

1,2,3, Once Again

An “experimental documentary” – we get warned by the director Vasco Diogo in the very beginning of his film. And indeed, during this 48 minute long project, we encounter numerous visual and audio effects in a story, which is actually a mosaic of documented scenes from the "Centro Hospitalar Psiquiátrico of Lisbon" shot during sessions of a treatment with the people suffering from Alzheimer. And perhaps because of this very structure and the approach we could say that this is a documentary at its best.

Avoiding any kind of narrative which would, in a usual way, introduce the chosen topic, explain the depicted therapy and the nature of the disease, the author has decided to approach the subject from a different angle. Instead of trying to navigate the storyline and acquire the position of the guide and a narrator, the approach of the director is resembling the one of the viewer of this film: by just presenting the acquired material, he himself is letting to be led by the images, that trigger his thoughts and associations. Telling by observing would actually be the definition of this technique, that reminds on the principle once applied by James Benning. The chosen scenes Diogo connects into associative chain, where by watching and listening the viewer gets inspired to reflect upon given, while at the same time he slowly gets the overall picture of the subject, gets to know the personalities of the participating patients and their relationships. The author acquires the same position by refusing to force his own interpretation on the story, but is concentrating instead to carefully watch and listen what camera and microphone has recorded. His story has no introduction, nor conclusion, it is there to engage the viewer, bring him into its world by this precise form that allows enjoying in spontaneous tiny details, touchy moments... And lures the viewer to give the meaning to it himself. And the director gives an example himself: the applied audiovisual effects, where he distorts the sound and the picture (echo, plying the footage backwards, mirroring of the image, color and light effects...) do not serve to simulate the state of mind of the patients, but to abstract, to channel the emotions, associations, and highlight the ones that drew his attention during the process of observing. And although these effects might appear crude and unconventional, the director's approach during the whole process of documenting this subject is outmost subtle, careful, precise and concentrated. What is a goal of a documentary, but to document? Many examples of the genre show that chosen themes and subject suffer aware or unaware subjectivity, judgement and one sided interpretation by the author. By avoiding this working method, this “experimental” project is actually approaching the ideal of the genre, to be objective as far as possible. The applied effects are the authors statement: they are pointing out to his presence and his position towards the subject. He himself is the observer who is absorbing and exploring, letting his mind to think aloud and his imagination to be ignited. The effects should make us abstract the seen, to turn our attention to some interesting details that we notice and more easily connect with our experience and thoughts.

In its structure the film uses exclusively means of the cinema – visual and audio. The editing does not steer the material but is being steered by it. Same counts for the effects that are result of the authors observation process, as well as of the game and trying out. This seemingly random treatment is actually more honest, open minded and has more respect for the material. With the addition of the excellent camera language (framing, usage of high and low angle, interesting group portraits...), these elements are making the scenes unusual, torn out from the pathetic frame, time, definition – what we see are simple – people, or even just their minds, thoughts, random, like in a dream, a memory, collective,

our... This treatment makes the film go much deeper, into questioning our consciousness, the way we perceive reality...

This excellent documentary features sensibility, sharp perception, bravery in editing and applying effects, curiousness and lust for experiment... It is not a coincidence that the director has the names of the great explorers. Without tendency to define the given and to put it into a frame of his interpretation, he opens up many questions and new horizons, by taking us to this exciting meditation in the rhythm of the strange little poems... 1, 2, 3, once again!