

“Absently  
enchantedly  
Destined  
to splice it  
together”

**“Absently enchantedly Destined to splice it together”**  
Caitlin Quinlan

In “A P.S. to Christmas on Earth,” written in 1966, Barbara Rubin described the film’s creation:

*so i spent 3 months chopping the hours of film up  
into a basket  
and then toss and toss  
flip and toss  
and one by one  
Absently enchantedly Destined to splice it together*

Rubin, absent, enchanted in the editing flow, worked in a mode as mesmeric as the work itself. Critic and friend of Rubin’s Amy Taubin wrote for *Screen Slate* that the filmmaker “edited and re-edited [the film] obsessively,” searching for her vision of harmony between its two reels that run simultaneously, projecting an image inside an image. These sights—of sexual pleasure, the intimacy of the body, and the rhythms and rituals of their overlap—are at once hypnotic and haptic, blurring the duality of physical and mental sensation (“the subject, what else could it be, was all about cocks & cunts & fantasies,” said Rubin). It’s easy to get lost in this double play, attempting to parse what can be seen. At times, it’s obvious; at other moments, an expanse of wet flesh filling the frame begs for further definition. A layer of luridly painted bodies dances and writhes on top of a projection depicting genital close-ups, on top of which psychedelic coloured filters are added live, only enchanting further.

Though “cocks & cunts” might be in short supply in Jackie Raynal’s *Deux fois* (1968), made five years after *Christmas on Earth*, certainly the fantasies remain. The two works foreground the movement of bodies, the performance of physicality, and how these motions repeat and multiply. The line between the ritualistic—the hedonistic, the free, the sexual—and the mundane—the repetitive, the formulaic—is intricately exposed. Fantasies of the mind and experiences of the body are blurred. We are constantly invited to look twice, whether at overlapping images and simultaneous projections, or at scenes that occur again and again. Another fleeting, libertine connection: Rubin’s title *Christmas on Earth* comes from Arthur Rimbaud’s delirious poem in prose “A Season in Hell,” while the filmmaking collective that Raynal was a part of, the Zanzibar Group, took their name from him as well, from a line he wrote in a letter to his sister, “I will go to Zanzibar, where there is gold.” It was perhaps both Rimbaud’s reputation as late 19th century poetry’s enfant terrible and the heady symbolism in his writing that enamoured him to these filmmakers, who sought experimentation and rebellion through the surreal in their own work.

If Raynal’s film appears to be less sexually driven, and Rubin’s less mundane, they both perform a canny double act. When Raynal in *Deux fois* repeatedly holds a small mirror up to a light behind the camera, flashing the reflective beam into the lens as if it were morse code,

the beauty of the image and her provocative stare could hypnotise. The quick, tiny movements of her hands, tilting the mirror up and down, feel charged with erotic potential. Later, flashing across a dot matrix advertising billboard are the words “Bring a Little Lovin.” Shot in close-up, the billboard exists outside of the film’s space and time, filling the frame with its glittering pixelated images of a woman and man dancing, zooming stars, lightning bolts, and Lichtenstein-esque onomatopoeia (“Bang! Boom!”). What follows is a silent dreamscape of the multiple lives of a woman (Raynal) and the different men she encounters, occupying bare spaces in a ghostly country manor, shot at tilted camera angles as if in an amusement park funhouse. Sometimes Raynal and the men caress each other, sometimes they laugh, shout—or so it appears from their physical movements, presented as they are without sound. There is a blankness to these scenes, a cold quality exacerbated by the minimal spaces the figures occupy. The “lovin” seems limited to the billboard, the erotic potential of bodies playing out with greater heat in the space of advertising.

*Christmas on Earth*, then, with its transgressive and explicit documentation of unsimulated sex, is hotter than hell. Yet its rhythmic and repetitive structure engenders a kind of fatigue, wearing these images out of their immediate and physical salacious power, and transforming them into something more fantastical. Where the erotic might appear in Raynal’s gestures, it diffuses in Rubin’s filmmaking; the mental becomes the physical and vice versa. Structure is also something to question here. Though Raynal at the beginning of *Deux fois* tells the viewer the sequence of events that will take place and specific details about them (that the sky will be shot in extreme close-up, that there will be a sleeper and a dreamer), those scenes then drift, through their long takes and elliptical narratives, into passages of oneiric looseness. And despite Rubin’s formal and visual structure of the image inside an image, she plays with spontaneity and rupture through sound. The work is meant to be screened with live radio playing to accompany it, changing the possibilities of tone and interpretation across audiences and time periods. In its very form, *Christmas on Earth* further lends itself to looking twice—in a different year, month, even hour of the day—given that the programming of any given radio station in that moment will profoundly reshape the work.

Reshaping, rewatching; Rubin and Raynal invite repetition in viewing to expand the experiential possibilities of their films. Look again at Rubin’s obfuscated snapshots to reveal more within the image, or at Raynal’s lengthier, more elusive scenes that dip in and out of narrative forms to find new meanings. Look again in both at the waxing and waning of eroticism and mundanity, and sense the intimacy between the two. In the absent enchantment of these images, spliced and tossed and layered, new worlds appear.