the Sasquatch gave me the transcript,” you know you’re DEEP down the rabbit hole.”

– HollywoodChicago.com





CREDITS

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INTERVIEWEES

Garland Glessner, Carolee Gilligan Wheeler, Jason Schupp,
Gordon Mclachlan, Jeff Hull, Uriah Findley, Sara Thacher,
Jake Cenicerros, Daniel Shoup, Darin De Stefano,
Michael Wertz, Kiyomi Tanouye, Geordie Aitken

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