

SPLICE

Fall/Winter 2019



Unmapping the Prairies | An Optical Storm | Navigating Past and Present
Manipulating Celluloid | Notes From a Programmer | The Oser Essay

filmpool.ca

FILMPOOL STAFF

Gordon Pepper: Executive Director

Amber Dalton: Membership and
Communications Coordinator

Logan Vanghel: Production Coordinator

FILMPOOL BOARD OF DIRECTORS: (2018-19)

Jason Britski: President

Matt Ripplinger: Vice-President

Dawn Bird: Treasurer

Jeremy Ratzlaff: Secretary

Louise BigEagle

Ron Brandt

Luke Halyk

Morgan Jones

Sophie Kokott

Karla Paragg

EDITOR

Wanda Schmöckel

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Danielle Austin

Splice Magazine

c/o the Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative
#301-1822 Scarth Street | Regina, SK.
S4P 2G3

P. 306.757.8818 | F. 306.757.3622
splicemag@filmpool.ca | filmpool.ca

Splice Magazine is a publication of The Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative. The Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative is a non-profit artist-run centre that supports, encourages, and assists independent filmmaking in Saskatchewan.

The FilmPool is committed to developing an awareness and appreciation of independent film that reflects the individual and collective cultural expression of Saskatchewan people.



LETTER FROM THE FILMPOOL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Splice Magazine is one of only a handful of magazines across Canada providing a voice for independent filmmaking. This is why it has been such an important communication vehicle for the FilmPool and for our entire Saskatchewan independent film community. It's crucial we have an organization, like the FilmPool, which not only supports the production of independent film, but also, one that provides the fascinating behind the scenes stories and context of the films themselves. The great thing about working at the FilmPool has been my opportunity to meet so many different people, from all walks of life, and to understand, as well as support, their artistic journeys. Everyone's film is unique, with its own personal inspiration and motivation. Shouldn't we ensure that these unique works of art and behind-the-scenes stories be documented and shared with others? This is why the FilmPool will always make every effort to publish Splice Magazine and to promote the artistic, cultural, and political significance of these films.

Thank you again to our editor Wanda Schmöckel and to all of the contributors for producing this outstanding issue of Splice Magazine.

Gordon Pepper
Executive Director
Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Fall 2019 issue of Splice magazine. Saskatchewan is fertile ground for independent filmmaking and film culture, and Splice endeavors to be a hub for writing about our vibrant scene. This issue chronicles the urgent and necessary filmmaking of documentarian Tasha Hubbard; the boundary-pushing expanded cinema of Light Terrors; an interview with emerging experimental filmmaker Matthew Ripplinger; the curatorial work of filmmaker Dianne Ouellette; Amalie Atkins's otherworldly installation at the Remai Modern; and – for the first time in *Splice's* pages – the 2018 Oser Essay, by

author Jesse Desjarlais, an annual award given to the year's outstanding film studies essay – which *Splice* is pleased to offer our readers with thanks to the University of Regina's Department of Film.

Thank you to our writers and contributors for making this issue such a rich reflection of film culture in Saskatchewan.

Bon cinéma!

Wanda

CONTENTS

- 4 UNMAPPING THE PRAIRIES
- 10 AN OPTICAL STORM
- 14 NAVIGATING PAST AND PRESENT
- 18 MANIPULATING CELLULOID
- 22 NOTES FROM A PROGRAMMER
- 26 THE OSER ESSAY



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



City of Regina



cultivating
the arts

UNMAPPING THE PRAIRIES

TASHA HUBBARD LOOKS BACK

BY CARLE STEEL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON MONTES & GEORGE HUPKA

Facing page: Tasha Hubbard,
photo by Jon Montes

The credits of Tasha Hubbard's film *Nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up* roll over an aerial shot of crops at the height of summer. It's a beautiful sunny day. The fields are an even, Monsanto green, not a bite out of them. Original homestead boundaries flicker across our consciousness, then fade back into nothing, just one more shadow of the great forgetting on the Canadian grasslands. A mapping, an unmapping.

Hubbard is born of this place, a Cree woman, adopted as a child by a family of white farmers. When she first heard about the shooting of Colten Boushie, she was in the car with her son and nephew, who were giggling in the back seat. The suddenness of the death was shocking to her, she says in the film. "Our Cree beliefs tell us that our children don't belong to us. They belong to themselves, but we are responsible for keeping them safe." Hubbard says she always thought she could teach the boys how to protect themselves as they grew into men. Colten Boushie's death made her realize she couldn't.

On the internet, the dehumanization had already begun: "In my mind, his only mistake was leaving witnesses," read one tweet. "Shoot, Shovel, Shhhhhhh!" Read another. News outlets quoted the RCMP's statement that a theft on a farm had resulted in a death.



“Our Cree beliefs tell us that
our children don’t belong to us.
They belong to themselves,
but we are responsible
for keeping them safe.”





At its centre, *We Will Stand Up* is a story of the death of a kind young man who loved horses. He was a spelling bee champion, beloved by his mother and his cousins and his friends. Then his murder, and the injustices to his family and his memory that followed.

As an academic and researcher, Hubbard immediately saw Colten Boushie's death as part of a continuum that began with the settling of the plains. "I started thinking of it in terms of this wider context of the prairies, of colonialism," she says. "I was seeing the comments come out, the way Stanley's family was treated, the way Colten's family was treated."

She thought of what this death would mean to her son and nephew if grown adults — educated adults — were celebrating the death of a young Indigenous man.

Her first impulse was to write about it. With encouragement from her family, what began as a blog post turned into the idea for a documentary.

Hubbard began filming at Gerald Stanley's first court appearance. "Most people knew this was going to be big," she says. "Did I know the twists and turns it would take? No, but that's documentary. What was going to happen in this incredibly charged atmosphere? You don't really know at the start. It's your best guess."

At its centre, *We Will Stand Up* is a story of the death of a kind young man who loved horses. He was a spelling bee champion, beloved by his mother and his cousins and his friends. Then his murder, and the injustices to his family and his memory that followed.



The film is also a history lesson, personal and political, told through scenes of trials from the past, and a peoples' fight to survive. It is Hubbard's own story, told lightly, in her own voice: This is what happened. This is what has always happened.

There is a symmetry to the scenes Hubbard shows us in this film, awful and beautiful at the same time: the hanging of eight men in the Battlefords in 1885, their families and communities rounded up and forced to watch. What else was Colten Boushie's death than a kind of psychological warfare? The rage of the farmers at a gathering in the area, saying they would have shot him too; the RCMP as false mediator, the role it's had from the beginning, to protect settlers' property gained from the riches of stolen land. The Boushie family's epic trek to Ottawa, then on to the United Nations, with his cousin Jade Tootoosis as the family's brave and eloquent spokesperson. Hubbard's own son and nephew, walking the broken grassland, its history smoothed away by a farmer's crop. Visiting with members of her two families – birth and adopted. Her father will teach the boys about the meaning of justice in Cree culture. Her adoptive grandfather will teach the boys how to handle a rifle safely and to pick cans off a fence.

At the centre of the film rests the facts: Colten Boushie was shot in the back of his head at close range after he and three friends got stuck on a piece of Gerald Stanley's land.

It sounds like some of the kids were being jerks: jumping on a quad, running from an angry Gerald Stanley and his son. What followed, like so many deaths of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan, sounds like murder.

But it isn't, according to a jury. Here on the prairies, the kids were criminals, and the farmer was just protecting his stuff. *That's what you get for trespassing.* The trial is a travesty, as is the treatment of the family and witnesses.

The film is more than a simple recounting of facts, however devastating. "I didn't see this as the definitive text of something that happened," Hubbard says. "The transcript is there, people are going to write about the trial."

Hubbard says the film is more of the perspective of someone who is deeply of the prairies, who has had the experiences she's had. "Also it's the perspective of people we never hear from — a family who lost their loved one, who didn't set out to have this happen to them. But it did. Then we're told to trust a system that isn't set up for them."

Facing page: Tasha and her grandfather, *We Will Stand Up*, photo by George Hupka

All photos courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.





We Will Stand Up, photo by George Hupka

The challenge was to find a way to make these layers cohesive. Over the months of making the film, she and her long-time producer, Bonnie Thompson, wrote out their notes on the three strands of the story and moved them around until they hit on a natural movement from one strand to the other.

The connective tissue between the layers took the form of a simple animation showing Indigenous people being pushed off the land, the tracks of the people, the brutal Indian Agents and their army of mounted police, the predecessors to the RCMP. The animation is effective: a viewer may want to argue against the facts narrated by Hubbard, but there is no arguing with a story told so plainly over simple images of people in braids watching a hanging.

“We’re taken into that world that the illustrator and the animators create. They’ve created this space for people to enter.” Hubbard says she needed the animation to tell that part of the history. It’s the power of the story that carries us into that space.

“We learn through reading and information provided to us, but the story is what gets into people’s bones, gets into their minds,” she says.

As someone who has thought deeply about the context of an Indigenous present in the prairies, through her studies and her other documentaries, Hubbard goes straight for our bones.

Part art, part long-form journalism, *We Will Stand Up* has enjoyed a wide release in Canada, screening at film festivals and requested by governments, universities, and community groups.

The word ‘activism’ has been used to describe the film and Hubbard’s work. While it’s largely used to dismiss people fighting against injustice, at its root, she says that activism is about activating something, about shifting things. “Most Indigenous documentary filmmakers, and a lot of others — what we hope to do is to shift things. Sometimes that can be a small shift in





Boushie delegation at the UN

someone’s thinking, and that’s great! I celebrate that as much as I celebrate anything else,” she says.

