

Precise Moments of Existence

An Essay on Kye Wilson's Film, *Angel:legnA*

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"We should long ago have become angels had we been capable of paying any attention to the experience of art, and allowing ourselves to be changed in accordance with the ideals it expresses"

- Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema, Andrei Tarkovsky

An autumnal wind rustles through reeds and dead leaves, but an otherwise uncanny stillness infiltrates the landscape. As a watchful camera lens waits patiently, the shot is interrupted only by the slow encroachment of an indistinguishable figure walking steadily into view. Wilson presents us with the first scene of his latest film piece, *Angel:legnA*: a cinematic dreamscape, destabilizing and reassembling our perceptions of time, place, and arguably our own existence. The moving image piece draws from the work of Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky; Wilson aligning Tarkovsky's metaphysical explorations of the human condition to the way in which disabled people might experience and perceive life. This hidden parallel in the work introduces many of us to an unfamiliar perspective, and an almost uncomfortably raw 'reality' emerges. We are swept up by a tide of loss and infinite searching, and like most engaging pieces of film and art, we are left with a much more complex set of questions than we started with.

Wilson's video work places great importance on its durational aspect, emphasizing his interest with themes of time and the conversations had between presence and absence. In *Angel:legnA*, Wilson's long takes are mechanical, methodical, almost trance-like. The unrelenting gaze of the camera does little to stimulate, but this is not Wilson's intention. Instead, we become lost in the structural mirroring of the dreamscape we are witness to, entering us into an entirely abstract space. As in Tarkovsky's work, these lengthy takes cause spectators to be "shifted into an empathetic state co-existent with the image" (Kreider & O'Leary, 2013). This is not simply 'realism'; here we are made to become a part of what we are watching. The sudden jump cuts again simulate the transient nature of a dream, a motion succinctly described in Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (2010), "You never really remember the beginning of a dream do you? You always wind up right in the middle of what's going on". Through this, does the artist mean to represent the way those with mental disabilities perceive life? Or is this a means of presenting the various dreams and memories collected from Wilson's participants*? We are constantly following both characters' interaction with the space, watching their every move and hunting for every symbol to form our own comprehensive understanding of this dream. Is there

symbolism in each of the household items we come across? As each object is framed so precisely within each shot, we see reality transformed strategically into a still life painting. A mirror atop a table-clothed dresser, three old suitcases, a dolls house – the placement of everything is so deliberate, so real, that arguably this inversely becomes Wilson’s key to constructing the ‘non’-real. The continual fluctuation between a monochromatic and a green-hued colour filter further taints our ability to perceive. As in Victor Fleming’s film, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), this becomes a reminder that we cannot rely on our visual senses to comprehend all that what we see.

And yet, by the end of the film *Angel:legnA* becomes more than a dream-like experience; it is the momentary confusion experienced between a dream and waking up from one. The camera introduces us to the perspective of an alternative human experience, but in doing so brings us into the room unable to speak, unable to feel, unable to hear exactly what is going on; we can only see. Nevertheless, although dreamscapes are defined by their indefinability, the reality we come to perceive in *Angel:legnA* is also cold and high-res. We are living, nay, following, precise moments of existence but left questioning our perception of things that should be so familiar. This disorientation is soothed only by the comforting voice of the narrator we so readily place our trust in; the only thing we *can* hear. He asks, “*What power do I have? The power to be invisible, overlooked, to be passed over...?*”. We are humbled by this omnipotent voice. In his essay *Magical Surfaces*, the Belgian artist David Claerbout defines the photographer as, “makers of everything down to the smallest detail”, essentially “playing God” (Claerbout, 2016). Arguably here this personification of the camera allows the medium to become ‘God’. We as the audience are the ‘angels’, or rather, the messengers. As we are immersed into the prolonged, distorted reality of the film, the challenge is to accept the discomfort and emotional rawness mirrored back to us. Can we be changed in accordance with these ideals?

* Participants include adults with learning disabilities, alongside creative practitioners (artists, film-makers, writers, poets, and musicians).

Bibliography

Claerbout, D. (2016). *The Silence of the Lens*. [online] E-Flux. Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/73/60460/the-silence-of-the-lens/>

Greider, K. and O'Leary, J. (2013). *Time, place and empathy: the poetics and phenomenology of Andrei Tarkovsky's film image*. [online] Taylor & Francis Online. Available at: <http://Time, place and empathy: the poetics and phenomenology of Andrei Tarkovsky's film image>