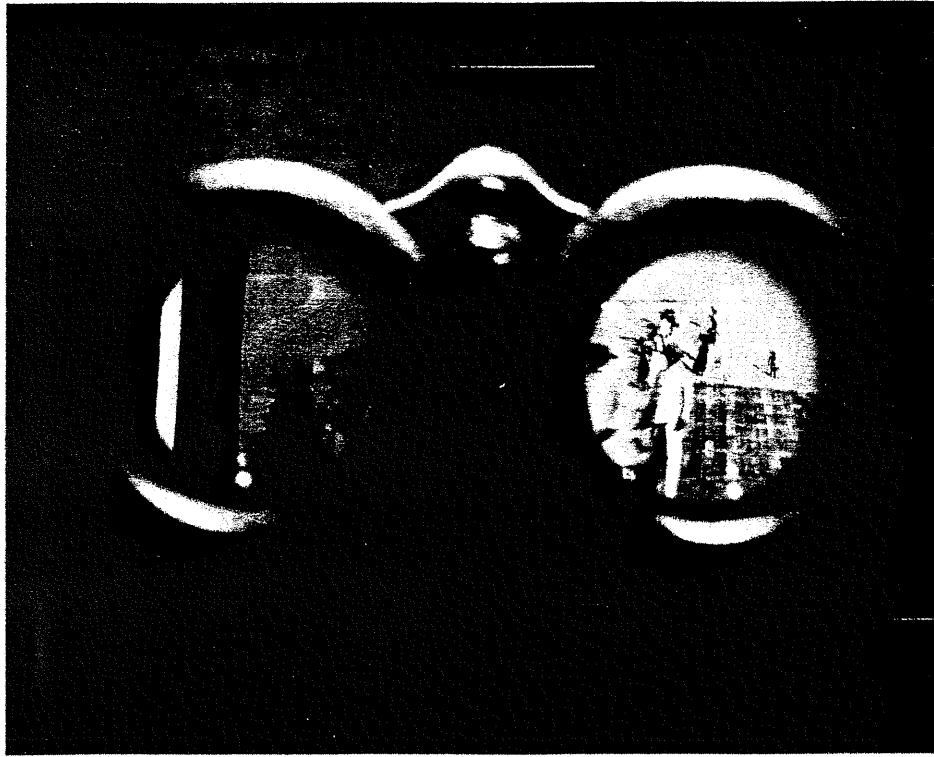


answer print

Spring 2010



Playing With Light

by Aidan Lytton

Among the films screened at the 2010 \$100 Film Festival, Amanda Dawn Christie's daring combination of film and improvised live performance, entitled *Transmissions*, stood out as the most unique and engaging. Christie is an experimental artist in the truest sense, letting her creative curiosity constantly guide her in new directions. The most fascinating aspect of *Transmissions*, is its ability to showcase a creative mind at work, chiseling into new ground, while simultaneously remaining part of a theoretical lineage which has guided experimental filmmakers past and present on their quest for undiscovered treasures of creative expression.

The nature of Amanda Dawn Christie's performance-film work is at first difficult to wrap one's mind around. Christie merges the roles of filmmaker, editor and projectionist into one supreme conductor. Using film loops on multiple projectors, she toys and experiments with the images in real time as they leave the projectors. Using prisms, lenses, and even her own body, she manipulates the light as it transmits from the projector to the screen. Repetitious loops are given infinite room for variation as the onscreen images are warped, refracted, and superimposed upon each other, creating a perpetually engaging display of light. The images used in *Transmissions* are cryptic and symbolic; as the name would suggest they focus on communication technologies. Film loops depicting a cell phone being opened and closed, and fingers typing away dramatically at a laptop, coupled with enigmatic phrases popping up on the screen establish a theme based on the concepts that surround the transmission of information. The establishment of theme brings the viewers attention to the nature

of the images - information being manipulated and transmitted through electro magnetic frequencies. The soundtrack, which is composed of what may very well be static and distorted radio signals, reinforces the theme established by the visual elements of the film. Although very abstract and open to interpretation, *Transmissions* acts as a catalyst for meditation on the manipulation of natural forces, sound, and light waves, to create and transmit meaningful information. Among the most striking images used in the film is that of a train leaving a lit station and entering into the dark unknown of night. This image is strongly metaphorical of a meaningful transmission leaving one medium (a film projector perhaps) and entering into the unknown space where it becomes an abstract series of vibrations, susceptible to infinite manipulations, before it is received by another medium (the viewer's eye) and regains meaning. Christie considers part of her role as projectionist-performer to be a stunt driver, taking a machine designed to go from point A to B, and exploring the broad scope of detours and unexpected possibilities that can occur between A and B (Christie. 2010 \$100 Film Festival Program). The image of the train in *Transmissions* is powerfully representative of this artistic philosophy.

