

## Screening Review:

# Spring 2000 Filmpool Premiere Screening

Saskatchewan Filmpool Co-operative  
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by Jess Boyce

The moment I received my program for the Filmpool's Spring Premiere Screening, I made note of two interesting things. First, the line-up of films was quite diverse. The program listed several experimental and narrative films, as well as an animated film that falls somewhere in between. But what interested me further was the diversity of filmmakers: longtime and more recent Filmpool members were represented, and thanks to the inclusion of the "48-Hour Filmmaking Frenzy" pieces, the audience had the opportunity to see the collaborative work of filmmakers with varied levels of experience as well.

In spite of disparate origins, a dark theme uniting the films revealed itself as I watched. All but one of the seven films screened deal explicitly with mortality and death (and, since my film studies training begins and ends with FILM 100, it is quite possible that the other film, an experimental piece, does too and I am unable to see it). In three of these films, we visit graveyards – and in a fourth, we watch as one is made. In one film, we are confronted with images of sickness and treatment that expose our bodies' fragility. Another film explores characters' attempts to prevent tragedy through magic. And in *Springtime for Zombies* – well, you get the idea. From the living, to the dead, to the

undead, the Premiere Screening gave the decent-sized crowd plenty to contemplate, and even provided us some light moments.

The evening opened with an "experimental form of storytelling" in Maureen Bradley's *Stranded*, an exploration of the body, aging, and death. Narration recounting the unseen Charlotte's neurotic obsession with escaping her hair and dust elements which remind her of what is heard over images of undervalued creatures and stalks of swaying like yellow crops. The juxtaposition of these images and words leads the viewer to reconsider our conception of where our bodies end and the world outside begins. Challenging the notion that bodies are encased, solid, Charlotte sees her body everywhere and is disturbed by her discarded cells "collected in little piles" on surfaces in her home. Eventually, she is compulsively driven to shave her body and finds herself feeling (and thus alive and free). I realize the tactile qualities of the images and sounds in this film, which draw attention to our sensual experience in a compulsive way.

Next up was Darryn Holbrow's *You*, a conventional narrative film whose opening might fool the viewer into thinking an innocent love story about to unfold. As quickly as it focuses on the two coworkers in the canteen making eyes at each



Iris, a character in Shawn Fulton's *Cat's Pyjamas*

courtesy of Shawn Fulton



image provided by David Geiss

still from *Transient Tragedy*



image provided by David Geiss

Zombie Gerald Saul drinks coffee in *Springtime for Zombies*



photo by Shawn Bauche

Anita Radmacher does the hand-processed film dance during the "48-Hour Filmmaking Frenzy"

over soft music, the tone changes. A sinister and violent undercurrent in the workplace is revealed, created by the through-and-through evil boss. Believing that he has total control over not only his employees but the whole town, he makes life miserable for the young waitress and her would-be lover. The isolated roadhouse bar becomes an ideal setting for revenge. I won't give away the ending, but *Only You* certainly didn't have a cut-and-dried resolution. Though the heroes are able to consummate their love (with a nod to Titanic's 'steam on the car window' scene), the story does not feel completely resolved and one is left wondering what these characters will do next.

I was glad to see that the three films from the "48 Hour Filmmaking Frenzy" would be screened, as I'd missed them the first time around. I was quite impressed with the films the participants were able to create in such a short time, especially considering many of them were new to film. Three teams of 3-4 participants were given 48 hours, a Bolex, and the task of conceiving, shooting, processing, and editing 200 feet of 16mm black & white film over a weekend. The resulting three films made excellent use of the downtown area, showing that one needn't stray far from the Filmpool to make good films that happened to fit nicely into the evening's darker themes.

Surprisingly, the film with the brightest take on death was *Springtime for Zombies*, the effort of Krysta Mitchell, Gerald Saul, Alan Fullerton, and Regan Jans. In addition to the obvious treat of seeing Gerald Saul portray a sad zombie, the film is a surprisingly sweet tale of finding true love (in a cemetery, naturally). The film had a bit of a surrealist feel, with bizarre screams accompanying our hero's wanderings, and one really neat shot that seemed to have a flock of geese taking direction from the filmmakers as they follow the undead couple.

