



LOOPS



Erin Coates, *Thirst*, 2012, sound design by Stuart James, HD video with sound, 5:09 minutes.

FRIDAY 8TH JUNE

KILLING FRIENDS

JULIAN HOEBER (Los Angeles)

THIRST

ERIN COATES (Perth)

FRIDAY 15TH JUNE

YOUR DOOR

HEATH FRANCO (Sydney)

THE DONNER PARTY

SIMON KENTGENS & KURT AUGUSTYNS (Belgium & Netherlands)

CURATORS NOTES

Midnight film screenings have almost always been reserved for exploitation, counterculture and B-movies. Perverts, punks and junkies frequenting inner-city dive cinemas to indulge in the crude pleasures of drug induced sex and violence.

Spawned in the early seventies in the hustle and bustle of New York City and San Francisco, the late night double bill regularly coupled avant-garde art films with exploitation and horror. The Elgin and The Palace Theatre would screen films such as Jim Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, George Romero's *Night of The Living Dead*, Alejandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo* and Tod Browning's 1932 classic *Freaks* back to back with the experimental cinema of Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger. Perhaps midnight is the perfect hour for such films to be screened, a time for dreams and the repressed to rise to the surface and willingly be devoured by the population that is still awake.

These unconscious dreams are what drive *Loops* to be presented at such an hour. The works exhibited draw confluences with the absurd - the unreal, the abject - the real and that which we all experience during sleep. While each piece can be read in various contexts, the curatorial focus of *Loops* has been to examine the works similarities through their coupling and presentation at midnight.

Connections are seen between Heath Franco's invitation in *Your Door* and Count Dracula beckoning Jonathan with his deathly fingers, while Julian Hoerber's *Killing Friends* and Simon Kentgens & Kurt Augustyns' *The Donner Party* expose the literal smoke and mirror effects of low-budget B-movies.

The implication of narrative in Hoerber's *Killing Friends* and Erin Coates' *Thirst* can be read in context to the open-ended narratives in postmodern horror film, specifically in Dario Argento's *Suspria*. Both Hoerber and Argento sacrifice logical narrative to explore the viscerality and objecthood of the body within a dream-like mise-en-scène. *Thirst* also nods to *Suspria* with a minimal, saturated colour palate drawing the viewer in and focusing on the beauty of the abject. Coates' abjection is much slower than Argento's with the audience never rewarded with the money shot murder sequence as in *Suspria*.

Narrative is similarly questioned in *The Donner Party* and what the viewer experiences is something between documentary, DVD extras and dream sequence. A Surrealist approach of cutting and collage creates a disjunction of viewing modes and the audience is asked to question traditional linear-narrative readings.

The video works presented in *Loops* may live in the world of contemporary video art but can all be read in context to Offbeat midnight movies. These works sit outside of high or low culture by simultaneously exploring both and offer differing illusions of reality and rational coherence. Midnight is the opportune time to view such works.

- James L Marshall

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Simon Kentgens & Kurt Augustyns, *The Donner Party*, 2007, Video 18min.



BEYOND THE 'REAL' AND THE 'FAKE'

I was watching a Marina Abramović lecture the other day on YouTube and she said something that struck me as both odd and slightly incongruent. To loosely paraphrase Abramović, she said that performance artists hate the theatre because it is 'fake' and performance art is 'real'. She then went on to list some examples to solidify her case: (paraphrasing again) '... when performance artists bleed it is real blood - in the theatre it is ketchup... when performance artists are shot they are real bullets - in the theatre they use blanks.' Though I could see Abramović's point, and agreed with her in part, this statement sat uneasily for a number of reasons. What struck me most about Abramović's comments, was that she believed that the lines between the 'real' and 'fake' were so clear and easily defined. This may well be the case with the overtly constructed artifice synonymous with the type of theatre that she was alluding to, but when you think about the way Beckett used 'unreal' absurdist repetition to evoke the banality of a very 'real' existential conundrum, then the delineation between Abramović's defined poles becomes less apparent.

I also couldn't help but think of Paul McCarthy's extensive back catalogue and how his overtly 'fake' ketchup blood in some ways seemed more real than the 'real' blood that supposedly flowed from Chris Burden's arm after he was shot in his 1971 work, *Shoot*. Ironically there is something very 'unreal' or staged about someone deliberately being shot or cutting themselves for the purpose of a performance. However, this does not necessarily negate its vitality and power as a piece of performance art, it just muddies the waters when you begin to categorise it as an encapsulation of reality.

It is this tension between the 'real' and the 'fake' that links the four video works that feature in the *Loops* screenings.

