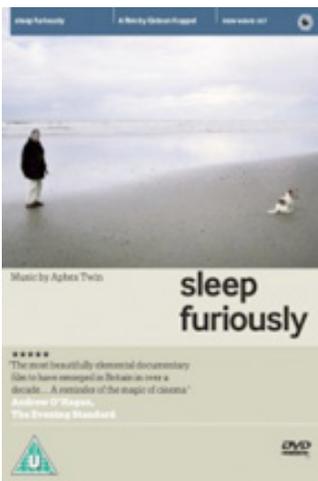




'Sleep Furiously' an Essay on Empty Spaces, Smallness, and the Pleasure Derived From Community

By Neal Dhand

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Sleep Furiously

Directed by Gideon Koppel

Wales, 2011

Is it possible to create an essay film without words? Gideon Koppel may have found the formula in his mostly silent, gorgeously photographed *Sleep Furiously*. But an essay on what?

Set in a small farming community in Wales, Koppel's richly textured film basks more in its minutiae than in any particular plot. Baking a cake, children's music, the rustle of hay, a baby kicking in its sleep in fast-motion, endless horizons, Koppel's film is an essay on empty spaces, smallness, and the pleasure derived from community. It is rewarding in its slowness and moving in its quietness.

There is drama: a town-hall meeting tells that the village is in danger of abandonment and regression. Four people show up to church.

But Koppel is less interested in producing any reasonable solution (none is given) than in allowing his camera to unobtrusively bear witness. Consider one of the more breathtaking moments of the film where the camera views a green landscape



in extreme wide-shot. Gradually, from the right side of frame two parallel white lines come trickling forward. It takes a moment to realize that these are sheep. The shot is long, and it's because, as in most other shots in *Sleep Furiously*, there is more to recognize outside of the initial movement and composition. A white blot rests in the middle of the field. Is it a

stray sheep? Another lone sheep darts off on its own back the way it came from. These visuals, where the viewer is allowed – forced in some way – to scan the frame fully and beyond any initial, brief recognition, testify to the underlying motives of the filmmaker. Koppel wants the audience to watch as he watches. Not to judge, or draw conclusion. Just to watch.

There are children in the film, but Koppel chooses curiously to focus instead on the adults of the community: a mobile bookseller, various farmers, a woman with a stuffed owl. The divide comes sharply into focus: this is a community on the brink. Old ways – those so lovingly portrayed – are dying out. Youth here exists completely separately: musically, in a crib, in a photograph. The epilogue, emphasizing those empty spaces, only serves to, somewhat ominously, reinforce this idea.



Sleep Furiously will be available for streaming on Fandor (www.fandor.com/sleep_furiously) for only 24 hours on July 29, coinciding with its New York City opening at Cinema Village.