

Projected Figures

Film Bits and Bobs



Home About Current ▶ Older ▶ FrightFest ▶ A-to-Z Twitter @AntBit



Spontaneous Artifacts (2020)

Posted on 14 April 2022 By AntBit

0
SHARES

Twitter

Facebook

Spontaneous Artifacts begins, more or less, as it intends to go on, with a curious mélange of spoken word, written text, music and 3D animation. To the digital image of a diamond hovering above a spinning record, David Finkelstein can be seen intoning from the bottom of the screen (even as text of what he is saying appears above him): “The last time we slid around on the groove of the record as it slid and slid and slid closer and closer to the stylus, waiting for that moment of contact, when everything would vibrate immediately, immediately into a crackling, vibrating sound.” This is the promise of an opening musical track – like the initial vibration that some mystics believe sparked the universe – and also an expression of the desire for contact or connection, for there to emerge from the chaos of sights and sounds some sort of art. Then Finkelstein’s collaborator Ian W. Hill appears, similarly chanting and gesticulating like a beat poet to the accompaniment of further text and digital imagery, and soon both Finkelstein and Hill become a regular double-act together at the periphery of the screen, as the film’s **Vladimir and Estragon**, or perhaps **Statler and Waldorf**, weaving their free-associative commentary amid a confusion of often surreal visual material.

In other words, **Spontaneous Artifacts** is a feature-length experiment. The process behind it started with Finkelstein videotaping himself and Hill performing their improvised free verse in response to each other, and then with Finkelstein composing and recording a score for their words, and finally adding layers of animation that play upon the text in a visual medium. Much as the record seen spinning at the start has a picture of a saxophonist at its centre, the film too offers a cinematic form of jazz, with each of its different parts dissonantly complementing the others in holistic symphony. Presented as a series of episodic sketches and ruminations, the film is abstract and can at times seem almost incoherent, but certain phrases and images (diamonds, thumbtacks, fruit, swords, books, tarot cards, brains, cars) recur, with the onus being on the viewer to follow the wild thread of thought and to make the connections (like a stylus to a record). At one point Hill talks about remapping the contours of his own brain, “trying to plot out new routes that were not previously there, perhaps between something like anger and something like euphoria”. This film does something similar to the mind, firing our synapses in new and unexpected configurations as its desultory dialectic leaps from one idea to the next. Indeed, another recurring image here is of a brain lighting up and shooting out laser-like beams – and if some of the concepts here and their associated visualisations seem decidedly lysergic in nature, hallucinogenic drugs and their effects on our thoughts, perception and even reception also come in for express discussion.

The circle formed by the spinning record at the beginning of **Spontaneous Artifacts** will make its return as clock face, millstone (“heavy turning”, as Hill comments, “makes all of our lives possible”), wheel, an aqueduct formed (via an Escher-like paradox) into a ring, and finally a spiralling sculpture through which our narrating heroes drive a car en route to a stylised version of the **Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC**. Along the way, their round trip takes in history, literature, the cosmos, marketing, ecology, hope and despair. All this ends up being reduced to art – indeed, quite literally, to paintings on a wall, which are of course a reflex for cinema as well as an instantiation of the title.

“Don’t think about anything,” Finkelstein says somewhere near the middle of **Spontaneous Artifacts**, “Just let the ideas sit.” It is probably as good an approach as any to this strange, free-wheeling riff on the human condition and its many representations.

strap: David Finkelstein & Ian W. Hill’s experiment remixes improvised riffs on human experience into an animated oddity

© Anton Bitel

Follow @AntBit

Subscribe to Blog via Email

Join 204 other subscribers.

Email Address

SUBSCRIBE

Click here to find out about this site’s problem-free host.

