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A flood of images that speak volumes

Language plays a crucial role in film and theater. Some artists flood the audience with words, while others rely on nonverbal communication. The variety of techniques is most noticeable in experimental works that test the limits of their art forms. Recent efforts by filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky and playwright Richard Foreman, who stand with the most highly regarded artists in their respective fields, provide excellent examples.

Dorsky, a visionary San Francisco filmmaker, makes silent movies. He uses photography and editing as the components of his cinematic language. His films, he once said, build "a language which has to do with using the screen itself as an energy field," presenting strings of images that can't be translated into words.

The radiant beauty of Dorsky's method was evident in three films presented recently by Lincoln Center's Image Innovators series. "Alaya" dazzles the eye with images of light-struck sand, while "Triste" and "Variations" juxtapose pictures of man-made objects with shots of the natural world, suggesting that all phenomena have profound interconnections sensed only when we use our eyes to soar beyond word-centered perceptions.

Foreman loves imagery as much as Dorsky does, filling his plays – 47 of them – with flamboyant gestures and intricate stagecraft. He loves words, though, and his new "Bad Boy Nietzsche!" overflows with them. This is fitting, since the main character of its dreamlike plot is German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, fighting for his rapidly waning sanity in a world that's gone haywire.

This zany tragicomic play takes its cue from a famous incident in Nietzsche's life, when he tried to stop a man from beating a horse in a city street. But typical of a Foreman work, it's interested less in history or psy-



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'TRISTE': Silent filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky's movie played in the Lincoln Center series in New York.

chology than in art, catapulting us out of the everyday so we grasp the greater possibilities of human existence.

Sometimes, the play's events are wildly vulgar and unsettling. At others, they reflect Nietzsche's own words: "The divine art is flying to great heights, from which one throws what is oppressive ... into the depths of the ocean." Foreman's plays are for adventurous eyes and ears only, but there's no dramatist who blends ver-

bal and visual language with more astonishing results.

– D.S.

■ Dorsky's 'Variations' will be shown every Tuesday from March 28 to May 30 as part of the 2000 Biennial at New York's Whitney Museum of Art. Foreman's play 'Bad Boy Nietzsche!' continues through April 30 at his Ontological-Hysteric Theater in New York.