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The textures of memory: Ute Aurand's *Rushing Green with Horses*

Just over eight minutes into Ute Aurand's feature-length film, *Rushing Green with Horses*, is a sequence which gives the film its title. First, a rush of green trees and blue sky, light reflected across the inside of a train window, images unfolding against a sonic backdrop of the train rattling down its track. The moving canvas onto which a pattern of images emerges forms a steady rhythm mirroring the movement of the train itself, the hurtling movement forward occasionally slowed by balletic turns of the camera enabling a closer examination of the passing scenes: trees filled with the white blossom of early spring, a quick glimpse of two riders on horses galloping across open pasture. Next, a field of grass and the richly textured patterns created as the sun and wind move across it, birds chirping in the background. A hand reaches for an apple on a tree, grabs it, pulls it towards the camera. The image is then replaced with one of a bird taking flight, before we hear the loud crunch of a bite being taken from the apple no longer in view, then silence as clouds pass over what could be a crescent moon, but is revealed to be a solar eclipse. The moon devours the sun while people lying down on the grass gaze upwards.

The sequence, like the rest of the film comprised of material gathered by the filmmaker throughout her daily life and travels over a period of twenty years, conveys a sense of the experiential textures of memory and the passage of time, expressing both its fleeting nature as well as the supreme or more poignant moments which seem crystallised in time. This thematic concern with the interplay between the perception of time as either compressed or expanded is also expressed through the film's unique grammar of editing, including distinctive staccato-like edits, which intercept, fast-forward, repeat. Sometimes fluttering like the blinking of an eye or a stuttering heartbeat, they serve as a kind of punctuation throughout the body of the film. The gaps, the occasions when subjects are decentred or out-of-focus, or the image obscured, or when sound and image are out-of-sync, reference the impartiality of memory and the fragmentary process of its recall. Like the experience of the train traveller admiring the passing scenery glimpsed from the window, images speed towards us and then away again, leaving an imprint - their own memory.

These textural qualities of memory are explored throughout Aurand's film, often focusing on the more embodied aspects of memory. Whether through the haptic use of the camera, and its privileging of out-of-focus or obscured images, a subjectivity implied through moments when the camera is playfully turned on its side, or through the foregrounding of the physical bodies of the subjects before the camera – the neck of a loved one asleep on the grass, a close-up of an eye only partially in frame, the camera's focus on hands both young and old, at times including the filmmaker's own hands – touching a fence post, holding a cup of tea, a letter, or once even covering the lens of the camera – engender a wholly tactile and sensorial engagement with memory.

This focus on embodied experience is established early on in the film's opening sequence featuring a teenager dancing to music played on a handheld device. The distortion of the diegetic music on the soundtrack, at times accompanied by the sounds of bodily thumps or the faint sounds of the teen humming along to the music, calls attention to its 'archival' nature, producing its own sense of hapticity, while the film's editing, responding to rhythms of the music as well as the dancer, further emphasises an engagement with more embodied aspects of memory.

Although, as Chris Kennedy has written, Aurand's films undoubtedly reflect a 'decidedly joyous present tense – the flooding imagery of the now'¹ – in a style comparable to the films of Jonas

1 Chris Kennedy, programme notes for „In Present Tense. Films of Ute Aurand“, 4 November 2009, California College of the Arts in collaboration with the Pacific Film Archive.

Mekas and Margaret Tait – like the work of Mekas and Tait, which involved filming their everyday environments and gathering material over many years – the body of material presented in Aurand's new film forms a dialogue with itself, communicating across a variety of times and places. It is in this way that Aurand's film serves as a kind of memory text, capturing the more ambiguous ways in which the sounds and images of people and places are remembered – the kinds of qualities that are often frustratingly absent from photographs taken as mementos of a particular person or place. Rather than offering a complete 'picture', our memories are often more likely to be comprised of an eclectic assemblage of seemingly arbitrary details – the sound of someone's voice, their laughter, a particular gesture of the hand, a line on the face, a colour, an incidental song, etc. Furthermore, in our memories these details are often juxtaposed in unexpected ways.

Aurand's approach as a filmmaker proves particularly adept in conveying these more ephemeral qualities of memory. Acts of exploration rather than a predetermined form of self-expression, her films succeed in capturing the details of the everyday that are often overlooked – a quality which renders the work particularly moving.

Like its title, *Rushing Green with Horses* presents itself as a kind of haiku poem – a form primarily concerned with presenting 'things' rather than 'thoughts' and facilitating their free juxtaposition. Although Aurand's film makes no attempt to explain what is seen or heard in the film, it ultimately doesn't matter if the viewer has no understanding of the relationship between the filmmaker and the people and places depicted. Instead, the film's generous engagement with the everyday 'things' in front of the camera enables connections to be made beyond the world of the film and the individual memory of the filmmaker – evoking the textures and qualities of memory that are part of a wider, collective experience of memory.