

Durational Film and Spiritual Reflection, presented by Sue Thomas

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Visual art offers an opportunity to experience the world in a different way. For the artist it is a personal expression of something known and probably of significance to them, brought to form. This process is one of new understanding, sometimes even catharsis. For the viewer, their experience will almost certainly be different again. No single interpretation can ever be the same as another. For example, there are as many emotional feelings associated with, say, the colour blue as there are shades of blue.

Many artists choose the natural world as a signifier for their work, using it to represent what they hold dear. The choice of nature as subject also resonates strongly with spirituality. In early times so-called 'primitive' religion allowed natural forms to take on the mantle of sacred objects. They were used to represent deeply felt beliefs in something greater, unknown and beyond everyday life, deserving of significant respect. They enabled man to engage more strongly with the material world and to use what Abram (2013) describes as '*the acute levels of more-than-human communication*'⁽¹⁾. In current times those who see the environment as something special and in need of protection, or those who walk in nature to recharge their batteries and to feel closer to the more-than-human world because it possesses something man's made world cannot provide, seem to be expressing similar spiritual beliefs.

The use of close-up, detailed images take this process one step further. When they are presented in filmic form Corredor (2006)⁽²⁾ describes it thus,

"Artists are extracting fragments of reality from the chaos of nature and are transferring and setting them in artistic visual frames charged with patterns, facts, logic of ideas, flow of emotions or flights of the imagination, and thus intensifying our experience of awareness of nature."

Working with durational or 'slow' film to create artists' moving image is a form of visual art that allows us to watch in detail events which in ordinary time may pass unnoticed. This art form can provide time for an exquisite examination of the everyday. Film maker John Woodman ⁽³⁾ whose work explores landscape and natural phenomena, uses film of a long continuous duration to enable us to examine our relationship with nature. Bill Viola ⁽⁴⁾ also use this technique, in his case by reducing the number of frames per second, to emphasise the significance of what we observe as it unfolds in slow motion.

Durational film is also a serious attempt to counter the speed of everyday life, to offer an opportunity to relax the pace of both thought and action and move solely into the present, a process somewhat akin to gentle meditation. As this process happens, heart and pulse rate slow, pressing thoughts recede and the viewer is able to enter more fully into the images, thus imbuing them with additional depth and meaning.

These three factors, the natural world observed at an unfamiliar level of detail and at a durational pace, successfully combine to offer the viewer an opportunity to consider life from a very different perspective. One which can either engender personal spiritual reflection or provide an opening for spiritual discussion.

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