*View Down The Hole*, by Anita Radmacher, Jon Tewksbury, and Dave Stefanyshyn, was described as "playful yet dirty" in the program. Quick pan shots of the city, backed by a fast-paced soundtrack combined in an ode to urban exploration. The use of a moving camera was effective in examining the lines and shapes of the downtown area.

The final Filmmaking Frenzy film, *Transient Tragedy*, also made use of Scarth Street – and a cemetery – for much of its story. Kevin Chow, Rick Fayant, Don Fayant, and Steve Suderman's film tells the story of a man whose life becomes aimless after his baby dies. Set to Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven," we watch as the grieving father slips further into despair, living on the street and wandering around the city. I really liked the "home video" footage that opened and closed the film – it really tied the portrait of the anguished man together.

I was eager to see Gerald Saul's *Naive: Toxic 4*, as it had been a year since I'd seen the last installment in his series. This one, like *Toxic 3*, documents a personal confrontation with sickness. Opening with positive and negative shots of staples that seem to jump and scatter to the sound of piano keys being struck by Saul's young son. I found myself eager to find patterns in this sequence, and began thinking of the black-and-white inverted images, the black-and-white keys of the piano... but this contemplation was put on hold by the second part of the film, which quietly shows



close-ups of stitches, veins, broken skin, and stapled skin – marks of medical treatment. Saul stares directly at the camera – not to challenge, but to expose. A final return to sound and abstraction gives the viewer a chance to sort out this confusion which is personal yet relates to us all – how do we make sense of our bodies? Can we put them back together when they become fragmented? I wonder if this series will continue, and if it will continue to pose these kinds of questions. I hope it does.

The evening closed with Shawn Fulton's *The Cat's Pyjamas*. The animated film tells the story of several quirky people and animals whose lives intersect in comical and tragic ways. Opening with a startling scene in which a man and a gorilla fight while balanced on a log rolling through a rushing river, we are soon introduced to a mourning, angry widow, a young woman who attempts to cultivate a plant that can predict tragic events, and a man who stumbles around the city, calling for his lost cat. An offbeat story of synchronicity unfolds as these characters briefly touch each other's lives, and ultimately meet one night at the strangest gallery opening you'll (hopefully) ever see.

Fulton's characters are complex – there are no caricatures or predictable responses here. Each demonstrates compassion and impatience, certainty and awkwardness. This depth combined with the candid-style dialogue makes the characters easy to connect with as they each search for something on the streets, in the forest, and in cemeteries. Though we are shown only snippets of the characters' lives, it is these brief episodes – Gordon clumsily playing with his cat, Daisy's care for her sick "child" – that reveal the most about their personalities. These little moments make this a film I'd like to watch again and again – I feel like the subtleties in the sound and imagery need close attention to be thoroughly understood. Particularly interesting is the way the characters' progression throughout the film is marked by a shift in the integrity of the drawings. At times the characters' bodies are solidly defined; at others, Fulton colours outside the lines. At one critical point, the character Daisy finds her body losing its curves, her hands becoming blocky and cumbersome. These visual elements work with the tangled storyline, mysterious characters, and layered sound to create a real richness – no wonder this film seemed to be an audience favourite at the screening.

Fitting with the informal "theme" of the evening, *The Cat's Pyjamas* is sad and deals with themes of mourning and tragedy, yet comedic elements (particularly the early scenes with Herbie, a child whose body has aged to that of an old man, and those with the trend-seeking art curator) add brightness. Add to this beautiful, "realistic" animation and outstanding voices, and you have a wonderful close to the evening's screening.



Top to bottom: Gordon, Lisa, and  
characters in Shawn  
*The Cat's Pj*

courtesy of Shaw

