

# *CINÉ-TRACTS*

A JOURNAL OF FILM AND CULTURAL STUDIES

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# Radical Science Journal

Special **MEDICALISATION** Issue  
Number 12 (1982), 160 pages, £2/35

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JANET JENNINGS: Who Controls Childbirth?

SHELLEY DAY: Is Obstetric Technology Depressing?

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## Special **MEDICALISATION** Issue

The latest issue, published autumn 1982, concerns both the medicalisation of childbirth and the limitations of left criticisms of medicine.

The collectively written Introduction, 'Unnatural Childbirth?', takes up the issues arising from recent struggles for the right of expectant mothers to choose their own methods of giving birth. As many hospitals impose the 'active management of labour', women are being terrorised into submitting to medical definitions of 'safety' whose real priority is to reduce doctors' uncertainty by reducing the autonomy of mothers and midwives. While the opposition movement has rightly counterposed 'active birth' methods, there are prevalent notions of having to 'trust' either nature or technology — a dichotomy which mystifies the social construction of particular childbirth methods. It's less painful to attack obstetric technology as 'unnatural' than as class and gender oppression, especially since it precludes the sorts of popular skills which lessen women's dependence upon medical institutions.

In 'Who Controls Childbirth?' Janet Jennings draws on her experience as a midwife to describe how medical procedures rob the mother of joy in childbirth by intervening in ways which actually introduce additional risks as well as taking away control. She defends midwives' independent role in helping the mother to guide the birth process, rather than allow obstetricians to relegate midwives to the subordinate role of maternity nurses.

Is obstetric technology depressing? Shelley Day poses that question and then goes on to link the conflict over childbirth methods to women's wider oppression which often leads to the medical niche of 'post-natal depression'. She shows how that experience gets mystified as an individual illness, in turn attributed to technically defined 'vulnerability factors'. She argues instead for uncovering the inner connection between oppressive 'female normality' and the 'female abnormality' expressed in depression.

Subsequent issues will appear as follows:  
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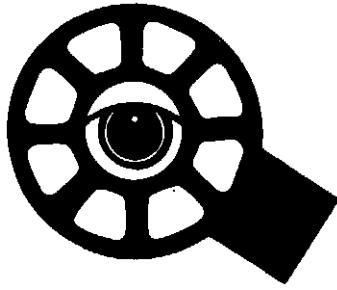
The *Radical Science Journal* is the only English-language periodical providing extended critical analyses of science, technology and medicine. Since 1974 this journal has been challenging the capitalist role of science and of scientism in the left.

Lastly, Evan Stark asks 'What Is Medicine?' in order to clarify the limits of a narrowly medical approach to health. According to commonly made radical criticisms, medicine sets out to 'medicalise' social problems for the sake of professional self-aggrandisement or, alternatively, withholds access to its health benefits to oppressed groups. Stark characterises such criticisms as themselves mystifying because they attribute extraordinary powers to medicine and ultimately reduce health to medicine.

Stark argues that medicine's curative powers are historically specific, always dependent upon broad improvements in people's lives. Medicine 'conquers' diseases individually only when their social causes have already been conquered by society as a whole. Yet at the same time medical practice represents that advance as its own achievement. In reality the apparent 'victims' (of medical control or neglect) have periodically asserted themselves as protagonists of their own health, largely outside of medical institutions, while capital has generally sought a healthy workforce less through medical care than through Keynesian expansion and social engineering. Thus we can see medicine more broadly in relation to the actual health strategies pursued by both capital and labour, rather than as a body of abstract principles or techniques as yet misapplied.

Stark's materialist approach aims to get beyond merely medical ones — with 'medical' encompassing clinical medicine, epidemiology, medical sociology, environmentalism and even radical health criticism. Although these approaches do acknowledge the health effects of people's entire lives, they tend to do so by explaining and managing illness as products of 'conditions', while concealing (or even perpetuating) the basis of these oppressive conditions in historical relations of production. Such approaches lend themselves to dependence upon forms of state intervention which actually disorganise people's capacity to define health autonomously through enjoyable lives. Stark concludes by calling for health strategies grounded on expanding labour's productive and reproductive powers, especially through a transformation of capitalist waged work.

# CINÉ-TRACTS



*January 1983.*

*Dear Subscriber:*

*With this issue, Ciné-Tracts is suspending publication. We have decided to take 18 months to rebuild the editorial and financial base of the magazine. When we re-appear, the editorship will have changed and the magazine published in a new location. We deeply appreciate the support that all of you have given us and we intend to honour the outstanding issues that we may owe you. Your names will be kept until we resume publication. The issue that you have in hand is the first (after seven years) to have received any financial support and we wish to acknowledge the extraordinary work done by Peter Harcourt, Bruce Elder and Françoise Picard in getting the grant money to produce the issue. Also, thanks to The Film Studies Association of Canada. It is my hope that Ciné-Tracts will return, a stronger, more vibrant and better magazine.*

*Thank-you again for your support. Sincerely, R. Burnett, Editor.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Burnett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

# cine-tracts

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# INTRODUCTION

*by R. Bruce Elder*

The history of avant-garde cinema reflects changes in the conception of the nature of the self (i.e. that totality, illusory or otherwise, that constitutes a person) prevailing at various periods in the half century and more that it has existed. The beginning of each of its major phases was marked by an alteration in the way the self was thought to be formed and to operate. It is generally well known that much of the work of "the first avant-garde" — the so-called surrealist<sup>1</sup> avant-garde (Man Ray, Germain Dulac, the early Buñuel), the dadaists (e.g. the early René Clair) and the impressionistic filmmakers (e.g. Vigo)<sup>2</sup> which flourished in Europe in the twenties — through its use of montage constructions that were patterned on the chain of free associations, its use of symbolism, its use of "open" texts — texts which demand to be re-interpreted by each individual viewer to incorporate his own personal experiences — and its thematic concerns, which frequently dealt with the vicissitudes of instinctual expression, embody a conception of the self that is akin to that offered by early schools of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Similarly familiar is the notion that the equation of theerotic quest for instinctual satisfaction, the aesthetic quest for beauty and the psychological quest for "the self" characteristic of the early American psychodrama suggest a substantially revised but still Freudian conception of the self.<sup>3</sup> While the impress of that particular conception can be found in any of the major works of this period, it is, perhaps, nowhere more evident than in Maya Deren's film **Meshes of the Afternoon**, a film which many consider to be the seminal

work<sup>4</sup> of this period. The structure of that work was designed to demonstrate the manner in which the mind takes a commonplace, everyday occurrence and embellishes it in the course of rethinking and reworking it. The embellishments follow a clear pattern: they trace the regression from a depressive ("depressive" in this instance referring to the **capacity** to experience sadness, loss and mourning) to the paranoid/schizophrenic position.<sup>5</sup> The mechanisms involved in this regression<sup>6</sup> include the processes of separating off of those internal forces which are experienced as negative, aggressive and threatening, projecting them onto another person and then identifying with that aggressor. How advanced for its time a film based on these mechanisms really was can be discerned by considering that it was not until almost a decade after the production of this film that psychoanalytic theorists in America began to consider these concepts.