“We can’t stay on the same path that’s been set. However the film contributes to a shift off that path that leads to continual dehumanization of people I love and care about — if that’s activism I’m okay with that.”

“The tragedy is that not every family is able to speak in that way, or to have a documentary made about them. There are many families who find themselves in a similar situation and don’t have a place to speak” Hubbard says. “That’s one thing that Colten’s family would say and reiterate throughout the process: ‘We’re not just here for us.’”

And Hubbard’s own family?

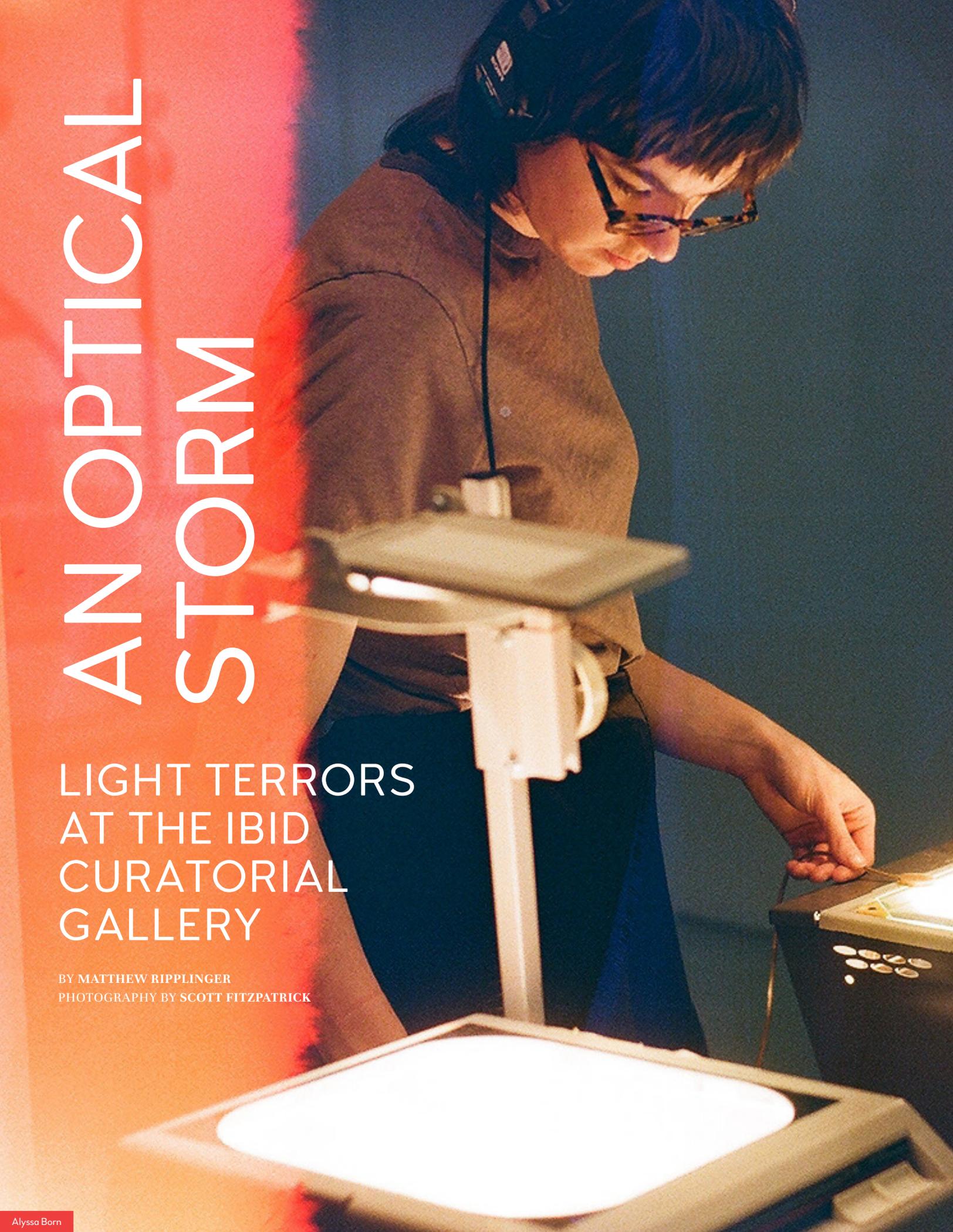
Early in the film, Hubbard tells us that her family has a motto: “This is our territory. We belong here, even if people try to make us think we don’t.”

We Will Stand Up is a testament to that deep belonging.

As for her grandfather, Hubbard says that though he may not always know what she does in her films he supports her work.

“Something I’ve always appreciated about my grandpa is that he has always recognized that things don’t look the way it was agreed to,” she says. “My grandpa is not any different than the people who grew up with an education system that is designed to not tell that history. People say the education system is failing. No, it’s working the way it’s designed to work. Indigenous people are not meant to be taught about and understood. We’re all living in a time and place where the meaning and intent of the treaties were actively hidden. We’re living in a time of shredded documents and archive budgets being slashed. This is where we are.”

Yet even now, her grandfather’s thinking can shift. “He’s 93. He can shift. So can we all.” /S



AN OPTICAL STORM

LIGHT TERRORS
AT THE IBID
CURATORIAL
GALLERY

BY MATTHEW RIPPLINGER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT FITZPATRICK

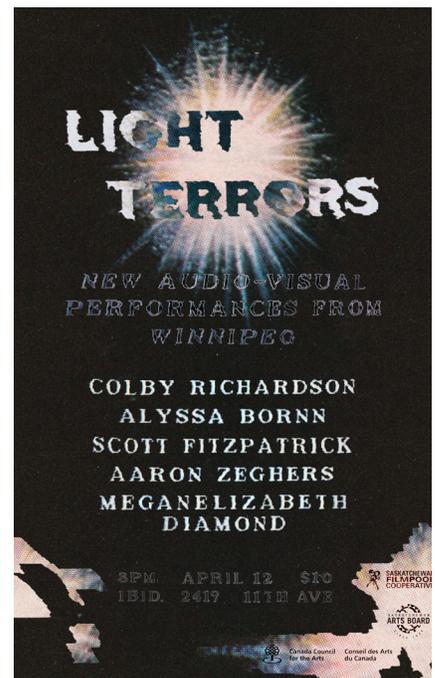


Colby Richardson

A light storm from our neighbouring province of Manitoba touched down at the IBID Curatorial Gallery in Regina this past spring. Light Terrors brings together an assortment of works made with obsolete technologies with the intention of subverting their original applications.

This mobile expanded cinema series features Meganelizabeth Diamond, Scott Fitzpatrick, Alyssa Bornn and Colby Richardson – four Winnipeg-based artists showcasing their uncompromising visions utilizing film, overhead and slide projectors, and analogue video mixers. The artists manipulate these obsolete machines to not only create images, but to discover new sounds whether derived from recordings, optical track readers, or the distorted sounds of the machines themselves, performed in real time. The artists construct an analogue synthesis between audio and visual mediums in presenting a unique variety of audio-visual works.

THE SHOW OPENS WITH *Alterations* performed by Meganelizabeth Diamond, implementing celluloid collage work with three slide projectors, blending the more commonly experienced slide show viewing with the handmade



Light Terrors exhibition poster



reconstruction of images sourced from her relative's homes. She combines remnants of found film and family photos to create entirely new scenes in conjunction with familiar soundscapes that were present in these fragmented memories. Focal shifts of the projections symbolize the distance between past and present.

The act of adding and removing the slides manually express a physical link and special bond to the celluloid and to family, and further reconstruction of the unforgotten and reimagined landscape.

SCOTT FITZPATRICK'S *Second Star* employs a quartet of motion picture film projectors and film loops with a lo-fi laser print text aesthetic. The machine is reimagined as an audible instrument. Instead of an optical track,

the laser print text is read by the exciter lamp in the projector to create rhythms and tones relayed through the audio mixer. A triptych of black on white text is projected onto one wall, and a background dancer moves with the sound on an adjacent surface. Scott's lo-fi aesthetic of laser printer ink onto clear leader yields grainy black and white symbols and mirrors the distorted yet organic sound. The sound of each loop varies in length and pitch. Midway through *Second Star*, Scott unveils a special black leader loop, spliced with a metal adhesive that lends an extra staccato to the sound design.

ALYSSA BORN helms a duo of overhead projectors with her audio-visual piece *Eclipsing*, utilizing glass prisms and filters to create refracted light trails and topographic zones reminiscent of a night sky full of stars, as well as monolithic shapes. Through the performance, Alyssa continuously rearranges the materials to transform



the two-dimensional plane, and takes it a step further by removing the overhead glass, channeling the light at different angles to further obscure the projection. The contact microphones connected to each projector create a communicative source for the artist to draw these abstract sounds from her devices.

The combination of image and sound creates a feeling of openness in the space and a physical connection to the user through vibrations.

COLBY RICHARDSON caps the night off with *DE / GEN* which is comprised of two analogue video mixers transmitting through a single projection. He takes control of the matrixes and algorithms bound by these mixers by repeatedly duplicating the number of screens, ultimately morphing into a myriad of high contrast black and white screens as the performance unfolds. A continuous cycle of image regeneration and degeneration results in a stroboscopic frenzy. Tones shift and evolve from a playful and balanced conversation between the machines, to a more visceral attack on the senses with an uncanny flicker and sound.

