

## Tunnel Visionary

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***John Smith's film installation White Hole glimpses a Europe undivided between east and west, says MIKE QUILLE***

White Hole at Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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IF YOU want an antidote to ongoing Black Friday-style consumerist madness in the run up to the "festive" season, then get along to the gallery space in the newly refurbished Tyneside Cinema.

Its radical alternative comes in the form of a new and poetic film installation by veteran independent artist and film-maker John Smith.

White Hole is a continuously looped six-minute long black-and-white film and, for the first half, there's a slow movement towards a light at the end of a tunnel.

The narrative describes a visit to Warsaw in 1980 and a young and idealistic artist's pleasure at the lack of both aggressive advertising and overwhelming, unnecessary consumer choice in the shops.

Also, though, we hear demoralised Poles who admire Margaret Thatcher and want more consumer goods.

Then the narrator describes a later visit to Leipzig in 1997, the year Tony Blair came to power, where he witnesses apparent prosperity but also growing problems of unemployment and inequality.

And he hears East Germans say that "there's a tunnel at the end of the light."

The film goes into reverse image and we're moving towards a black light at the end of a white tunnel. The soundtrack plays backwards too, making it sound like a foreign language. Visually and aurally we experience the contrasting ideologies of capitalism and communism.

It's a simple but very powerful juxtaposition of image and sound which reverberates as the film loops, working dialectically to express positives and negatives, beliefs and realities, history and the present, forwards and backwards.

We're reminded of a time in the middle of the last century when there was a strong belief on both sides of Europe that a better world was possible - that there was light at the end of the tunnel - with each side looking to the other for inspiration.

And we're reminded of the opposite, the reversal of progress, with that idealism and confidence evaporating into our current lack of an alternative politics and how our political and economic life goes steadily backwards across the continent as social and collective bonds are loosened by implacable neoliberal market forces.

White Hole thus brilliantly succeeds in expressing truths about eastern Europe which all the TV programmes this year about the fall of the Berlin Wall have failed to mention - that the wall was built as a defence against predatory, exploitative capitalism, not as a prison wall.

And it also conveys, with a subtle and understated black humour, the bleakness of our current political situation - no choice, no vision and no sense of an alternative to the consumerist madness of endless Black Fridays - the tunnel at the end of the light.

*White Hole runs at the Tyneside Cinema [tynesidecinema.co.uk](http://tynesidecinema.co.uk) until January 6. Free. The film will shortly be screened in the Random Acts series on Channel 4.*