GROWTH FILMS presents
pursuit of loneliness
An elderly female patient dies in a county hospital leaving no known next of kin. Over the course of the next twenty-four hours, the film charts the efforts of four central characters in finding a family member to contact in regards to the death of this anonymous individual: a nurse, a social worker, the emergency contact person listed on the decedent’s admission form, and lastly an investigator from the public administrator’s office.

Slowly but surely we become privy to the manner in which all belongings, holdings and personal effects of the decedent are gathered and accounted for, and we begin to understand that we are in fact witness to the systematic eradication and extinction of an individual. This is essentially a cautionary tale of the preciousness of community and the importance of family that have been taken far too much for granted in a social climate of comparative wealth and cultural apathy.

“Pursuit of Loneliness” was written and directed by Laurence Thrush. Acclaimed artist William Basinski provides the soundtrack. The cast is comprised of real doctors, nursing staff and investigators from the Los Angeles Coroner’s Office, and the film blends elements of documentary realism within the confines of a strong narrative.

The film is set in Los Angeles, where as many as 100 people are employed in the office of the public administrator to manage the unclaimed bodies of the deceased with no next of kin. A study of the way in which institutional health care and bureaucracy can desensitize us to the point where we lose sight of the face of humanity behind human suffering, the film poses the difficult question of whether people end up living in a certain way because they choose to or because society reduces them to a certain type of existence.
“Pursuit of Loneliness”
Synopsis

What happens when someone dies and there’s no record of any next of kin? “Pursuit of Loneliness” looks at that deeply personal and interpersonal question when an elderly woman dies anonymously in a county hospital. Four central characters - a nurse, a social worker, the emergency contact person listed on the admission form, and an investigator for the public administrator - try to find the deceased woman’s family over the next twenty-four hours.

Slowly but surely we watch as her belongings and personal effects are gathered and accounted for and we witness the bit-by-bit eradication and extinction of an individual. In a world that values possessions and comparative wealth, this is a cautionary tale of the preciousness of community and the importance of family. “Pursuit of Loneliness” is a very human story but it studies things that can be very inhumane: institutional health care, bureaucracy, money, apathy; and it makes us ask ourselves whether people end up living in a certain way because they choose to or because society reduces them to it.

Laurence Thrush wrote and directed “Pursuit of Loneliness”. Acclaimed artist William Basinski provides the soundtrack. The cast is comprised of real doctors, nurses and investigators from the Los Angeles Coroner’s Office. The film blends elements of documentary realism within the confines of a strong narrative.

“Pursuit of Loneliness” is set in Los Angeles where nearly 100 people work to identify the next of kin for unclaimed bodies at the public administrator’s office.
**“Pursuit of Loneliness”**
**LAURENCE THRUSH**
**Filmography**

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“Pursuit of Loneliness”
Directors Statement

This screenplay originated from an incident that my girlfriend told me had happened to her at work. Being a nurse and on call, she was called into work in the middle of the night and seeing as she could not leave her young daughter alone by herself in the apartment, she took her with her to the hospital. The daughter was told to wait in the nurses office while her mother attended to the patient that she had been called in to perform an ultrasound exam for. Whilst waiting for her mother, the daughter could hear a patient calling out repeatedly for water, yet no one came to his aid. The daughter was struck by how sad it was that this elderly; infirm man had no one to attend to this most basic of needs.

My intention was to make a film that examines what happens to people who have no one to care for them. Taking this to the extreme, I invented a scenario where an elderly patient dies alone in a hospital, with no next of kin, no friends or family to contact. The subsequent search for next of kin sets in motion a mystery drama that explores the central thesis that in the United States you can lose all contact with family and friends until no one knows or cares if you even exist.

Having lived and worked in Los Angeles for the last eleven years, I have experienced the city as a fractured landscape lacking basic social infrastructure, a place that is a collection of strangers. The entire film is set in Los Angeles, where as many as 100 people are employed in the office of the public administrator to manage the unclaimed bodies of the deceased with no next of kin. During the making of the film I struggled with the question of whether people end up living in a certain way because they choose to or because their society reduces them to a certain type of existence. I see the film as a cautionary tale of the preciousness of community and the importance of family that have been taken far too much for granted in a social climate of comparative wealth and cultural apathy.