These ideas, in their outline if not in their details, are generally well-known, and so only sketchily developed here. Less well-known is that the films of Brakhage and his followers which dominated the avant-garde of the 1960's embodied a very different conception of the nature of the self, one much more consistent with the understanding of the self proposed by phenomenologists and specifically by adherents to that particular brand of phenomenology known as existential phenomenology (exemplified by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Brakhage and "the generation of the sixties" emphasized embodied or incarnated being, by stressing that seeing is an act of the whole body. Too, the work of Brakhage and his followers, like the existential phenomenologists, seem to imply that the self is known reflexively, i.e. that one learns about himself through knowing the objects that he knows. Accordingly, Brakhage's stylistics refuse to accord a place to any immutable transcendental self that persists unchanged through the course of the experiences it undergoes. This explains why the acts of seeing that his films describe have the fascinated almost hallucinatory quality that they do, for the self in his work is given over almost totally to the visionary experience and is almost completely absorbed by it. But this, too, explains the anxious intensity so characteristic of his work, for a self that is not understood to possess some part that is stable, some part that persists through change — one that is thought to be wholly "out there," involved completely in the experience that it is having — is one that is in constant jeopardy of dissolving into fragments in the flux of experience. On a view like Brakhage's then, to undergo a change in perception is quite literally to experience a death and a rebirth.<sup>8</sup>

The warmth with which Michael Snow's films were greeted was in no small measure due to his re-establishing of stable self and, consequently, a stable place for the spectator. This reformulated notion of the self's nature is of key importance in **La Région Centrale**. **La Région Centrale** is a film of constant motion,<sup>9</sup> yet its motion, like that in Snow's other films, is quite restricted in its range of variations. The camera moves constantly around a fixed centre; the movement is always circular, though its speed does vary. The circles, too, can be tilted even while they are being described, thus creating the figure of a circle in rotation. The camera can also be "twirled" on its axis, thus forming a circle within a rotating circle. The apparatus which performs these movements<sup>10</sup> was so engineered that the camera always points outwards, its axis aligned with radius to the point of the circle which it occupies at any given moment. Hence, while the camera is at the centre of the landscape the film depicts, it constantly looks outward and so photographs every point in that space except that at which the apparatus itself is located.

Snow has made quite explicit the implications of this form of construction. In a conversation with Charlotte Townsend he commented:

If you become completely involved in the reality of these circular movements, it's **you** who is(sic) spinning, surrounded by everything or conversely, you are a stationary centre and it's all revolving around you.<sup>11</sup> But on the screen, it's the centre which is never seen, which is mysterious. One of the titles which I considered using was : ? **432101234** ? : by which I mean that as you move down in dimensions you approach zero and in this film, **La Région Centrale**, that point is the absolute centre, Nirvanic zero, being the ecstatic centre of a complete sphere.<sup>12</sup>

Brakhage, like Snow, created films whose organizing principles derived from the use of a moving camera: in fact, the initial outrage provoked by the appearance of Brakhage's early

films focussed mainly on the intensity and "irregularity" of his camera movements which many found "jerky and uncontrolled." Furthermore, Brakhage's films, like those of Snow, constantly imply the centre out of which their camera movements are generated. In Brakhage's films, that is so since his hand-held camera movements, like the trace of paint left by an Abstract Expressionist painter, is to be considered a record of gesture, a piece of behaviour motivated by and expressive of the subjective state of the artist at the moment in which he engaged in it.<sup>13</sup> Thus in viewing a Brakhage film, one learns, — or, at least, is supposed to learn — from the way in which external objects are photographed, the conditions of the filmmaker's internal world. Thus, like **La Région Centrale**, Brakhage's films derive their structure from the relation of a centre (which is constantly implied but never depicted) to a periphery.

There are, however, important implications to the differences in the attributes of the camera movements the two artists characteristically employ. By means of extraordinary equation between expression and vision (an equation based on the idea that the bodily changes which at least register — if they are not identical to — the variations in one's emotional state are inevitably reflected in changes in one's visual consciousness), Brakhage's camera movements take on the qualities of the operations of the eye. The camera, with Brakhage, in fact, becomes a metaphor for the eye; accordingly, movements traced out by the camera have mimetic significance. Snow's camera movements, have a more mechanical quality because the qualities of vision to which he aspires belong to a superhuman vision, a vision unattached to any body in space, that is why, unlike Brakhage, he never attempts to transform camera-derived representations to make them resemble that of the eye.<sup>14</sup> His is a more idealized vision for it is set free from any particular location in space<sup>15</sup> and seems for this reason, to take on aspects of "eye of God."

Brakhage's belief that corporal variations are necessarily reflected in variations in one's visual percepts includes the belief that the native differences between individuals, evident in the clear difference between each person's body and that of every other person, involve differences in one's visual consciousness. Each person, then, is gifted with a unique way of seeing.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, he has devoted his art attempting to document his own unique vision. Snow, on the other hand, has given us what is truly an art of the camera.

But, as I try and bring out in my "conversation" with Snow, published in this issue of *Cine-Tracts*, the subject of Snow's films, a subject which persists, unchanged through all the experiences it undergoes, is a somewhat paradoxical entity, for its self-identity is grounded in the fact that it is a nullity, a nothingness (a "nirvanic zero") inasmuch as it defines itself in terms of being other than — i.e. of **not** being — what it experiences. It persists, unchanged, through experiences only because its existence is that of an empty concept; it is only because it is, simply, not what it experiences that its content is never altered.

Like the conception of self that informs Brakhage's films, Snow's conception is also a phenomenological one, though Snow's is more closely related to the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl than to the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Brakhage, like Merleau-Ponty had insisted upon the primacy of perception as a mode of access to the real. Snow, like Husserl is as much concerned with the apperceptive acts of the self (consciousness) as with its perceptual acts. The congruence of Snow's conception of the self with that of Husserl can be discerned by comparing Snow's view of the self (as discussed above) with that of the following passage from Husserl:

I who am sitting here reflecting on myself become conscious that under a consistent and exclusive focussing of experience upon that which is purely inward, upon what is 'phenomenologically' accessible to me, I possess in myself an essential individuality, self-contained and holding well-together in itself. Continuing this self-reflection, I now also become aware that my own phenomenologically self-contained essence can be posited in an absolute sense, as I am the Ego who invests the being of the work which I speak so constantly about with existential validity. I myself as the individual essence, posited absolutely, as the open infinite field of pure phenomenological data and their inseparable unity am "the transcendental



Ego'; the absolute positing means that the world is no longer 'given' to me in advance, its validity that of a simple existent, but that henceforth it is exclusively my Ego that is (given from my new standpoint), given purely as that which has some being in itself, in itself experiences a world, confirms the same, and so forth.

(From the Preface to 1931 English edition of **Ideas**.)

The religious dimension of Snow's work<sup>17</sup> is rooted in his conception of self,<sup>18</sup> which can be glimpsed in the equation he draws between consciousness and Ultimate Reality.<sup>19</sup> I don't think that it would be going too far to suggest that this reality which undergoes change without itself being changed has the attributes which the Christian followers of Husserl ascribe to the soul.

A new phase in the history of avant-garde cinema emerged with the waning of structuralist film. Exemplified by the work of Yvonne Rainer — and unfortunately, vastly less celebrated in its appearance than structuralist film was — this development, too, involved a revised conception of the nature of the self. Snow, as we have seen, had made use of an evacuated conception of the self — of its being as being a nothingness. From this there developed, in the next phase of avant-garde cinema, a conception of the subject which, because it is an empty — because it possesses no natural, "God-given" core — is mobile and fluid.<sup>20</sup> The subject, according to this school of thought is nothing at all; it is merely a set of mutations, a filiation of alterations, a manifold of trajectories plotted by the conditions in which the subject finds himself and by the agency of which he is constantly reformulated. This conception of the self, then, puts an emphasis on process rather than identity.