Avant-Garde filmmaker and theorist Germaine Dulac outlines in her writing the difference between what she calls "visual" and "anti-visual" films. For her, visual films are those which explore the pure form and motion of what has been captured on camera, where as anti-visual films are preoccupied with the telling of a dialogue based narrative. The pre-occupation with narrative in anti-visual films distract from the pure visual experience that the film medium has the potential to create (Dulac.

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'Visual and Anti-Visual Films'). Dulac's criticism of commercial cinema as anti-visual, proposed in the 1920's, established the creation of truly visual film art as the goal of the avant-garde filmmaker. Although Christie employs the use of a narrative skeleton to base her improvisational performance-films on top of, her work is in every sense in keeping with Germaine Dulac's vision of an intensely visual film experience (Christie. 2010 \$100 Film Festival Program). The essence of *Transmissions* is based upon the creation of image through the transmission of light. Christie's experimental manipulations of the images released from the projector emerge the viewer, as well as the walls and roof of the cinema, in rhythmic motifs of light and images.



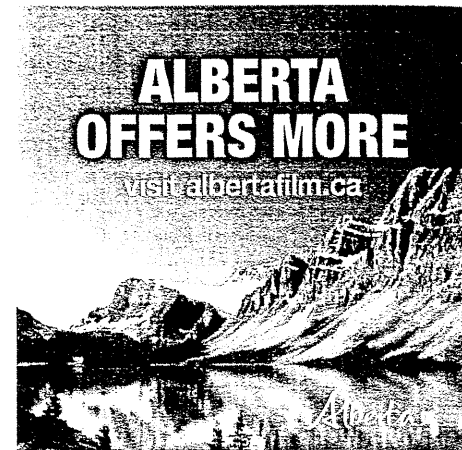
Transmissions by Amanda Dawn Christie

lels between the ideas of these pioneers of experimental film, and Christie's manipulation of light and image with prisms and lenses.

While Amanda Dawn Christie uses the foundations laid by previous filmmakers, she renovates and expands upon these foundations. She takes the creative editing process so essential to May Deren, and brings it into the present moment, physically shaping the nature of the light as it leaves the projector. The film loops she plays with are simple and based around rhythmic motion. Unlike Deren's manipulation of motion on film, which are forever set in a single variation, Christie's manipulations are spontaneous and infinite in variation, taking on a different form each time the film is viewed. The root of *Transmissions'* unique beauty, is that it brings the viewer out of the voyeuristic experience associated with traditional film viewing, and into an awareness of one's actual surroundings. The film does this with the presence of the filmmaker working live in the theatre, and light from the projector refracting to illuminate portions of the theatre other than the screen. This characteristic contrasts sharply with the Surrealists, who sought to create a type of "conscious hallucination" where in the dark of the cinema the viewer is brought out of a lived experience of reality, and into the subconscious realm of possibility (Goudal. *The Shadow and its Shadow*). Christie makes her performance

part of the viewer's reality, and hence they become inseparable, the boundary between lived experience a created performance is blurred.

Transmissions is imaginative in its exploration of the possibilities of performance film. This is a genre that remains still largely uncharted, and Christie delves into it fearlessly, taking established elements of experimental film, and utilizing the unique capabilities of performance film to guide them in new directions. With minimalistic loops, Christie's film is in keeping with the low-budget tradition of experimental film. However its very nature transcends the concept of a "budget" in a certain sense, as there is no single copy of the film that will ever be produced or distributed which one can attach a budget to. The creation of a real time film performance which integrates the viewers lived and film viewing experiences through manipulation of image and light, makes *Transmissions* a work that truly exemplifies experimental film.



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