

The Mechanics of Fluids

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Les mecanique des fluides



International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film

VERDICT: Gala Hernandez Lopez's essay film addresses the incel phenomena from a position of fascination and empathy, seeking to understand the pain of isolation in a connected world.

Ben Nicholson

October 19th, 2022

In 2018, an internet user known only by his on-screen alias, Anathematic Anarchist, posted a suicide note on an incel forum on Reddit. Coming across the post, filmmaker Gala Hernandez Lopez decided to go in search of the other vestiges of this persona that she could find online, deeply hoping that the note had not preceded an actual suicide and that Anathematic found the strength to overcome his despair. That search forms the narrative backbone of the short essayistic documentary *The Mechanics of Fluids* through which she finds herself navigating some of the web's less than savoury corners in an attempt to understand how loneliness operates – and perhaps is exacerbated in – a hyperconnected world.

As the term incel has become more ubiquitous and understood over the past few years, it has tended to arise in popular culture more as a shorthand, either in the service of snappy, derogatory characterisation or a targeted punchline. What is perhaps most immediately striking about Hernandez Lopez's film is the thoughtfulness with which she treats this subculture which, via her narration, she suggests she originally thought she may find some solace in as someone who was, herself, involuntarily single. Of course, what she finds in her search is an underworld often defined by a "corrosive, acidic hatred" of women that often goes hand-in-hand with a genuine threat of real-world violence. Far from just dismissing it, she searches for its causes finding a parallel to the overwhelming pressure of social isolation in the spasming explosive rage of Joaquin Phoenix in *The Joker*.

The visual language of *The Mechanics of Fluids* is, appropriately, infused with aesthetics and motifs from online culture. Whether a drone shot scanning over the roofs of American suburbia that transpires to have been created in a virtual environment, or the popping up of browser windows framing YouTube videos filled with incel talking points, the screen is constantly recalling that of a laptop. In amongst these are several computer-generated animations, which become more complex, entangled – and impressive – as the narration goes further into the rabbit hole. It is hard not to recall, most readily, the videos that Hernandez Lopez has pruned from the internet – videos often filled with anger, pain, and seclusion – but that is to do a disservice to the maturity and poise with which the subjects are treated. Subjects who, she points out at one point, would view her as the enemy.

Director, screenplay: Gala Hernandez Lopez

Producers: Lucas Le Postec, Thibault de Gantes, Ninon Chapuis

Cinematography: A. Pol Camprubi

Editing: Albert Dexeus, Gala Hernandez Lopez

Music, sound design: Melia Roger

Sound: Diego Delgado

Animation: Claudia Martin

Venue: DOK Leipzig (International Competition Short Film)

In English, French

39 minutes