As with many more orthodox conceptions of the subject, the subject is here understood as being the ground of meaning, but unlike most traditional views, this view holds that the subject is not an entity but only a relation between terms which generate meaning. But that through which the subject is generated is not here understood to be the **Logos** as it is in most traditional views, for, according to this conception, nothing ever has meaning by itself just as no word ever by itself "hooks into" any signified. Rather, something becomes meaningful only by its negative relation to other terms from which it is differentiated.

It is widely known that these views derive from Saussure's theory of languages. By way of an attack on nominalist theories of language, Saussure argued that language is not a system of fixed and unalterable essences but rather of labile forms. Saussure understood language as a system of relationships between constituent units which themselves are constituted only by the differences which mark them off from other units paradigmatically related to them. Thus, only the place a term occupies in a network of relations with other associated terms determines its value and meaning; no term has meaning outside a system of relationships.

This most recent understanding of the subject in avant-garde sees him as constituted in a manner similar to that by which meaning is constructed in language, that is, by his place within a network of differences. Like the signified, the subject cannot be thought of as something with an absolute meaning which persists through the experiences it undergoes. It has no absolute being inasmuch as it is never present as Presence,<sup>21</sup> the subject being defined precisely as something which is differential; like meaning in language, it depends upon the systematic arrangement of differences between signifiers themselves.

To illustrate his views on the inseparability of the signifier and the signified, Saussure proposes an important image, one that has considerable explanatory value for the views on the constitution of the self under discussion: "Again language is comparable to a sheet of paper; thought is the front and sound is the back. You cannot cut up the front without at the same time cutting up the back; similarly, in language, you cannot isolate sound from thought nor thought from sound; you could do this only by a process of abstraction which would result in the creation of pure phonology or pure psychology."<sup>22</sup> In Lacan's theory, the subject is, in a similar way "sub-ject" (i.e. thrown-under)<sup>23</sup> to the signifier for it is subject to constant reformulation by the signifier.<sup>24</sup>

Desire, too, according to Lacan's later views, is an effect of language. Language, Lacan demonstrates, in his famous analysis of the "Fort/Da" game Freud described played by his grandson,<sup>25</sup> how the filiation of the chain of signifiers allows for the elision of a gap produced by a lack of an object. "It is the connection between signifier and signified which alone permits the elision in which the signifier inserts the lack of being into the object relation, using the reverberating condition of meaning to invest it with the desire aimed at the very lack it supports."<sup>26</sup> Consequently, discourse becomes a movement towards something that is governed by a lack. But desire, Lacan says, operates in the same way; thus, the entry of the subject into the Symbolic involves the initiation of desire.

Inasmuch as there is no spectator who comes to a film before the beginning of the symbolic phase, there can be no spectator who is involved solely in the identificatory processes of the Imaginary phase — there can be no possibility of a subject involved merely in a pure repetition of primary identification. There can, therefore be no spectator untroubled by desire and desire introduces gaps which are never fully sutured. Thus, the question of how to forestall the process of Imaginary identification, the question urged on us by many political analysts of the effects of the cinema, can be seen as a secondary one; the primary — the most urgent — demand is to understand the divisions, the gaps in the subject — to comprehend his lack of Imaginary coherence.

This shift in emphasis from a transcendental subject to a labile and divided self — a self divided between subject and ego, between unconscious and conscious — is central to the works of Yvonne Rainer.<sup>27</sup> Thus Rainer's work involves a number of oppositions — oppositions between image and sound, between written text and spoken text, between depiction and account, between past and present, between "here" and some other place — which make incompatible demands upon the spectator and, ultimately, make the spectator aware that he is engaged in competing processes — is split between watching and listening, hearing and reading, imagining and perceiving. The notion of the individual as being self-contained and wholly harmonious in all his parts is displaced and replaced with the notion of the person as divided and as possessing parts which do not coincide with one another — whose divisions, then, are not completely harmonious with one another. The conception of the self as transcendent which dominated previous phases in the avant-garde cinema has been repudiated and replaced by a conception of the subject as being formed in experience inasmuch as it is the condition of meaning. The static conception of the self of the previous phases has, thus been replaced with a conception of the subject as labile and as self-conflicted.

The question as to why avant-garde film seems so obsessively concerned with the idea of the self is a large one, but it must be broached — or some how deflected — if the commonplace (though somewhat trivial, in my view) allegation against it of excessive self-absorption and self-indulgence is to be avoided. The answer I would give seems initially to be self-contradictory, though I believe that in the end it is not so. The strong impulse to examine the nature of the self originated with the withering away (this process of withering away began in the seventeenth century, proceeded from then at an ever increasing rate and was completed before the end of the nineteenth century) of those highly-ordered worldviews which had accorded to man the value he was believed to have on the basis of his place within that cosmological system. According to such views, man's value was bestowed upon him from the outside (inasmuch as it depended upon his **place** in the system). With the collapse of such world views (a collapse that was heralded in existentialism, in "death of God" theologies and especially in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche) man, as Nietzsche so insistently pointed out, was thrown back upon himself as the producer of values. The experience of the collapse of the system of values given to man from forces beyond him and the recognition of the need for man to produce a new set of values from within himself prompted much self-examination and "inwardness." At about the same time, Darwinian and Freudian philosophies displaced the individual — whose being had traditionally been linked (in a manner which Freudianism challenged) with self-consciousness — from the centre of the world stage, as Copernican thought had before displaced him from the centre of the cosmos. This induced a sort of narcissistic wound in reaction to which man scurried to a rather primary sense of the self as being at the centre — at least the **psychic** centre — of things.

Many of the issues discussed in this introduction underpin the arguments in most of the articles of this issue of **Cine-Tracts**.<sup>28</sup> Lianne McLarty's article on Wieland points out that informing Wieland's work is an opposition between a "natural" self — which Wieland identifies or correlates with landscape and with herself as a creative artist and as a (creative) female — and several false selves. McLarty explores how these false selves are formed by the social roles people assume. When McLarty analyzes how the involvement of the individual in Canadian society and the coherence of that society itself is engendered by a system of artificial symbols, she approaches the understanding of group dynamics which Freud proposes in **Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego**.

William Wees' article on Anger places his work — correctly — a bit outside the chronology I have been outlining. In the early to mid-sixties, many of the major filmmakers, like Anger, turned towards mythopoeisis. This development is commonly understood to be accomplished with the shift from Freudian to Jungian conceptions of the ideas of the self. While for the most part, I disagree with this claim (I believe that the salient features of the Jungian model can more profitably be translated into the Freudian framework), Anger's work remains an exception. Wees' analysis of the use of light in Anger's films relates Anger's techniques to his interests in "occult" metaphysics and the visionary experience interests perhaps best explained by Jungian concepts.

Peter Harcourt's analysis of Martin Duckworth's film **The Wish** presents a rather more gloomy picture of the self, one that is forged in a sense of loss and guilt. To Harcourt's very interesting and insightful analysis, I should want to add the following. The sense of guilt the film evokes arises because the film's central concern is "the lost object." Obviously the primary lost object is the mother whom the girls wish would return; the complexity of the film, however, develops from the variety of forms in which the lost object appears. Some of them are:

- 1) the mother, who is lost to Duckworth's children
- 2) the wife, who is lost to Duckworth himself
- 3) (by identification with the children), the mother, who is lost to Duckworth (Hence the presence of the grand parents in the film and the juxtaposition of different temporalities)
- 4) a "way of life" represented by the grandparents' pastoral existence, which is lost to subsequent generations
- 5) the children's loss of real figures to correspond to their parental **imagos** (this helps to explain Duckworth's sense of guilt)

Like the "absent objects" of which I speak in the paragraph from my article on photographic representation which Harcourt cites, these "lost objects" were once experienced as being fully present, but now are present only as a trace — in one case, as a photographic trace, in the other, as a mnemonic trace. This constitutes the operative analogy for the film, for it enables an inquiry into photographic representation to serve as study of memory and loss.