Light Terrors is an innovative ensemble of obsolescence that challenges expanded cinema and light-based performance. It was an inspiring night of profound audio-visual spectacle presented by the Winnipeg Film Collective, and I look forward to seeing what they do next. /S



Installation view, Amalie Atkins, *The Diamond Eye Assembly*, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, 2019. Photo: Blaine Campbell

There is a sense of useful symmetry to Atkins' narrative: an alchemizing of defunct traditions into modern tools.

NAVIGATING PAST AND PRESENT

AMALIE ATKINS AT THE REMAI

BY JENNIFER SPARROWHAWK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLAINE CAMPBELL

Amalie Atkins' *The Diamond Eye Assembly* is comprised of three 16 mm films, *The Diamond Eye Assembly*, *Transvection*, and *Requiem for Wind and Water*, the installation weaves together a myth-like, poetic narrative depicting the experience of multi-generations of refugee prairie women. It is a hero's journey, with the hero (or heroines in this case) being two twin sisters who set out to avenge their mother who was slain by a braid-severing, mysterious, witchy antagonist.

Hair serves as a symbol of identity in the films. And to be slain in the world of *The Diamond Eye Assembly* is to have your braids shorn. Without them you perish. The villain's costume resembles the distinct onion-

domed roofs of Slavic architecture, symbolizing the persecution of the Mennonites in Atkin's ancestral nation of The Ukraine.

The filmmaker skillfully and thoughtfully honours the experience of her displaced Mennonite ancestors while also subverting oppressive European gender binaries.

An early image is of the grandmothers in a farmhouse kitchen in the 1950s. One is assisting the other by fastening an apron around her waist. The act is done with an air of genuine kindness. But one apron becomes



two, then three, and soon the woman has tied what appears to be dozens of aprons onto her friend's torso. The act of service becomes excessive, destructive. This speaks to the nuanced relationships between women in a patriarchal society – how they can at once be sources of support for one another and also (often unconscious) enforcers of burdensome gender roles and expectations.

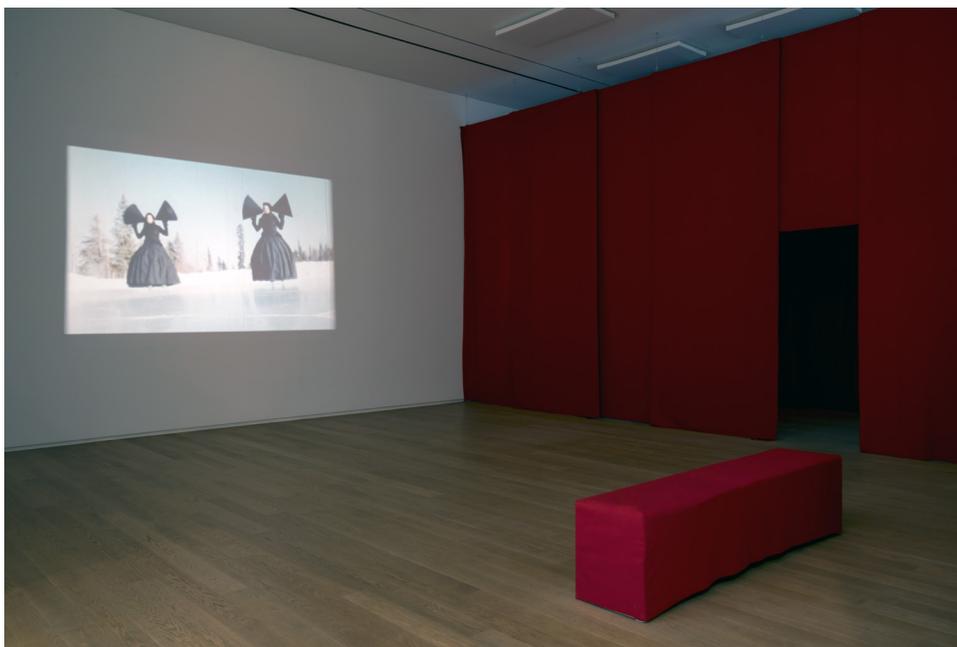
Later we see our protagonists, the twins, as children intently playing with blocks under the kitchen table. As they construct columns and towers they are summoned to leave their creations behind in order to assist in the kitchen with a funeral ceremony. There is a presentation of shoes made of bread which may be delicious, perhaps even comfortable, but not very practical footwear, especially for ambitions like construction or architecture. Conversely, there is a scene where the now teenaged twins encounter a pack of 1960s women on roller-skates on a lone paved road in the country. Clearly, they are all taking the newly available birth control pill and reveling in the new-found autonomy over their wombs, and freedom to do things like roller skate with their friends in the afternoon instead of changing diapers or freshening up their husbands' highballs. The twins don skates too

and join in on the fun, but when they decide to check in at the homestead and try skating on the wild prairie grass they fall on their respective faces. Their modern footwear made for pavement makes it near impossible to traverse the prairie landscape.

Atkins illustrates the complexity of balancing evolving feminist ideals, independence, and empowerment with traditional prairie identity. If a woman chooses an alternative to heterosexual marriage and having children it can compromise her role in her community with painful consequences.

TRANSVECTION offers a dreamy interlude from the narrative. The film is a loop of the twins floating through time. From childhood to old-age and back again, all the while conjoined at the arm.

There is a sense of useful symmetry to Atkins' narrative: an alchemizing of defunct traditions into modern tools.



IN REQUIEM FOR WIND AND WATER we see the adult twins use their domestic skills not for sewing baby clothes, but combining them with their zest for building to construct a shelter for themselves while they devise a plan to slay their mother's conqueror. The scissors used to cut braids are repurposed into a pair of field glasses to help track the very culprit responsible. The twins use their culinary skills not to have supper waiting on the table for their husbands' weary return from the field, but to create a lavish banquet of intricate, delectable dirt-based dishes designed to tantalize and, if not fatally poison the villain, subdue her enough to confiscate the locks of hair of their ancestors she's been hoarding on her person like a game of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey gone horribly wrong.

Once in possession of the plaited talismans, the twins reverently offer them to the swiftly flowing river, to be carried by wind and water into the future as a means to eulogize their ancestors' lives and the hardships they endured to preserve the freedom, identity, and culture of generations to come.

ATKINS' THE DIAMOND EYE ASSEMBLY is a beautifully crafted homage to her Mennonite lineage and an

important addition to the canon of settler prairie mythology. The installation honours the past while criticizing its repressive shortcomings, helping pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for prairie inhabitants. /S

The Diamond Eye Assembly appeared at the Remai Modern from April 5 – June 9, 2019.



Installation view, Amalie Atkins, *The Diamond Eye Assembly*, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, 2019. Photo: Blaine Campbell





MANIPULATING CELLULOID

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW RIPPLINGER

BY JASON BRITSKI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW RIPPLINGER

Matthew Ripplinger at the Edinburgh Film Festival, photo by Hannah Brooks

Matthew Ripplinger is an emerging experimental filmmaker based in Regina, Saskatchewan. His interests focus on black and white 16mm and 8mm film, hand processing, contact printing, optical printing, and home-made emulsion. At press time, his film *Sir Bailey* has screened at 15 film festivals in six countries. Aside from creating his own independent avant-garde films, he also works as a cinematographer in both fiction and documentary. In addition, Matthew works in the medium of printmaking, and explores themes and processes combining the mediums of analogue film and print work.

Stills from *Sir Bailey* by Matthew Ripplinger



Jason Britski: Can you tell me a little bit about *Sir Bailey*? Where did the idea come from?

Matthew Ripplinger: The idea for *Sir Bailey* came to me when my family and I had to face the hard reality that my dog – that I had grown up with – had become sick and was not going to be around for much longer. This film is a way of paying tribute to one of my dogs, Bailey, through my own artistic endeavors. The analogue film suits this project as it creates a physical connection to a physical being I have been around since my childhood. What I wanted to do was make a film that wasn't completely sentimental, that would have a conflict at its centre – the conflict being Bailey fighting the bone cancer that he was suffering from. Since I am really interested in avant-garde film, process cinema, and different analogue techniques involving chemistry, I felt like this was the project where I could really elevate my research in that field.

JB: Can you elaborate on your process?

MR: I had three short shooting days with my dogs Bailey and Brooke. I even brought them to the production studio at the (University of Regina). On the last day of our dogs' lives, I grabbed a Bolex and lights from the film department, and captured some shots of Bailey in our home during his last few hours of life. This is where the majority of the film is sou rced. He could hardly stand. It took a lot of encouragement to have him get up and walk around for one of the shots in my film. I kept the filming brief, as I wanted to let him relax in these moments and be present with my family. At this point I wasn't exactly sure what I would do with this footage. But I knew that I wanted to work with the theme of decay, loss, and suffering through a physical connection by manipulating the celluloid through photo-chemical means.

The technique that I came across was homemade emulsion. I came across this technique in experimental film handbooks and by viewing filmmaking workshops online, and did a lot of research. I was exposed to filmmakers like Lindsay McIntyre, Alex McKenzie, and Esther Urlus through an experimental film class, as well

as my own research. To me, it is a really unique thing that very few people are doing.

JB: So, this technique was all self-taught? You didn't have any help in figuring out how to do it?

