

Cosmic Rays Film Festival 2020

Introduction by Josh Martin

Immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, student writers for *Aspect: Journal of Film and Screen Media* had one last chance for a film festival experience, attending and screening films at the 2020 Cosmic Rays Film Festival. The fest, which was held from March 5-7, 2020 at the Varsity Theatre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, showcased the best work in experimental cinema for the audiences of the Triangle area. With the 2021 edition of the festival canceled due to the continuing global pandemic – and the future of in-person film festivals in further peril – these reviews from the 2020 edition reinforce the essential work that these artistic events do for communities like Chapel Hill.

Even more crucially, these reviews highlight the continuing vibrancy of contemporary experimental cinema. Whether engaging with famous images, digital media, or household items, these films stretch the possibilities of the medium in challenging and fascinating ways. The first of two volumes of reviews from *Cosmic Rays 2020* addresses films from Shelly Silver, Jodie Mack, Zachary Epcar, and Ross Meckfessel, ending with a dispatch from the festival's wide-ranging celebration of the work of Naomi Uman. Read more from *Aspect's* team of writers below!

Turn

By Josh Martin



Photo Credit: Shelly Silver

Entirely silent and shot in pristine black-and-white, Shelly Silver's *Turn* pushes the limits of our fascination with a single, seemingly insignificant movement. Inspired by the final image of Jean Seberg in Jean-Luc Godard's iconic 1960 film *Breathless*, *Turn* displays a series of women turning around and meeting the gaze of the spectator (according to the festival guide, the film was shot in Berlin in 2017), changing the power dynamics of Seberg's turn away from the camera. The diversity of the participants and their varied performances of this single gesture provide the most compelling aspects of the film. Some are young and some are old; some take the opportunity to smile, while others seem intent on maintaining a pensive, reserved expression. Though the various turns are arguably too short for the viewer to gain any real impression of the physiognomy of the performers, the film's stated thesis – a homage/reinvention of a classic image that could reveal new political and emotional dimensions – gives it a curious power.

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