The film seems to me to deal with the desire to restore the lost object to the condition of being "fully present."<sup>28</sup> (This is, in effect, the girls' wish — they want their mother to come back.) But the cinematic image, too, seems to present an object (or event) in its utter plenitude — to render it fully present. The frozen image and the still photograph, however, evoke a sense of loss. This difference is explained by the fact that the events represented in a film seem to belong more simply<sup>29</sup> to "the here-and-now" while a photograph, as Barthes points out, seems to involve an illogical conjunction between the "here-and-now" and the "there-and-now." But, if the film image seems to re-establish the sense of utter plenitude, the cut (whose functions are highlighted in this film by the devices of "severance" which Harcourt describes) recreates the process by which that plenitude is lost, the separation from once "fully-present" object. The **Wish's** cutting between moving images, frozen images and still photographs creates a rhythm of oscillation between the imaginary plenitude of the shot, the loss of that plenitude with the cut and the representation of the now lost object in the photograph.<sup>30</sup> It is, I believe within this context

that the desire of which Harcourt speaks must be understood. Desire, as Lacan suggests, is the successor to the essential lack experienced by the child who has separated himself out from his mother.

Contrary to Harcourt, I believe the ending of the film does seem to involve a form of resolution, inasmuch as the end of the film is also its beginning.<sup>31</sup> Not only does this circular form act to create an autonomous form for the work (thus endowing it with the full being of an object rather than the lesser form of being possessed by illusionistic constructions<sup>32</sup>), thereby recreating the sense of presence characteristic of the Imaginary, but it also acts to resolve certain of the temporal anomalies that initially appear to characterize the film, for it serves to arrest temporal progression and so make the fleeting moment seem eternal. Thus it acts to restore the presence of the lost object by returning the sense of the eternal present characteristic of the primary process.

Carole Zucker's article on my own films takes the nature of the self involved in those films as central. I should not want to conclude this introduction without saying how grateful I am for her insights into these films.

## FOOTNOTES

1. The commonly used categorizations seem to me enormously problem-ridden. Vigo's **A propos de Nice**, for example seems to me (as to many others), much more genuinely surrealist than Dulac's **The Sea Shell and the Clergyman**. Nonetheless, they have a degree of currency in writings on the history of avant-garde film and I use them here to indicate the **range** of films to which I am referring.

2. But (to make the exclusion implicit), obviously **not** the graphic cinema of Eggling, Richter, the early Ruttman, Fischinger, et. al.

3. That the drama in many of these concerns the tragedy of the loss of sense of "identity," or to put it a little more technically "ego autonomy" reveals the nature of the shift is from a conception of the self that is tied to the early Freudian instinctual theory to one related to the later psychoanalytic ego psychology — broadly the ideas of Hartmann (involving the notions of ego strength and conflict-free ego functioning), Erikson (identity) and Rapaport (ego autonomy); thus the anxiety (the so-called "angst") of these (in fact, very unexistential) films should be understood as being signal anxieties. Furthermore, the very nature of the terms of the equation bring to mind Hartmann's ideas of secondary autonomy.

Another way of considering the relation between the form of the psychodrama and ego-psychology would be to consider the "tale" of Erikson's (who was, by the way, himself an artist before qualifying as an analyst) works. Erikson himself reveals what it is; he commented in **Childhood and Society** about the war veterans who had suffered combat neuroses; "What impressed me most was the loss for these men of a sense of identity...it was as if subjectively their lives no longer held together — and never would again. There was a central disturbance of what I then started to call ego identity." The analogy to Erikson's tale could also explain the "adolescent" character of the psychodramas for, according to Erikson the ego identity takes on its lasting shape and character in this period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

4. A view with which I cannot wholeheartedly concur. It seems to me that Joseph Cornell's films and especially **Rose Hobart** (1936), are the truly seminal works. In their wacky ellipses, their shifting, unstable spaces, their scrambled, allusive and ultimately undefinable narratives, their perpetual regeneration and consequent immediate destruction of new organizing formal principles, these works are a virtual catalogue of the devices which would inform and aspirations which would animate the "New American Cinema" for the next thirty years. The fact that both Stan Brakhage and Larry Jordan collaborated with Cornell on film projects or helped to bring some of his unfinished films to completion — that Brakhage has issued Cornell's **Gnir Rednow** (a film related, as the title indicates, to Brakhage's own **Wonder Ring**) and **Centuries of June**, both of which Brakhage himself photographed and which, although Cornell himself felt were imperfect, Brakhage could find no way to improve, and so released exactly as Cornell had left them, and that Larry Jordan has issued no fewer than six films by Cornell — should indicate something of the importance accorded to Cornell's work by two of the leading filmmakers of the sixties avant-garde.

For some reason, a segment of the feminist movement which has chosen to honour avant-garde cinema with its theoretical rectifications have taken to claiming that such male oppressors as P. Adams Sitney have conspired to underplay the formative influence of Maya Deren's films on the development of American avant-garde cinema. I first heard this claim at a Women and film Conference at the State University of New York at Buffalo in February, 1974, about a year before the appearance of Sitney's **Visionary Film**. At the time, Annette Michelson pointed out that the appearance of Sitney's forthcoming text, which she had already seen in manuscript form, would put such accusations to rest. She was, of course, correct; **Visionary Film** devotes its first two chapters to a painstaking analysis of Deren's complete **oeuvre**, including a judicious and extraordinarily fair commentary on her somewhat embarrassing (embarrassing to **me**, at least) later works.

It was bad enough to accuse Sitney of neglecting a filmmaker in a text that had not yet appeared. (Nor did his public pronouncements of the time collaborate these allegations. In his early statements the historical schema has had developed for **Visionary Film** — which he outlined in a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1971, in which he was already citing Deren's work as seminal.) This unwarranted speculation was itself pretty unbecoming. But to hear the allegations of deliberate neglect repeated at a seminar at Trent University's Canadian Images Film Festival this winter — in the midst of an unspeakably banal and error-ridden paper — was beyond belief. Perhaps it might be worth pointing to the women involved, so that they will have some drum to beat, that Sitney very significantly underestimated the importance of two women filmmakers — Marie Menken — whose underestimation he regretfully acknowledges and often attempts to remedy in speaking engagements — and Shirley Clark — an underestimation that he doesn't admit to. Still to read another in this group stating that the important avant-garde films of our time are **Daughter Rite**, **Thriller** and **Song of the Shirt**, whose appearance should make Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow "eat their hearts out" (and even attributes this insight to Noel Carroll!) leaves one wondering whether there is any concern for artistic issues on the part of anyone in that faction. (v. **Fuse**, v. 6 no.'s 1 and 2, p. 24)

5. We are here using Melanie Klein's famous schema of which even Lacanian analysts of cinema have made so much. These ideas are expounded in **Envy and Gratitude and Other Works** 1946-63, (London: Hogarth Press, 1975).

6. To reinforce my claims above that the concept of the self underlying the avant-garde films of this period was one which closely resembles that of psychoanalytic ego psychology, one might recall that these mechanisms are understood as the **ego's** mechanism of defense.

