

Carmen Gray on FoR Shorts #1

To make or to watch a film is to engage in a process of translation. Traces of reality persist in the frame, but in what guises do they appear, and how is their meaning revealed or reconstituted? We grasp for a communal language as a portal to our pasts and to each other.

In *Silabario*, by Marine de Contes, a lone island stands, obscured by a haze of clouds. A trill pierces the air. Distance, suddenly, is no object. On La Gomera, one of the Canary Islands, the whistled language of Silbo cuts across forested valleys and ravines difficult to traverse by foot, enabling an ease of communication that was indispensable in times before mobile phones. As an articulation of identity, Silbo is being revived and passed on. Locals reconnect with natural transmission modes, facing the sky like birds, and a future that honours the past like a song.

‘There’s no need to reinvent the world,’ we hear in *Hotel Royal*, by Salomé Lamas. ‘Paying close attention is enough.’ A woman filling in as a chambermaid at a Portuguese hotel scans the personal belongings in each room off a long corridor, as she goes about her duties. A narrated screenplay echoes her movements and line of vision – but never exactly squares with what is in the frame, reminding us that cinema is always an imperfect construction. The tock of an asthma inhaler keeps rhythm like a metronome, or a machine striving for life. Behind each numbered door, objects of the absent lie as transient markers of identity, and of stories that remain out of reach. Closed up in the wake of catastrophe, and haunted by endless variations on the identical, the hotel becomes a site of intrusion. As voyeurs or lone travellers on our own brief stop-off, we thirst to make meaning; to co-opt each over-determined item and read it dry.

Sensory immediacy transcends the remove of time in *La Cumbre*, by Felipe López Gómez. A layered soundscape of fauna and running water, and the oral recounting of memories, reanimate still photographs with the atmosphere of bygone family life in a cottage in the Colombian Andes. The filmmaker alleviates his nostalgia for childhood, and a home departed. His grandmother, tapping precise, descriptive co-ordinates that take one’s mind back, recalls making the sweet drink *aguapanela* with a citronella-like plant that must still grow beside the kitchen window. For transient moments, it is also as if the gulf between the audience and the formative years summoned up dissolves in the luscious, generative green of a shared vision. Battles fought over territory extend to its competing narratives in history. In a digital age, those with dominion over mediated reality have the power to colonise minds. But what if we read rebelliously, lamenting and calling back into being the erasures that underpin such struggles?

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