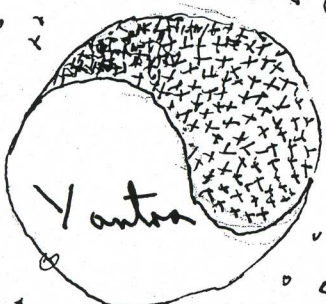


L'Étoile de Mer

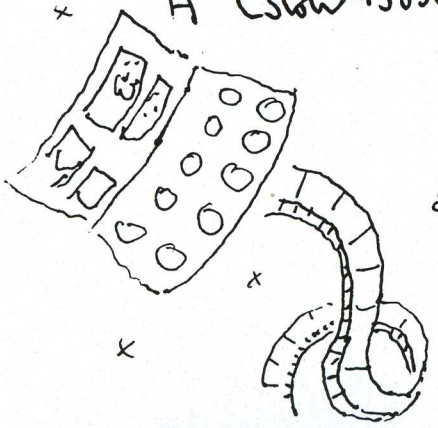


One Photo, Two Photos



Bristol Poetry Festival. Analogue Cinema.

A Slow Bore



Slow Poems

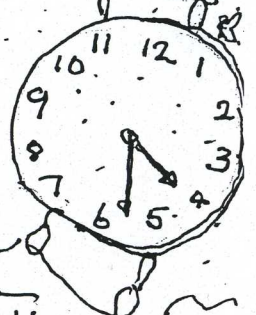
Riverside Studios Cinema

FILM POEMS 3
2001

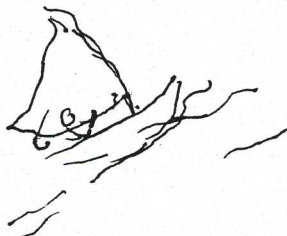
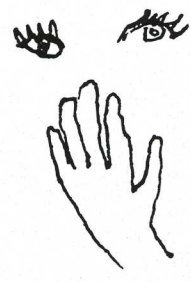
Un Chien Andalou



The Back Steps



A Short Film About Time



58049

Film Poems 3 programme notes. Doubles as issue 11
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remains authors or as stated. With thanks to... Ed Lewis
and his team, Hester Cockerill, Christophe Dupuis, Jean-Michel
Bouhours, Felicity Sparrow, Gareth Evans, The ex-LUX, the
bfi, the film makers and their estates, the audiences.

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Film Poems 3

Un Chien Andalou.

Directed by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali. France. 1928. 17mins. b/w. Silent.

Photographed by Albert Duverger. Cast Pierre Batcheff, Simone Mareuil and Jaime Miravilles, with appearances by Luis Bunuel, Salvador Dali and Jeanne Rucas.

'Un Chien Andalou, though primarily a subjective drama fashioned into a poem, is none the less, in my opinion, a film of social consciousness. A masterwork from every aspect: its certainty of direction, its brilliance of lighting, its perfect amalgam of visual and ideological associations, its sustained dreamlike logic, its admirable confrontation between the subconscious and the rational.' Jean Vigo in 'Vers un cinema social,' 1930.

In his autobiography Buñuel claimed that the film was "born of the encounter between my dreams and Dali's", that when working on the scenario their working practice was to reject any idea or image which might lend itself to rational explanation. Despite the many 'readings' and attributed meanings which the film has garnered over the years, the filmmakers themselves have remained evasive as to any singular interpretation, being more concerned with its effect on audiences: "Historically the film represents a violent reaction against what in those days was called 'avant-garde', which was aimed exclusively at artistic sensibility and the audience's reason... In Un Chien Andalou the filmmaker for the first time takes up a position on a poetic-moral plane ... His object is to provoke instinctive reactions of revulsion and attraction in the spectator. Nothing in the film symbolises anything." (Luis Buñuel, *Art in Cinema*, 1947). Quoted in Francisco Aranda, *Luis Bunuel: A Critical Biography*. S&W London 1975. Contemporary filmmaker Jean Vigo admired Un Chien Andalou for its inherent artistry and its "savage poetry". Despite the infamy of its prologue, wherein a man -Buñuel himself - appears to slash across a woman's eye with the razor (surely the most quoted scene in cinema's 100 year history) it is the film's poetry with its attack on normal/complacent vision which reaches out to audiences more than 70 years later. Felicity Sparrow.

