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## Bodysong

Contributed by Brent Simon  
Wednesday, 14 September 2005



*Bodysong* isn't a documentary, per se. And it's not a music video. It's actually both a film and a website, if that makes sense. The brainchild of director Simon Pummell, *Bodysong* is the story of humanity writ large — in "chapters" of birth, love, sex, violence, dreams and death — all chronicled through moving images taken from footage across the world and spanning more than a century.

Here, let me explain. Inspired by the birth of his own child, Pummell got it into his head that there is an undeniable universality to our struggles regardless of culture, and so wouldn't it be interesting to try to cull together a narrative from "found" archived footage over the last 100 years of cinema. Cut to the ambitious, ambient score by Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood, *Bodysong* is the end result of his experiment. Think of it as an 85-minute extrapolation of and cross between the fantasy sequences from HBO's *Dream On* and those old biology and nature filmstrips shown in science class up through middle school, except as shrewdly interwoven by an impressionistic artistic mind. Winner of the Best Documentary Feature prize at the British Independent Film Awards, *Bodysong* is definitely not the type of film you pop in when you're merely seeking some colorful diversion with dinner, but rather it's indubitably artful and thus more than worth a look if its concept triggers a hairsbreadth of interest.

The material on display in *Bodysong* really runs the gamut, from newsreel footage to home videos to industrial filmstrips to old Hollywood scenes and the like. And some of the most effective material is among the most abstract: a young German child absentmindedly waving a Nazi flag, or a group of children fighting over a tricycle, for instance. The more hardcore representations (both of sex and violence) are more often numbing rather than illuminating, though. Pummell asserts that the power of the movie derives from its sheer force of numbers

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— that each face, body, etc. is both abstracted and dignified by being part of humanity's huge flow, which is of course collectively larger than any of us can conceive in our everyday lives. He's right, in a sense, and *Bodysong* achieves the effect of reminding you of this, but of course what gives meaning to our lives is the very context that Pummell largely strips away here — the ways in which we innately personalize our own narratives. This makes *Bodysong* fascinating but still overall a little antiseptic.

DVD extras include interesting interviews with both Pummell and Jonny Greenwood, and catalogued information and links to the accompanying website, where more in-depth explanations of the background of each piece of footage are archived. In the end, *Bodysong* is an intriguing filmic experiment as much as anything else, and the fact that it can be enjoyed in bite-size tidbits — hey, like life itself — makes it worth checking out for the more reflective cinephiles out there. B- (Movie) B (Disc)

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