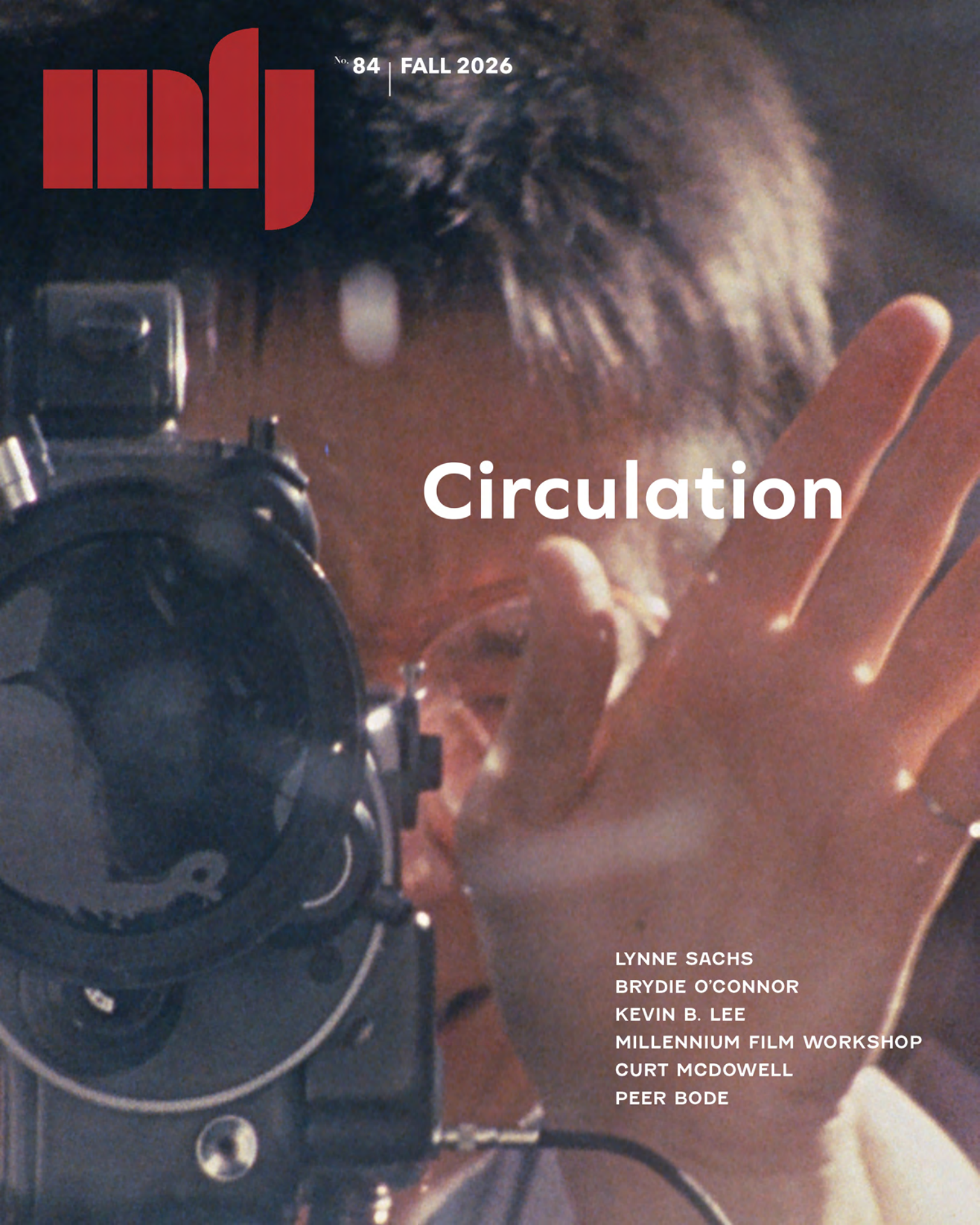
No. 84 | FALL 2026



Circulation

LYNNE SACHS
BRYDIE O'CONNOR
KEVIN B. LEE
MILLENNIUM FILM WORKSHOP
CURT MCDOWELL
PEER BODE





ALL IMAGES Lynne Sachs, *Every Contact Leaves a Trace* (2025), frame enlargements. Courtesy the artist.

TEST RUN: LYNNE SACHS' *EVERY CONTACT LEAVES A TRACE*

Lynne Sachs' *Every Contact Leaves a Trace* (2025) opens with footage of paper manufacturing, which soon becomes a recurring motif. A strange lens magnifies the cards establishing the film's central theme: how easily our view of a person's identity can be distorted. The film promises multiple views that become, as Martin Amis once described poker games, "wobbled through the prism of personality."

