

THE DUTCH PRESS ON 'PART TIME GOD'

"An extremely original film about the origins of the earth, free will and the existence of God. A film about 'everything'."

Mark Moorman, Het Parool

"*Part Time God* is a unruly, infectious film. It demands unconditional faith of the viewer, because it asks one to submit to a chaos of impressions. (...) Cohen is not interested in anecdotes, he is looking for what lies behind them. Deep, but never pretentious."

Joyce Roodnat, NRC Handelsblad

"One of the most impressive films of recent years. (...) It is a film with the charm of a junk-filled attic, in which the visitor is overwhelmed by impressions and discoveries. In certain respects, *Part Time God* is reminiscent of *Koyaanisqatsi*. The film is incredibly well edited and maintains its fascination. Seeing the shots all at once, an orchestra of impressions, associations and feelings dances past and roams the spirit for days.

Sjaak Roodenburg, Elseviers Magazine

"Cohen's caper with the potential of video, which he later transferred to film, is very successful. The trick with the steering hand forges different images together and gives the viewer an intuitive feeling of affinity.

The fine photography by Cohen himself and, as always, the extremely functional music by Henny Vrienten contribute to a fascinating and thought-provoking experience."

Erik Koch, De Telegraaf

"A film which, in both its substance and in its chosen form, make your laces fly out of your shoes. (...) His playful mania is contagious, his fascination is understandable and his film keeps the attention for eighty minutes."

Pieter van Lierop, Utrechts Nieuwblad

"Form and substance of the film, which provide the viewer with a semblance of freedom, are in perfect balance and stimulate the emotions and the mind of the viewer susceptible to such exercises."

Hans Beerekamp, NRC Handelsblad

"It is striking that all these subjects in their arbitrary juxtaposition have yielded a lucid film which is as gripping as it is comic – each scene separately and in their mutual contrast. The film is cynical, because it exposes the impotence of science in the face of the great issues of life, but also romantic, because it celebrates a feeling of unity on earth despite everything.

Part Time God is more a poetic film than a philosophical one and is difficult to compare with others.

Ab van Ieperen, Vrij Nederland

Successful film by Cohen about freedom

Paul Cohen made a fascinating essay about the question of how far people (and other organisms) are able to exercise free will about the course of their existence. *Part Time God*, shot on video and then copied to film, has the form of an interactive computer program in which the filmmaker chooses the course of events. The finger of an anonymous decision-maker touches an image from a chart and the camera zooms in. We witness attempts by a New York artist to integrate an inevitable breast amputation in her work, the meditations of a young and depressive

grape-picker about the causes of an unrequited love, of the sea of time available to a old-age pensioner doing her knitting and the theological difference of opinion in the marriage of a Surinamese duck-breeder and his wife who has joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. The interaction between the faith of the convert and the predestined life of the Peking ducklings provides food for thought. A high-point in *Part Time God* is the moment when one of the birds manages to wriggle its way free of the hook which selects candidates for slaughter at random.

Alongside shocking images, Cohen also uses another mechanism. Along the bottom of the screen appear small black & white 'talking heads', philosophers and other pundits who provide a theoretical foundation for the thought-provoking pictures. When a finger taps a head, it starts talking. Form and substance of the film, which provide the viewer with a semblance of freedom, are in perfect balance and stimulate the emotions and the mind of the viewer susceptible to such exercises.

Hans Beerekamp
NRC Handelsblad

A festival filled with personal reports from society

Part Time God by Paul Cohen is original. Ten years ago, Cohen graduated from the film academy with *The Hamburger Theory*, in which he projected video images between which the viewer could draw parallels. *Part Time God* is in reality a variation on the same theme. About twenty television pictures are projected on the screen. Then a hand appears which, as if operating a video player, brings certain pictures into the foreground, winds them back and forth and puts them back into the overview.