8. Brakhage makes much of this by using what I refer to as "perpetually regenerating" forms. Brakhage's films proceed by the constant setting aside of the form with another — by the constant rejection of one form and the adoption of another. In fact, Brakhage so radicalizes this form of construction that the point at which one form

breaks down and is replaced by another is frequently the end of each individual shot. In such cases (which are quite common in Brakhage's **oeuvre**) a shot with one set of attributes (a "conventional" representation, say) can be followed by a shot with a completely different set of attributes (a piece of leader, say, or an homogeneous field of light, or one involving anamorphosis or painting on film.)

9. Because the camera is in constant motion, the vantage point from which the landscape is represented is constantly changing. Hence, the fixed viewpoint of traditional painting — and it should be noted, it was in traditional landscape painting that this fixed vantage point found its most important role, a fact which might well explain why Snow moved from the urban environments of his earlier films to a natural setting to make **La Région Centrale** — is repudiated in this work. **La Région Centrale** thus belongs to a central line of development of twentieth century art, one devoted to the attempt to overcome the restrictions involved in the use of a fixed vantage point and to explore the possibilities inherent in the use of a shifting vantage point. Indeed, the passage at the end of the film, in which the camera eye becomes positively discorporate and unattached to any location in space — in which the camera seems to have overcome gravity and to be whirling through outer space — might well be the culminating work in that tradition.

Despite the fact that he may have created the greatest work ever within that tradition whose basic aspiration was to represent a landscape from a shifting vantage point, Snow was criticized, at the same feminist seminar and by the same speaker I mentioned above, for the "fixed stare" which was said to characterize his **oeuvre**. This fixity of his gaze, needless to say, was alleged to be a masculine trait in his filmmaking.

10. which Snow had specially constructed for this film

11. Snow proposes, then, that there are two modes of experiencing the film, one of which involves the viewer's identifying with the camera apparatus, the other of which has him outside this identificatory process. As I try and suggest in my "conversation" with Snow (published in this issue) most of his films — and his artwork in general, — invite such a dual experience.

12. Charlotte Townsend, "A Conversation with Michael Snow on **La Région Centrale**" Arts Canada Feb/Mar 1971.

13. Brakhage's films, then, have a performative dimension, as one cannot consider just their internal relations but must also consider the **acts** by which they are produced. But Snow's **La Région Centrale** also involves an, at least, quasi-performative dimension, as it is concerned with the implications of the methods one employs in representing a landscape. He said about the making of **La Région Centrale**:

I wanted to make a film in which what the camera-eye did in the space would be completely appropriate to what it saw, but at the same time, equal to it. Certain landscape paintings have a unity of method and subject. Cézanne for instance produced an, to say the least, incredibly balanced relationship between what he did and what he (apparently) saw.

And further:

I was speculating on how you could make a real landscape film.  
(from Charlotte Townsend. *ibid.*)

14. Much of Brakhage's visual rhetoric (the use of anamorphosis, of stock unbalanced for the light by which it is exposed, of soft-focus shooting, of painting on film, of under-and over-cranking of the camera, of colour, gels, of extreme close-up shooting — a cinematic "myopia," so to speak — as well as the darting and even shaking camera movements (imitating the movement of the eye right down to its saccadic movements) was designed to assimilate the camera's "vision" to that of eye/mind. Snow's does just the opposite; he foregrounds the features specific to camera-derived representations. This surely is one of the reasons for his acute interest in the photographic frame, for there is no comparably sharp boundary to the eye's field of vision. His camera movements, too, have no precise correlatives in the domain of vision; there are, for example, no correlates in vision to the smooth pans used in or to the enlargement of a portion of the visual field, unaccompanied by perceptual change, found in **Wavelength**.

15. This is most clear in the extraordinary mobile vantage point of **La Région Centrale** and the final section of **Presents**; but even in the mid-section of **Wavelength** the gaze appears to be located, as Snow points out, "in the air." Similarly, the extreme acceleration of the panning and tilting in seems to separate the gaze from any particular spatial location.

16. This idea represents one point of contact of Brakhage's views with those of the Romantics. By tying our vision to the body (it is this that leads Brakhage to want to reveal the somatic components of vision — the contributions of retinal excitation, of phosphenes, of hypnagogic elements, etc.), Brakhage is able to claim that sight, — or imagination as he, following the lead of the Romantics, terms it in order to emphasize its creative dimension, — is a product of natural forces.

It should be pointed out that Brakhage also believes that the natural variations in vision are lost when one acquires a "social" form of experience. This acquisition Brakhage relates to the learning of language, apparently because he believes that after acquiring language, one's visual consciousness becomes restricted to presenting general images which embody properties abstracted from the sets of objects referred to by common nouns (which, according to this view, constitute the key features of language; like many theories of language, then, this theory is based primarily on the noun.)

It is interesting that this theory is not really all that far from Freud's views on "inner speech" and imagery. In his 1914 paper, "The Unconscious," Freud described the type of hypercathexis which gives rise to consciousness:

The conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. (The system Pcs-Cs comes about) by this thing presentation being hypercathected through being linked with the word presentation corresponding to it. It is these hypercathexes, we may suppose, that bring about a higher psychical organization and make it possible for the primary process to be succeeded by the secondary process which is dominant in the Pcs. (Standard Ed. XIV, p.194)

Thus the tragedy that befalls visual consciousness with the acquisition of language is, on this view, that of specificity. And certainly, Brakhage's films are given over to the attempt to recover some of the traits of primary process thinking.

17. Though an often-overlooked dimension of his work, it is very important. Consider the vision of total equivalence expressed in the equal importance accorded to all parts of space by the circular camera movements in **La Région Centrale**.

18. Also suggested by his figurative title for **La Région Centrale**, in which the dimensions of reality converge towards the central reality of nirvanic consciousness.

19. I should like to point out (without becoming too esoteric) that the relation between this idea and the doctrine of certain Hindu sects, that the soul (atman) and Ultimate Reality (Brahman) are identical.

20. The self of transcendental phenomenology — the self involved in the films of Michael Snow — **is** the nothingness which it is, it **is** a pure form of subjectivity which is always other than the experiences which it has. According to this later school of thought the subject is not pure form of being — is not something "given" but something that is constituted in experience and so is continually in process.

21. Thus, contrary to the idealist view, the signified can never be separated from the signifier. This view has important implications, for it entails that there is not Transcendental Signifier, there is no signifier which does not in itself, in its essence, refer back to any signifier but "goes beyond the chain of signs and itself no longer functions as a signifier." (Derrida, **Positions**, p.23)

By refusing to equate the signified with a concept possessing an existence independent of language, this view refutes the idealists' belief in a metaphysical origin of meaning anterior to the production of significance. Thus, the hypostasis of the signified (in the Meaning of **Logos**) which culminates with the positing of a Supreme Being (in whose likeness the subject as a derivative site of meaning is said to be fashioned) is thus avoided. Similarly, by understanding the subject to be constituted by a set of differences through which he comes to be defined — as being then, "subject" to a chain of signification — this view refutes the idealist notion of "a human essence" which transcends the social system — an essence which, indeed, acts as a transcendent being supporting that structure. The idea of a transcendent subject intending meaning — of a subject which exists outside of language and manipulates meaning — is replaced by a conception of a subject which is **originally absent** and which is **produced** only by the signifying chain.

