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Peace on Earth Film Festival

Two documentaries on controversial science head up the locally produced Peace on Earth Film Festival. Launched in 2008, it's a free, three-day showcase of shorts and features promoting "peace, non-violence, social justice and an eco-balanced world."

"Loving Lampposts" □□□ : Todd Drezner, who earlier profiled a schizophrenic in "My Name Is Alan, and I Paint Pictures," explores autism in this revealing documentary with a personal touch: His autistic 4-year-old son is drawn to lampposts in a local park. As parents of autistic children share their experiences, the focus is less clinical than social: how to handle perceptions of the condition.

Instead of debunking various diagnoses and remedies, "Loving Lampposts" lets adults with autism define their own conditions. "Autism is a gift disguised as a dilemma," suggests one, using her laptop to voice her thoughts. Another, who teaches piano, says, "Autism is a different way of being, not necessarily a disordered way of being." In the end, Drezner embraces the doctrine of "neurodiversity," a plea for accepting his son and others like him as a new minority, not just a medical anomaly.

"Scientists Under Attack" □□ : German director Bertram Verhaag attempts to push back against corporate politics in this doc subtitled "Genetic Engineering in the Magnetic Field of Money." He sympathizes with persecuted researchers Arpad Pusztai and Ignacio Chapela, skeptics of biotech.

"This is a story about knowledge, democracy and the freedom of choice," claims an activist opposed to genetically modified foods created by multinational businesses. Verhaag charges that renegade data is suppressed. Siding with victims, though, is insufficient. The alarmist "Scientists Under Attack," which suffers from scary music by Gert Wilden, is not scientific enough to prove a conspiracy or rebut the bad guys.

No MPAA rating. Running times: "Scientists Under Attack" (88 minutes) screens at 12:20 p.m. Saturday; "Loving Lampposts" (83 minutes) screens at 5:10 p.m. Sunday. Both at the Claudia Cassidy Theater in the Chicago Cultural Center.

Bill Stamets is a Chicago-based free-lance writer and critic.