In the enlargements, sub-documentaries are shown: a New York artist has to have her right breast amputated because of cancer and makes plaster casts of her torso; a Dutch student picks grapes in France to recover from an unrequited love; a scientist works on a particle accelerator, a Surinamese duck-breeder is married to a Jehovah's Witness. At the bottom of the screen, heads are sometimes projected and occasionally enlarged to talk about issues of life and the world.

All together these provide fairly free-standing

images and thoughts about man as robot, as unpredictable being, as manipulator and manipulated. Sensible thoughts, loose-sand philosophies and painful confessions are juxtaposed, while the hand of Paul Cohen guides and decides who can speak (the viewer is unable to choose). Cohen zaps through twenty TV images and we follow. This leads to a strange film which sometimes seems rather random. There are no conclusions, but *Part Time God* remains intriguing.

Peter van Beuren
De Volkskrant

Most interesting contribution

'Part Time God' is a investigation of a difficult problem. Using five brief life stories from different parts of the world, Paul Cohen poses the question of free will versus determinism. The visualisation exploits a trick of form which perfectly suits the contents. Referring to interactive computer programs in which the viewer can create his own virtual reality, one seems able to choose from a number of pictures.

However the fragment of a story is selected by an anonymous hand which can also fast forward, zoom or call up an expert - literally a 'talking head'. So there is no free will for the viewer, who is relieved of the opportunity to zap. This observation game is technically perfect. The dominant form however is at odds with the stories, which become snowed under. The experts seem like a parody on TV pundits and lose

their effect after a couple of times. While *Part Time God* is more convincing in form than in content, it is undoubtedly the most interesting Dutch contribution. The film provides a sublime series of shots which, not always directly graspable, display an all-encompassing and intuitive connection.

Mark Duursma
Trouw

Part Time God

The surprise of the festival looks like being Paul Cohen's *Part Time God*, an extremely original film about the origins of the earth, free will and the existence of God. A film about 'everything', to quote the original working title. With the aid of video tech-

niques, Cohen introduces a universe of images in which the hand of the Part Time God repeatedly chooses a picture and a story line. The picture can be manipulated and from time to time experts are called in, appearing as little talking heads at the bottom

of the screen. The stories which Cohen shows illustrate in a striking way the power and impotence of man to determine his own fate. Form and substance are perfectly joined.

Mark Moorman
Het Parool

PART TIME GOD

(DUTCH — DOCU — 16mm)

A DNU Film/VPRO Television production. (International sales: De Nieuwe Unie BV/Orthei Filmproductie.) Produced by Rolf Orthei. Directed, written by Paul Cohen. Camera (color), Cohen; editor, Sytze Kramer; music, Henny Vrieten; sound, Hugo Helmond; computer animation, Truin van Tubergen; special effects, Adrian Hill. Reviewed at Vancouver Intl. Film Festival, Oct. 7, 1998. Running time: 80 MIN.

The lackadaisical deity of "Part Time God" is director Paul Cohen, who takes great pains to reveal the filmmaker's usually unseen touch in the editing-and-organizing process. The central device in this provocative Dutch docu is literally his hand, which repeatedly intrudes into the frame to choose between parallel stories shot (on video) in seven countries and transformed (on film) into a computer-like collage.

Although not obvious at first, pic is toying with the notion of free will vs. such forces as chance, destiny and you-know-Who. Jumping from a lovelorn grape-picker to a nuclear physicist to a pensioner surrounded by clocks, from a Surinam duck breeder and his evangelical wife to a Danish lighthouse keeper to a New York artist facing a radical mastectomy (with grueling footage of the operation), Cohen occasionally hits fast-forward or rewind to make a point. He is aided by hypnotic music and the tiny, black-and-white heads of philosophical pundits — like biologist Richard Dawkins and Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine — popping up at the bottom of the screen, ready to chat at the touch of a finger. A woman's voice would have been useful here. Pic is utterly fascinating, and, most intriguing, it points to interactive, seams-exposed storytelling from documakers, mostly in the educational arena. Theatrically, "Part Time God" will find few parishioners, but look for countless disciples in the coming millennium.

—Ken Eisner

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