

The Essence of Filmmaking - Director Andrej Zdravic

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I must admit that for the last couple of years, I have been on a quest. A quest for the essence of filmic narrative. I think it occurred when "Chasing Amy" got nominated for something. For the record, I believe Kevin Smith is sent here from another dimension (Video Store) to engage us in a battle for the future of storytelling. I am on the side of good.

For the last week, I have been attending The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar in Brookville, Long Island, on an emerging filmmaker grant. Robert Flaherty is most famous for "Nanook of the North", considered by many to be the start of the documentary movement. However, for Robert, an explorer, this film was narrative fiction. It was us, the white man, that saw his work as anthropological or documentary. With that in mind, I refocused my quest for the nature of filmic narrative. On Wednesday, I watched, or rather experienced several films by Slovenian-born filmmaker Andrej Zdravic. Had I heard of him? No. Will I forget him? Never.

With more courage in one fingernail than Jerry Bruckheimer's entire staff, AZ decides to explore a subject, puts his camera in a place few of us would ever dare to go... and observes. What he captures is in a word "mind-bending". Whether it's a series of paper bags spinning in circles down Manhattan streets, an operating room from the 1970's or a lava flow, this director makes us see and feel things that may or may not be present in the image or sound. It's those connections that interests him. Your feelings - what you felt, saw and experienced. It's film theory of the highest order, made palatable to a wide audience.

"Origin" is a 24-minute film in which we watch the world unfold before our eyes. The struggle of lava flow as the Pacific Ocean crashes in to wipe out what was there only seconds ago, takes on a terrifying angle as powerful as any part of "Saving Private Ryan". I could not take my eyes off the screen and I am still dealing with what I 'saw'. The only reason Nike, Coke and Hollywood haven't snapped up this maniac is because he won't let them.

The Revolution continues... This week at MOMA in New York, The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar will be holding a selection of films from the program. If you can't make it, might I suggest a visit to the Slovenian Film Fund's site, hyperlink above at left, or contact Canyon Cinema for Zdravic's other works.

- John Fucile

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