THE BEST OF RICARDO LOPEZ: THE ETHICS AND EXPRESSION OF
RECORDED MEMORIES IN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

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ABSTRACT

When Ricardo Lopez killed himself in September 1996, he would leave behind twenty hours of videotaped diaries documenting the building of an acidic spray device he intended to use in a letter bomb that would disfigure pop singer Bjork. Within the footage, shot over a span of nine months, he would talk at length about his motivations and desires, his disjointed feelings about the world, and the family that he would slowly shun and push away over time. The footage was kept under FBI possession for several decades until it was made available online. Uploads of the footage on YouTube have accrued thousands of views and hundreds of individual comments.

This project looks to the diaries and those comments to illustrate how decades of separation from such disturbing events has led to a comparatively muted reaction from viewers, whose reactions range from analytical to cynical to ignorant, presented as a short documentary film contrasting those comments against the video footage. This project also examines a filmmaker’s own decisions in determining what source materials to use and how to edit them together to express a chosen theme. Finally, this project hopes to examine these ideas under a thematic umbrella of memory and manipulation, looking at what YouTube commenters find memorable about the diaries, what the filmmaker sees as memorable and worth inclusion in a film, and the ethical questions inherent in framing the audio, video, and comments to present a new interpretation of these elements.