Over the course of the film, Sachs' personality will indeed appear to wobble as she engages friends, family, and acquaintances in varying styles and formats—Super 8, 16mm, smartphones, Zoom chat windows, even paper, embroidery, and voice recordings. Though Sachs appears in her earlier films, here she turns her investigative eye more resolutely on herself, showing the way her encounters have marked her psychologically. Still, she is seldom on screen, often remaining behind the camera, perhaps for practical reasons, perhaps in an attempt to universalize her self-questioning.

In our 2021 conversation for the podcast *How to Enjoy Experimental Film*, Sachs posited the notion that experimental films are, in themselves, "documents of investigation." Here, her collection of hundreds of business cards becomes the starting point of a larger inquiry. Handling these cards, Sachs reflects upon how each person affected her life, all the while questioning the purpose of keeping these objects. The ambivalence is underscored in a poignant discussion between Sachs and her niece and nephew (Viva and Felix Johnson Sachs Torres): one suggests burning the cards, the other highlights the environmental impact of doing so. Earlier, in a moment strangely reminiscent of Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)* (1971), Sachs' voiceover slips from an exact description of the cards she is shown holding. For instance, she mentions a "He" who may or may not be willing to appear on camera, despite the card in her hands being that of filmmaker Jennifer Reeves.

So it is—these business cards, like images or recorded voices, become unreliable representations of identity. This idea comes full circle when Sachs encounters filmmaker Juan Jiang, whom she'd met a decade earlier during a screening and states, "when you're around someone for a certain amount of time, they kind of freeze in that time." Visual tricks are deployed: Jiang's clothing changes; two versions of her appear in one frame. Sachs exhibits the filmmaking artifice not in order to distance us, but to deepen our engagement.

Why, then, do we record, document, and keep traces? *Every Contact Leaves a Trace* poses this question, recognizing the paradox therein: film fixes moments, but our interpretations will invariably change as we change. Instants and people are revisited over the course of the film and even in its short hour and a half, our impressions of them shift.

Sachs explores her own identity by visiting her family's ancestral home in Germany. Trying to understand her own "place" in the environs from which her family fled decades ago, the filmmaker shows her reflection in a glass-paneled door, her face hidden behind the camera. A fleeting glimpse of a sign advertising glasses reminds us of the process of looking and who is doing it. Surprisingly, Sachs finds "artifacts" of her own "belonging in a place [she] was taught to fear." Shots of darkened windows, strangely reminiscent of the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery emphasize the fragility of her own existence and evoke









her ancestors' flight from troubled Germany. During a reunion with a German Jewish friend, Sachs expresses inner turmoil over Israel's actions following October 7th: "I distance myself from all of the decision makers who claim to represent me…"; "In Gaza I feel culpable, implicated."

Her interior life is again on the table in a scene featuring a therapist she once worked with. Eventually it is revealed that her "therapist" is actually played by actress Rae C. Wright. The scene is uncomfortable, especially when Wright seems genuinely irritated by Sachs' level of emotional investment in the scenario. In another tense moment, Sachs mistakes a Latvian hairdresser for Ukrainian, suggesting her own ignorance. These occasions reveal Sachs herself as an unreliable narrator, highlighting a certain discomfort with her assumptions about others. The viewer is left to question how much of the film is "true" as opposed to "wobbled" through a particular point of view.

The most challenging reckoning occurs during her interaction with filmmaker Lawrence Brose, who was falsely accused—so he says—of possessing child pornography. Sachs' initial judgment is upended when he tells her the accusations are baseless. The film allows us to share her confusion and reflect on our own misreadings, prejudices, and skepticism. Sachs says of Brose's presence: "I only took what he had to say as his experience and his attempt to give context. For me, it was a reflection on the dilemma that comes with engaging another human being's struggle, and trying to give that some sort of meaning or stature. In the film, we only have access to his subjectivity … and mine."

Sachs is generous to the audience, offering us space to think rather than confronting us. She regularly follows more intense moments with "thought vessels"—shots without dialogue or music that let viewers digest what they just saw. For example, images of hair-cutting follow her mishap at the salon (Latvia, not Ukraine) allowing the audience time to consider the preceding dialogue.

Yet, despite the visual innovations that deepen our understanding, it is the reality of human relationships that remains the film's most enduring aspect. Fabric artist Betty Leacraft emerges as one of the most endearing figures in the film. She refuses to "perform" for the camera, choosing instead to humbly demonstrate her craft, explaining the importance of making mistakes and adjusting one's approach. A reflexive moment occurs at the film's close when Sachs struggles with an embroidery lesson, and is reassured by Leacraft that the project is just a "test run": "when you get to do the ones for the gallery, *that's* when you should be worried!" The film becomes itself a sort of "test run"—an embroidery of imperfection, missteps, and interpretation. It is as if Sachs is trying to criticize her own work in the same instant as making it, aligning herself with the audience as if she were sitting alongside them.

DAN ADAMS