

David Cotterrell: Crisis at Sea (v)

Date: 1st March 1998

Materials:

DVD loop (6mins)

A small scale disaster film of a paper boat in distress in a North London bath tub

...more than a mile in diameter... The edge of the whirl was represented by a broad belt of gleaming spray; but no particle of this slipped into the mouth of the terrific funnel, whose interior, as far as the eye could fathom it, was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water, inclined to the horizon at an angle of some 45 degrees, speeding dizzily round... and sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagra ever kifts up in its agony to Heaven. Edgar Allan Poe, A Descent into the Maelstrom, 1841

Filmed in the shared bathroom of a North London bedsit, Crisis at Sea is a short disaster movie in which a paper boat, happily bobbing in green-tinged bath water, is sent to its destruction when the baths plug is pulled.

As the boat begins to spin out of control, drawn into the vortex of the drain, there is a feeling of panic: our ability to imbue the boat with human emotions makes it impossible to avoid imagining possible escape routes. That this is a toy boat cannot be denied, anymore than we can deny the problems with scale as Godzilla and Mothra enter into mortal combat next to a miniature Japanese freighter. Cotterrells interest in site is evident: far from trying to reinvent the location of his movie, the artist records the sounds of neighbouring televisions and voices seeping through the walls of the bathroom.

Cotterrells tempest in a teacup is the inverse of Poes sublimely gothic maelstrom: there is no mystery involved in the paper boats demise. But we are still moved by the inevitable sinking of our protagonist: along with the tepid water, we see a lifetime, albeit a paper boats lifetime, slip away.



Initial View Credit: David Cotterrell (1998)



Drama Begins Credit: David Cotterrell (1998)