

The fix[ated] image and the fluidity of time in Frédérick Belzile's, *L'Araignée* (2008)

By Alan Kollins

For all its static and measured [real] time fixtures, Frédérick Belzile's *L'Araignée* (2008) manages to evoke a palpable experience, as the piece seeks to subvert a disembodied tourist gaze with associations of desire and loss. The fixed gaze and spatial relations of *L'Araignée* are less about disorientation than they are about suturing the viewer into the video's landscape as the visual diegesis becomes inhabited by a sub-conscious, a subject who is less an onlooker than she is a participant. Acting as a conduit for the viewer's sense of loss -loss of orientation or the disembodied loss of self within a foreign space -the subject both stares at, and reflects on, the public square of Antwerp - a pedestrian space that becomes oddly familiar through a narrative trajectory and *L'Araignée's* clever use of sound.

Much like Maya Daren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1947), which flirts with the sub-conscious to seek meaning of a filmic relationship between experience and place, *L'Araignée* is preoccupied by the insertion of a subject that works to suture a tension between [disembodied] self and environment. For *Meshes*, this thematic is highlighted through superimposition of the subject via the visual trickery of the optical printer – multiple bodies of the subject appear throughout the film. Alternately, *L'Araignée* invokes its subject, and a prevailing sense of loss, through sound manipulation while the fixed image of the installation remains significantly intact. At the critical moment when the synchronized sound of the public square sonically drops into what might be compared to audio reverberations of a relaxation tank or the dense echo chamber of a fishbowl, the voyeurist gaze of the viewer - to this point fixed, static and disembodied - becomes sutured by an emotionally fractured subject. This marks a dramatic tension in the video's spatial and temporal modes signaling a self-conscious presence that compensates for the viewer's disorientation with a fixed image, its visual/perceptual landscape and the endurance required to manage the video's real time sequence.

L'Araignée's shift in spatial perspectives highlights both the limitations and strengths of video installation as an interactive art piece. The seemingly open nature of video (the digitalization of the photographic or film image) lends itself to film only in the manner in which movement occurs not in the apparatus but in the spectator (Philip Monk, 2004)¹. *L'Araignée's* dense, static and repetitious spatial field works in striking opposition to its wounded subject who, as the result of a subtle, at once unexpected, narrative arc, makes an appearance in voice and in inter-titles. This fracture – abated by the sonic shift mentioned above and the speaker's poetic story of loss – prompts the viewer to find both relief from the fixed camera gaze and acknowledge their individual relationship to the altered space of Antwerp. The transformation from disembodied to embodied signals the viewer's own movement, not anything inherent in the mechanisms of *L'Araignée's* media. Moreover, it is the work's payoff and one worth sticking around for as our relationship to space and the media itself is, for all intents and purposes, has been altered for the better: a symbolic movement in filmic time and space.

¹ Monk, Philip. *Paint it Black: Curating the Temporal Image*. Reprinted in [Projecting Questions? Mike Holdbloom's Invisible Man between the art gallery and the movie theatre](#), Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 2009.

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