

Eve Sussman/ Rufus Corporation

'whiteonwhite:
algorithmicnoir'

Cristin Tierney

*546 West 29th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday*

This season's answer to Christian Marclay's "Clock" is the bleakly Orwellian and open-ended sci-spy story "whiteonwhite:-algorithmicnoir," the latest effort from the filmmaker Eve Sussman and the Rufus Corporation.

While Mr. Marclay measured time by splicing together clock-oriented clips from the history of film, Ms. Sussman dwells on indeterminacy in all forms: temporal, spatial, political, psychological and cinematic. In theory "whiteonwhite" can go on forever without repeating itself. Set in the 1970s, it was shot over a period of two years, mostly in the oil-producing regions of Kazakhstan, with an emphasis on vast, ruined landscapes and alienating Communist-era architecture. Its 3,000 short scenes, 80 voice-overs and 150 pieces of music are edited "live," that is, paired and sequenced by a computer program (the algorithm) in ever-different combinations. (The organizing tags include "snow," "landscape," "apocalypse," "hallway," "blue," "future" and "mugging," and register on an adjacent monitor with each change of scene.)

An American geophysicist named Holz, played by the American actor Jeff Wood, appears intermittently at the center of a fragmented, never-resolved espionage plot involving surveillance, interrogations, a briefcase and a lithium-becalmed populace. Political thrillers like Jean-Luc Godard's "Alphaville" are evoked, as are art films and video installations with Eastern Bloc subjects, including Chantal Akerman's "D'Est," Jane and Louise Wilson's "Stazi City" and Tacita Dean's "Fernsehturm."

The oppressive, end-of-the-earth setting may be the true star here, but the real-world grittiness is balanced by a sense of the film's artifice, grainy stylishness and ultimate randomness. The absence of a controlling narrative moving things toward a denouement of some sort is unexpectedly liberating. It is rather amazing to watch this immense apparatus creaking along, building suspense and then flattening out, without ever really going anywhere or forcing you to go with it.

ROBERTA SMITH