Stylistically, the film is a chronicle of pure procedure. All standard practices associated with attempting to locate next of kin are adhered to at every stage of the process. This all culminates with an extensive search of the decedent’s home, where she seemed to live out the last few years of her life as a virtual recluse. Slowly but surely we become privy to the manner in which all belongings, holdings and personal effects of the decedent are gathered and accounted for, and we begin to understand that we are in fact witness to the systematic eradication and extinction of an individual.

This film is based on a singular, ambitious premise or "what if?...", "what if a person dies leaving no next of kin" and the rest of the film just allows this premise to unfold. The film documents the effect on the hospital staff and public employees that such an event inevitably causes. I wanted to make a humanist film that focuses on the drama of a solitary forgotten individual, a small, observation piece that might be reflective of the larger problems of a troubled society.
“Pursuit of Loneliness”
KEN HANADA
Producer

Ken Hanada is a Japanese Producer currently living in Los Angeles.

In 1986 Ken joined SIZE, Inc. a commercial production company out of Tokyo Japan as a production coordinator building his experience up to a producer, networking the Tokyo office with Los Angeles, New York and Sydney for 8 years.

In 1994 Ken left SIZE, Inc. to work as a freelance director and creative director for various record label companies and Japanese Feature film companies. 5 years of directing lead to more than 30 music video’s for the Japanese market. Ken also had his chance to assist Japanese directors on various feature films for Japan during this time.

In 1999 Ken was asked to join the creative team at Delphys Inc. an advertisement agency owned by TOYOTA. He worked as an agency producer and a creative director for them creating numerous advertisement campaigns for TOYOTA specializing in the international corporate campaigns which ran in the Pan-European market and also the Pan-Asian market.

In 2005 the Pan-European TOYOTA corporate campaign “Aim: Zero Emissions” was awarded as the Best Automobile campaign at the MEDIA & MARKETING AWARDS. In 2006 the “Aim: Zero Emissions” campaign was again awarded the Best in promoting CSR at IVCA Clarion Awards and also won the Sappi print media Efficiency award at the EACA EFFIES Awards.

In 2006 Ken stirring his inner desire to purse making films left Delphys Inc. to producer and direct films.

In 2009 through Producer Takao Saiki, Ken was introduced to Laurence to help produce the upcoming movie “Pursuit of Loneliness” with Laurence. Filming took place in 2009 in increments and now is completed.

Ken is now in development of two films that are due to be released in 2012-2013.
“Pursuit of Loneliness”

CAST

Cynthia Ratsch  Joy Hille
Maria Escalante  Sandra Escalante
Joni Young  Suzanne Faha
Jen Herrera  Monique Flores
Beverly  Sharron Munfus
Kirsi  Kirsi Toivanen
Brooke  Natalie Fouron
Jose  Jose Jauregui
Mr. Bennett  John Magginetti
Head of Nursing  Jim Ratsch
Doctor  Donna Ames
Ward Walker  Ward Douglas Heid
Head of Public Administrator Dept  Craig Hendrickson
Interviewee  Justine Herrera
Nurse at convalescent home  Tamika Donelson
Ultra Sound Patient  Carolyn Downs
Patient  Lucienne Sylla
Patient  Donald Sitnick
Patient  Ardy's Lloyd
Risk Management  Janice Sidorick
Director of Patient care  Jude Aluce
Hospital Director  Cheryl Campos
Director of Nursing  Linda Cline
Veterinarian  Allyne Moon
Veterinarian Receptionist  Irene Cools
Nursing Secretary  Sharon Canet
Nurse  Susan Allen
Nurse  Shelly Anzivino
Nurse  Angela Baltazar
Nurse  Hollis Brown
Nurse  Marlene Daley
Nurse  Denise Fisher
Nurse  Paige Hale
Nurse  Grace Hurtado
Nurse  Natasha Van Der Linde
Nurse  Mabel Rodriguez
Nurse  Mary Showstark
Nurse  Sabrina Smulders
Nurse  Alicia Thomas
Nurse  George Villarreal
Public Administrator Office Assistant  Sylvia Hernandez
Public Administrator Deputy  David Smith
Public Administrator Deputy  Brian Elias
Public Administrator Deputy  Ryan Hays
Public Administrator Deputy  Hiroshi Igaki
Public Administrator Deputy  David Goldstein
Public Administrator Deputy  James White
Police Officer  Bryan Gallaway
EMT Nurse  Nick Aranda
Animal Control Officer: Ron Johnston
Neighbor #1: Alex Timmons
Neighbor #2: John Elam
Religious Visitors: John Kirby
Religious Visitors: Robin Kirby
Shopkeeper: Quen Ma
Pharmacist: DJ Patel
Pharmacy employee: Carime Gallegos
Head of Security: Gary Rifat
Security Guard: Michael Arteya
Cleaning lady: Guadalupe Garay
Hair salon stylist: Hilda Marruto
Convalescent Home Receptionst: Karolina Fil
Roommate: Maitlen Churton
Cynthia Ratsch Body Double: Mickey Faerch

