

THE MILL

The Mill (34 mins) is an experimental documentary shot in a largely un-modernised paper mill in southern Estonia. The film is non-narrative in the conventional sense and relies heavily on a representation of the sensory experience of being in the factory.

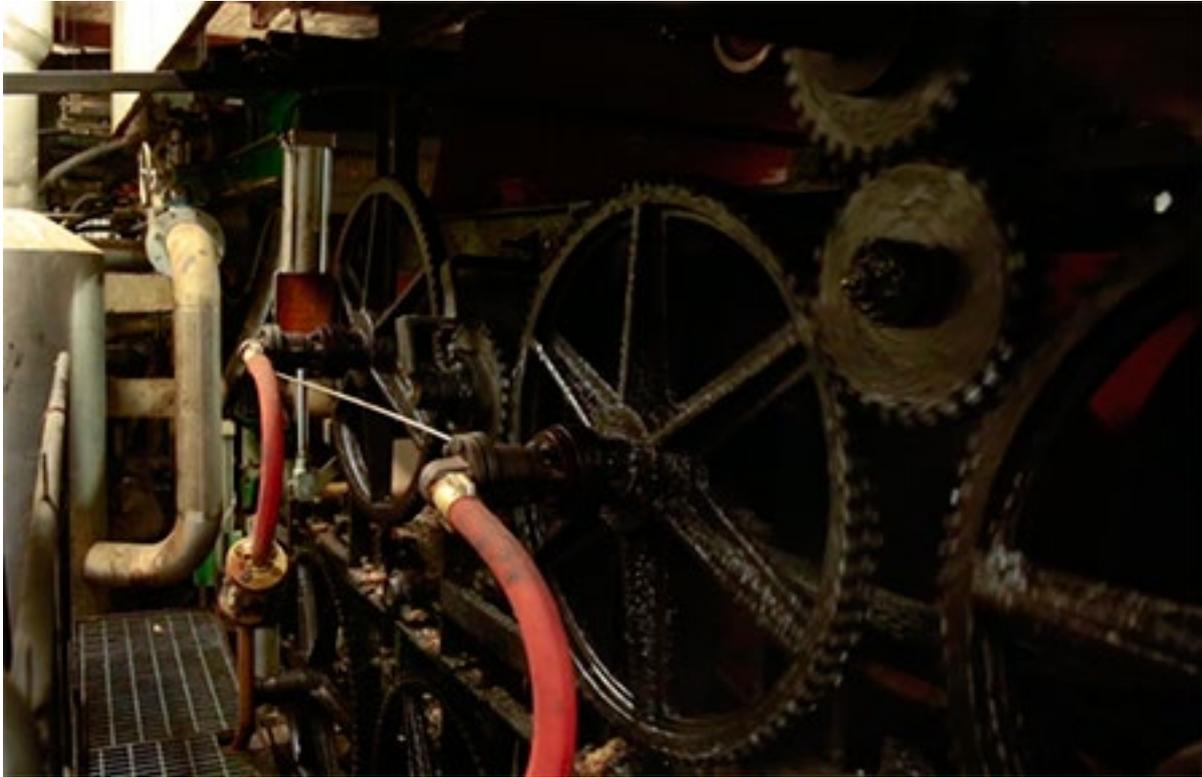
There were a few possible ways to form a coherent experimental film from the material we had collected, bearing in mind that neither director wanted to make a conventional film. We could, for example, have constructed a film made up of visual or sonic associations, pulling shots from anywhere in the factory to form scenes based perhaps on matching colour, texture, sound, etc. Ultimately, we took a cue from the factory space itself, forming scenes (such as the film has them) from the geography of the factory, with sound and sometimes obvious visual differences telling the viewer when we have moved to a new room. However,

we were careful not to make these transitions take control of the film as neither of us wanted to fall into the trap of making a simplistic process film.

For us, the experience of watching a film is often the experience of being led by the filmmaker. This is not a hidden fact, as the word ‘director’ shows. In making *The Mill* we were interested in what happens when the filmmaker relinquishes some of this control to the viewer. What is the viewer’s response to a film that steers away from managing narrative in the normal directorial way? Are there benefits to a film that avoids a conventional, usually human-centred, approach, so beloved of directors for the ease with which it gives a cohesive structure and sense of purpose?

With a more, let’s say, ‘gently’ directed film, the viewer becomes freer to abstract the elements that are important to them. The lack





of conventional narrative means these elements can be arranged and even re-arranged by the viewer within their own intellectual space, giving filmmaker and viewer something closer to equal status. Perhaps there are patterns set up by timings and movements that phase into and out of the conscious mind; perhaps the soundscape triggers personal associations with memories just out of conscious reach; perhaps the directors even intended these connections... It sometimes takes courage to leave these associations to the viewer, after all, wouldn't a film and the effort of making it be wasted if something so crucial was missed? It's a problem that is often solved in documentary by ever tighter control of the mental space within the film, with use of voiceover, talking heads, shot by shot illustration of what a protagonist is saying, easily identifiable musical cues, etc. These are oversimplifications that can be resisted, they

can neuter what should be a rich and above all imaginative artform. If more of this imaginative space is given over to the viewer, the experience of watching a film becomes much closer to one of discovery, with a larger part of that discovery being of the viewer him- or herself.

Time in our approach to making *The Mill* could be described as stochastic. That is, while not being treated in a conventional linear way, it is not static (how could it be?); its movement is not predictable, narrative, or progressive, but it is nonetheless always in motion. This stochasticism allows the viewer to create their own patterns, connections and reactions to this sensorial experience. It allows them the space, ideally, to have an experience of watching, and to become aware of that experience, then to examine it, perhaps even becoming bored, and, within that film space, to work past a conscious awareness of boredom through expectation, to

a point where they are bored with boredom, and can then finally begin in-depth exploration. We hope this occurs through both the film's visuals and soundscape—while the eye is examining color and light and movement, the ear can be free to dig through layers of tone, rhythm, texture, distortion, vibration, drone, as it finds its way to focus and zoom as sharply as a lens. As a result, each viewer's experience will be different, as the film provides the stimulus without pushing for a specific outcome.

Within the factory that is the setting for *The Mill*, time as something narrative, as something that measures units of social progress, is immaterial and irrelevant. Time only has meaning in the measurement of repeating intervals and iterations: a wheel rotating, the compressions of a pump, the vibration of water droplets, etc. That is to say, machine time exists

in the various steps and stages of the process, in actions that are free of narrative time, which exists in parallel, governing the lives and stories of the humans who reside in the same space. Machine time is eternal, a series of single instances that repeat, lacking any use for a conclusion.

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