L'Etoile de Mer.

Directed and shot by Man Ray. France. 1928. 15 mins. Silent with musical accompaniment. L'Etoile de mer poeme de Robert Desnos tel que l'a vu Man Ray" written by Robert Desnos. Assistant cameraman Jacques-Andre Boiffard. Cast Alice Prin [Kiki], Andre de la Riviere, Robert Desnos. '...one night I told my friend Robert Desnos, before he left on a two-month journey, that I would be happy to make a film out of a script by him. I committed myself to finishing the film by the time he would be back and the following morning, as promised, Desnos brought me a script-like poem filled with very photogenic images, yet very simple as such, a poem inspired by a starfish kept in a jar by his bed and written over the previous night, half-made of dreams and half-made of reality.' Man Ray, *Vu*, Jan 30, 1929.

A Short Film About Time.

Produced, directed, and written by Paromita Vohra. India. 1999. 11 mins. Camera Arun Varma, Sound Resul Pokutty. Cast Surabhi Sharma, Dilip Panniker, Gulzar.

'Depicts the sometimes funny, sometimes sad, but always shifting relationship between a young woman with a broken heart, her psychotherapist and his watch. Through their interaction, the film wonders about the nature of pain, the meaning of time, and the means of making it pass- or not pass. Shot in a day and completely self-financed.' PV.

For You.

Directed by Peter Todd. UK. 2000. 3 mins. Silent. Camera Roger Schindler. Editing Anthea Kennedy. Intertitles and images of a suburban garden as a record of a relationship. '...an ode..' Felicity Sparrow. *Garden Pieces*. Poem Film Film Poem. n.9. Feb. 2001.

A Colour Box.

Directed by Len Lye. UK. 1935. 3.5 mins.

'Lye is considered to be the pioneer of the technique of drawing, painting, and scratching directly onto the surface of the celluloid.' *bfi Animation Catalogue*.

Colour Poems.

Directed by Margaret Tait. UK. 1974. 12 mins.

Nine linked short films. Memory, chance observation, and the subsuming of one in the other. 'The titles within the film are: Numen of the Boughs, Old Boots, Speed Bonny Boat, Lapping Water, Incense, Aha, Brave New World, Things, Terra Firma. A poem started in words is continued by the picture; part of another poem is read for the last of the nine. Some images are formed by direct-on-film animation; others are 'found' by the camera.' MT.

"The kind of cinema I care about is at the level of poetry. In fact it has been my life's work making film poems. There are other uses of film of course ... but I don't do that, other people do that. I think my films appeal to people through their dreams if the connections in them are felt connections rather than logical connections." (Margaret Tait, describing her film practice in Margaret Tait: Film Maker, Dir. Margaret Williams, GB. 1983.).

Yantra.

Directed by James Whitney. USA. 1950-57. 8 mins.

'..keeps the audience's mind free from preconceptions and association. It is an object of meditation that requires no aesthetic or spiritual instruction to be appreciated.' bfi Film and Video Library Catalogue.

"'Yantra' means 'machine' in Sanskrit, and though usually implying a meditational aid (like a mandala, rosary or prayer wheel) may also refer to the Great Cosmic Machine – the elemental manifestations of energy which fragments, coalesces and seemingly differentiates to produce the illusion of our visible world. James' film answers to both these criteria, for it induces and aids a meditation on the nature of reality and the generation of matter – which can as well be contemplated in a scientific framework as fertilisation/cell-division or nuclear fission and fusion, or in the alchemical context as the boiling up of the elements in the Grail. Or – and this is crucial – as a purely aesthetic visual communication divorced from any extrinsic knowledge.... James worked on Yantra for about eight years (1950-58), meticulously painting the patterns of pin-point small dots on paper cards, and hand developing and solarizing much of the footage.... Yantra received its soundtrack when it was shown in one of the Vortex Concerts; Jacobs and Belson mixed portions of Dutch composer Henk Badings' Cain and Abel to form an uncannily appropriate and exciting musical counterpoint to the images." William Moritz 'Non-objective Film: the Second Generation' from Film as Film: formal experiment in film 1910-1975, Hayward Gallery catalogue, 1979.