MR: Yes, I basically taught myself how to brew the emulsion. Although many filmmakers before me laid the groundwork. Without them I would not have known where to begin. I needed an extra hand in making the emulsion during my first few trials. My friends and fellow filmmakers Elian Mikkola and Jeffrey Altwasser initially assisted me with mixing the chemistry. I followed the recipe and steps from Esther Urlus' book *Re:inventing the Pioneer*. She includes a detailed description of how to make emulsion, as well as different kinds that yield faster, or slower film speeds. The one I made is a basic emulsion recipe that yields an ISO of one or lower. I don't think you could really expose it through a camera at 24fps, and the delicate nature of the emulsion would risk breaking off of the base. I would contact print from my camera negatives in strips of a little more than a foot in length. That's the best way to do it because if the emulsion strip fails, I can always go back to my negative and try again. So, I used Esther's recipe, and did a lot of trial and error. It takes maybe a day or two to make the emulsion. The most difficult step is the emulsification, where the silver nitrate and the potassium bromide solutions must be mixed very slowly, and in the dark. Through multiple trials, I was able to arrive at a process to make it on my own. The other step, which is quite difficult, is the reticulation process. This shifts the metals in the emulsion and distorts the photographic image by heating up the film. Where the trial and error occurred was in terms of the best way to apply the emulsion onto the film, and what clear leader, or recycled film, would be the best material to use. That took a couple of days, and then once I figured it out and got a good exposure and contrast with the film, I decided that it wasn't abstract enough. So, I experimented with different heating temperatures for reticulation – and different ways of applying the emulsion as well. I was using a brush to paint on the film base, trying different ways of painting with a brush, and



experimenting with how much emulsion to coat the film with. In the end, it took months to get the reticulation results that I wanted.

JB: How do you feel about it now? Are you happy with the results?

MR: I'm very happy with the way the film turned out. There are things I would like to have added, or tried to expand on in terms of my process. I did try putting Bailey's ashes on the film, on the emulsion, and adding him directly on to film. But I didn't get the look that I wanted, and I was running out of time with the deadline for the project to be finished, so I stuck with what I knew and I could work with for the best results, and went forward with that. As for the finished film I am quite satisfied.

JB: Can you tell me a little about the importance of the audio design and the soundtrack? The first time I saw it screened it was silent. I was really struck by what you did with the sound once the film was finished, and the continued work with the imagery. There was a lot more work put into it that really elevated the film in terms of both picture and sound. It really is a striking film.

MR: At my senior year screening I showed a silent version through digital means, because I didn't have a soundtrack ready at that point, nor was the film ready to be made into a print. I liked the silent screening at the Artesian, because the atmosphere and the environment still carry sounds throughout the space. It was interesting to hear sounds from inside and outside the room during the screening, even though they didn't really relate to the film at all.

After the 4th Year screening I went back to work as there were some more shots I needed to add, and more optical printing to do in order to make a final print of *Sir Bailey*, because that was the main objective for my film. After I spent many nights at the Filmpool working on the optical printer, and then I would take the film home and process it, and take it back to the Filmpool to work on

the Steenbeck. I probably spent an extra two weeks with the optical printer, and then a little less than a month editing it. There are some things I would've loved to add, or maybe one shot I would have liked to have left a little longer, but I just didn't have the image. It just didn't exist. Some editing techniques I used were graphic matches, and cutting on action – not necessarily the action of what Bailey was doing on screen, but the action of the celluloid, and how the celluloid was shifting and distorting; it could transition into another shot, and maintain that fluidity. I worked on the soundtrack throughout the summer.

For the sound design I wanted to include as much of Bailey's sounds as I could. I included "found" sounds of Bailey walking across the hardwood floor at my parent's house, and I also added the sound of his bowls that he would eat and drink from. I recorded the bowls as I rubbed them together to create a metal, not necessarily an industrial sound, but some kind of droning sound. I wanted to use items that he interacted with to have him more physically present in the film. There was also a lot of sound manipulation, echoing, and using reverb for the bowls. The sound of Bailey's breathing is also in there. I would stretch most of the sounds out to elongate the tones. I used his heartbeat as a motif for the tension present in the film in matching the velocity of the movement, and the pacing of visuals. Basically, me running out of time to spend with my dog.

JB: Were there any other sources of inspiration in terms of how you created this film?

MR: The very first film production class I took was taught by Mike Rollo. He exposed me to all kinds of experimental and avant-garde films, and introduced me to techniques such as hand processing and contact printing. I have been very inspired by filmmakers like Peter Tscherkassky, Paul Sharits, Francois Miron, and Esther Urlus. There was a class assignment with the Bolex – shooting with 16mm film. It took a couple weeks to get the film processed, but when it came back I was blown away by the look of the projected black and white film. It has a very organic look.



Before I was even interested in film, I was enrolled in the science department focusing on chemistry. I'm not even sure what field of chemistry I was really interested in, but I knew I liked the idea of mixing chemicals to create new compounds and trying different formulas. I also like the fact that what I might be trying to achieve through the film will turn into something I didn't expect. Mike showed me a lot in terms of how to process and experiment with film. He showed me the G3 tank and how to process 16mm film, and that's when I made the first film that I shot on film, *Dr. Ripp*, which I hand processed. That was a really good starting point. One great experience (that I had making) *Dr Ripp* was that I was able to go to a film festival in New York called New Filmmakers which showcases emerging filmmakers' work. The venue was the Anthology Film Archive – there's so much history in that space. They preserve all the film prints from all these experimental filmmakers from the American underground avant-garde era. Maya Daren used to live in that building. Apparently, they still have the sink she used. The screening went really well, and I did get to go up on stage for a Q & A.

JB: You recently got back from a film festival in Scotland. Can you tell me how your experience has been, screening the film in other cities and countries?

MR: *Sir Bailey* premiered at WNDX in Winnipeg, and that went really well. I was able to (attend), and it was a great experience to see it on film in a theater for the first time. Everyone is so nice in Winnipeg, and they have a great experimental film community.

After that, it screened a few times in Regina – at the SIFAs, where it was awarded a technical achievement award, and then screened at the Pile of Bones Underground Film Festival; at Antimatter; and then it made a run in the states at Athens International and Chicago Underground Film Festival. The most recent screening was at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in Scotland. That was so much fun. It was one of the greatest experiences that I have had in my life. – going to Scotland, and meeting all these great filmmakers. It was part of the program,

Black Box: Entangled Experience, which was the experimental program for this festival. The thing about the Edinburgh International Film Festival is I didn't actually submit. I was invited to screen it there, because I had submitted to an experimental film festival that was in Latvia called Process. The programmer there is also involved with the Edinburgh International Film Festival. She saw my film, and I received an email saying I was invited to Edinburgh to screen my film, so that was a really cool thing to happen.

JB: How did they screen your film? On 16mm, or digital?

MR: I got to screen *Sir Bailey* on film, and there were five other films that were also shown on 16 mm, as well as one 35 mm print. That was really cool. It was so great to have my film travel to Europe and be viewed by an international audience, and to meet other filmmakers at the festival as well. It's really good to make connections like that, and to be able to visit a city like Edinburgh. The city is so beautiful and everyone is really friendly.

JB: What are you working on now?

MR: I am working on a couple different new techniques using organic film processors. With coffee, grape juice, plants, and stuff like that. I'm also branching out more into colour film. My last four films have been in black and white, and so I want to bring some colour into my work. My dog Brooke, who I also grew up with, passed away on the same day as Bailey. Brooke was a year younger, but she was also very sick. Her liver was failing, and she had to have both of her eyes removed, because of cataracts and pressure building up behind her eye. That's a film that I am working on as well. *Sir Bailey* was about struggling with an illness, and using a specific technique for that. But with Brooke I want to make a more perceptual film – using color film to explore what Brooke is seeing, or perceiving, or feeling. That's going to take a while to make. I have tons of different ideas that aren't necessarily fully thought out, but I usually start with a technique, and then I try to find the meaning through that adventure and expand on that feeling through visual representation. /S





NOTES FROM A PROGRAMMER

TRANSFORMATIVE IMAGININGS AT THE ROYAL SASKATCHEWAN MUSEUM

BY DIANNE OUELLETTE

I envisioned *Transformative Imaginings* over several years as a curated collection of films looking at the themes of colonialism, Truth and Reconciliation, spirituality, hope, and visualizing a better future. The idea came to fruition this past winter at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, where the screening attracted a diverse audience, with more than 170 in attendance. These films transform traditional narratives of what was and what is, helping to construct an imagined future, and offer some optimism for a better world.



Transformative Imaginings raises awareness of current global perspectives from varying cultures, with each filmmaker telling a unique story. Terril Calder's (Métis) poignant film, *SNIP* shares a story of survival, reflecting on Canada's genocide of Indigenous children who were forced to attend residential schools.

The film opens with a church bell ringing and the lettering on the cover of a holy bible being ripped and replaced with the film's title, *SNIP*. As crows fly from the bible's words, beneath the open spaces created by the newly formed letters, the words fall away and children appear to be looking through the gaped letters. The film continues as a children's book opens to different cut-out scenes created from its pages. Through this cut-up animation process, main characters, Annie and Gordon, travel back in time to save two children, Charlie and Niska who are trapped in a residential school, designed to exterminate their culture.

This stop-frame animated film captivates and transports the audience to the characters' brutal colonial reality in the barren space where the children are confined.



