

Films from the End of the World

Sunday, June 3, 2007 — 7:30 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

The Anatomy of Melancholy (1999) by Brian Frye; 16mm, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

"Sometime in the 1960s, a chiropractor from Kansas City made a short film called *A Portrait of Fear*. The film consisted of several tableau shots of amateur actors standing in a field at night reciting painfully overwrought dialogue, apparently lit by the headlights of a car. I assume the cinematographer used an Auricon, as the sound was recorded directly on the B&W reversal original. In 1998, he sold me the outtakes, strung together just like you see them." (Brian Frye, "*The Anatomy of Melancholy*," waste-book.blogspot.com/2006/01/anatomy-of-melancholy.html)

"I want to help films do what they're trying to do. These films that I'm presenting are often so pregnant with ideas that all it takes is allowing them to speak themselves, to present themselves in a way that they can say and express all those things that they are trying so hard to do already. With *Anatomy of Melancholy*, finding the material was such a revelation. As I looked at it I realized that it was doing on its own everything I had been trying to do for five years. It was already there, just a perfect thing that was all the more powerful for me because it was so raw and helpless, just waiting for you to accept it as a film. I like that, and it's part of what I like about Warhol's films as well. My favorite way to talk about Warhol's films is that they don't tell you to do things, they just ask you. They invite you in, giving you a space to immerse yourself in, and provide you with an opportunity to experience something with them. They give you enough time to submerge in the experience. It's very plain to me that those films changed the face of American filmmaking because of that." ("A Cinema of Possibilities: Interview with Brian Frye" by Ray Privett and James Kreul. *Millennium Film Journal* No. 37 (Fall 2001): *Idiosyncrasies*. Read the entire interview at www.mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ37/BrianFrye.html)

total power dead dead dead (2005) by Stephanie Barber; 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes, print from the maker

"A haiku or love letter to the charm of two dimensional images. The spectacle awaits our adoration, gives a tender intimation of collusion." (Stephanie Barber)

The General Returns from One Place to Another (2006) by Michael Robinson; screened as video, color, sound, tape from the maker

"Learning to love again, with fear at its side, the film draws balance between the romantic and the horrid, shaping a concurrently skeptical and indulgent experience of the beautiful. A Frank O'Hara monologue (from a play of the same title) attempts to undercut the sincerity of the landscape, but there are stronger forces surfacing." (Michael Robinson)

Portrait #2: Trojan (2006) by Vanessa Renwick; video, color, sound, 5 minutes, tape from the maker
Score by Sam Coomes of Quasi. Shot by Eric Edwards

"The strongest work of art at the 2006 Oregon Biennial, Vanessa Renwick's short film, *Portrait #2: Trojan*, deserves some attention. It is special because unlike a lot of the works here it seems whole and fully realized in its self-contained encapsulation of a nuclear power plant's last day. Yes, it is an architectural snuff flick, but its implications go way beyond a 7 second news clip or the fact that it is in this regional show.

"For me, Trojan (what a pregnant name?) was the only thing I could remember about Portland when I visited here in 1979. It was right after the 3 Mile Island disaster and though I had seen many nuclear plants none of them looked like 3 Mile Island. This one did and it scared the hell out of me. But I also loved the form; the cooling tower looked like a man made volcano with an hourglass form reminiscent of that on a black widow spider and of course a woman in a great dress. It also screamed 70s brutalist architecture and I suppose it is etched in my mind somewhere near Eero Saarinen, Louis Kahn and Richard Serra's works. As an hourglass it seemed to be mortality incarnate. I loved it in the way I loved and dreaded the awareness of my own heartbeat.

"Trojan had been decommissioned by the time I moved here and many think it was an inspiration for the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant in "The Simpsons," though I doubt it was meant as a direct commentary. Still it must have some tangential relationship to the cartoon, Matt Groening is from Portland after all. I even remember a group called "The Irradiated Poets" who used to do readings there during the dot.com days.

"Renwick's piece is a more direct commentary, Ozymandian in its implications. The film starts by showing the structure as imposing, threatening and beautiful. It seems to have fit into the landscape, an aging decommissioned ruin. A symbol of romantic dread and a great picnic spot." (Jeff Jahn, PORT: portlandart.net. www.portlandart.net/archives/2006/09/vanessa_renwick.html)

"Trojan Nuclear Facility, Oregon's powerful iconic landmark, goes adios." (Vanessa Renwick, www.odoka.org)

Blockade (2005) by Sergei Loznitsa; screened as video, b&w, sound, 52 minutes, tape from First Run/ Icarus Films

"The longest siege during World War II was that of Leningrad, which lasted for 900 days, from September 1941 to January 1944, when Hitler attempted to starve the Soviet city of three million people into submission. Estimates of the number of residents who died from starvation, disease or cold range from 641,000 to 800,000.

"Comprised solely of rarely-seen footage found in Soviet film archives by director Sergei Loznitsa, *Blockade* vividly re-creates those momentous events, featuring a meticulously reconstructed, state-of-the-art soundtrack added to the original black-and-white silent footage. The result gives viewers the eerie impression of being not just an observer but virtually a participant in the events as they unfold on the streets of Leningrad.

"*Blockade* is organized episodically, beginning with defensive measures, including artillery emplacements, anti-tank fortifications, trenches, and observation balloons; the devastating effect of artillery shelling and aerial bombing of the city; the marching of captured German soldiers through the streets, surrounded by taunting Soviet crowds; the corpses lying on street corners or dragged on sleds to mortuaries for eventual burial in mass graves; citizens desperately foraging for food, water and firewood; the joyous celebrations upon the breaking of the siege and the disturbing aftermath." (First Run/ Icarus Films)

"I tried to structure the film around the onset of horror,' Loznitsa said. 'Death advances, and life falls away. That happens gradually and unnoticeably for us; we gradually immerse ourselves in the nightmare of a completely absurd existence.'" (quoted in "Everyday Battles" by Anna Malpas, *The Moscow Times*, March 17, 2006. <http://context.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2006/03/17/108.html>)