One Potato, Two Potato.

Directed by Leslie Daiken. UK. 1957. 23 mins. Photography Peter Kennedy.

'An amateur film by folklorist Leslie Daiken studying London children amusing themselves in the streets and playgrounds. The games range from the traditional to the contemporary, from the elaborate group activity to a stick-trailed-along-railings solo by one boy.' bfi Film and Video Library Catalogue.

The Back Steps.

All Aspects by Leighton Pierce. USA. 2001. 5.30 mins.

A Children's Halloween party provides the material for this study in folded time. LP.

Running time approx. 95 mins. Programme subject of variation.

Curated by Peter Todd.

Programme notes compiled by Peter Todd with many thanks to Felicity Sparrow.

Film Poems 3 was first screened as part of the Bristol Poetry Festival October 4th – 14th 2001 on Saturday 13th October. 2.50pm. Arnolfini Cinema, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol, BS1 and screened at the Riverside Cinema London 2nd ~~November~~ 2001.

December

4.

Against Forgetting - Film Poems 3: the preserved light.

Gareth Evans

'If the cinema is to survive it will be only through a few groups refusing to visit commercial kinos... They will have to make scraps of film that every commercial producer would refuse and project them on kitchen walls...' The novelist Bryher, writing in avant-garde film journal *Close Up* in 1931

As soon as he heard (on the rhizome network, the wires humming with concern), he cabbed over, Todd that is, speed-blacked it across the unknowing city. Like someone who is one step ahead - just - of the building's final, tumultuous implode, and has filled an ear with the tiny roar of a fading child in a cornered room. He got in... and he got several out, but it was close. Bookings had been made, paperwork was wet, it was that fresh, things were signed but wreckage knows no contract save its deal with the termination of dreams. The staff were already on the street, binbagged out with less notice than of a quake's awakening, dazed witness to the scorched earth policy of contract hygienists, not so much cleaners as makers of tidy Marie Celestes. Like this, the Lux was closed down, put down, locked down (the prisoned works inside) and now it drifts, but stationery, in the onward flow of institutional failure to support. And the films, all the films, would the office erasers wipe tapes, would they scratch the trace off the reels, pile tins like traditional cheeses out in rain for rusty rot? It felt like Ray Bradbury, like the need to remember. To choose a book and know it so well others might read it forever through your telling. Would the films be kept likewise, seen and stored in the eyes of their carriers, to be viewed later in darkened enclosures, where the image could run on the retinal screen and audiences, perhaps individually (for the intimate need and in partial homage to the fact that community is hurt when cinemas are shut), would approach close to the face of the conveyor, like a lover almost, and watch the focused worlds within their gaze unwind their secret stories.

The light repository is still un-earthed, still buried and agitated, in bad not good quiet. If we were being favourable, we could think of Timothy Leary's head, cryogenically stacked 'for a better time'. But odds are not on such generosity with certain incompetents holding the keys. There is talk - and good - that site-specific business might unfold in the nearing future, evening drops by the committed core at currently unsigned addresses where titles suitable to unique place - and smuggled out perhaps - might alight and display. But the unclarity of futures is why we should value Todd and his exhibition now. *Film Poems 3* comes at a time when its productive increment, the fertile delta of bookings, suggests a survival and thriving beyond expectation, and therefore stable through simply being (and available). However, it is perhaps the final instalment until this primary archive is released from 'terminal row' and that notorious corridor's panicked pacing (he spirited a couple out, we know, and holds them now, like evidence and some form of belief talisman, that such works did once and can exist again, in all their bright unfurling, proof that the largest collection in Europe was not some shared, delusional psychosis of desire).

So, with this gift of gathered light more charged because it signifies (yet rises over) threat, it is sense-making that the 'Poems' phrase of titling offers itself as guide to this compendium. Poesy is fleeting grace, crystallised utterance that in its fragility endures. It is the dropped feather of a passing that holds the flight within it always. Epiphanies of torment or joy grounded in ink, moment alive because ambered on the page. Such implication is resident in this selection. And the qualities a poem brings - relationship of text or form to theme (of vessel to its juice), its potency with silence or spare sound (the gaps and absences where truths can be heard murmuring), its holding of all times, to varying degrees - are here explored in ways diverse as mornings in the world.

