

AUSTIN

WORK [VII]

001: My name is Austin Dandridge, and I work for the Ryerson Center.

002: It's kind of cool, actually. It's this after-school program, for kids where, you know, the parents both work, or there's only one parent in the picture. The Center has a bunch of audio-visual equipment, and I teach the kids how to use it.

003: Ages six through fourteen.

004: Oh, yeah, it's great. I love them; I mean, they're just hilarious.

005: I've always liked kids. I don't know, maybe it comes from having two younger sisters. I feel very comfortable being the one who's like *teaching*, turning people on to new things?

006: I think I *would* make a good dad. [laughs] I actually am really looking *forward* to—well, never mind, that's off the subject. [laughs]

007: Yeah, we do—well, this might be interesting to you: I have the kids do little documentaries.

008: Video documentaries. We have some camcorders, even a few old TV news cameras, one of the local networks donated them to us. So I train the kids in just the basics of it, where to point, where to look, how to shoot, and then I talk to them about what a documentary is; I talk to them about the different *types* of documentaries, and then I get them to do their own.

009: Oh, they're *hilarious*. I have a tape somewhere of some of them; I should show you. It's all like, uh, you know, one kid is really proud of his sneakers, so he did a documentary called *Shoes Day!* which is all like shots of him striking, I don't know, action poses, I guess? [laughs] Like kung-fu leaps and stuff? And in every shot he has the kid who's working the camera zoom in on his *feet*. It's like *twenty shots* of this.

010: Some are more traditional, I guess, kids interviewing other kids about like, *what do your parents do for a living* or whatever. The older kids especially are really

into trying to make it “real,” like other documentaries that they’ve seen on TV, or in school, I guess. But the documentaries they’re making at like age eight are totally brilliant and weird.

011: Yeah, I mean, *Shoes Day!* [laughs]

012: Let’s see, what else? Music videos, that’s a big one. Lots of twelve-year-old girls lip-synching to Christina Aguilera, working out dance moves, that kind of thing, very freaky.

013: Did you ever see that movie *Donnie Darko*?

014: Two words for you: Sparkle Magic.

015: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. *Totally*. But, I don’t know, I shouldn’t make fun, I guess. I mean in its own way it’s really interesting. Like you have these girls, right, and they’re clearly trying to work something out here, like, uh, they’re *using* pop culture as a tool, a tool to help them figure out how they relate to the erotic power of their own bodies—oh, great, I think I just went on record as saying that twelve-year-old girls are erotic, there goes my job. [laughs] But you know what I mean.

016: Yeah, they’re on this like *cusp*—they’re just a few years away from being recognized by society as fully-functioning sexual beings, and it’s obvious that they’re already trying to think about what that means, and how they’re going to negotiate it, and I really feel like that process is *valuable*. So I throw this audio-visual stuff at them, and I guess at my most lofty I hope that they can use it to aid them in that process. But they use *everything*—all that pop culture crap that floats around them *all* gets brought into that process. They define themselves in *relationship* to it.

017: I guess I worry about that, yeah. But for every girl who will define herself by embracing it another will define herself by rejecting it. I think it’s important for them to be *aware* of these different roles, and, yeah, to try them out; if they try them out they have a better sense of *what* they’re rejecting, what it *means* to reject it.

018: Um, I guess you could describe it as a kind of play. Sure.

017: I don’t know. Adults definitely play less. And, yeah, they don’t seem to be as involved in the process of defining themselves; discovering themselves. Adults seem, ah, more *fixed*? Like they’ve already worked out their answers to these questions?

018: Uh, you know, like *what is the relationship to my own sexuality? What does it mean to be in this body in this world with other bodies?* Just, basically, *who am I?* As people

move into adulthood there's this notion that we're supposed to have these questions answered, and so we just grab an answer that seems to be working and we say *well, I'm going to stick with that one.*

019: I don't know. I mean, those are big questions [laughs]. I don't know that they can ever *really* be answered.

020: Oh no. I'm not *sure* of anything.