Charlie doesn't survive, reflecting the reality that many children did not come home from these schools. Annie and Gordon are able to save Niska. As they escape the school, Gordon throws a match given to him by Charlie, igniting the school in flames. We hear a drum beating, and the narrator explains that the three characters dance in the light. Manitous (ancestral animals) join them from the forest as Charlie's spirit watches from atop a tree. The children's escape from the school becomes an anticipated end as feelings of anxiousness and hopefulness are brought to the fore. Although, Charlie walks with the ancestors, sadness prevails as both children did not survive.

It's Like That, by The Southern Ladies Animation Group (S.L.A.G), is an harrowing story of refugee children in Australia. The film was completed over many months, with each artist in the collective contributing small animated pieces.

The stop-motion bird characters, representing incarcerated children, generates a motif through the varied styles that each artist brings to the film.

It's Like That, uses recorded voices of three refugee children, who were interviewed in 2002 by Australian journalist Jacqueline Arias. At the time, the children were being held in mandatory detention. The innocence of the children, portrayed as vulnerable little birds, comes through in the harsh reality of their confinement, pulling feelings of melancholy and hopefulness for their freedom.

Jacqueline Michel's (Anishnabe/Kitcisakik) live action short, *Mahiganiec* illustrates a fable of a wolf-child and a woman who assumes the child needs to learn the ways of a human. Michel works with themes linked to the history of the Anishinaabe Nation, and



her storytelling here captivates as we anticipate the wolf-child's release, realizing she cannot, nor should be changed.

Jonathan Thunder is a filmmaker from the US. His mesmerizing film, *Walk in Dreams*, takes viewers on a journey to an imaginary world inhabited by fantastical creatures. As a painter and filmmaker, his exquisitely hand-painted dreamscape explores the dynamics of its eerie characters. The film opens with a quote from Edgar Allan Poe, "All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream" and sets the tone for the haunting film that follows. Mesmerizing creatures are morphed into peculiar beings. A tiny tadpole-like creature and a giant snail have the heads of a rabbit, flowers float in empty space and then on land, a rabbit with red eyes, and another with spinning blue eyes appear to be hypnotized into a dream-like state. Another rabbit with sad green eyes holds a bottle, seemingly drunk. Moving into the drunken rabbit's eyes, turtles float in space with grass and trees growing from their backs, revealing the same rabbit standing in front of a tree. The enchanting lullaby-like soundscape entices us as Thunder beautifully renders this imagined nightmare-world of walking in dreams.

This film haunts us not because of the ghostly creatures and tone, but because his message of a lulling peaceful dream reveals turmoil, reminding us that these beings live in a colonized world.

Amanda Strong, a Michif interdisciplinary artist, employs stop-motion animation in her film, *Biidaaban*. The story follows a young Indigenous gender-fluid person and Sabe, a 10,000 year-old Sasquatch shapeshifter, who appear to move through time. They are continuing the ceremonial traditions of their ancestors by harvesting sap from sugar maple trees in urban Ontario areas, memorializing traditions and ceremonies. The characters transcend time and space, as they witness past ghosts. Motifs of ghosted ancestors include, caribou, wolves, and Anishinaabe people as they materialize, reminding *Biidaaban* of what once existed. These imagined visuals are reprised throughout the film, as we witness the past and present coming together, stepping us fluidly through time. Strong decolonizes through the lens and shows us traditions as *Biidaaban* experiences internal conflict while guided to continue their ancestors work on colonized lands.



Danis Goulet is a Cree/Métis filmmaker who grew up in Saskatchewan and now lives in Toronto. Goulet draws from the Weetigo (from a Cree oral story) in her short live action, *Wakening* and projects a futuristic vision of a time when the environment is devastated, and society is under military control. She creates a world where all citizens live under occupation and need to fight for their survival. Weesakechak, a Cree woman who carries a bow and arrow, combs a destroyed city. She is fighting in the resistance against military occupiers in this devastated world. As she wanders the zone, she comes to face the Weetigo in an abandoned theatre. The Weetigo, who is traditionally known as a boogeyman used in Cree stories to keep children from wandering too far from home, adds to the suspense of the film.

By bringing the Weetigo into this futuristic film, she reflects on the cultural genocide of Indigenous people, their lands, and traditions.

As the Weetigo overtakes soldiers in front of Weesakechak we see that the characters have joined in the resistance. In this apocalyptic world, Goulet gives hope that they will survive as the Weetigo turns from the archetypal boogeyman to an ally assisting with the fight. The Weetigo, like Weesakechak, will continue to exist as long as they fight to be remembered.

Hazhir As'adi's *Blows with the Wind*, captivates viewers with this story of a scarecrow who transforms into a human. Difficult decisions are made in the scarecrow's new human life, and this breathtaking film considers the way life is lived and struggles are endured. Echo Henoche's delightful animated film, *Shaman*, retells an Inuit legend of a ferocious polar bear turned to stone by a Shaman. The screening wrapped up with Tara Audibert's (Wolastoqiyik) visionary animated film, *The Importance of Dreaming*, reinforcing the program's themes of love and faith. This beautifully constructed forbidden love story between a white owl and a red fox leaves us with feelings of warmth and a smile.

Yet, this love story reaches back through time to the personal story of Audibert's parents and how, through the Canadian Indian Act, her mother, an Indigenous woman, married a non-Indigenous man and lost her status. The fox is shunned by her family to follow her owl love and soon has fox children who learn from both parents. The fox's family comes around eventually to meet the children, bringing everyone together. As time passes, Owl does not want to forget this beautiful life and soon flies to the sky and becomes a glimmer, a memory. The message of, 'do what you want and be who you are' prevails, leaving us feeling empowered with hope in a time of reconciliation.

Collectively, these films express optimism by sharing stories about overcoming the seemingly impossible, and ultimately envisioning a better future.

By opening my mind to these works, I'm absorbed by the imagined realms of this talented group of filmmakers. Sharing this collection of films not only allows these filmmakers' perspectives to shine, but helps to cultivate ideas, increasing knowledge and understanding through a multiplicity of stories with universal themes, bringing together a diverse group of filmmakers and audiences. /S

Transformative Imaginings screened at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum on March 8, 2019



THE OSER ESSAY

In commemoration of Jean Oser's contribution to the Regina film scene, the Department of Film at the University of Regina awards the Jean Oser Prize annually for the outstanding critical essay written in a Film Studies course. The Saskatchewan FilmPool is pleased to reprint this essay in *Splice*.



Jean Oser

An Afrocentric Analysis of Religion, Music, and Technology as Combatants to Oppression in Post-Slavery America as Represented in *The Brother from Another Planet*

BY JESSE DESJARLAIS

“But the wicked carried us away in captivity

Required from us a song

How can we sing King Alpha’s song in a strange land?”

“Rivers of Babylon,” The Melodians

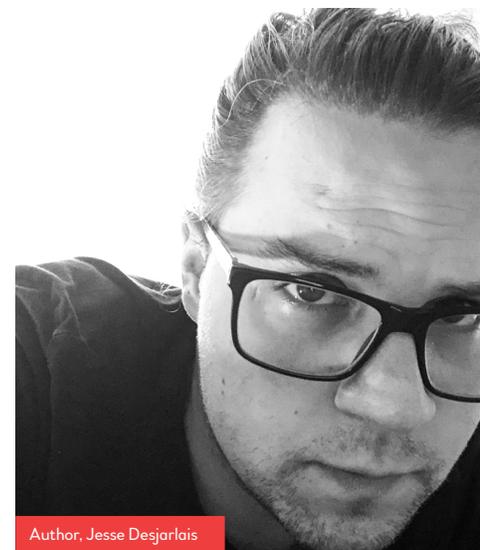
When the eponymous alien crash lands in the Hudson River at the beginning of John Sayles’ 1984 film *The Brother from Another Planet*, he finds himself in a precarious, yet fortuitous position. Resembling an African American human and chased by white slave catchers from his home planet, The Brother blends into the racially diverse neighbourhood of Harlem, a small area of Northern Manhattan that is rich with musical, religious and political history for African Americans and has historically been a landing site for immigrants entering the United States. As an escaped slave in the modern era, The Brother represents African Americans’ continuing struggle to escape a past of slavery and oppression, and in his muteness, we see an apt analogy for a silenced people engaged in a fight to reclaim their voice. His inability to speak also highlights his status as an immigrant and his subsequent inculcation into American life. As a clear filmic example of Afrofuturism, *The Brother from Another Planet* explores themes of alienation and estrangement in a post-slavery society, the displacement caused by immigration and the forced migration of African slaves, the role that religion and music play in



expressing this displacement for African Americans in modern times, and the process of self-identification in relation to technology for the African diaspora. In an article regarding critical race theory and *Afrofuturism* in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Isiah Lavender III writes that, in slavery, “race itself functioned as a labor-based technology” and that African Americans were “coded as natural machines”, rendering them “cyborgs in a white human world” (190). Representing the modern African American, The Brother as a slave embodies these characteristics of hybridity and inhumanity. As an antidote to this technological enslavement, The Brother is gifted; his technological mastery, his telepathic powers, and his ability to heal and awaken both human beings and technological devices provide topical commentary on slavery, oppression and technology, especially when related to the Afrofuturist music of Deltron, Parliament, and the healing qualities of Reggae and the Rastafari movement. Additionally, his abilities as a healer point to a past and future of cultural reconciliation and reclamation for African Americans through spirituality and religion. The Brother’s experiences with religion and his status as a quasi-Messianic healer are elucidated through an examination of the history of African American religion and its impact on African American culture in order to amplify an Afrocentric voice that has been lost in the annals of slavery and oppression. Through this consideration of Afrocentric religion and Afrofuturist music, it can be shown that *The Brother from Another Planet* illustrates the necessity for a purely Afrocentric voice to be heard as a combatant to the oppression and technologization of African American culture in post-slavery America.