Lacan thus speaks of emergence of the subject in a following way somewhat similar to Derrida's denial of the Transcendental Signifier.

in the first coupling of Paradigmatic terms the unary signifier (i.e. the subject's first nonsensical and irreducible signifier—RBE) emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for another signifier, which other signifier has as its effect the **aphansis** of the subject ("**Aphanisis** is a term which Lacan has taken up from the work of Ernest Jones to refer to the constant fading or eclipsing of the subject. Lacan illustrates the concept with a Venn diagramme, the disjoint sections of whose partially overlapping circles represent Being (the Subject) and Meaning (the Other) and (unorthodoxically to the form of Venn diagrammes) whose field of intersection represents Non-being. About this Venn diagramme he says, "If we choose being, the subject disappears, escapes us, fails into non-being; if we choose meaning, then meaning is only left curtailed of being, of non-meaning which is, strictly speaking, what constitutes, in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is in the nature of meaning as it emerges in the field of the Other to be in a large part of its field eclipsed by the disappearance of being induced by the very function of the signifier."—RBE) Hence the division of the subject — where the subject appears somewhere as meaning, is manifested elsewhere as a "fading," a disappearance. There is, then, one might say, a matter of life and death between the unary signifier and the subject, **qua** binary signifier, cause of his disappearance. (**The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis**, p.218)

22. Saussure, then, mounts a double-pronged assault on the Cartesian notion of the pure cogito and on idealist and nominalist theories of language.

23. This is the point of Lacan's famous formulaic summary of Saussure's theory (S/s) for it shows us the supremacy of the signifier over the signified.

24. These Lacanian views have important parallels in the theories of transitivity advanced by the Chicago school (which along with the theories of Charlotte Bühler and Elsa Kohler he mentions in his paper "The Mirror

Stage as Formative of the Function of I"). This is clear not only in his theories concerning the reciprocity between the Ego and the image in the mirror phase, but also in the very Hegelian cast to his early theories of desire according to which what one desires is the object of the Other's desire.

25. first described in **The Interpretation of Dreams** (S.E. Vol. V 461f) and returned to in **Beyond the Pleasure Principle** (S.E. Vol. XVIII pp.14-17)

26. from "The insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious."

27. It should be admitted that Rainer's work takes the issue of identification as a crucial one for the cinema; it seems obvious that the question of how one can use demotic subject matter, representational forms and narrative construction without provoking identification seems to be central to her film work. But I believe that the reason Yvonne Rainer considers the evocation of identificatory processes to be problem-laden is that it creates the mistaken impression of the coherence of the subject. Thus the particular way by which she solves the problem; she utilizes devices to make the divisions in the spectator (or rather the spectator/auditor/reader) apparent.

28. This, it seems to me, is what the motif of holding or touching is about, for the sense of touch is often considered the most effective of sensory modalities for guaranteeing an object's presence. ("Feel it! Touch it!" one is counselled to ensure that some object is really there, that it is not hallucinated.) Furthermore, touching and especially holding seems to involve a form of fusion, and it was through the merger of the infant with the mother that the infant originally felt the full plenitude of being and presence.

The references to the gaze in the film function in a similar way, for the gaze, too, is experienced as a unifying agency for it, too has the capability of restoring the coherence one possesses at the stage of the Imaginary.

29. But, of course, this is not completely so. This sense of the "here-and-now" depends on the reactivation of the imaginary, and, as I pointed out earlier, there is no spectator who is ever — no matter how effective the film's illusionistic construction — unproblematically involved merely in the operation of the Imaginary. Nonetheless, I do think it true that an event depicted on film appears much more to belong to the "here-and-now" than one depicted on a photograph. (On this matter, consider how frequently an attendee at a horror movie must remind himself "It's only a movie!")

30. The lostness of the lost object is suggested by its temporality — by the fact that it belongs to a "temps perdu."

31. insofar as it represents the beginning of the visit that is recounted in the film.

32. A being not dissimilar to that possessed by lost objects.



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# MICHAEL SNOW AND BRUCE ELDER IN CONVERSATION

## Introduction:

Last Fall, Michael Snow proposed to me that we undertake what he called "a conversation" about our films, our artistic beliefs and certain of our "philosophical" ideas. As appealing as the idea was, because I found myself immersed in a very large film project that produced unremitting torment for nearly a year, I was unable to carry it out. When a financial setback forced me to suspend the project temporarily, I became eager to take up the idea and contacted Snow. Snow suggested we begin with my writing down some comments or observations about his work. The theme of this issue being what it was, I began by querying Snow about his ideas on photography specifically and on representation in general. Snow took my comments away with him to a northern "retreat" and returned a week later with a series of what I believe are most remarkable responses. Like most of Snow's published "comments," they are extremely dense, punning, deliberate and allusive. For this reason, I have made some notes on his responses.

RBE: Concerning the mammoth exhibition of your work assembled by the Centre Pompidou, you commented that it was composed of "camera-related works, or at least things which have to do with the effects the camera has on perception." (Pierre Théberge, "Conversation with Michael Snow" in **Michael Snow** Catalogue for exhibition at Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1979). I understand this to mean that you believe that the kind of experience afforded by the camera (the "camera's vision") occupies a central role in your work. Could we begin with your explaining what you think the most significant features of that type of experience are and why you have accorded them so central a place in your work.

MS: My attention was directed to the camera as a director of attention from considerations of Art itself being (in another situation) a director of attention. Similarly cameras both intensify and diminish aspects of normal vision and they "set apart" those aspects for possible examination. By the object-memory which they produce (photos, films, tapes), they give a locus for and evidence of selection, of choice. The rectangular camera frame/mask of course continues the human intervention of architecture and sets up the possibility of a perhaps edifying dialogue between the rectangle and all its specifically human content with the nature (that might be) pictured through the camera or in the rectangular result. That the photographer/viewer is hidden in this architectural paradigm also becomes interesting. On the other hand, fishing and photography are very similar. The result of framing in photography is always a fragment, making the camera potentially analytical, an epistemological tool. That's to say (to repeat?) that out of the universal field, knowledge isolates, selects and points out unities or differences which were not previously evident. Identification, definition is a matter of limits, of recognition of limitations, bounds, boundaries. There are ways of indicating the depth of implication of this human viewer instrument between us and the rest of the universe. Lenses extend, expand or contract vision (abstract it) in both the optical and chimerical senses. I'm interested in the way that the products of cameras are ghosts of their subjects. Less than dessicated, wonderful as the relic is, it has (almost) only two dimensions. Still photos are suffused with nostalgia seconds after their taking/making. Cinema ghosts are more active, Flying Dutchmen.

I don't know why I became interested in these things. It gradually became evident to me that more was to be done in this area, that I was especially interested in time, that I might learn something about it, myself and what-it-all-means. No doubt it has something to do with my childhood (ha ha). My father, who was a surveyor then civil engineer during most of my life had only one eye, then lost the sight of his other eye during my teens, which made us both very interested in vision.

RBE: In a seminar at Visual Studies Workshop, Garry Winogrand made the following pair of comments about photography: (1) "My only interest in photography is photography"; (2) "when you photograph — there's (**sic**) things in a photograph, — right? So this can't help but document or whatever you want to call it. It's automatic. I mean if you photograph a cake of soap, in the package or out of it, it goes without saying...(If you were to photograph in Arizona or Alaska) then that's what your pictures would look like; whatever those places look like" (Dennis Longwell "Monkeys Make the Problem More Difficult: A Collective Interview with Garry Winogrand" in Peninah Petruck ed, **The Camera Viewed**, New York, E.P. Dutton 1979 p.120). These comments seem to me not very interesting taken individually, but their juxtaposition I find extraordinarily interesting. The first comment simply affirms the modernist credo about the values of purity and of being truthful to the materials of one's medium — values which were generally understood to have no part in, — and indeed, sometimes, antithetical to — the referential or representational potentials of a work of art. The second, on the other hand, affirms that **mimesis** is inevitable condition of photographic works. Taken together, then, the comments seem to imply that **mimesis** is the proper end — a kind of Aristotelian final cause, if you will — of photography, essential to it very being.

