



Kinaesthesia

Director: Gerald Fox

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a Foxy Films production

Executive Producer: Jason Wood

Producer: Gerald Fox

Co-producer: Dasha Cowley

Post-production Co-ordinator: Sarah Snelling

Researcher: Dasha Cowley

Assistant Director: Dasha Cowley

Scriptwriter: Gerald Fox

Cinematographer: Douglas Hartington

Editors: Dasha Cowley, Gerald Fox

Art Director: Ian White

Set Designer: Philippa Hart

Costume Designer: Dasha Cowley

Grade and Restoration: Vince Narduzzo

Colourist: Paul Dean

Music Composer: Alan Snelling

Re-recording Mixer: Alan Snelling

Thanks: BFI National Archive, Jemima Khan,

Bryony Dixon

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97 mins

Digital

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Preview

Kinaesthesia

+ Q&A with director Gerald Fox

In the small canon of filmmakers basing characters in their work on real teachers they once had, few examples may prove as flattering and charming as what BAFTA and Grierson award-winning documentarian Gerald Fox does with Vladimir 'Vlada' Petrić, his former film professor, in *Kinaesthesia*. Co-founder of the Harvard Film Archive, the Yugoslavia-born Petrić was a historian, theoretician and aesthete of cinema, with occasional forays into other fields, including directing, screenwriting and acting – his onscreen appearances include a supporting role in Mel Brooks's Soviet Russia-set *The Twelve Chairs* (1970).

A kaleidoscopic documentary, *Kinaesthesia* adapts a significant portion of Petrić's essay 'Film and Dreams', focusing on how silent-era filmmakers explored the possibilities of the new artform to palpably translate both feelings of movement and the experiential qualities of dreams. In Fox's movie, Petrić as a narrator (voiced by Fox) speaks about dozens of films, his words taken from both that essay and writings by some of the relevant filmmakers.

But this is no mere clip show. Interweaved with footage of silent-movie dream sequences are reenactments of those same scenes, or at least the dazzling techniques they use, with an onscreen avatar of Petrić (played wordlessly by Goran Kostic) living out his own versions of memorable moments from such masters as Fritz Lang, Buster Keaton, Maya Deren, Jean Renoir, Teinosuke Kinugasa and Luis Buñuel.

What were the origins of this unique approach to a film-history documentary?

Gerald Fox: I was lucky enough to study with Petrić and one of the courses I did was on film and dreams, where we studied everything from this early cinema right through Fellini, Bergman, Buñuel. It was mostly great European directors who [made] what Vlada called 'oneiric cinema' – dreamlike cinema.

He was obsessed with this idea that these early filmmakers, in particular, wanted to activate the sensory motor centres in the brain and create this thing called kinaesthesia, so that you felt like you were moving. That was through camera movement, editing and the use of cinematic devices like double exposures, multiple superimpositions, slow motion, these sort of things which were new when cinema started and were like devices to recreate dreaming. I think their [intent] was to allow audiences to have that same sensorial experience you have when you're dreaming. You really feel like you're flying or whatever it may be.

[Petrić] had also written an essay called 'Film and Dreams'. I was looking back at it a few years ago and realised that it is the 100th anniversary of some of the great films. And I thought I could use this essay and actually focus in on the early period, rather than trying to do a broad survey and going into Bergman and Fellini because the [wider] you go, the more you're watering down the depth that you could hope to achieve. Predominantly, there was this desire to celebrate the 'dream film' in cinema and to do it through him. His essay does it so well, and if I could use his essay and research things that the actual film directors themselves had said – René Clair, Jean Epstein, they were all great thinkers – and use some of their thoughts about dream and cinema, we could make a film that does that.

Kinaesthesia

Preview: Kinaesthesia

+ Q&A with director Gerald Fox
Fri 17 Apr 18:00; Sun 19 Apr 15:00

The Fall of the House of Usher

La Chute de la maison Usher
Sat 18 Apr 15:10

A Page of Madness Kurutta ichipeiji

Sat 18 Apr 18:10

Metropolis + intro by filmmaker Gerald Fox

Sun 19 Apr 12:00

Silent Dreams Shorts Programme

+ intro by filmmaker Gerald Fox
Sun 19 Apr 18:15

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And then I thought, why not try and have a character who looks like Petrić? We can find him wandering around in a dreamlike world, dreaming himself in and out of these films and having the same experiences. Dream sequences are [often] the most exciting bits of those films because they had free rein to do what they wanted, and they wanted to experiment there. But you can't just stick film clips together because what happens then is you don't know where one clip is beginning and [another] is ending. You're actually doing the filmmakers a disservice by doing that because you're just butting them up. So, I thought, introduce this character wandering around who looks like Vlada Petrić, and then also use him in voiceover.

One of the pleasures of seeing a silent film at the cinema can be when the score used deviates from the kind of music known to accompany those films when they were contemporary, allowing this blending of older artistic sensibilities with modern ones. For your film, there's an extra layer to this because you have a new score written to serve as the soundtrack for dozens of different silent movies within one combined package. With that in mind, what sort of musical throughlines were you looking for from your composer, Alan Snelling?

That the music was modern, but it would also have elements that reflected each of the individual films, where there was a sort of a 'Japanese sound' or a 'Russian sound', for example, for each one. But it would all feel like it could be one soundtrack, and then you change each [musical] sequence to fit that particular film and give a sense of what each different movement of cinema and the imagery is [about]. If you're seeing it on a big screen with the music, the hope is that you'll feel like you're in a continuous dream.

In terms of recreating techniques or silent-film scenes for your interspersed footage, which proved the most challenging?

Well, the animals didn't always behave themselves. I remember the camel people arrived and promptly crashed their truck with the camels [onboard] into the wall. There were problems with the antlers of the reindeer and it [also] wouldn't stand still. I actually stood in and tried to ride that horse [we use] and nearly ended up in a river because it just went out of control. I was hanging on for dear life. And there was a swan that kept attacking us when we were filming stuff on the lake, literally charging at the boat.

I presume there was no temptation to faithfully recreate the eye slicing from Un chien andalou (1929)?

Well, we got him to do the [motion], but not to actually cut the eye. We did try and reenact the bit with ants on the hand. God knows what they must have done to get that many ants coming out of the hand because we could not get it, no matter what. I put some honey on it, but they all seemed to run away! It was impossible.

Josh Slater-Williams, bfi.org.uk