

Gustavo Fontán: The Free Horizons of Sound and Image

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At first glance, Gustavo Fontán appears to be an anomalous filmmaker in contemporary Argentine cinema. He doesn't appear to have anything in common with the works of celebrated Argentine filmmakers like Ana Poliak, Pablo Reyero, Carlos Echeverría, Edgardo Cozarinsky, or even the (early) work of Leonardo Favio. Likewise, his work is absolutely different from that of Matías Piñeiro, Alejo Moguillansky, and Mariano Llinás, all former students of Rafael Filippelli at the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts, and now fully active filmmakers in their own right. If anything, there is the desire to classify Gustavo Fontán as a filmmaker influenced by forerunners of global cinema such as Robert Bresson, Víctor Erice, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Alexander Sokurov, a filmmaker who introduced their techniques of framing, noise, light, and shadow to Argentine screens. But still, this would be too simple. One could call Gustavo Fontán a “cinematic poet,” given that he once aspired to join the world of poetry and literature, and that he as a filmmaker he adapted the texts of Juan Laurentino Ortiz and Juan José Saer into cinema. Yet, even this label would be incorrect.

Gustavo Fontán's 2002 feature film *Where the Sun Sets* (*Donde cae el sol*) depicts a love story between an elderly man and a woman thirty years younger, in an exquisite work reminiscent of American independent film or the Dardenne brothers. Compared to Fontán's later, more adventurous work, it seems odd that he would have made this film. From the time of *The Tree* (*El árbol*, 2006), which will be screened at this festival, he begins making films that combine low fidelity sounds and fragmentary images, creating what one could call musical or poetic structure. *The Tree* is the first work in a series of films on the home of Fontán's parents, a series that continues until *The House* (*La casa*, 2012), which I screened last year in Tokyo as part of a program I organized with the name *New Century New Cinema Presents Cine Argentino Vol. 5*. While *The House* is reminiscent of the films of Tarkovsky and Erice in its use of imagery of wood and water and sounds of bugs and children, as a work it is full of freedom and without attachment. At this year's festival we will screen *The Face* (*El rostro*, 2013), the first installment in a series on rivers that begins with a film that could be called a symphonic poem for a river, *The (River) Bank that Becomes Abysmal* (*La orilla se abisma*, 2008), which I also screened last year in Tokyo. Though *The Face* depicts the daily lives of “performed” fishermen, it is not limited to this endeavor. Through the digitalized images of a handheld camera that uses black-and-white Super8 and

16mm film, the film actively speaks to the materiality of different formats of black-and-white images. Another fiction film by Fontán that I would love to see introduced into Japan is *The Mother* (*La madre*, 2009). The work is reminiscent of Tarkovsky in its free use of off-screen sound, though Fontán's use of the technique is distinct and achieves a sense of liberation that is fully his own. Fontán's films lead the senses of their audiences to a place where sound and image can be perceived as material, and in so doing can be said to liberate new horizons of freedom. Thus the question — should we consider them poems?

(Translated by Kyle Hecht)