CREW

Writer / Director: Laurence Thrush
Director of Photography: Gary Young
Producer: Ken Hanada
Sound Recordist: Vinnie Fatato
Editor: Olaf Harris
UPM: Hiroshi Igaki
1st Assistant Camera: Mark Braun
Additional Sound Engineers: Gene Martin & Zach Wrobel
Art department: Diane Kami
Finishing, titles and compositing: Ben Looram
Color Timing: Dan Sumpter
Sound Design and Mixing: Eric Ryan
Special make-up: Akiko Matsumoto
Camera Department PA: Keisuke Saito
Production Assistant: Tatsuya Yamauchi
Production Assistant: Jun Umemoto
Location Manager (Cemetery): John Robinson
Location Scout: Stuart Barter

Music by WILLIAM BASINISKI c/o SHAKTI MUSIC
Pursuit of Loneliness

Documentary-styled down to the casting of primarily non-pro actors in their own workplace roles, "Pursuit of Loneliness" pays dispassionate attention to concerns most people prefer not to think about until forced: preparing for death, and its bureaucratic aftermath.

By DENNIS HARVEY

Documentary-styled down to the casting of primarily non-pro actors in their own workplace roles, "Pursuit of Loneliness" pays dispassionate attention to concerns most people prefer not to think about until forced: preparing for death, and its bureaucratic aftermath. Scrupulously neutral and naturalistic, but still involving, Laurence Thrush's second feature is probably too stark for most commercial avenues. Still, it should do well on the fest circuit while attracting more adventurous arts casters and DVD/download distribs.

It takes a while to realize the lady we first see walking two small dogs in a park is Cynthia (Joy Hille), an elderly Los Angeleno found dead in her hospital bed by a shaken young ultrasound technician. It takes even longer to realize that "Pursuit" tells one story in two parallel strands, the first of which gradually reveals loner Cynthia's last days, living alone in a house alarmingly cluttered with evidence of her hoarding and TV shopping-network addictions. A second, more dominant thread charts the actions required by hospital procedure and public law after her demise. These are complicated by the fact that Cynthia has passed on without an apparent will, surviving relatives or even neighbors who knew her as more than a nodding acquaintance.

What could easily have been a dull or maudlin slog instead becomes a barely fictionalized portrait of people at work in unheralded jobs. All are thoroughly professional, most pleasant, a couple strictly by-the-book. Much specialized labor is required to settle Cynthia's worldly affairs, from the chief shift nurse who officially records her passing to the animal-services worker picking up her dogs.

It falls to no-nonsense public administrator's office rep Joni (Suzanne Faha) to begin the arduous task of taking inventory in the shuttered home, cataloguing clothes with the pricetags still on and 35-year-old prescription bottles so the residence can be cleared for future habitation (or demolition). Just as this life's loose ends appear to be tying up -- inasmuch as the authorities can manage -- the pic returns to previously introduced figure Mr. Bennett (John Magginetti), who is similarly without close friends or family as Alzheimer's forces him reluctantly from a hospital bed to a convalescent home.

Thrush, whose Japanese-language feature "Left Handed" dealt with another socially isolated protagonist (a teenage boy who refuses to leave his bedroom for two years), has a good eye and a sure feel for workplace routine. There's scarcely a moment that feels acted, and while the pic does bog down a bit toward the end, its nonjudgmental, detached yet empathetic progress holds interest more than one might expect. Nonetheless, some viewers will inevitably find the black-and-white feature excessively restrained and undramatic.