The ritual, the repetition of gesture and act - in making or subject - is also important here. Anchoring the image in celluloid and therefore time: learning it by heart through oftentime saying, so that it enters the blood and the weave of the day, is latent in the coursing, first in the making - and being - always and around the image, then ending in the ebb and flow of projection.

Ritual, the considered act for greater purpose than easy function, is a defining part of 'Un Chien Andalou', perhaps the ur-text of the visionary tradition, a reverse creation myth (for film at least) that undoes sight with one of cinema's most notorious images. Here it's showing - rare, this - on 35mm, thus the impact becomes environmental in scale. But what can be written about this sequence, a stream that denies words, both because it has been read almost to death and because it is itself such a sheer image plain that words seem leaden beside it? That's not to say that text does not crucially play a role. The temporal indicators - in their accumulated and apparent disjunction: once upon a time, Eight years later, three o'clock, 16 years ago, in Spring... deliver a script of seeping destabilisation. That the ocular slice occurs in the first, the genesis phase, removing symbolically the key co-ordinate of cinema's triangulation between film, screen and viewer, is the most provocative call imaginable to abandon conventional sensory response and immerse oneself in assembled disruption. This works because the move to a psychic or unconscious prerogative is initiated through a focus on the absolutely physical - the sharpening of a razor, the jellied spill of sight.

In the film poem - and surrealism in particular - objects are both absolutely themselves, discreet, edged, charged through close attention, and osmotically merged with all matter, hybrid forms electric with association, potential. This affirmative reach - between books and guns, armpit hair and pubic beard, between the mouth and the gaze (persistent, the ground zero of cinema, despite its apparent extinction earlier), along with a constant focus on the hand as the agent of (flawed) purpose - makes for a reading as densely threaded as any encounter and the dream of its result.

Thus the desire and the union in one, desire not unbound but framed and therefore strengthened in concentration. 'Un Chien's' erotic (because so enlivened) collapse of surfaces and densities into its narrative of logical excess is exhilarating because all references, all points of spatial and material certainty are shot, all anchors lifted and yet it still generates forward sense. Its pursuit and arrival are felt, not analysed, to be right. We have entered the world of its obsession and find ourselves believing the obsession to be the world, a world where the shore, the threshold line of possibility, is the site of buried mortality, where characters do not make the final journey across water but are stumped in a dune. End discredits and black.

The film's opening scene is also and obviously confident, perhaps the most assertive in cinema. In seeking to (virtually) destroy spectatorship, it almost archives itself before there is anything, except the once upon..., the moon, a violent man and a woman to be collated. Film becomes the memory of film, iconic, the last thing seen, a lover's face, the night sky. Does this suggest that so little is needed to make a narrative, that just a handful of components can provoke imaginative takeover in the viewer.

At that moment, the engine of the momentum is twofold - the percussive cutting and the tango's tang. Once you have heard the scored 1960 version - concretising the music (Wagner and dance track) Bunuel played behind the screen in the first view, then Mauricio Kagel's original 1983 composition for string orchestra - conventionally suspenseful as it might be - becomes the aural equivalent of false memory syndrome. The trait in the best Film Poems, that of singular remembrance, is taken almost to extremes here, as one image threatens to erase (ironically) what follows it.

This cinematic coup d'etat was screened on June 12 1929 with a new film by Man Ray. The celebrated photographer's previous work for cinema, 1928's 'L'Etoile de Mer' runs with many of the structural motifs the Spanish dog displays: its dream-fuelled narrative (but 'you are not dreaming', declares the picture at one point), its locale - a domestic interior and the occasional street, a couple shaped by passion and even a signifying totemic animal, here a starfish (in Bunuel's, a death'shead moth). One of the creators, writer Robert Desnos, also performs, as Bunuel did, in the action. But there is significant difference also. The latter's razor-edged clarity of sight is in direct contrast to the marine blur of many sequences in 'L'Etoile', with its oceanic wash of attraction and intent. Through a rain window and often darkly, liaisons occur - a woman undresses and is provocatively splayed - but while we do experience the believable world, of factories and alleyways, it is the atmospherics of beauty, of fire and water and starfish limbs that make for the more convincing reality, and less their definable form (the newspaper that blows past the courting couple a sign that the wind blows banal events away out of this picture's concern).

