



# Ken Jacobs New York Times June 2008

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MOVIE REVIEW

### Razzle Dazzle: The Lost World



Ken Jacobs

Variations on a purgatorial theme: a still from the experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs's "Razzle Dazzle: The Lost World."

### A Whirling, Digitized Ride on a Small Celluloid Raft

By NATHAN LEE  
Published: June 27, 2008

The filmmaker Ken Jacobs calls his new feature-length movie "Razzle Dazzle," and boy, he isn't kidding. Subjecting a minute-long film made by Thomas Edison in 1903 to a kaleidoscopic array of digital distortions, effects, filters and montage techniques, Mr. Jacobs, one of America's most esteemed avant-garde filmmakers, has orchestrated a scintillating tour de force.

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An eye-popper and brain-boggler, "Razzle Dazzle" is also, remarkably, a thing to stir the soul, delivering in its final stretch an astonishing, unexpected political jolt that elevates what appeared to be a mere (if marvelous) formal triumph into a shattering confrontation.

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Arriving at this magic moment makes for one of the most striking imaginative and perceptual adventures since the advent of digital video cinema. Though I've used the word "filmmaker" out of convention, Mr. Jacobs is decisively a video maker here. Even more than "Inland Empire," David Lynch's encyclopedic survey of low-fi video poetics, "Razzle Dazzle" makes no bones about dancing on the grave of celluloid, fully embracing the textures, tones and rhythms of an electronic, as opposed to mechanical, motion picture art.

Mr. Jacobs has pointedly subtitled his work "The Lost World," acknowledging both the character of its content — images of a vanished culture — and its relationship to a nearly obsolete technology. (I'd like to think he's also winking at another digital spectacular concerned with old-world phenomena: "Jurassic Park.")

As in "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son," Mr. Jacobs's seminal found-footage opus from 1969, "Razzle Dazzle" blows apart its source material — zooming in, out and all around; magnifying the tiniest shapes and shadows; shattering the image flow with a wild array of cuts, wipes, fades and superimpositions — and then reassembles the fragments in fresh patterns.

The raw material, footage of passengers orbiting on an amusement park ride, lends Mr. Jacobs a base-line shape and steady pulse on which to ply his variations. There's a purgatorial quality to this eternally twisting scene, with its phantom figures doomed to haunt the same circuit. Much of "Razzle Dazzle" feels like a kind of experimental horror film, as Mr. Jacobs isolates gray, grimacing faces and pours a deep blood-red pixelation amid the desolate black and white.

I saw gargoyles, inchoate disasters, broken limbs, Francis Bacon agonies, chunks of concrete on an angry lava flow. A huge eruption of angry orange confirmed, in my mind, the aura of imminent apocalypse. "Razzle Dazzle" is a roiling Rorschach, an invitation to perceptual play. You may well see rivers of spilled strawberry milkshake or Casper the Friendly Ghost.

You will, in any case, be seeing it enchanted by peculiar 3-D effects, a trademark Jacobs technique achieved by means of stroboscopic lighting and micro-editing finesse. And there's little doubt about the motifs in the final passage, an assemblage of vintage photographs representing the shapes and faces and horrors of war. Mr. Jacobs uncovers the fear beneath the glee of those whirligig riders, captured, at the turn of the last century, by a film technology that would record 100 years' worth of terror before heading to its own extinction.

### RAZZLE DAZZLE

#### The Lost World

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Created by Ken Jacobs. At the Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Avenue, at Second Street, East Village. Running time: 1 hour 32 minutes. This film is not rated.