

This is the demilitarisation of filmmaking, the end of cinematographer as ‘shooter’ – gone are the crosshairs on the ground glass, walking bullets onto the issue’s target. Where you look, the way you look, is no longer circumscribed with a bullseye.

Faces are included or redacted according to peacetime principles. The director refuses to hang his hat on the techniques of interrogation, the way so many documentarians do: the torturous sit-down interview. Instead, spoken word can be at once wild and synchronous, attributed and disembodied, dissociated and owned, but never ad hominem pinned on anyone. The opposite of the hysterical aftermath’s angry grieving back and forth. Finger guns out.

Unlike a sniper’s scope, this camera can see around corners; simultaneously, we are inside the classroom with the cowering re-enactors who have barricaded the door, and out in the hallway, where the pretend assassin begs to be let in. Constructed scenes can exist in this nonfiction film. So can pure surveillance passages of students traversing hallways. Shots of the CCTV devices themselves are made into a montage of introspection with their truthless gazes.

Our eyes remain open while the schoolchildren close theirs, trusting us as they meditate on their precious breaths. The foreground is the background. Adults are children, acting out classroom invasions; children are adults, poking holes in lies at town meetings.

Todd’s direction does not isolate and neutralise according to the rules of engagement of normal, blunt force trauma film formulae. Stuff the wound with gauze – music here, no music there.

Do you have any more questions about this automatic weapon I am holding? Nope. The director speaks once, but whispers to us in every frame.

Notice how you feel.

The threat always comes from inside.

Remember that one for a long time; the drill sergeant gently admonishes the teacher who has shot a computer-generated student through the chest.

I am overwhelmed by so many subtle details. A maths teacher shakes his head at the end of a drill – archival footage of the installation of a metal detector that cuts to the bone.

One amorphous school, Texas-Chicago-America, a convention in Las Vegas, the mountainous desert imprisoned by billboards, casino hotels with eyes that blink suggestively. In a stucco house in California, a sewing machine gun splices Kevlar into free bulletproof hoodies to disguise capitalism’s ugly face.

I can see why my advice wasn’t helpful early on in the editing of this film. I didn’t understand the construction because it is so original. It’s not a language I’ve even heard before, or a structure I could imagine. I learn how to watch it from watching now.