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Circles of Confusion

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Sunday, 23 April 2006


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CIRCLES OF CONFUSION is SFIFF's aptly named experimental series. Some films from out of state, others local, the series featured ten films most of them discussed individually below.

AFRAID SO is the new found footage montage by local great Jay Rosenblatt. Based on a poem by Jean Marie Beaumont, the audio for the film is the voice of Garrison Keeler intoning a litany of questions, some charming, others frightening, each of which accompanied by a black and white clip of an evocative action. Keeler asks: "Will it hurt?" Rosenblatt shows a child shaking, crying, pulling away from a vaccination. "Will this go on my record?" We see one man hitting another. Rosenblatt identifies the long list of questions and in supporting them with images, also alludes to the challenging process of inquiry and the fear that seems implicit in the process of questioning the future. Of course, all of these questions can be answered by the title.

The second film, BRILLIANT NOISE appeared to be a digital experiment performed on images of stars and planets. Bearing no title or director's name, the film is abstract and occasionally addresses the imperfections of perception. Though it's challenging, it seems, somewhat inconsistent. The only plainly identifiable shape we encounter is that of a globe. At moments it appears that we're looking exclusively at satellite footage of other planets - sun spots, moon rovers and the like - but the mosaic style depiction of the action makes it impossible for us to decipher the image. Perhaps this is the intention, but I could have sworn I saw a car driving down a street.

The third film was an Italian film by Sergio Basso, called FEBBRAIO 30. Beginning with a black screen, a girl asks a man to tell him a story and he offers her only plot with no elaborative detail. In this story, there's a game of 1, 2, 3, Freeze, a girl breaks up with a boy, an old man gets into an elevator with the girl and he dies. After the girl in voice over repudiates the value of his story, the images begin and we see the story in all its abstract wonder. 1, 2, 3, Freeze is represented in a series of freeze frames and the couple's break up (which is only inferred) occurs lyrically, with movements that are expressly dance-like. The old man's death is both literal and metaphorical; simultaneously lifting the girl as the old man sinks slowly to the floor. A meditation on the values of story and the effects of representation, the film is both sweet and sanguine and offers the viewer a nice bridge between conventional narrative and experiment.

BENEDICTION by Tess Girard is a local ethnography with an emphasis on family and loss. As we see close ups of leaves and ice as it crystallizes, we hear Girard's internal monologue mixed with the monologue of her grandfather and voice mail messages left by her mother. Though the images are largely composed as either extreme close ups or blurred footage, all of the visuals provide indicators of the loss of Girard's grandmother by illness. In some ways, what we hear juxtaposed in the voice overs of the mother, as opposed to those of Girard or her grandfather is a contrasting of proactively or reactivity, but to characterize their discussions with just one dimension would be unfair. Girard laments: "there's only so much you can say about someone you wish she had known better", and in saying this, she discloses the need for the drawn out close ups and blurred footage. In saying this she also discloses her need for the film. Eventually, Girard identifies her loss as not just a loss of a relative but also a loss of time she can't regain.

TROGLODYTE is a film by Desiree Holman that has already received some attention. A piece of a larger video installation, it may be unfair to judge the film, as a separate entity from its group. What we see are five or six people in ape suits intermittently dancing in their "native" terrain by a waterfall, and then dancing as a unit (think Paula Abdul) in front of a black backdrop, surrounded by video effects. After the monkeys dance, images of waterfalls are contorted and bent so that the waterfalls too seem to move. Described as video art and sculpture, a lot of things are lost on the viewer: the great

detail of the ape suits is apparent but the film doesn't seem to identify any explicit theme or purpose, and this makes TROGLDYTE seem dependent upon the other films in it's series.

RELATIVE DISTANCE, by local C. Begien is about the filmmaker's deliberate distance from her mother, brother, aunts and uncles. Cathy tells her family to tell the camera what they would like to say to her without any fear that she'll interrupt. This footage fills the right of the split screen. On the left we see the filmmaker in various states of maintenance: on an exercise bike, lifting weights, vacuuming shoes, taking a bath. Meanwhile her family tells her they love her and wish she wouldn't push them away. Finally, Cathy lies in a bed on the left while the right side of the split screen features her personal confrontation. "They only ask you questions because they don't know...They love you and you're lucky to have them...Why do you act like a brat when you're around them?" And finally, the film becomes something of a comment on fear and shame when Cathy says: "They now you're gay", and laying in bed, now with a girlfriend, Cathy exposes her bound hands. A restraint that is conceivably of her creation, the purpose for the experiment is literally unveiled.

OPEN by Katherine McInnis is a montage of vague surveillance photos of a city. Images of passersby and cars are slowly jerked out of their rhythms by the fragmenting of the image. A possible meditation on the inexactness of surveillance, OPEN proves our suspicions that the streets are always in someone's view.

SUSPENDED SERIES #2 was a wonderful optical experiment by AMY HICKS. At first the film looks like a the view from a car with a mirrored hood, however the film was actually the product of an analogue to digital transfer that, after being transformed by digital effects, took on the resemblance of a film by the classical avant-garde. When replicated, as if through a fun house mirror, the bay bridge took on a feeling of play, like the feeling of being a child and deciphering the world with all its alien qualities. And then, beyond the anthropology of the images, we begin to see shapes transform into more familiar sights and the images, like their meanings, require distance to have clarity.

SITE SPECIFIC LAS VEGAS 05 by Olivio Barbieri was one of my two favorites in the set. SITE SPECIFIC is loosely edited aerial film of Las Vegas, shot with a specific focal distance that transformed the city that plays into a collection of toys and models on a landscape that seems altogether false, even in its most natural climbs. An exploration of the objectification, perhaps the fetishization of this consumer capital of glamorous excess, this playful approach to landscape provides it's own teasing brand of truth.

The final film in the set was the longest and possibly the most complex. INSTRUCTIONS FOR A LIGHT AND SOUND MACHINE by Peter Tscherkassky reconstructs shots from Sergio Leone's the THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY to unveil issues of perception and vision and their baggage in cinema. The film reads like a gestalt game. First a colonel (or a conquistador) in negative image looks into a telescope and sees the Wild West. During seizure inducing editing and a blazing high pitch sound, the film strips the Leone text of it's color and boils it down to vauge light and shadow, which is then inter-cut (again at high speeds) with what looks like the reverse shot, resulting in a kind of paralleling of shots or stories that forces you to choose which story to follow. Finally the film closes with the voyeuristic conquistador at his windowsill, reminding us how our viewing can transform the things we might have believed we understood.

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