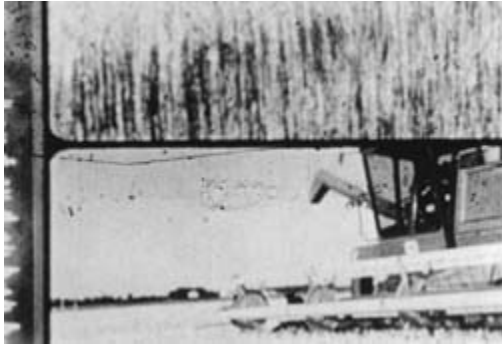


Mark Street Film Reviews

WINTERWHEAT



Year Released: 1989

MPAA Rating: Unrated

Running Time: 8 minutes

[Click to Expand Credits:](#)

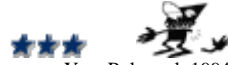
“Winterwheat” was made by bleaching, scratching, and painting directly on the emulsion of an educational film about farming. The source footage shows tractors and threshers rolling over flat fields of wheat, hands holding grains of wheat, and occasional maps of the US. This footage is covered with layers of scratches, blotches, and streaks, rushing along at the speed of 24 frames a second, in the manner of most hand manipulated films. The film is made of short sequences, punctuated by blackouts. The soundtrack consists of noises, which alternately sound like strong winds and machinery.

Street’s colors and forms are appealing, and the musicality with which he shapes his material is stylish. The rushing fecundity of the imagery suggested to me a feeling of biological abundance, of the teeming energetic life of microorganisms, which live within a field of wheat. It certainly created a feeling of an unleashing of a wild, free form energy into the dry tone of the educational film.

In a second section, Street plays with a variety of frame rates slower than 24fps. This strikes me as a major expressive advantage over typical hand manipulated films, which all run at the same frame rate, like music which is forced to be played all at one tempo.

Street varies the speed from the kinetic rush of 24fps all the way down to speeds of about 2fps, which almost feel like fast slide shows, allowing you to truly experience each frame as a piece of still art. This section, imbued with a tomato-y color, also obscures the underlying farm footage much more, and is thus inherently more abstract. This section provides a satisfying deepening of the material from the film’s beginning.

BLUE MOVIE



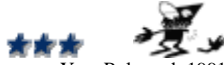
Year Released: 1994
MPAA Rating: Unrated
Running Time: 5 minutes
[Click to Expand Credits:](#)

The source footage of “Blue Movie” is loops constructed from old porn films, which, judging from the ladies’ hairstyles, might be from the ’50s or ’40s. The first loop repeatedly shows a man bending over a woman. The film is hand painted so that each successive frame is a different color – blue, purple, yellow, orangey red. The overall effect is not of any particular color but of a rhythmic flicker, which both pulses and fragments and slows down the action. Yarden’s exotic string music lends a feeling of lushness.

A middle section shows the alluring glances of several women, covered by moving squares of purple and blue, and darker splotches of black. The soundtrack is constructed from loops of Anais Nin reading from her diaries, fragments which sound like descriptions of her feelings of alienation in her relationships with men. The radical female subjectivity of Nin’s voice, contrasted with the radical objectifying power of the porn images, makes a powerful statement. The floating squares emphasize the frames of film, and the power of film as a way of containing and controlling female sexuality.

A short final section shows a loop of a woman, moving from a pose with eyes closed and lowered to gazing directly at the camera, mediating directly between her subjectivity and her objectification.

ECHO ANTHEM



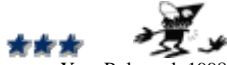
Year Released: 1991
MPAA Rating: Unrated
Running Time: 8 minutes
[Click to Expand Credits:](#)

The source footage of “Echo Anthem” (which is hard to make out, because of extensive hand painting of the film) is shot from the point of view of someone driving along a suburban street, entering a house, looking in the fridge, and then turning on the TV, where they see a football game. Images of a marching band and a waving American flag soon give way to images of mass destruction, as from an aerial bombardment. The occasional glimpses of policemen and emergency vehicles make this footage look like it could be from the London blitz or from the bombing of Dresden. Emergency radio dispatchers are heard. Then we hear incredible mass cheering as ticker tape descends around the flag. All of this is quite obscured by slashes and blotches of constantly moving paint on the film, mostly in deep blue, but also in reds and yellows.

The crowd and the ticker tape reminded me instantly of the “victory parade” following the Gulf War, as did the film’s 1991 date. I attended this parade as a protester, and it was the single most vivid example of human ugliness I had ever witnessed, with masses of people celebrating the horrors of the Gulf War as if they were the most magnificent things ever achieved by Mankind. I was sick for many days afterwards.

Street’s juxtaposition of TV sports, war, and celebration creates a kind of non-didactic political statement, in which the mindless thrill of belonging to a crowd at a football game is compared to the patriotic thrill of celebrating American military might. Just as TV was used in the Gulf War to distance the public from the horrors of the massive slaughter and destruction, making it seem more like a video game with high-tech weapons, the splotches of paint in “Echo Anthem” make it hard to see exactly what is going on in the underlying footage, which I believe is part of Street’s point. Yet the frantic pace of the paint and the deep, primary colors that make the images simpler and starker, also serve to express a sense of urgency and terror below the surface.

SWEEP



Year Released: 1998
MPAA Rating: Unrated
Running Time: 7 minutes
[Click to Expand Credits:](#)

The source footage for “Sweep” was taken during a walk Street took with his 18-month-old daughter through their Brooklyn neighborhood. Even though every image was of a scene intensely familiar to me (Street lives just a few blocks away from me), it was difficult for me to recognize the specific locales, because all of the footage is heavily hand processed with a variety of streaks, splotches of a wide range of colors, scratches, cracks, and tints. The frame rate of the images ranges from the jumpy, high-energy surge of 24fps to the slide-show-like 3fps, in which you can clearly contemplate each crack and splotch. This surface detail makes one constantly aware of the flat surface of the movie screen, never allowing one to disappear entirely into the illusionistic space of the filmed images. The playful energy of these colorful surface details adds a sense of lively commentary, and jazzy improvisation. The soundtrack consists of domestic sounds plus the father and daughters conversations (mostly the father’s). “Sweep” is a portrait of a middle aged artist regaining a sense of seeing the world through entirely new, fresh eyes, by spending time with his young child.