Initially, I found Julian Hoerber's, *Killing Friends* a little difficult to watch. It was simultaneously mundane and brutal, and through its overtly clumsy and constructed depictions of extreme violence, it evoked a suffocating paralysis that I found confronting. Watching Hoerber's *Killing Friends* elicited a similar reaction to that which I experienced watching Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*. As we are so accustomed to the conventions of narrative in the cinema and the requisite suspension of disbelief, it is difficult to not feel frustrated when you believe a device is being adopted and abandoned repeatedly. Like Haneke's *Funny Games*, you feel as though Hoerber in *Killing Friends* is somehow having it both ways, i.e. either the film operates within the rules of this narrative construct or it doesn't. However, like *Funny Games*, it is in this play with the convention of cinematic narrative that *Killing Friends* finds its expansive power; and more broadly it is in its play with the tropes of cinema and video/performance art that it cultivates its rich resonances. It is this hybridisation and in turn push to reinvent, or at the least reinvigorate these previously defined disciplines that begins to invoke what Jörg Heiser calls a 'super-hybridity'¹, wherein the appropriation and conflation of a multitude of often conflicting tropes, symbols, motifs and artistic devices work to liberate the work from an immediately recognisable form and in turn enable it to momentarily elude definition.



Heath Franco, *YOUR DOOR*, 2011, HDV, 8mins 17 sec, Edition of 3 + 1 AP

A more recent work, Heath Franco's, *Your Door* unashamedly adopts the super-hybrid mantra, wherein the artist conflates YouTube do-it-yourself low fi special effects, Dadaist repetition, the comedic grotesque of B-Grade horror and soap opera, and the slang colloquialisms of Australian suburbia. This pastiche is presented in a gaudy hyper-real flatness that uses the aesthetics of overtly 'fake' music video production to elude to a state of being that is not dissimilar to Beckett's numbing existentialist conundrums. Though stylistically different from Hoerber's *Killing Friends*, the Nihilism links the two, though Franco seems to be having a laugh too along the way. Like Hoerber's work, Franco's *Your Door* might be described as a type of neo-existentialist or perhaps neo-absurdist video art that conjures the 'real' through its embrace of the 'fake'. In this regard, it rallies against the social constructs that are depicted on our day time television screens and which hover oppressively in the peripheries of the social contract, part self-preservation and part consensual exile.

The Donner Party, by Simon Kentgens and Kurt Augustyns is perhaps a little more complex and in turn more difficult to approach. It weaves in and out of the conventions of cinema, documentary and video art to such an extent that it manages to thread them into a singular homogenous whole, wherein nothing is 'real' and nothing is 'fake' or conversely everything is 'real' and in equal measures 'fake'. *The Donner Party* is stark and visceral in its photography and flirts with a loose, and methodically banal, narrative device only to stifle it repeatedly. Yet it is precisely through this oscillation between documentary and fiction, the mundane and the mythological, that the film achieves its clarity and its potency. Just like the bird, who we fear may spring back to life at any moment, *The Donner Party* appears dead too, scientifically cold, before it springs back to neo-romantic life with overt metaphor and lush poetic photography. Yet these romantic devices are repeatedly infiltrated by the mundane but brutal narrative through line. This is not *Shoot*, or Abramović's, *The Onion*, wherein the non-existence of the fourth wall is never in question. For although *The Donner Party*, like in some senses *Killing Friends*, might find the origins of its flirtation with the 'real' in French New Wave cinema, it is comfortably liberated from the shackles of this dichotomy. There is a sense of hope here but it is infused with the knowledge of the nihilistic extremities of post-modernisms crescendo, wherein the romantic hope of previous epochs smelled like delusion.

The future and the 'real', or the 'real' future is a theme which also infiltrates all four films. Though few of the films adopt a strict linear narrative device, in all of the films there exists an engagement with time. Overtly and in a nullifying way, this notion of linear time is presented in a banal and mundane manner in Erin Coates' work, *Thirst*. Referencing Zombie horror flicks, the creatures in *Thirst* slowly emerge into shot in an ever increasing throng only to, anti-climatically, slowly walk out of shot again. Certainly this appears to be a linear depiction of time, but it could also be circular too, could they be coming around again to walk the same path ad infinitum.

So too with *Killing Friends*, there is a linear narrative of sorts but then again you feel this could be a film that is played on a loop, over and over again, unresolved for eternity.

It may well be possible to suggest that the lack of strict narrative device and a linear arc are the distinguishing features of video art and set it apart from the cinema. Yet, there are always cases in point to dispel this theorem, - even Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* and *Drawing Restraint* works, though by no means operating within traditional cinematic narrative devices, do employ visual crescendos and arcs synonymous with epic cinema, as a way of propelling the viewer over the visual peaks and troughs that constitute the aesthetic and intellectual 'journey'.

However, unlike Barney's epic video-art/cinema, these four works seem to embrace the banal, the pathetic and the mundane as not only fundamental aspects of our existence, but realities that should be investigated and perhaps even celebrated. They sit in a new age of contemporary video-art, wherein all references are available, and can be conflated and employed at will with little regard for the rules of the adopted convention. Much like Jörg Heiser's notion of 'super-hybridity'², these four films are examples of work that draw on art and cinematic history but are not shackled to it; they are aware of the lines of demarcation between genres and disciplines but are not limited by them; and they are aware of the illusive nature of the 'real' and are thus able to achieve it by being 'fake'.

In this sense all these films are capable of being banal, funny, hopeless, irrelevant and brilliant. It is because, on the whole, that none of these works seem to be too concerned with being either, that they are sometimes able to elude any type of categorisation and definition - and this makes them something worth watching.

- Patrick Rees

¹Jörg Heiser, "Analyze This", Frieze, Issue 133, (September 2010): 94.

²Ibid.