

1988?

Reviews

ACROSS THE BORDER

Angie Daniell reviews Duncan of Jordanstone College's new 'Made in Scotland' compilation.

Not a name that trips easily off the tongue, Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College, but one that's making itself increasingly known at video screenings on both sides of Hadrian's Wall. This second compilation tape of the best of students' work, premiered last month at AIR Gallery in London, also included several names from that other bastion of video teaching, Sheffield Polytechnic. Not that this makes it any easier to identify any distinctive college hallmark or binding themes. However, while the Television Workshop comes equipped with tantalising facilities like Paintbox, their use isn't much in evidence (with the exception of Liz Power's *Cruise to the Universe*); the approach being analytical as opposed to technically experimental. (That said, two very short pieces by Christopher Rowland, *Tomato Martyr* and *Splat*, work purely as slapstick jokes).

Whilst much of the visual or textual content seems primarily concerned with the tenuousness of communication, Pictorial Heroes prove an exception with a typically hard-hitting piece, *Sniper 1*, about politics and the media. Over an opening flare of white noise, a gun's telescopic sight slides into place. A vulnerable figure is stalked across a landscape of urban decay. At one point, the Scottish Television studios are closed in on, while a cut-up soundtrack rattles off bullet(in)-sized pieces of news about public order and public unrest. A stark and uncompromising piece, but which tends to lose itself in its own jagged form, the tension seeming to derive from rather than question the conventions of television drama, with, for example, dramatic cuts from the gunwoman to a figure escaping from a tunnel.

In a more contemplative mood, *Fly in Your Eye* (Sandra Christie) and *Arrivall Departure* (Malcolm Dickson) both revolve around the understanding of memory. In the former, close-ups of a naked, blinking eye and the hesitant tracing of a snail-shell line are juxtaposed with the image of a baby in an attempt to explore a past which memory invariably distorts. In the latter, a woman's face floods the screen over glimpses of a ghostly landscape, rushing past as if from the window of a train. Flickering, over-exposed Super-8 footage of family holidays and long-lost friends conveys a sense of memory as indecipherable, mysterious, oblique, yet, like the face, looming powerfully in the mind's eye; images that offset a briskly academic analysis reducing both memory

and amnesia to purely scientific phenomena. One of the longest pieces at 11 1/2 minutes, its visual content, relying so much on repeated images, didn't quite justify its length.

Many pieces accorded an important place to the spoken word. In Richard Couzins' *Nicely Executed*, an anecdotal fable about a rabbit who loses its tail links a sequence of disparate images - a finger trapped in a model guillotine, a peg being snapped onto a washing line. There's more truncatory violence in David Kelly's *A Force To Be Reckoned With*. First we hear snatches of threats and insults as an angrily contorted face looms out from a mist-shrouded Union Jack. The scene then abruptly switches to a Play School set with a perky little monologue by the sort of schoolboy who has mittens attached to his duffle-coat sleeves. The everyday violence of the first part is contrasted with the fairy-tale grotesquerie of the boy's eventual plight - his hands getting chopped off by his parents and palmed off (sorry) as dog food.

Text and image are used with verve and humour in Clio Barnard's witty exploration of science, the universe and the common-or-garden potato. Meticulously, obsessively, the narrator of *Dirt and Science* dissects her household tasks with the help of an unlikely-looking 'Leonardo da Vinci', resplendent in flowered frock. A bath-tub of dirty water is multiplied to fill a black background like so many constellations. "Who shall cleanse me?": the plaintiff cry of the Housewife, elbow deep in grime, takes on a spiritual resonance in this celestial setting.

Word disintegrates into pure sound in Cavan Convery's *A Mere Stimulation*. Aggressive male faces shout in an escalating sharply-edited sequence till a torch transforms a real mushroom into a sizzling simulated atomic one in a fragmentary piece on violence.

In *The Parallel* (Lei Cox), sound is synchronised with movement. A man's footsteps reverberate loudly as he paces backwards and forwards over a green strip of earth dividing water and sky. After a while, though, the man's 'reflection' starts trailing behind, and gets further and further out of step, till finally continuing its movements long after the first figure has left. Effective because of its very simplicity, sustaining the attention with-

out recourse to fast edits. Liz Power's *A Cruise to the Universe*, on the other hand, is an example of pure delight in the visual. A Chinese orchestra accompanies cute, animated paper cut-outs of dragons and divers, fish and flowers as they swirl around miniature globes.

An equally intricate, if less well focussed, piece of animation is Bella Emslie's *Love and the Domestic Appliance*. Hybrid models wave arms and handles in frantic contorted movements which could be interpreted as a quest for structure to their seemingly random existence. Finally, in three short pieces by course tutor, Stephen Partridge, text and image become one. Three short sentences about sentences appear in white on black on the screen - each with a different character, pinpointed perfectly by David Cunningham's accompanying music. Simply to quote what the sentences say is insufficient since they come alive only when seen in the context of their movement. In the easiest of the three to describe, a jumble of letters scrolls across screen and then settles to read: 'These letters constitute these words.'; an action repeated to state: 'These words constitute this sentence.' Such indisputable truths are turned back on themselves like Buddhist proverbs; little pearls of video wisdom, as the old saying goes, where the medium is, indeed, the message. **Media**

Angie Daniell

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