

David Cotterrell: Borrowed Time (v)

Date: 30th August 1997

Dimensions(m):4.0, 7.0, 10.0

Materials:

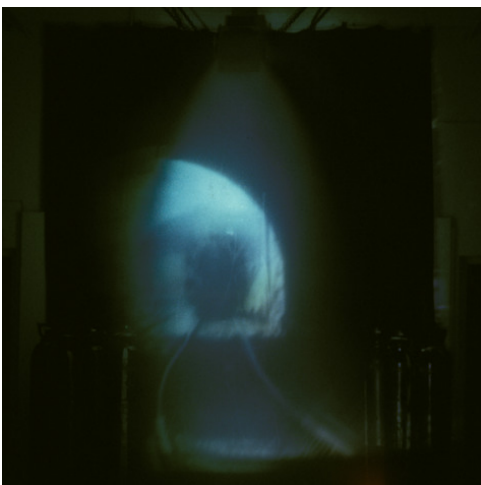
Liquid CO₂, Projected Video & Programmable Lighting Desk

A train thunders at great speed towards the audience, a projection on gas creating a near supernatural phenomena

As the house lights fade to black, a plume of smoke pours down from high up on the far wall and a blue-tinged image begins to form on the descending CO₂. The ominous sound of something huge and metallic accompanies the vision as it creeps forward, holding the viewer captive, like a rabbit mesmerised by oncoming headlamps. What is being unfurled, laid bare (rather than obscured), is a steam train emerging from a tunnel - a train of supernatural proportions, projected on to gas and thundering towards its audience with increasing speed. Then, just as we are able to delight in the recognition of this apparition about to run us through, the image is snatched away, leaving us straining to hear its diminishing groans as it chugs past this all too mortal coil into the great hereafter.

Borrowed Time is a most sobering work: evoking feelings of both anticipation and loss, the piece leaves in its wake a meditation on the relative brevity of even the longest of lives. Cotterrell understands the effect of all his jiggery-pokery but refuses his audience the pleasure of celebrating technical prowess for its own sake. In part a tribute to the Lumiere Brothers, Borrowed Time is a feat of artistic engineering.

Cotterrell first made the piece for his MA degree show, borrowing components from special effects companies and consulting with engineers to find out how it could work. That it worked at all was not to be predicted. Many expected the experiment to fail. Borrowed Time is Cotterrell's attempt to recreate a recurrent childhood dream. Making the ephemeral tangible requires smoke, but the only mirrors necessary are the ones viewers must hold up to themselves: this sleight of hand, exposed as the house lights come up to reveal a grubby, smoke-filled room, asks its audience to consider its desire for romanticised nostalgia over bare-faced reality.



The image first appearing on the surface of the gas Credit: David Cotterrell (1996)



Liquid CO₂ projection surface Credit: David Cotterrell