

Erased

Explorations of the relationship between the M2 motorway bridge, a mid 20th century Ballardian concrete superhighway, at once austere and yet effective, and the only ever partially completed 1880s Temple constructed in the late 1880s by James Jershon Jezreel that form its foundation, the three moving image pieces at the centre of *Under A Bridge* display clear links to film structuralism as appropriated and reconfigured by the avant-garde filmmaking practices of the late 1970s and developments in new narrative cinema. The formative moving image works by architect and artist Simon Barker, *A Medway Hymn*, *These are the Stones* and *The Naming of the Island* (Ballard's *Concrete Island*) via Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) offer an effective and carefully calibrated mediation of environment, community and the lipstick traces the past leaves on the present.

Like the films of the pioneering American filmmaker James Benning, Barker explores the relationship between image, text and sound whilst paying attention, in the manner of Patrick Keillor (albeit minus a 'Robinson' type narrator figure), to the vernacular landscapes of British life. Like Benning, Barker's framing is static, observational, meticulous, referencing the memory of the temple and evoking the reverence its creator would have wished to inspire. Again, like Benning there is a sense in the fixed, tableaux-like compositions and long-take, semi-documentary visual aesthetic of a world that exists both within and outside the film frame and the notion of everyday lives being lived blissfully unaware. In *A Medway Hymn* the motorists, motor-bikers and train travellers, the joggers, the rowers and the doggers denote it. There are also some playful cats that appear in the corner of the frame (to the left of a sign reading 'Freedom') and the gently ebbing grass and wheat, caught in the breeze, Dovzhenko-like and oblivious.

There is a sense in Barker's images of a surprisingly harmonious alliance between past and present and of a symbiotic relationship between the natural world and the one engineered by mankind. Concrete interacts with fauna, the sky beats down, and the river laps and undulates. All is well. Equilibrium is maintained. As with Gideon

Koppel's hypnotic and poetic *Sleep Furiously* (2008), this is a topographic analysis of mental and physical landscapes and a journey into endings and beginnings, in which Barker reveals what has been erased, lost and made obsolete through recourse to his camera's on/off switch.

If there is a rigorous and precise quality to Barker's images of columns, pylons, paths, roads and waterways, his use of sound is more playful and meta-textual. These films look and listen, focusing on the construction of the image and the direction of the gaze whilst also diverting our attention to aural events. Once more exhuming the notion of past history and suggesting a reverence for it, contact microphone recordings taken from under the bridge are employed to capture the ethereal, ghostly quality of the odd and echoing sounds that are transmitted. The mesmerizing, utterly unclassifiable science films of Jean Painlevé, as re-scored by Yo La Tengo, are recalled in the film's watery sequences, (a ladder leading nowhere but down, traffic cones languishing in the silt, muck and mud) with what appears to be underwater sounds laid over the text. Normality and the commonplace made strange.

A non-professional choir, sourced through the Kent Association of the Blind, perform the Jezreelite *Hymn 136*, denoting that in some sense James Jershon Jezreel, even though physically absent and more or less excised from local history and mourning the Jerusalem he did not quite establish, is still in communication with the Medway environment. The audio performance of the hymn has been treated and found sounds added, rendering it's opaque language and oblique meaning all the more surreal, an echo confined it to an age we barely recognise and which feels both alien and strangely comfortably familiar to us.

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