Desnos was a poet, and primarily of desire. He died in the German camps, having penned some of the most luminous declarations of the century. Here his lines, like those of the hand, chart the couple's journey: 'women's teeth are objects so charming that one ought to see them only in a dream or in the instant of love'. These two, of course, are the same. His advice to 'beat the dead while they are cold' is an affirmative declaration both that the chill of passing is not perhaps its final state, and in that uncertainty with what might follow, he prophetically rises out of his own fate and underscores the ability of art to endure.

An affection text also gives spine to maker/programmer Todd's 'For You' (a poem-in-film-poem). The simple screen of a white notebook page reveals that 'for you, I'd film the stars at night, a golden tree, the season change, where you will sit, winter trees, a path we walk'. This life, understated, the street and garden world made fresh through calm perusal warms the viewing as a heart's token. Witness and its communication becomes a vouchsafe of love (just as Desnos' lines and the hand lines of a written sentence). Stock, the celluloid lode, is offered in devotion to the other. Emotion and environment fuse in a calm, almost utopian landscape of the suburban. Establishing shots serve instantly as narrative revelations. Story is compressed into the primary nodes of a pulse: everything that is needed, visually and sonically. It's not about silence but degrees of hearing - the car at the end of the road, just in frame - and the tree's fine wind, a gentle scoring of the seen, like the breath of a lover in the blue hours of early morning.

For Todd, Margaret Tait is an essential, an island voice with all the maverick individuality that implies, fortunate to have found a site that matches and waters her vision. The fecundity of Tait's world lies not just in the spillage of natural life out of unkempt verges but also in her ability to encompass, notebook-like, all of her years within the pulsing form of daily filming. Her 'Colour Poems' are just that: alerting the

viewer with a siren start that her Orkney vantage post will deliver concise, spectrum dispatches, but this time with a more overt social drive. North Sea Oil - the marine surround to so much of her work here contains a political swell. But alongside there are engorged poppy heads, a girl (Tait's niece?) and her aha! as she opens a box (just opens a box but perhaps more) and marches, processions, boats, green life: all and any images could go in to films that, as journals do, record the eye's fruit. Multiform, her distinctive self glues it. World as floral, faunal, human detail: the garden of full mind.

Len Lye's 'A Colour Box' offers the rainbow range but to ends so unlikely it adds to the dazzle by default. This uptempo good-time jazz scored commercial for the GPO and cheaper parcel post (with weights and prices included in the animation) is a breathlessly energetic dance of lines, dots, shapes and all the rich hues. It is most of all an advertisement for itself, a dazzlingly free creation that glories in levity. A selling success, who knows? Probably, as any organisation open enough to sponsor such a project deserves our support. Those truly were the days, it seems from here.

Abstracted Lye might be, but the patterns are real - geometry is foundational after all - and James Whitney's extraordinary opus 'Yantra', a labour of love if anything is, continues the story. It's the '2001' of artist's film, macro and micro, molecular/cosmic, at once the marine unconscious and the body's dream of its own matter, a glimpse of the subcutaneous charge, the invisible interior. Apt then, the sonic wave that's with it, the hospital monitor, the Hubble galaxy tone, radio signals from far out, far in. And the effort of making, similarly a huge aim coupled with precise realisation - the system of crafting that matches the machine of the theme, but then through the concrete swarm to transcendent vistas, material to metaphysical. 'I am my brain's publisher' said Philippe Starck one time. Life and purpose, the energy of both in full cycle (Whitney's Uroboros Films). The snake consuming itself forever in making and moving on. Unforgettable, and an apprenticeship to intention that is medieval, lives on a pitch with cathedral ambition.

From far reach to the family ceremonial: Leighton Pierce's 'The Back Steps' - all painterly smudge (a touch of the Man Ray) and kid's ghostly business. It is suitably approached this way as it places the children in the moment of their own fun and at a junction with the ongoing history of a tradition. Boundaries unclear, self dissolved in situation. Frontiers are again unpredictable in 'A Short Film About Time', with its emotional moment of therapy - or rather the required acts of memory (in both senses) and analysis of this recollection - the seamless and present tense of this and therefore its parallel to the act of screening, a present viewing of past permanent present. Freefall time.