You yourself belong to that select group of advanced artists, which also included amongst its members both Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, who working in

New York City in the middle and late sixties, an era of high abstractionism, reformulated artistic practices by insisting that representational elements be allowed a place in advanced art. It seems to me that somewhere behind this insistence is that near paradox inherent in photography, that in photography we discover a medium whose essence — or perhaps better, whose very being — defies self-enclosure, a medium which refuses to become isolated self-contained entity, without reference to the world. Rather its nature seems to spill outward, for a photograph is destined to become like the Other which it depicts. (Thus mimesis is its final cause.) Yet, even as it is informed by the Other and incorporates the Other into itself, it remains distinctly itself, for the form of the Other is incorporated in the photograph by becoming embodied in the photograph's own proper material, namely light (sometimes coloured light).<sup>1</sup> But it is not just a question of the relation between the matter and form of a photograph or of the photograph having at once some of the features of objects and some of the features of images. Rather, the fact that the photograph necessarily takes its being from the form of the Other means that the photograph, **qua** object, is an image.

When writing this, I think of Sartre's discussion of a form of being that "is what it is not and is not what it is." It seems to me that a similar paradox is inherent in your work. Thus, while modernism had proposed that through the devices of abstractionism there could be achieved an alignment of the form of work with its material nature, in order to achieve a work of which it could be said that it possessed a consolidated and solid form of being, — had aspired then, through abstraction to make a work (e.g. a painting) truly be what it is (i.e. a painting) — your works, even while they are true to the media in which they are realized, are nevertheless straightforwardly representational. Thus many of your photographs (e.g. **Midnight Blue** and **Red**) are constructions, are self-contained, at least in the sense that the imagery of the works is restricted to the chronicling of the making of the work of which that imagery becomes a part, yet at the same time, **are** representational. It's as though representation, indeed, illusion belonged to the very objecthood of the photograph. And certainly, your work seems, in relation to the modernist tradition, the history of which is the successive repudiation of one after another of the accidental features traditional paintings possessed — from representation through deep space, to the record of expressive gesture, to relief credited by thick painting — extraordinarily catholic; many of your pieces (e.g. ???) seems given over to the task of reconciling diversity. ??? balances features like flat space, references to the work's construction, and anti-illusionistic devices, features modernists praised, with deep space, narrative allusion and illusionistic constructions, features which modernists strove to eliminate from a work of art.

MS: I don't find Winogrand's comments too interesting at all but your use of them is terrific and as you can see I got pretty excited and involved in these issues already while trying to answer your first question, probably by telling you mostly stuff that you already know. Another aspect of interest is that the camera makes conventions that are comparable<sup>2</sup> to those developed by representation in the Renaissance (perspective, etc.). The camera and its products involve as many eccentricities in relation to "truthful" representation (What?) and the way we and our eye/brain see. The use of the **camera obscura** by Dutch 17th century painters and simultaneous work on lens optics might be a factor in all this.

Once in conversation<sup>3</sup> (subject "modernism," "postmodernism" in which I suggested that "post-modernism" was more of a wish than an actuality), I also suggested this perhaps interesting distortion of the history of western art. Once there were "Whole" paintings that made a rich and unified use of all the possibilities of the medium: e.g. Velasquez, the Tiepolos, Vermeer, Chardin. Modern Art has been an analysis of such works, progressively isolating and reifying single aspects and ending recently with, in this order: concept, decoration and finally context. This is a monstrous generalization with perhaps a photographic grain of truth to it which might be a motivating factor in the current attempts of certain Neo-expressionists.

Another perhaps edifying generalization is this one: evidence of process has been most clear in the expressionist "line" of Tintoretto, Grunewald, Rembrandt,

Courbet, Van Gogh, De Kooning. There is another, less "humanist," less tactile, more "scientific," more imagistic line which seems to give evidence of a long-standing yearning for photography. Compare to the foregoing the qualities of image, but especially of surfaces, of the paintings of Leonardo, Vermeer, Ingres, Duchamp. Here an attempt has been made to do away, as much as possible, with any evidence of the hand's activity and the nature and qualities of the materials employed in order to attain the effect of an instantaneous, non-physical **image**. Click.

Just to keep on painting, so to speak, the best painting has always been involved with the stoplights at Fact and Illusion. Or is it Mind and Matter? The 3D/2D paradox is one of the subjects of all the best painting, even Mondrian. When it's a creation of a man with a supremely sophisticated intelligence and skill, in the right place at the right time (Yes, everybody's in their era), who is able to reflect on and image an area of sensual scrutiny most appropriate to his medium, "the attention man pays to women" (i.e. Vermeer), painting can be magically suspended in space and time at another crossing, that of the artist's concentrated energy and the look of the creative spectator.

When it appeared I was very impressed with Richard Hennesy's article "What's all this about photography" in the May '79 **artforum**. Over a year after that I read with amusement the enraging effect it had on Douglas Crimp in his article "The End of Painting" in **October** No. 16 (Spring '81). Crimp's critique failed.<sup>4</sup>

RBE: Another aspect of the double-sided nature of representation is their double temporality. As an object, a representation belongs to the "now," to the instant (in fact, to all instants) in which it is perceived; it is available at hand at the very moment one looks at them. And, yet as an image, it refers to a moment (or a series of moments) in the past when it was made or which it depicts. (In photography, the moment of making of the image and the moment depicted tend to co-incide: perhaps this is what you suggest by the self-enclosure of some of many of your photographs e.g. **Authorization** (1969), **Midnight Blue** (1974) and **Red<sup>s</sup>** (1974); certainly the coincidence of temporalities is another case of the identity between a photograph's nature as an image and its nature as an object). But it is, of course, the dialectic between these two sides of a representational image's temporality that is interesting, for in this dialectic the past moment or moments referred to or depicted in the work are made "ready-at-hand" for all times — are made to belong constantly to the present. Thus, they take on something of the character of the eternal, in a way not dissimilar to the fashion in which, in **One Second in Montreal**, instantaneous events become durative. There seems to be something of a religious dimension to this.

MS: Speaking of religion, I've always wanted to hear everything said at once but while I'm waiting I must say I'm always embarrassed by what I say.<sup>5</sup> I doubt if it's sillier than what other people say, it's just that so much has to be left out! Naming that list of artists (from **all** artists!) saying that that historical line "exists," concentrating on the "modernist" attitude neglect so unfairly so much! But that's obvious isn't it? Just be interested.

I am very grateful for your insightful description of the temporal states sometimes generated from my work. I've never been able to systematically and objectively understand how it's done. I've always hoped that I and the spectator might benefit from my own attempt to apprehend and invoke a **participation mystique** with the nature of the "reality" being presented by the little things I do and be led to extrapolate (emotionally or intellectually) that situation to the larger situation to which it belongs. My own fairly obsessive attempts at resolving existential problems have always started from an attempt at realizing a specific concrete/materialist base. Successive seeming clarifications in my philosophy as in many others always head to a Mystery. I'm not a "literary" philosopher but, if we are here to name everything, it all has to build to a Transcendental Signifier. Out of facetious humility, I'm "religious." The paragraph above means that I'm resigned to begging for revelation and thus probably don't deserve it. But Who's to say?

