



BARTLEBY REVIEW

Issue 31 - April 2015
.....
www.bartlebyreview.com

A Synced Engagement ••• Madison Killo

Jeremy Shaw
'Medium-Based Time'

*Contemporary Art Gallery
555 Nelson Street
Through April 19*

Every hour on the hour, "The Quickeners" is screened. With a distinct beginning and end, it forms a full narrative structure. In this way, your experience is controlled—inducing a "Quickening" (or ecstatic state) of your own.

Jeremy Shaw's transcendental collage sequences real ethnographic footage of a small group of Pentecostal Christian snake handlers overcome with "Human Ativism Syndrome" (H.A.S.). In this pseudo-documentary, H.A.S. is a condition that actualizes the desires and feelings of the "Human Beings," who are predecessors to the "Quantum Humans." The desires and feelings of the Human Beings are foreign to the Quantum Humans who are characterized by purely rational thought. Afflicted with H.A.S, the minds of the depicted Pentecostal Christians—Quantum Humans whose

minds have lapsed back to the mental stage of “Human Beings”—have been endowed with emotive faculty.

The film begins with a series of cutaway shots—a road, intertitles, movement, and then a face. A man begins to sermonize. You try smooth the edges of his language, looking for something familiar, but the man speaks in gibberish. A religious gathering materializes, yet there are snakes, bodies extenuated in the air, mutual embraces, and dance. The relation between the mind and the body have been obliterated. The Quantum Humans’ minds have reverted to a more primordial state—one of indiscriminate sensation. Shaw overlays all of the footage with subtitles, replacing what the Quickeners speak about with aphorisms such as “I was so tired of the future.” Their worship is nonlinear in that there is no schedule or designated speaker at their gathering.

The nature of science fiction is that it portrays empirical experiences rather than emotive ones. Shaw plays the part by balancing a neurological field study with the construction of an ulterior world: the world of the Quantum Humans (and of the Quickeners themselves). The ethnographic is approached through the lens of science fiction, treated with the latter’s elements of popular culture. It remains hard to logically situate yourself in the succession of virtual events despite this point of familiarity. The beholder is both a spectator of a fiction and a partaker, in trying to discern what is real in the apparatus of the fiction.

This is Shaw deploying the trickery in his nostalgic medium. By using 16mm footage, you come with preconceived ideas of what may unfold on screen. The ethnographic footage is recycled, becoming a platform for something new. The film is hyperreal—the footage is true, but beyond plausible, and the sequencing and narrative structure are confusing. While the piece can be perceived as Shaw aggregating his own desires and tendencies, “The Quickeners” ultimately results in a contemplative and succinct critique of societal tendencies and rigidity. Where does reality end and Shaw’s transcendental imprint begin?

You gradually begin to hear Shaw’s imposed sound, deep booms of synthetic waves carrying an implied futurism under the influence of volcanic eruptions. As they gradually come into your awareness, they are intense yet at no point become overwhelming. You begin to draw the line between your synced engagement with the video and the worshippers’ engagement with the “Quickening.” Still, there is no disillusionment as the work holds you in. You feel no need to leave. In fact, you feel the need to stay.

With that said, “The Quickeners” is an artwork that directly instigates an affectual state. It realizes the potential that art has to design affect. Jeremy Shaw facilitates this with a concoction of sound counterparted by the interlacing of the past, present and future of constructed worlds to seem familiar to our own. If only for a moment, the viewer’s state is suspended within the paradigm that Shaw creates.

Madison Killo