No lack of clock clarity in Leslie Daiken's folk anthropology 'One Potato, Two Potato', at least not on first glance. London kids at play in the 1957 afterwash of Blitz London brickpiles and dereliction. The BFI calls it an amateur film but there's nothing sloppy at all about this. Is reality amateur? Should kids be professionals (in short trousers)? If Daiken would like to be thought of as an honourable anti-specialist, then that's fine. But this is a discovery whatever the name, archaeological light of real value. It's as if the streets of Todd's London are seen in earlier rupture, a playground of the damaged, a broken world in which the majority population is kids (echoes here: a boy fashions a bow and arrow on a traffic island straight out of JG Ballard; 'Lord of the Flies' gangs patrol railyards, proceed through the stony desert of the urban).

Sure, at one level, it's a window on street amusements from easier times, from a golden age of and for imagination, where climbing and placing one's body in relation to matter and others was play enough. Co-ordination games, mind making a world each time school's out. This film is a marker of the shift away from that good simple. See it as a Chauvet cave of cinema, of images uncovered years later, the rituals displayed being timeless, alien, specific and species-shared all at once. Kids' shadows on the pavement are almost the earliest theatre, Plato's cast philosophy made young.

This out-of-timeness, this past / future document, suggests both a post-apocalyptic relearning of old and trusted practice along with a more imminent revisiting - the bonfire night that becomes a trigger to more recent events. And such ritual in the motion, its time worked on like wood or the coast, the children with their gaming-gestural repetitions, not leading to boredom but to a grounding of experience. Plant it seasonally. And the girl of the end, who draws a chalk line on a wall, the imagination triumphant, breaking brick distance with a line of hills, the crest of a sea swell: it's actions like this that make it as much of an ur-text as 'Chien' - without beginning or end - the time present and time future of Eliot's dictum, and we in our seats at the still point of the turning world, as the reels turn and make it all, each one new, every time the room softens into a velvet night.

To itself, the British cultural machine feels well-oiled enough without these lyrical incursions from home or abroad. At best they're tolerated, with embarrassment, like some relative on early gin at a funeral. But more often these significant outrider visions - and others like them - are seen as barbarian deviations that somehow got in when the windy lookout was unstaffed. Their threat is closer now (the machine would rather curate darkness). Of course, that they were made at all - in this time's thinking - is enough for awe. Bankwise, it's low-end for certain, but not in the range. Like the cockroach after the blast,

perhaps the justice comes when the struggle they've been through to arrive at all means that they can survive as documents in the breaks of the collapsing world. They also offer a smaller target. The nomadic culture – hustling for making with all the ingenuity of asylum seekers, and a certain, similar - within their own terms - desperate or inspired risk.

What they, the Lux and current business show is that some bridge between cinema and the more supportive gallery environment is now essential. These are in one way tough works, but fragile also when they hit the market highway. It's always only been individuals who have really kept innovative production and promotion alive in this country. From the outskirts of the air-conditioned (but at the centre of experience) they keep the creative human story forward. The heart thrives on current - it leaves and prodigal returns from the outer territories closer to the world. Cut the flow and it's stagnancy: a swamp soon is. Lock the messenger of vision out or starve them of funds and other means will emerge. If they are denied the reels or tapes, then it's not hard to see them spreading the news by any means necessary, as alley prophets, town criers declaiming in squares and colonnades.

They tell tales from the calm interstices, from the grace ports of the crisis and from the growing end-zones - fire yarns for the gathered folk to stave off night (but dig into it also, like darkest peat, damp to touch and glowing). They find constellations of use in the image's flickering light. The tales they tell might be flawed (like life is flawed), ruptured and veering, but the pure - or quest of it - is dangerous, it could kill us with its fundamental claims. Mongrel futures are the only workable ideal; hybrids, mixed-race in form and content. And if their halls - the Lux and like - are sealed against them, then these makers shall wander the world with the evidence and their reports. They shall call meetings on the midnight quays, in the guttered factories or high on the droving roads, restless speakers by the tree and there, in the broken sites, perhaps far from thoroughfares, they shall screen the potent truths they find beneath the tidal night, project their films on ravaged sheets and weather-beaten walls. And we shall be there also, waiting and, if lucky, briefly held, redeemed.