

THE JOYLESS ECONOMY



QUINZAINÉ
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2026

A
FILM
BY
MARJORIE
CONRAD

2026 – USA – DOCUMENTARY – ENGLISH – 58'

SYNOPSIS

A documentary that explores how a woman's movie collection triggers her infidelity. Created for one viewer—the woman whose confessions are revealed through hypnotic second-person narration.

INTERVIEW WITH MARJORIE CONRAD

How did this project come to be?

MC: While at work, I noticed a woman carrying a bag from a local Seattle cinema. I was intrigued. I introduced myself, we started talking, and I learned that she, B., had watched almost every title mentioned in Kier-La Janisse's memoir *House of Psychotic Women*. This was odd; it's over 400 films, many of them rare and esoteric.

As I got to know her, I learned she felt “numb” in her life. She thought there was nothing she could do but “accept the lack of possibility.” While discussing ideas, she began to reveal the story of her affair, often citing movies. She said her favorite scene in all of cinema was the subway scene from *Possession*, but it made her sad that love “didn't win” in Żuławski's films. She wanted love to be enough. She told me she still repeatedly watched the same scenes in *Variety* without knowing why. She explained discovering *Repulsion* at twenty. Though she'd seen many horror films up to that point, it was the first time she “honed in on one that was woman-centered.”

I became increasingly curious about B.'s other favorite films, how she understood and related to them. It felt as though the affair and her cinephilia were connected.

Once the affair and cinephilia connection became clear, how did the project evolve?

MC: When I asked B. what she wanted from a film project, she said she wanted to regain her sense of self. That she hadn't respected herself “in any way for years now,” and had “lost track of what was good” in her.

She said that making a film felt unfamiliar and even scared her. I wanted to honor her trust and assemble something that stayed true to her experiences without putting her or her loved ones at risk. I had to protect her desire to be seen yet not seen.

I asked her to write either a story from her life or a piece of fiction, something she might want to develop. The story she wrote described a series of events that bore an unusual resemblance to those in *Variety*. From there, I used a technique common in reality television and asked her to record her responses to short questions on her own. My only direction was to record in 10-minute increments, even

if she didn't know what to say. Starting with movies meaningful to her, the questions widened to cover many topics. This interview lasted over a year, with each new question informed by the previous answer.

How did your ideas for the project change during this process? How did your relationship develop?

MC: Initially, I had no specific ideas about the form. We just started talking. As I listened to her story and asked questions, references and images came to mind. The film's shape slowly revealed itself as I tried to make sense of the information I was given. I took all my cues from her.

Some themes emerged. She'd had a difficult time identifying with her gender growing up, and now imposed certain feminine standards on herself. She loved dominant characters who were unacceptable and out of reach. Distant, erotic, forbidden women. Masks as a means of exploration. Objects as a way of processing emotion. The power of repetition and ritual. A need for both vulnerability and control. Mastering reality through fantasy. Constant testing of boundaries in relationships. Self-love and self-disgust. Care and abuse. An intense dislike of labels. As she sent me more and more confessions, it seemed she was working through memories and reinterpreting them. Everything fed into the film.

How was B. throughout this collaboration?

MC: B. was not an easy subject to interview; she didn't seem to believe her life was worth examining. Throughout, I kept revisiting the same questions from different angles to clarify ambiguities and contradictions, even though I was constantly worried I'd scare her off. Fortunately, she chose to continue the dialogue. B. was an imaginative, private person who'd never publicly disclosed her inner world before. She was driven to create an alternate, parallel reality, a way into the films she watched.

I think I set out to repair something. Neither the film nor the filmmaking resolved the tension or brought any closure. In the end, maybe the only thing we repaired was B.'s teddy bear, Corduroy.

You mention that you took your cues from B. Can you expand on that?

MC: I reacted to B.'s words and her preferences and focused on what was important to her. She'd mentioned the scene from *Possession*, a transitional moment that stands apart from the narrative order. This informed the loose prompts I gave to shoot the mini-DV home movies on her own, channeling personas and scenes from other films she liked.

In my effort to understand how her possessions and behavior might relate, I decided to photograph B.'s entire movie collection and other objects significant to her. I left my hands visible in some footage to signal my role. I changed her words to the second person so that she'd have a way to separate herself from the work. The entire time, I was aware that if I didn't handle her story responsibly, she'd regret the collaboration, if not at first, then later. Preserving some anonymity and distance was essential.

The idea of showing nearly everything in her collection (in the order it was placed on her shelves) came to me in a dream after a long period of struggling with the edit. I tried it out, sometimes showing the item full screen, sometimes using a split screen to allow a side-by-side comparison between her collection and the home movies, asking myself what it revealed, if anything. I thought this could give the viewer the freedom to project their own memories and draw their own conclusions. I also knew B. would love seeing her favorite things up on the screen.

Anything else you care to add?

MC: Here are some interesting sentences from B.'s recordings that weren't included in the film:

"When I was little, I always wanted to live in a haunted house."

"Reality is scary, and I am afraid of it."

"Years pass, and the people who make fun of you end up wanting to f*** you. It's the way boys are."

"I don't like my job. I feel meaningless. I forget who I am every day."

"I fill every moment with objects. If I lose the object, I'll lose the memory."

"I never felt like I owned my body. Or my mind, half the time. I've always felt this distance from myself."

"Y and I would dress up like [Jean] Rollin vampires, sit in the living room, and do weird things."

"I always want more. I always want risk and danger."

"The freedom in [Jesús] Franco's movies, the lack of shame, I didn't relate to it at first. But it opened a door for me."

"I don't think what Franco and Rollin make is porn. It's about love, more than anything else. And loneliness. Desperation."

"I don't think of myself as someone who wants power or wants to be in charge. I think of myself as completely submissive in many ways. But I guess I do want power. And thinking about it now, of course I do. In some ways, I want it more than anything."

"I like—even though I shouldn't—the secrets I keep that the people I encounter every day will never know."

"I've idealized many things. I've imagined circumstances much differently than reality has played out. It's a means of escape for me. If I only live in the fantasy, I don't have to face the pain of the situation."

ABOUT MARJORIE CONRAD

Marjorie Conrad is a French-American filmmaker based in Seattle. Her experience in reality television production—both in front of and behind the camera—shapes the way she thinks about consent, representation, identity, and perception.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Joyless Economy (2026)

Body Issues (2024)

Desire Path (Final Cut) (2021)

Chemical Cut (2016)

Limehouse (2011)

CAST & CREW

Directed by Marjorie Conrad

Written by B. Curran, Marjorie Conrad

Produced by Marjorie Conrad, John Tuthill

Images by B. Curran, J. McCarthy, John Tuthill, Marjorie Conrad

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Sound by Marjorie Conrad, John Tuthill

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