

21-87 A Multimedia Analysis

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Arthur Lipsett, writing on his own film:

21-87 could be described as a fragmented shock-state which the spectator must grapple with, continuously counter-check and question...21-87 is an extreme statement of anxiety by a young filmmaker who considers the film as “transitional”; that is—this film can also be viewed as an arrested moment in the work of an artist, caught in the act of departure from surface reality in the search of an expression on film of heightened [sic] inner states which could transned [sic] experiences of the known world. This desire for transcendence [sic] can be seen in 21-87.¹

21-87 exemplifies a form of highly compact cinema that manages to be compressed without being impenetrably dense. My argument for Lipsett’s work is that it tends towards the mnemonic. By ‘mnemonic’ I mean not only that the film makes acrobatic use of our memory, but that the film is designed — and I want to emphasize the word *design* — to be held completely within the head. Not all films can give themselves over to memory so completely. There is something in the opening image of 21-87, a human skull, that cues us to this possibility. The feeling of transcendence Lipsett was after, I’d argue, lies in the pressure, played out over our faces, between the movie in our heads pushing out, and the shock of the image on the screen pushing in. This is a remarkable and hypnotic film. A mnemonic jewel where light is fractured, scattered, but can be held easily in the hand. It’s a movie that should be memorized like a poem.

Note: This project is delayed, but is still in production. Our hope is to present a comprehensive multimedia breakdown of Lipsett’s film in an effort to do our part to help correct the dearth of Lipsett scholarship. You may wish to click on the sidebar to the left to join our mailing list and receive an e-mail update when this project goes online. In the meantime, please enjoy the rest of the edition, and feel free to leave us a note about Lipsett, this project, this edition, or anything else about *Synoptique* you wish to comment on or question.

¹ Arthur Lipsett, “Notes and Proposals” (Canadian Journal of Film Studies, 7.1 Spring 1998) 50