

Parallax

Expanded Cinema Performance by Alex MacKenzie

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The Western Front, 303 East 8th Avenue

Presented by Cineworks Independent Filmmakers Society

Aimer, par tous ses sens, l'éphémère. - Jean-Bertrand Pontalis

Reviewed by Catherine MacLennan

Alex MacKenzie's *Parallax* features images that are displayed side by side, distorted, coloured, in negative, and taken out of context - a hands-on performance utilizing multiple techniques to transform filmed images to enable the audience to view these images, and the world around us, in a new light. The images and the performance deal with the ephemerality of existence - evocative, anxious, soothing, fleeting, and futile, *Parallax* is a collage of the helpless creatures and life forms of the planet. The film's performance itself is an enactment of ephemerality - running the two projectors to show the film, using different speeds, the film is slightly different every time. Further, the film deteriorates with every showing, which changes the texture of the film, and finally through wear, the film will eventually break down and not exist - the film, and performances of it, will end.

The images in *Parallax* derive from MacKenzie's large collection of industrial and educational films. The original soundtracks have been removed and MacKenzie has added a new soundtrack of suggestive sounds and music (from the internet and various other sources) that again make us experience the images in another way, far from their original contexts. The sterility of the educational film vanishes; a collage of raw emotion emerges: baby birds wanting to be fed; a new born baby at the mercy of masked sinister-looking doctors; entrancingly beautiful images of leaves, plants, trees, images that are there, and gone; a girl turning her head, then gone; a blurry slow-motion city scene of 1970s figures, a time, and possibly people who no longer exist; a distressing scene of a patient in a bed struggling, possibly convulsing, with attendants of some kind, either helping or restraining her; a salamander struggling to find its way; and some figure of authority, sitting at a desk and talking away. The image of the talking man at the desk, a person who had something very important to say in some other era (the old fashioned glasses indicate 1950s/60s) is now fading away. His face fades away to a glow (slightly reminiscent of Magritte's portrait of Edward James, *The Pleasure Principle*) but in addition to his face becoming a blurred nothing, the sound is distorted; the edifying words are gone and now he just speaks a muffled, distorted blah blah blah.

At the Q&A session at The Western Front after the film, MacKenzie mentioned that the disturbing scene with the person in the bed was actually taken from a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) educational film, and that particular scene was demonstrating the incorrect way of performing CPR on a patient. The patient was not an actor in a film, but a patient in a hospital who did not receive the needed aid and died. Also in his discussion of the film, MacKenzie described the salamander as an "ill-adapted creature" that does not really fit in on land or in water. Awkward and pitiful creatures are on display in *Parallax* living, dying, and shuffling along in their worlds and moments.

Mackenzie does not want us to cling to illusions about film, either. Running the two 16mm analytic projectors himself, he brings a human touch to the screening of the film, something normally left to a machine and/or an unseen paid detached technician doing a job. The audience instantly sees the effects he works on the film and the screen, as the speeds change, as he is puts two images beside one another or as the film is stretched out into a rectangular shape over another image. His presence in running the films through the projectors throughout the performance creates an empathy on the part of the spectators - he is not some invisible god-director-machine, he is like one of the creatures on the film - precariously dealing with delicate film and old machines during a live performance, things could potentially break, fail, and abruptly, awkwardly end. In his comments after the performance, Mackenzie stated that he believed that our culture is obsessed with permanence; *Parallax* will one day no longer exist, which does not bother him - he "likes the idea of film falling apart."