Apart from a few too many lingering back-of-the-head shots, assembly is both unobtrusive and carefully thought through, with William Basinski's score the most emotionally assertive contribution.

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http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117947161?refcatid=31
A film festival can be a wild environment of free-ranging hustlers, wheelers, dealers, erstwhile filmmakers, publicists, and various two-legged creatures with phones apparently permanently attached to their faces. It can also be a gathering place for cinephiles and other mad people so crazed about cinema that they may fly halfway around the globe to catch the first possible viewing of a Sokurov, Apichatpong, or Ceylan. It can be a zone of nationalist zeal—the host country’s movie business and artists finally given a chance to be heard above the perpetual, worldwide din of Hollywood. It can be a safe haven for audiences and critics both, the former with a chance to be the first on their block to see a future Oscar-winner, the latter with an opportunity for (fingers crossed) a genuine discovery. It can be a mess, a royal waste of time, and just as bad, money. It can be wonderful, cathartic, life-altering, fundamental.

This is the first in a series of festival dispatches on the Film Comment blog that will try to convey what festivals are doing today, and particularly glean meaning and worth from the films these festivals have selected. Since it’s long been established that festivals now provide films with a means of public distribution entirely separate from a theatrical release (and now, the VOD and various video platforms), they can be the exclusive means for connecting with significant young filmmakers and generally with work too daring or dangerous for the conventional marketplace but that must be seen.

Since these dispatches come from a critic’s perspective (but also the perspective of one who has programmed for and worked for several festivals), the attitude won’t be one of a festival tourist (there won’t be carping about having to trudge through snowdrifts in Park City, or the sunburn one inevitably gets in Cannes) but of a film lover and explorer. That’s who I am, and who I say I am, when asked. Festivals, at their best, demand and reward the visitor with a sense of adventure, risk. The films that follow that same course tend to be the ones remembered long after a festival’s circus tent is deflated, folded up, and trucked away.

That’s certainly the case with the 2012 edition of Sundance. Of the 40 premiering features I saw, six (or 15%) emerged as films that will matter over the long run, and even flirt with greatness. There are many years at Sundance when you’re lucky to hit 15% with good films, so 2012 might be an above-average year at Park City. (That’s the thing about festivals, and it’s pretty unavoidable: failure rates are high.) What’s curious in this, and maybe even perverse, is that these six were generally found outside of the high-profile competition sections, and sometimes in sections that, due to scheduling, were relatively hard to access, such as the recently invented alt section titled “Next.”

