

review

## Heavy Eyes

Canadian experimental filmmaker and writer Mike Hoolboom on Siegfried A. Fruhauf's Heavy Eyes from Fascinations selection



Heavy Eyes (Schwere Augen, Siegfried Alexander Fruhauf, 2017)

The pictures in Siegfried A. Fruhauf's *Heavy Eyes* (10 minutes, 2017) have been already seen, and even bear the marks of this looking – like pre-washed jeans. They belong to the growing genre of found/stolen footage movies and supercuts, in which pictures are boosted from their original sources and repurposed. Do we need to make new pictures, when so many already exist, clamouring for our attention? Our picture mountains may be shredding the project of attention itself, as they become too available, creating new forms of invisibility. Not the traditional invisibility of repression and silence, but the new invisibility of transparency and abundance.

The artist is drawn here to white men and women who are beautifully lit, the soft light producing eternal face monuments. The faces are so iconic that the director can't help but return to them himself. After finishing a well-travelled version of the movie in 2011, he has come back, like a thief to the scene of the crime. He has recut his own film, producing a denser, more satisfying cut-up.

The faces that are at the heart of the movie don't offer themselves immediately to the viewer. Instead they appear in a palimpsest of emulsion and digital processing. These silvery pictures are shattered and multiplied. No sooner does a face appear than it doubles, then doubles again, as if there was no way to maintain a single identity any longer.

As Lacan reminds us: love means giving something you don't have to someone who doesn't want it. Here the look, which is also the emblem of desire, fractures the subject. And the look moves in two directions – it strikes out at its subject, turning the other into object, prey, utopian hope, escape route, saviour and villain. But it also turns back/inwards, and breaks apart the one who is desiring. Who am I now that I love you? I'm producing a new version of you, through my desire of you. I'm producing a new version of myself, by wanting you so much. Love is like found footage, endlessly recycling and remapping, producing multiple vantages and selves.

Desire is carried on two shoulders in this movie. The first is analog film and the second is digital video. Analog film returns us to the body, the direct impression of light falling on a body and then onto silver. Emulsion is alive, a vibrant chemical dream that continues to shift across time. It bears the marks of time, like any body. So much of what used to be called experimental film offers its viewers a return to the body of the pre-verbal infant. It is a haptic cinema of touch, an infantile encounter of overwhelming sensations, colours, surfaces and textures. These forms of cinema – carried on most notably by Stan Brakhage, though many came before and after the maestro – invite the viewer to re-enter the bodies they used to have, to surrender to the play of the senses, and to reawaken to the world in a new way – which is ironically the old way.

Digital cinema offers the possibility of an endless tinkering and reworking of the original image. In *Heavy Eyes*, the artist takes the faces, struggling to see and to be seen, and creates copies. This is the cornerstone of digital consciousness: the endless proliferation of copies which cannot be told apart from the original. As the copies become the original, even the notion of a single, original self (which the analog project is bent on restoring), is called into question, left in ruins.

The artist's reflection on desire and looking is carried by two traditions, though he leaves it

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up to the viewer to wander between them and marvel at the surface of broken mirrors, the silvery beauty of cracked emulsion, the avatars which invite us to join each of these faces on their restless pilgrimage to the heart of our own longings.

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#### **Mike Hoolboom**

Mike Hoolboom (1959) is a leading figure of Canadian experimental filmmaking. He worked for the distribution company CFMDC and as the artistic director of the Images festival. He is the author of a novel and a number of books on experimental cinematography. In his personal and essay films, he works primarily with "stolen footage". His films appear regularly at the Ji.hlava IDFF - in 2003 a retrospective of his work was held. He has published more than one hundred articles on fringe media which have appeared in magazines and catalogues around the world.