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### Bodysong is a Piece of Art that Tries to Actively Engage the Viewer

#### The Film Tells the Story of Life by Breaking it Down into Six Basic Elements

By **EI Bicho**

*Bodysong* is not a film to be passively watched, but is instead a piece of art that tries to actively engage. The director wants the audience to be mindful of the images on screen in the hopes that each viewer will create an individual and unique experience as he reflects on the film, which tells the story of a human being's life by breaking it down into six basic elements: birth, growth, sex, violence, death, and dreams. These key points show the universality of life regardless of nationality, ethnicity or creed.

The film is a celluloid collage edited together from archival films that have been recorded all over the world since the medium was invented. The picture quality of the images isn't always great, which is understandable considering the age of some of the footage. Most of the subjects are anonymous participants, but the film also uses iconic images.

We see Josephine Baker dance, Jackson Pollack paint and Helen Keller speak. There's famous news footage, such as the Vietcong officer who was shot in the head by General Loan in the middle of a Saigon street during the Vietnam War and the Chinese man holding the white flag in Tiananmen Square, attempting to block a tank. The stories about every shot can be learned through the [website](#) that was created in conjunction with the film.

*Bodysong* starts at the cellular level. We see the building blocks of life as they work their way from egg to child. Women from different cultures give birth in different settings, such as hospitals, homes and even in pools of water. This segment goes on way too long as the events and visuals are repeated over and over. The ideas were conveyed rather quickly, so the repetition became relentless and I found myself losing interest.

Children grow into young adults. They get involved in courtships that are consummated. This segment included pornographic images of intercourse and oral sex. I was startled, yet not offended. At first, I found them gratuitous. They seemed to call attention to themselves and I was taken out of the moment.

Thinking about the film days later, I realized that it was not the presentation of the images, but my reaction to them that caused my disconnection. Images of sexual acts certainly belong in a segment about sex. They were presented very matter-of-factly and not in a salaciousness manner. No more time was given to the sexual scenes than to any other events that comprise a person's life, so any issues I had were my own.

The violence segment starts with individuals fist-fighting and moves on to large-scale riots. Illness and death are explored with sick, old people appearing on a split-screen with microscopic views of different germs and viruses. After death, there appears to be a rebirth and we witness a conglomeration of scenes.

We see body modification, religious images and fire. There is art in the forms of dance and painting that then segues into symbols and communication. We finally hear people speaking, usually with difficulty as they are learning to talk. People stage protests for civil rights and other battles against authority. The film ends back at the beginning with images from the cellular level.

I appreciate the effort and ideas behind the film, but the project comes up short for me. It was interesting, and there were some good moments, but I was puzzled by the structure. I couldn't figure out what was taking place after the death segment.

At the end of the film, I saw that the segment represented dreams, but I didn't understand how because the sequences in the dreams segment are things that take place on this plane of existence, art and protests, things that are thought about and acted upon. Those aren't spiritual or afterlife dreams, but instead stem from

a person's imagination. Dreams are subconscious ramblings of the mind with logic all its own that take place all through life, so why place it after death?

Other than the dreams section, this could have been the story of any creature's life: birth, growth, sex, violence, death are things all living things share, and the dreams could be as well. Just because we aren't aware that other life forms have dreams doesn't mean they don't exist.

I find the decision to focus on humans interesting because the project's purpose seems to illustrate the universality of the human experience, yet the experience of life itself doesn't seem to be any different other than our own awareness of it.

An amazing soundtrack created by Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood accompanies the film. He does a masterful job capturing the mood of the segments. The film begins, like all life, with conception and birth, and the score for this segment brings to mind a science fiction film and explorations of new worlds.

The sex sequence is paired with free jazz; the frenzied sounds matching the carnal lust on display. A pounding percussion plays as the violence segment focuses on war. The soundtrack is available for purchase and can be sampled at the [Bodysong website](#). Radiohead fans will enjoy it.

The extras include other short films by Pummel, a commentary track that appears sporadically and deals more with Greenwood's music and only briefly touches on Pummel's work. There's no in-depth explanation given to the choices made in the visuals. There are some video interview clips where Pummel talks about the film, its creation and the web interactivity.

Some will definitely find *Bodysong* pretentious and boring, but for those who enjoy thinking as a form of entertainment, it might be worth your time. I liked the experience overall even though I wasn't completely satisfied with it, and I couldn't sit through it again without taking something of a psychoactive nature to assist my meditation.

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