Originally a Dutch settlement named after Haarlem in The Netherlands, Harlem has always been a haven for immigrants entering the United States. Throughout its history, this small Manhattan neighbourhood has housed “the massive waves of poor and half-starved and ragged immigrants from Europe”, each new group of settlers causing an exodus of the previous group, until the Dutch, German, Italian, Irish and Jewish had fled, leaving Harlem “virtually all Black” (Malcolm X 84-85). Like the Europeans, the enslaved, runaway Brother enters Harlem through Ellis Island Immigration Center, solidifying his status as both a slave and an immigrant. The film attempts to balance this distinction; it is as concerned with the inculcation of immigrants and the effects of musical and religious diversity in Harlem as a result of immigration as it is with the forced migration of slaves and its generational impact. John Sayles himself agrees in an interview that *The Brother from Another Planet* “compresses into two hours an entire experience of acculturation” (Sayles 112) and describes The Brother’s experiences as a “journey of assimilation” (Sayles 110). The hybridity of the Brother (slave and immigrant, man and machine) exemplifies how Harlem has historically been affected by these two social states. On one hand, the immigrant arrives

The Brother’s experiences with religion and his status as a quasi-Messianic healer are elucidated through an examination of the history of African American religion and its impact on African American culture in order to amplify an Afrocentric voice that has been lost in the annals of slavery and oppression.



Author, Jesse Desjarlais

He's not just
another
out-of-towner...

**THE BROTHER
FROM ANOTHER PLANET**

©1994 Ghost Rabbit



Religion and its impact on African American social issues has historically been diverse in Harlem, and *The Brother from Another Planet* attempts to contend with these complexities.

in the United States seeking refuge and desiring a new home; the displaced slave, however, is homeless and in exile, oppressed by their societal position and viewing their new surroundings as a savage and hostile place that could never be considered home. *The Brother* finds himself at the border of this conflict, and while the film muddles the distinction and perhaps fails to explore either side adequately, the historical impact of slavery and immigration in Harlem are academically useful when considering how *The Brother* interacts with religion, music and technology.

Religion and its impact on African American social issues has historically been diverse in Harlem, and *The Brother from Another Planet* attempts to contend with these complexities. Within the first fifteen minutes of the film, *The Brother* is exposed to both Islam and Christianity, and later on has a more extensive encounter with Rastafari. He is firstly encountered by a Muslim man seeking donations for a local youth centre. The man sees in *The Brother* a racial companion and subsequently blesses *The Brother* by imploring Allah's guidance. Despite the brevity of this encounter, it speaks to the rich history of Islam in Harlem and its importance for African Americans. Two particular branches of the African American Islamic movement, The Nation of Islam and The Five percenters, were vital elements of the Black Power movement's battle against systemic oppression, and their subsequent effect on the development of hip-hop will be of particular use when exploring the relationship between Afrofuturist music and *The Brother from Another Planet*. As an antithesis to *The Brother*'s brief encounter with Islam, he is briefly and potently educated on the historically oppressive nature of Christianity for descendants of Africa. In his ignorance, the Brother is caught eating food he has not paid for and is subsequently pursued by police. Following his evasion of the police officer, *The Brother* encounters an image of Christ crucified. This is followed by a shot of a young, black Harlemiter being arrested and positioned against the hood of a police cruiser, his arms spread in a similar manner to Christ on the cross. In this brief

African It is written in Rastafari in the New Millennium that, in accordance with what Garvey advocated, “the Judeo-Christian ethic that forms the spine of the prevailing ideological framework of Rastafari should be replaced, once and for all, by an African orientation”

sequence, Christianity is equated with incarceration, punishment and oppression in the eyes of The Brother, concepts he understands and fears innately as a slave. This comparison speaks to the historical justification of slavery under Christianity and the distrust and hatred of Christianity and White people for some followers under the umbrellas of African American Islam and Rastafari. For instance, Malcolm X “denounced Christianity as a religion designed for slaves,” an oppressive religion determined “to keep the Negroes in a subservient position” (Malcolm X xxvii), a stance reflected in this brief scene and by the fact that John Sayles cast himself in the role of the intergalactic slave catcher to represent White people’s role in oppression and slavery.

Similarly, Marcus Garvey, a proponent of repatriation to Africa who is now considered a prophet in the Rastafari tradition, fought for emancipation from mental, political and economic slavery for the African diaspora. His “Back to Africa” teachings immigrated with him from Jamaica to the United States when he established a Harlem branch of the United Negro Improvement Association in 1917, teachings that Malcolm X perpetuated when working with The Nation of Islam forty years later (although Malcolm X was firstly exposed to these ideas in childhood, his father was a local leader for Garvey’s UNIA branch in Omaha, Nebraska). It is written in *Rastafari in the New Millennium* that, in accordance with what Garvey advocated, “the Judeo-Christian ethic that forms the spine of the prevailing ideological framework of Rastafari should be replaced, once and for all, by an African orientation” (Tafari-Ama 219). *The Brother from Another Planet’s* treatment of religion is in alignment with these ideologies, and through these scenes exploring religion, we see that Harlem’s history with Christianity, Islam and Rastafari is of great importance when analyzing *The Brother from Another Planet*.

Systemic oppression is perhaps best illustrated when The Brother is exposed to drugs. In a drug hallucination-cum-vision quest sequence that occupies the most overtly religious and political aspect of the film, The Brother is educated on oppression within the Rastafari tradition. Upon taking narcotics, The Brother is taken on a Dante-esque tour through Harlem by the Rasta Virgil. Virgil educates him on the notion of Babylon as a representation of the oppression faced in the darkness of Harlem’s nocturnal underbelly. For Rastas, the term Babylon is a metaphor for “all forms of oppression and exploitation represented by the world economic system and its ideological and material apparatuses” (Tafari-Ama 193). It has come to represent Western society, the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism and global capitalism, all forms of systemic oppression that the African diaspora have faced and continue to face. Virgil explains how the drug and prostitution infested slums of Harlem



have become Babylon for black Harlemites: “Welcome to Babylon... Children withering away up here, Brother. Worshipping the idol of capital. Lusting after the false salvation of here and now. Black brother and sister perishing up here, man. Waiting for scrap from oppressor table. Oppressor got us for a house pet. Doing tricks to get reward. Oppressor need a slave and find it here. Oppressor need a harlot and find it here... Everything Babylon make, everything it take in, it shit out here” (The Brother From Another Planet). In this powerful monologue, Virgil channels the teachings of Garvey and the African diaspora’s need for physical, emotional and mental emancipation from White society. Garvey “stressed becoming independent of the White man” (Malcolm X 3) and urged the displaced African diaspora to return to their ancestor’s homeland just as Virgil urges The Brother to “take the ship home to the promised land” (The Brother From Another Planet) by smoking cannabis. In the Rastafari tradition, marijuana is used “as a ceremonially sacred herb for meditative, sacramental, and medicinal purposes” (Barnett and Onuora 166). This experience with Rastafari and the medicinal qualities of marijuana signifies a quasi-conversion for The Brother. He spends the rest of the film in direct opposition to Babylon, actively destroying the corporation that is flooding Harlem with drugs. In so doing, he represents an African American opposition to systemic oppression that culminates in a mob of urban, working class African Americans combining to help The Brother destroy his white slave masters. African Americans combining to combat systemic oppression, and imagining a future free from tyranny, is where Afrofuturism plays its part in the film.

The alienation felt by both Jamaicans and African Americans as a result of colonialism and slavery creates a connection between Garveyism and Afrofuturism. Both are characterized by a nostalgia for a lost home and express this displacement by rejecting their current location as hostile and imagining a future home separate from the United States. Returning to Africa has been taken one step further in the Afrofuturist genre; completely divorced from humanity by a history of slavery and oppression, African Americans’ home is relocated to outer space, and the struggles facing the African diaspora are equated with the alienation of an extraterrestrial existence. In fact, more so than simply embracing SF tropes to express these struggles, Isiah Lavender III writes in an article for *Science Fiction Studies*: “the blunt thesis underlying Afrofuturism is that all black cultural production in the New World is sf” (187). It becomes clear when considering these definitions that The Brother is an ideal example of the Afrofuturist alien. He exemplifies technological mastery as a means to combat oppression and save African Americans. His healing abilities also speak to a tradition of deification within Afrocentric religion, most notably the perceived

African Americans combining to combat systemic oppression, and imagining a future free from tyranny, is where Afrofuturism plays its part in the film.



divinity of Elijah Muhammad in The Nation of Islam and Clarence 13X in The Five-Percent nation, and the reverence of Haile Selassie I as the returned Messiah in the Rastafari movement. With both The Brother's Messianic qualities and Isiah Lavender III's ideas in mind, overtly Afrofuturist music becomes a powerful tool in illustrating how and why The Brother combines musical, technological and religious powers to provide healing to the African American people.

