MIT filmmakers and their letters to the unknown

Everything Must Change, directed by Michael Majoros, produced by James Kaufman, addresses a composite of five films conceived and produced by John Claypoole. Featuring devoee Cindy Kleine, Karrie Hrechdaclian, Jim Campbel, Lee Curchord and John Claypoole. Both films were shown on Thursday, November 22 at the Wexler Building Barton theater.

With the increasing costs of 16 and 35mm film production, the plight of the independent filmmaker for self expression has become increasingly desperat. The legwork alone to fund an independent project would be enough for a dramatic screenplay. Moreover the Hollywoodian format of the full length feature film has dictated the commercial viability of film projects, thus dooming the widespread distribution of shorter, artistic efforts.

The format chosen by Claypoole in Advence Unknown may well be the only effective way for financially impotent filmmakers to take on the big studios on common ground. In this composite effort five independent filmmakers were required to create a cinematic interpretation of a nostalgic plea and forge an audience can feel free to mentally dance.

Hrechdakian, who was shot by a sniper, opened the film dealing with the images of Cindy, her mother and the tormenting images which dwell in her: pictures of Vietnam, dead bodies mannequin clouns of choking fumes, struggling at sea. This otherwise soft-spoken individual reveals himself to us through the medium of his art. His torture is perhaps meaningful to those who know him.

I hope we can infer that his suffering is over, if not from his own relief then on our own homebase or through his reasoning yet tentative smile at the end of his segment.

Graduate student in the Master of Science in Visual Studies program, Karrie Hrechdaclian, directed the 19 minute segment, Letter to an Innocent Victim. This is the story of Georges, a close friend of Hrechdakian, who was shot by a sniper while driving in Lebanon. The teenager's death is to distressing, I kept thinking of how the experience of seeing a film dealing with the death of a close friend of the filmmaker, was very different from the filmmaker getting up on stage and verbally recalling the events. It was in Hrechdakian's use of imagery that I found my answer.

In the beginning, the images of Karrie's driving in the Lebanon countryside are not rich enough to relate to the devastating reality of her experience... until we see some super-8 footage of the victim sitting while on holiday with Karrie. Then suddenly the suffering crashes in the audience like a tidal wave as one witnesses the unquestionable existence of her feet friend. The saddening irony lies in the fact that the most moving imagery is also the most primitive - like the images of a home movie.

On a similar fantastical note, the most disturbing piece is that of Jim Campbell's 1st Letter to a Suicide; a film addressed to Campbell's older brother (wherever he may be) who took his life at the age of 21, thirteen years after having been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

The content of the letter is shocking. It should make us all think what issues filmmakers should feel comfortable in addressing in their audience. The answer is simple: it is up to them to decide, and up to the audience to respond. A more interesting question might be why does a filmmaker decide to use a theme which is appropriate to be shared only with the most intimate of friends and relatives? The answer is perhaps as complex as filmmakers themselves. I am tempted to say that the tragedy which may occur in our life, if survived, becomes a great source of creative energy. Campbell channels this energy from his tragedy into Letter to a Suicide in much the same way Van Gogh, Lautrec, and Keats incorporated their suffering into their art. In a novel approach Campbell doesn't use one single "living" person in his film. All memories are performed by his mom and dad are seen by the audience on a video monitor a pre-recorded video tape.

Last of the five is Lee Curchord's Letter to the Unknown, perhaps the nicest of the series to endure it's long periods of silence, darkness and dying sounds catch us unprepared, in the same manner as The Unknown might.

Michael Majoros Everything Must Change is the kind of film I would pay for George Burns to see. The film explores an old age as the after effects of the old age of ourselves only, better. In comparison, a film like On Golden Pond makes a trivial dramatic exercise. If you feel for the troubled oldmen of the entertainers world (including Ronald Reagan) are worthy of respect and admiration. We are all part of the old folks of Everything Must Change.

Majoros' camera brings us in the new perspective relationships with the end, if it measures through the truthful film it show they are to present. By using his structure of performance this film gains a tangible idea of what it takes to be an aged person in an unfriendly world. The courage shown by the main characters and their curiosity is uncommon. A completely blind woman, a semi-hired man and their three octogenarian friends prepares themselves for a musical performance of calmer, where they will act and sing. In the credits we learn that their musical performance was performed at 11 different locations in the Greater Boston Area. In the film we are given the chance to appeal to their all parallel performance. But as we do so louder, hoping for an encore, our time diminishes because everything must change.

Carmen Gavani

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PAGE 14 The Tech FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1985

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