The most beautiful and saddest film was certainly Denis Côté’s Bestiaire, filmed with extraordinary instinct and sense for compositional drama by Côté at a wild animal park on the Quebec–New York State border. (It also screened at the Berlin Film Festival, in its Forum section.) All of Côté’s films are concerned to one degree or another with the ways in which people work within (Carcasses) or coexist with (Curling) nature; a near-obsession with forests is only one of their dominant visual tropes. Oddly, given that this is Côté’s most explicit film yet about aspects of the natural world, the forest here becomes part of the background, since it surrounds the park. More central, as established in a concise and clever opening montage, is the idea that we, as viewers, play an important role as observers of images and of renderings of the natural world. A group of student artists drawing a taxidermically stuffed creature serves as the film’s visual introduction to such observation, and for the role that Côté consciously plays as an image-maker. This preamble frames everything that follows, as a montage of images reveals a massive compound holding a vast array of exotic animals, including giraffe, hippos, and lions, first seen in containment and then later in an ersatz kind of “freedom” as they’re released to their predetermined zones of the park. Without words on the soundtrack, or text and graphics on screen, the film conveys its sense of melancholy—not anger, really—over the state of relations between humans and animals, and the ways in which a park simulating nature creates its own kind of fiction, with the animals as characters in a preordained scenario of entertainment. Côté’s camera framing is always sharp, but it’s never been this precise, this attuned to the sense of visual limits and borders, and so assertively full-frontal—we stare at the animals, and they stare back. (And what movie, we wonder, are they watching?) The camera is deliberately, and ironically, a tool in hemming in the animals, while at the same time the HD video cinematography is pushed to extreme levels of definition, rendering the creatures almost 3D in 2D. Just as the frame reinforces the park’s sense of enclosure, the film’s sense of light gives the animals even greater life.
Much like audiences at the Toronto International Film Festival, Sundance audiences tend to be extremely nice toward the films and filmmakers. It’s rare to see mass walkouts, or post-screening debates. But when word trickled along the Park City grapevine that Craig Zobel, writer-director of the extraordinary Compliance, faced some kind of hostile reaction after the film’s first screening (with reported cries of “Exploitation!” and the like), it instantly made the film even more of a must-see than it already was. After all, Zobel’s previous film, Great World of Sound, indicated a real filmmaker with a distinctive point of view and style and an uncommon perception for the ways people actually work and make ends meet. But it didn’t suggest the skill at dramatic compression that is on display in Zobel’s new film, which was inspired by a chain of incredible-but-true accounts of crank-callers posing as police and convincing staffers at fast-food restaurants to restrain, strip, and rape fellow employees. Zobel applies a rigorous procedural narrative tack, presenting a typical chain fast-food joint but with specifically drawn characters, led by an officious manager, Sandra (Ann Dowd, in the great performance of the festival), who goes by the book. Seemingly inconsequential interpersonal details about Sandra and her staff prove to be the catalyst for the terrifying sexual-emotional earthquakes that follow, but from such specificity flows the kind of big ideas that are all too rarely addressed in American cinema, starting with this one: could the compliant, “good” German that ushered in Hitler happen in America?

The only misstep in Laurence Thrush’s second feature, Pursuit of Loneliness, is its tendentious, thudding title. Nothing in the film itself is remotely as obvious, and Thrush has made something as nuanced as it is important. Filming in black and white, his fly-on-the-wall camera observes a few days in the lives of people in Los Angeles, from an isolated limited-income retiree and a convalescent patient, to the various hospital and government agency workers who become involved in these lonely lives as the need dictates. The retiree’s life is actually seen in a Cubist perspective (in two separate time periods, intercut), but this isn’t apparent for quite a while, since Thrush makes his film with an extreme sense of docudrama: scenes transpire with dialogue, but they’re so de-dramatized and uninhibited that they never sound written, let alone acted. (The cast is entirely nonprofessional, consisting of local Angelinos.) The narrative structure gradually emerges, the course of which is to track the outcomes of these two people who become “cases”: their fates are in the hands of diligent, caring bureaucrats who take their jobs seriously, and more to the point, stand in for the family members who are notably absent. I can think of no fiction film in recent years so resistant to the easy notion of demonizing government and institutional workers that so accurately captures the ways in which key agencies in American society—hospitals, social welfare departments, public and private entities managing the well-being of the poor and the elderly—actually look, feel, and sound like. On top of this, Thrush has made a key contribution to the most interesting tendency in contemporary cinema—the in-between film that blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction, drama and documentary.

It’s fair to wonder, given that Compliance and Pursuit of Loneliness were among the most accomplished films anywhere in Sundance and absolutely worthy of placement in the high-profile dramatic competition, why they were relegated to the Next sidebar of supposedly “oddball” films. (Next was actually created after Cinevegas, the terrific festival run by Sundance’s programming director, Trevor Groth, and New Frontier programmer Mike Plante, collapsed along with the Vegas economy. Cinevegas typically screened American premieres that didn’t get into Sundance, and Next is intended to fill the vacuum.) There’s nothing oddball about these films, unless films pointing to new possibilities for American indie filmmakers can be considered oddball. The films by Zobel and Thrush are the sort that will pop up in competitions at significant international festivals—they may even be seen, when the smoke clears after 2012, as two of the year’s key films—which is why their positioning in Sundance became, for me, the overwhelming takeaway question of the festival. At least Compliance became a talking point due to its reputedly anger-filled initial screening (although, by the fourth public screening, when I saw it, the audience was firmly with Zobel); Pursuit’s scheduling ensured that it eluded all but the most attentive audiences. The film, in other words, had zero buzz. Some observers charitably reckoned that these remarkable films’ positioning was a way for the festival to draw attention to the Next program. Maybe, maybe not, but this illustrates the critical value of festival program architecture, the program structure by which a festival builds itself, and how that architecture tells the festivalgoer what the festival is actually trying to do—or not doing.