Firstly, the original music by Mason Daring and the soundtrack of the film must be considered. The thematic music that announces the arrival of The Brother evokes a distinctly Caribbean sound, pointing to the impact of Jamaican culture and Rastafari on the film's plot. The Brother's theme is played on a Steelpan, a traditional Caribbean instrument from Trinidad and Tobago that was originally an instrument used by French colonial slaves. The instrument and the Calypso sounds that

it evokes are as foreign and unexpected a presence against the New York backdrop as the alien Brother. The instrumentation of Calypso music, of which the Steelpan is present, is well documented in influencing the musical roots of reggae (Veal 27-28). Secondly, the foreign influence of Jamaica on the film's music is highlighted once more by including Lee "Scratch" Perry's music in the Harlem-Babylon sequence. Perry was a pioneer of Dub music, a subsection of Reggae noted for its extraterrestrial sound and its distinct sonic manipulation of space and soundscapes. A notable section from *Dub - Soundscapes and Shattered Sounds in Jamaican Reggae* illustrates how intertwined Afrofuturist music, Dub and The Brother from Another Planet are: "Dub's sonic effects...evoke the dark expanse of outer space...the meditative quality of the music, on the other hand, resonates with a listener's *internal* space. The African-inspired rhythm structures evoke a mood of *historical* space... Dub simulate(s) an

actual *physical* space within which the ‘roots’ African past and the utopian sci-fi future could be fleetingly experienced as one” (Veal 213). Perry’s work in his “space craft” sound studio (Veal 211), *The Black Ark*, bordered on musical alchemy: divine inspiration (Veal 211), raw elementalism (Veal 211) and Obeah, an African black magic (Veal 210), combined to define a new age of Reggae music that illustrated the mental decolonization occurring for members of the African diaspora. Through a blending of technology, magic and SF imagery, Perry’s music is an ideal fit for *The Brother from Another Planet*’s Afrofuturist soundscape. It is a wonderful example of an immigration of musical and cultural ideas between Jamaica and Harlem shown throughout history. It is simultaneously evocative of The Brother’s technological healing powers, abilities that are best complimented by the overtly SF music of Parliament and Deltron.

When The Brother heals wounds or awakens machines, it is with eyes closed, religious and sacred. The sacred aspect of his healing has its roots in the Rastafari belief that cannabis has healing properties, which explains Virgil’s offering of cannabis when The Brother is coming down from narcotics. His healing abilities are also musical; a bright, musical humming resonates as he performs his healing ritual. For George Clinton of Parliament, this healing comes from Funk. On Parliament’s 1975 record *Mothership Connection*, Clinton brings funk and its healing properties to the people in a similar fashion to The Brother. The self-described “Extraterrestrial Brothers” of Parliament are similarly endowed with technological wizardry, allowing them to override radio signals to distribute their music. In the opening track of the album, “P-Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)”, the philosophy and intention of funk is so described: as previously said, it has healing properties (“Whatever part of your body it is I want you to lay it on your radio/Let the vibes flow through/Funk not only moves, it can remove, dig?”); it comes from outer space; it is a seizing of power, intent on allowing an Afrocentric voice to be heard and understood (“We have taken control so as to bring you this special show/We will return it to you as soon as you are grooving”); and finally, it is a powerful and pure Afrocentric voice that is being heard instead of a commercialized and recycled sound that came to characterize white disco and R&B (“I was down south and I heard some funk with some main ingredients like Doobie Brothers, Blue Magic, David Bowie/ It was cool, but can you imagine Doobie in your funk?”) The purity of this voice is a crucial point, both punning on P-Funk as a pure, uncut drug, and speaking to Clinton’s detestation of Disco as stripped down funk, designed by studios for capitalistic gain. In *Somebody Scream!*, Marcus Reeves refers to this “mainstreaming of black music” as partially responsible for “leaving the generation after black power without voice or representation in the world of art, culture, and politics” (18). This commodification of music is also

The intricacy with which MCs express themselves in Hip-Hop speaks to the rich, complex polyrhythms and oral traditions that define the music of the African diaspora, and it is this expression that is lost in The Brother's muteness.

seen briefly in *The Brother from Another Planet*. Upon visiting a corporation responsible for distributing lethal drugs in Harlem, The Brother walks past a man attempting to sell him a Casio keyboard, audaciously claiming that “Anybody can be a musician” (*The Brother from Another Planet*) for the low price of \$40. This commercialization of culture speaks to the music industry benefitting financially from a re-appropriation of African American music.

Commercialization of this kind and the muddling of an Afrocentric voice was part of what the Black Power movement fought against, and Hip-Hop was born out of this ideological objective of “reclaiming a stolen identity” (Reeves 8). Religious movements were always at the forefront of this fight, so the impact of Afrocentric religion on Hip-Hop’s development is of no surprise. Christina Zanfagna writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*: “hip-hop culture has been in syncopated lock-step with religion from the beginning - an infrequently examined relationship that complicates reductionistic notions of Islam, Christianity, and the Rastafarian movement as completely coherent, distinct, and separate entities” (72). The Five-Percent Nation and founder Clarence 13X were particularly influential from Hip-Hop. Upon denouncing and separating from the Nation of Islam, Clarence 13X (deified as Allah the Father) rejected traditional Islam and taught his followers that, in addition to his divinity, all Five Percenters could become Allah through self-knowledge (Knight xiii). This teaching became relevant for young, urban Black rappers who sought power and “(Clarence 13X’s) movement became a major influence in (Hip-Hop)” (xiii). One particular aspect of The Five Percenters teachings which lent itself to Hip-Hop’s wordplay was the notion of the Supreme Alphabet, a system of textual interpretation in which each letter of the alphabet was assigned an associated word. From this system, words could be broken down to their individual letters to glean hidden meanings, and “the Alphabets gave rise to a stylized slang” (Knight 54) that came to define Hip-Hop. The intricacy with which MCs express themselves in Hip-Hop speaks to the rich, complex polyrhythms and oral traditions that define the music of the African diaspora, and it is this expression that is lost in The Brother’s muteness. The Brother does, however, embody Clarence 13X’s belief in becoming godlike through knowledge. The Brother’s various experiences with religion in Harlem compliment his healing abilities, allowing him to conquer oppressive forces and rise like a messiah in Harlem.

Following the influence of The Five Percenters, musical/technological healing, racial unity, and escaping slavery and oppression are of great importance to the Hip-Hop of Deltron. Heavily influenced both musically and philosophically by George Clinton’s funk, Del the Funky Homosapien abandoned his human alter ego, choosing to embrace Afrofuturist imagery by reimagining himself as a mechanical soldier and computer wizard



named Deltron. *Deltron 3030* is a concept album set in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic future where Hip-Hop is illegal. In the opening track “3030”, Deltron describes this future and his plan to help heal and empower the African diaspora. Like The Brother and George Clinton, Deltron is the “perfect blend of technology and magic”, a mech soldier who escaped military service because he “didn’t respect orders”. He uses his technological abilities to lead a war against a capitalistic regime that has enslaved all African descendants, returning from space to New Earth to incite all of the African diaspora to help him take back their musical heritage: “Enterprisin’ white men look to the horizon/Thinking more capitalism is the wisdom/And imprison all citizens empowered with rhythm/We keep the funk alive by talking with idioms.” This cultural imprisonment is reminiscent of Babylon as described by Virgil, and just as The Brother rallies with other working-class Harlemites to fight oppression, Deltron rallies for racial unity for the same purposes. One of the ways he achieves this is illustrated in the song “Virus.” By using his skills as a computer hacker, Deltron expresses his plan for bringing down the oppressive white order that has enslaved his people: “I wanna devise a virus to bring dire straits to your environment/Crush your corporations with a mild touch/Trash your whole computer system and revert you to papyrus.” Both Deltron and The Brother use their powers to combat systems of oppression, and Deltron illustrates this in a militant capacity, destroying and devolving White corporation’s technological capacity. This brief look at Afrofuturist music preceding and succeeding the film reveal that technological mastery lies at the centre of this struggle, as a final analysis of technology in Afrocentric music and *The Brother from Another Planet* illustrates.

By recalling Isiah Lavender III’s ideas that Afrofuturism has been defined by the historical treatment of slaves as technological devices, a reinterpretation of African Americans’ relationship with technology serves as a powerful artistic device in reclaiming history. Two notions regarding technology are particularly useful in analyzing *The Brother from Another Planet*. Firstly,

the idea of using telepathic powers to recall the past, and secondly, to use technological powers to awaken machinery. Both of these examples are illustrated by The Brother. By looking at the content of Afrofuturist music and how technology aids its production, both ideas are illuminated to reveal The Brother’s purpose within the context of the film and perhaps the greater impact of the film’s Afrofuturist themes on race relations in the United States.

Recognizing and contending with the past is at the core of almost all cultural output, and a crucial aspect of this is repetition. In *Black Noise*, James A. Snead’s argues that “repetition is an important and telling element in culture, a means by which a sense of community, security, and identification are maintained” (Rose 68). He also claims that “black cultures highlight the observance of repetition, perceiving it as circulation and equilibrium” (Rose 69). One must look no further than the technological developments that have made Hip-Hop and Dub the cultural forces that they are to see the impact of repetition. Hip-Hop’s use of turntabling and sampling is a continuation of the repetition that began with oral traditions, an acoustic metaphor that reinforces this history of repetition. The turntabling technique of “rewinding” originated with Reggae musicians in Jamaica, and was utilized by “spinning back a record to be repeated” (Smith 24) [It’s worth noting that the intergalactic slave catchers use a similar technological device as an oppressive force by “rewinding” The Brother near the end of the film]. Rewinding and scratching became staples of Hip-Hop turntabling, and teams of DJs would make live music through manipulating and repeating the music of their past Black musical heroes. The impact of this technique was turned upside-down with the advent of the sampler, a digital tool that greatly simplified musical repetition. As sampling became the basis for all Hip-Hop, it became a point of pride for Hip-Hop producers to find the most obscure, yet relevant music possible to sample. This sparked the cultural movement of “crate digging”, a process of scouring crates of records for forgotten music worth sampling; this practice influenced Deltron to describe Hip-Hop

producers as “high-tech archaeologists searching for knick knacks” (Deltron 3030, “3030”). The recovery and revitalization of this music through repetition is at the heart of this cultural phenomenon and illuminates how technological mastery can be a catalyst for expression. Sampling was of equal importance to Lee “Scratch” Perry and the Dub movement, the proclivity for repetition even extending to his digital manipulation of sound and heavy use of echo. This historical practice of sampling and repeating is of great relevance to *The Brother from Another Planet*. The Brother’s voice is lost, a representation of the unheard voice of the slave in the aftermath of colonialism. He is blessed, however, with the ability to recall past voices, as is made evident by his telepathic episodes in Ellis Island Immigration Centre. The Brother can repeat and reexperience the past like a Hip-Hop or Dub producer. Through the recording technology of his removable eye, he eventually using this skill of repetition to communicate his point of view to the corporate executive responsible for distributing drugs in Harlem. Although he can’t speak, he eventually learns to communicate through his technological abilities. However, it is his other characteristics as a silent healer in Odell’s bar and his ability to awaken technological machines that prove to be the most impactful and profound acts of the film.

The Brother’s voice is lost, a representation of the unheard voice of the slave in the aftermath of colonialism.

Fleeing the police, The Brother eventually finds refuge in Odell’s bar in Harlem. The bar serves as a microcosm of inculcated and dormant African Americans. The regular patrons and owner exemplify assimilation: Odell, the bar owner, expresses to his girlfriend that he doesn’t go south of 110th Street because they have the same commodities in Harlem; Smokey, a stereotypically superstitious West Indies Immigrant, drinks too much and practices his own ignorant form of scientific experimentation; the older gentleman Walter fears outsiders and viruses as if he was already transformed into a white American; and Fly, unemployed and lacking ambition, wastes his time on a defective alien spaceship arcade game, and when confronted by the intergalactic slave masters, incorrectly and ignorantly accredits his African American ancestors with building shopping malls in North Carolina as if it was the paragon of Black achievement. There is hardly any semblance of black heritage among them, and yet they simultaneously mourn the loss of the past, a past of black power, economic growth and achievement. They are reduced to machines in the tradition of Afrofuturism, like the dead video games in the arcade The Brother eventually works at, or the misfiring arcade game at the bar that is ridden with “internal malfunctions” (*The Brother from Another Planet*). Broken, lifeless and behaving below capacity, they too exist as the type of machine that The Brother can metaphorically fix. When he removes the internal malfunction from the UFO game in the bar, the patrons are amazed and uplifted by his talents, commencing an awakening that culminates in them uniting at the end of the film to fight the slave

catchers that chase The Brother. The Brother's healing power, be it Clinton's funk, Deltron's musical stimpack, or Virgil's religious vigor, represents a commencement of cultural healing and reclamation for African Americans, a rallying of African Americans in their fight against systemic oppression. The film is concerned with Afrocentric religion and music to illustrate a path towards cultural reclamation within the Afrofuturist genre.

At the beginning of the film, as the wounded Brother limps into Harlem at dawn, missing a foot from his crash landing in the Hudson River, he recoils in fear at the sound of a passing car by hiding in a doorway. As the car drives by, we briefly hear the car stereo blaring an original song from the film's composer, Mason Daring, a track entitled "Homeboy." Reminiscent of early Hip-Hop with a distinct funk bass and horn line, we briefly hear the MC rap, "Now's the time you need a home, boy" before the music fades into the distance. The song was performed by Joe Morton, the actor portraying The Brother, and it is the only time in the film that his voice is heard. Whether or not The Brother can understand the sentiment at the time, he finds himself in the ideal geographical location to escape his slavery. In Harlem, he finds a home that accepts him, a neighbourhood rich with historical examples of African American culture that he can strengthen and harbour with his powers. It is a cultural strengthening and healing that will require cooperation of Whites and a ceding of power. Director John Sayles, who cast himself in the role of the slave catcher, recognizes the historical impact of White oppression on African American culture and expresses the importance of hiring African American cast and crew who could represent themselves accurately in the film. As he said in Sayles on Sayles, "I didn't want (*The Brother from Another Planet*) to be a totally white movie with some black actors in it" (107). By lessening the frequency with which the White cultural voice dominates the social dialogue, an Afrocentric point of view can continue to be expressed through religious, artistic and political expression, the eventual aim being a balanced and inclusive representation of human experience. Ideologically speaking, there is continuing dispute among Black groups about the effectiveness and legitimacy of their Afrocentricity. Historically, the Nation of Islam has been guilty of promoting black supremacy and hatred, further skewing and complicating a centuries-old race issue; The Five Percenters have been accused of confusing the message of Islam, Clarence 13X's vision being described as "a psychotic delusion of grandeur" (Knight xiii); some proponents of Rastafari have entirely denounced the American Islamic movement as "non-Afrocentric" for tracing African Americans' religious and cultural roots to the Arabian peninsula instead of the African homeland, upholding Rastafari as the only religion among the three with "an Afrocentric orientation" (Barnett 159). Through a brief history of African American religion and music, we can see the near

As he said in Sayles on Sayles, "I didn't want (*The Brother from Another Planet*) to be a totally white movie with some black actors in it



insurmountable task facing descendents of Africa in finding a common cultural voice that is not muddled by historical differences and inconsistencies, although perhaps this is simply unattainable. Through The Brother's varied experiences with these religions and cultural groups, *The Brother from Another Planet* does its part in allowing African Americans to express their hopefully lessening grief in the wake of colonialism and slavery, and provides the opportunity for the displaced African diaspora to have their say in the battle against systemic oppression.

WORKS CITED

- Barnett, Michael, and Adwoa Ntozake Onuora. "Rastafari as an Afrocentrically Based Discourse and Spiritual Expression." *Rastafari in the New Millennium*, edited by Michael Barnett, Syracuse University Press, 2012. p. 159-174.
- Deltron 3030. "3030.", "Virus." *Deltron 3030*, 75 Ark, 2000. CD.
- Haley, Alex, and Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Ballantine Books, 1964.
- Knight, Michael Muhammed. *The Five Percenters*. Oneworld Publications, 2007.
- Lavender III, Isiah. "Critical Race Theory." *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, Sherryl Vint, Routledge, 2009, pp. 185-193.
- Lavender III, Isiah. "Ethnoscapes: Environment and Language in Ishmael Reed's 'Mumbo Jumbo', Colson Whitehead's 'The Intuitionist', and Samuel R. Delany's 'Babel-17.'" *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Afrofuturism (Jul., 2007), pp. 187-200, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4241521>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2017.
- Parliament. "P-Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)." "Mothership Connection (Star Child)." *Mothership Connection*, Casablanca, 1975. CD.
- Reeves, Marcus. *Somebody Screams*. Faber and Faber, Inc., An affiliate of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise*. University Press of New England, 1994.
- Sayles, John, and Gavin Smith. *Sayles on Sayles*. Faber and Faber Limited, 1998.
- Smith, Sophy. *Hip-Hop Turntablism, Creativity and Collaboration*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013.
- Tafari-Ama, Imani M. "Resistance Without and Within." *Rastafari in the New Millennium*, edited by Michael Barnett, Syracuse University Press, 2012. p. 190-221.
- The Brother from Another Planet*. Directed by John Sayles, performances by Joe Morton, Daryl Edwards, Steve James, Leonard Jackson, Bill Cobbs, John Sayles, and David Strathairn, Cinecom Pictures, 1984.
- The Melodians. "Rivers of Babylon." *The Harder They Come (Remastered)*, Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton, Island Records, 1972. MP3.
- Veal, Michael E. *Dub - Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae*. Wesleyan University Press, 2007.
- Zanfagna, Christina. "Hip-hop and Religion: from the mosque to the church." *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, edited by Justin A. Williams, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 71-84.





SIXTH ANNUAL
SASKATCHEWAN INDEPENDENT
FILM AWARDS

NOV 22
SASKATOON SK

CELEBRATING THE BEST IN SASKATCHEWAN INDEPENDENT
FILMMAKING

THE SIXTH ANNUAL
SASKATCHEWAN
INDEPENDENT FILM AWARDS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22ND
7 PM

REMAI MODERN

102 Spadina Crescent E, Saskatoon SK

The Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative in partnership with Rемаi Modern is very pleased to present the 6th Annual Saskatchewan Independent Film Awards. The evening will begin with a screening of the nominated films and conclude with a hosted award ceremony.

The Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative is dedicated to the production and exhibition of independent, visionary, Saskatchewan-made film and video art. SIFA is an annual event to support, showcase and celebrate Saskatchewan's dynamic filmmaking community.

www.sifa.ca

BEST SHORT FILM

BEST STUDENT FILM

BEST FEATURE FILM

BEST WEB SERIES

BEST ACTING

BEST TECHNICAL
ACHIEVEMENT

AUDIENCE CHOICE



SASKATCHEWAN
FILMPOOL
COOPERATIVE

rRemai mModern



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



FUNDING
PROVIDED BY



cultivating
the arts

Italian Deli

Imported Specialties



Est. 1966



Imported Specialties
Deli Meats • Cheese • Pasta • Party Trays

Carlo, Heather, Marina & Gino Giambattista