When it comes to lonely America, So Yong Kim seems to know it in her bones. For proof, look at her highly effective and accomplished For Ellen (correctly positioned in competition) about the futile efforts of a struggling rocker, played with adventurousness and animal ferocity by Paul Dano, trying to secure shared custody of his young daughter in a testy divorce settlement. Kim’s company, soandbrad, with her husband and filmmaking partner, Bradley Rust Gray, has delivered a fascinating roster of work, including Kim’s previous features, In Between Days (06) and Treeless Mountain (08), alongside Gray’s Salt (03) and The Exploding Girl (09), and the upcoming Jack and Diane, which Kim produced just as Gray produced the films Kim directed. All contain a highly acute sense of cinema sound and image, interiority, quietude, and grace, as well as a sensitive attachment to younger people living on or experiencing the sensations of being on society’s fringes. While Kim’s first two films often expressed her characters’ inner and outer states with few words and an impressionist approach, the surprise in For Ellen is its bursts of speech, layered in deep, almost boundless frustration over life’s dreams falling so short of the mark. Gray’s Exploding Girl saw Zoe Kazan achieve a sublime acting state in front of his highly receptive camera, and Kim now has Dano in her sights, and he taps his resources in a way he’s never done before, and it recalls the raw, exposed and cinematic performances that Robert Altman frequently drew out of his actors in a number of his films in the 1970s, from Elliott Gould in The Long Goodbye to Keith Carradine in Thieves Like Us.
PURSUIT OF LONELINESS

After an elderly hospital patient dies, a nurse tries unsuccessfully to contact the next of kin. Later, a social worker continues the effort but finds only the neighbor who was feeding the patient's dogs. A county investigator fails to locate any relatives and ultimately must process the belongings in the decedent's home. Meanwhile, we follow a frail man's discharge from the hospital and an older woman's day spent running errands and trying to stay cool during a heat wave.

Laurence Thrush's wistful Pursuit of Loneliness underplays conventional dramatic elements in favor of heightened aestheticism—gorgeous, fixed-frame, black-and-white compositions; a disquieting score by experimental media composer William Basinski; and a cast of nonprofessional actors. Thrush's precise vision, with its detached, observational quality, passes fluidly among the characters and emphasizes routine, bureaucracy, and a sense of anonymity. With a heartbreaking awareness of impermanence, we watch the artifacts of a life—pets, belongings, memories—reduced to paperwork. We also find ourselves aware of the one thing that appears nowhere in the film—family. - J.N.
In 2000 Laurence produced and directed his first documentary film, “Fidel’s Fight”, based on cockfighting in Cuba. The film screened in competition at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, the Doubletak Documentary Film Festival and won Best Cinematography at the New York Independent Film Festival in 2001.

Following a series of television commercials that he directed in 2003, Laurence was shortlisted for the Best Young Director Award at the Clio Advertising Awards and the Cannes Lions International Festival. Laurence has since directed a wide range of television commercials for both the US and Canadian markets.

2008 saw the completion of “Tobira No Muko / Left Handed”, Laurence’s first feature film as writer/director, which was produced in collaboration with executive producer Takao Saiki through Size, Inc. Cast with non-actors and filmed entirely on location in Tokyo, the film was awarded Best Feature at the Milan Film Festival, the Rhode Island Film Festival, L’Aquila Film Festival and the Japan Film Festival, won the Jr Jury Award at the Lyon Asian Film Festival and screened in competition at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, the Festival du Nouveau Cinema in Montreal, and the Fukuoka Film Festival, where it has received enthusiastic reviews. “Left Handed” is distributed by Vanguard Cinema (vanguardcinema.com).

“Pursuit of Loneliness”, Laurence’s second film as writer/director was shot entirely in Los Angeles and was produced by Ken Hanada through Growth Films.

Laurence is currently in preproduction on his third feature, “Vessels”, set in India and based on the subject of surrogacy and medical tourism. The project is slated to begin shooting in 2012.