More-or-less back on more-or-less land I'd like to return to this path for a moment: in my work with still photography I've tried to consider the nature of the surface, the way the shot-of-image is mounted, presented (it should be "integrated" with some compositional/content job to do), the size of the final print in relation to the subject, the source of illumination. In many works, I've made the subjects themselves (**Midnight Blue, Glares, A Wooden Look, Morning in Holland, Waiting Room, Times**). In some cases the subject is in the final work (usually partially), as you mention. I've tried to control the "distance" from the here-and-now of the spectator to the times and places in the past when the photos were taken. This gap is closed quite tightly in some works which try to achieve the presentness and lack of deflection elsewhere, more fact than fiction, of the best abstract paintings (ideal of "modernism!"). I was very influenced by Mondrian. I haven't much time for representations that want to take me totally elsewhere. Rather sleep.

**Iris-Iris** is a recent piece which tries to contain a set of pyramidal stages of readings of different times and places with (an attempt at) almost measurable temporal distances from the concrete here and now to remote theres and thens. Trying to make the inevitable nostalgia of photos palpable.

First; the work is two equal sized squares side by side. One panel includes a postcard of Mont Blanc on a painting (wall?). The other is a photo of a bedroom somewhere which shows the same (?) post card same size on the same wall (painting?) in a late afternoon (?) light. The self-referentiality of this work might keep a spectator moving around in a perception/thought cycle. By comparison **A Wooden Look** keeps you (relatively) in the now. A past glance causing a present glance. My photo-works continue the mistakes of the Buffalo Photo-pictorialists!<sup>6</sup>

RBE: The diagrammatic shapes some of your films (the conical shape of **Wavelength** or the interlocking, nearly sinusoidal shapes of ???) seem to me to possess temporal features analogous to those of representations. The shapes of both those film, for examples, suggest the passage of time and yet the diagrammatic shapes arrest the flow of time by converting time into a spatial form. These forms, then, like representations, seem to have aspects of both time and eternity.

MS: I'm sure you can imagine how pleasing to me this paragraph is. Thank you. To shape time (actually it's mind) seems to me to be the quintessence of cinema. In **The Republic**, Plato has Socrates describe the levels of Being of Table (last long sequence of **Rameau's Nephew** involved in this too). He says that qualitatively a representation of a table is inferior to a real table made by a carpenter but superior to that is the idea of table which is necessary before the other 2 can exist. Pythagoras is no doubt behind this and would have added a supstage; the cube. I think it is unusual to be guided to sense time as a particular shape and that it is a refreshment with eternal implications if you will. Also, Plato banished poets from the Republic not only because (as above) they trafficked in falsehoods but also because they seem to dwell on sorrow and make efforts to keep loss fresh.

RBE: The spectator constructed by your early films has a similarly dual nature. One part of him "entranced," mesmerized by the simple form; another part, a transcendent, reflective consciousness, is outside that experience reflecting upon that first part in the course of its experience. A duality similar to those described above seems to be involved here, since one part of the mind seems involved in the temporal experience and to participate in it, another part stands outside that experience and reflects upon it. And many of your photographs ask for a viewer that is at once involved in illusion and a detached, critical analyst of their conditions as objects.

MS: Film images are more hallucinatory (dream was the favourite paradigm of one period of avant-garde film) than still photographic or any others. This kind of drug-related pleasure has to be considered too. I like to have ecstasy and analysis. An ecstasy of analysis is an odd state alright! And an analysis of ecstasy seems a waste of a good time. Or is film the only occasion for this meeting?

I believe this dual state (simultaneous or oscillating fast or slow from "one" to "the other") is provoked by all my films in different ways and should be the spectator's intellectual and emotional recognition of the convergence of fact and illusion previously mentioned.

**Presents** continues this "duality" quite explicitly by making wide separations of elements (carrying the distinct sections of **Rameau's Nephew** further) and setting each element against what is (or seems) most remote from it or is **extremely** different from it. Nothing exists in isolation, and in works of art salient elements are made such by being set in or on environments. Narrative: protagonists do something somewhere. In order to see, among other things, the sculptural/theatrical artificialities of staging, these are set against a background of, or perhaps more accurately in a context of their opposite: "documentary." However, they can be as reasonably considered the other way around: "documentary" in the context of "staged." Two forms of construction. This is all made more complicated by the fact that all photography that's unaltered "graphically" is "realism." Then, within each of the 2 major sections, there are fluctuations of emphasis from the "concrete/materialist" to the "naturalistic/realist." In my own monologues about my work, I call these changes in "type of belief." Within the possibilities of hand-held 16mm, each shot in the montage section is set in a context of (between) extremes. Each shot involves a different kind of belief generated by the nature of the subject and its treatment by the camera (it's all handheld pans, varying speed, varying source of the gesture involved, varying direction, etc.). Because of the frequent cuts the shots all become objects for at least 1/24 of a second but like the changes in **Wavelength** they all insinuate different kinds of belief related to themes in the first (staged) section, but now in the language of "documentary" realism. The speed of cutting and variety of shots can at times undercut (ha ha) the realism of the image.

Sometimes it's a glance or a blink or peripheral vision, sometimes it savours, lingers, sometimes it's an exchange (there are many portraits) sometimes it's "too fast" but sometimes it's "too slow" and though the editing tends to isolate individual shots there are many widely separated connections and an accretive developing continuity. This section (montage) contains many references to the nature of and terminology used in film. In various ways it emphasizes the ghostlines of film and makes "realism" questionable. The most powerful film subjects for everybody are human sexual organs and the mutilation of people or animals. It has been said (J. Hoberman) that my painting treatment "trivializes" these subjects. I don't think so. It films them. Film **is** trivial compared to them. Their images are used to make this film. It's like the difference between the word "surgery" and surgery. Watching this section, what one experiences are the facts (of illusions) and, after the laughs of the first section (the "Presents" of the entertainment industry re-represented), the difficulty of contact with what keeps on seeming to be (often mundane) "reality" but keeps on disappearing (like "reality") makes entertainment retreat and tragedy appear. But what were we laughing at anyway? Fugitive.

Perhaps related: I think a lot of people in the "experimental" film world are being strangled by the Entertainment-Ideology mobius strip.

RBE: It seems to me that if I am correct about these ideas, the self-referential features in your works have a different use than they orthodoxically do. The purpose of most self-reference in a work of art is to eliminate any reference to or involvement with anything outside the work of art itself. Self-reference enforces the self-enclosure of a work, since it restricts the reference of the imagery in an artwork to itself. The motivation for this seems to have been to align the references of a work of art with the work's own being: that is why the references are so frequently to the "pure materials" of the medium itself. But while you have, in some of your photographic works, worked with self-enclosed forms, (i.e. with works whose imagery makes no reference to things outside the work itself), your use of these forms seems to serve different than the usual ends. The orthodox motivation for self-reference would be, on your view, pointless, since "The Other," you seem to believe, is necessarily involved in the image; and, if "The Other" is necessarily involved in an image, restrict-

ing the references of the imagery to the work itself would not eliminate the references to some "Other" outside the work itself; references to the work itself would involve, inevitably, references to an Other, your use of self-reference seems to me to have a dual motivation. Firstly, it reveals the stages in the process of the construction of the work, and so affirms (since what one constructs are objects) the objecthood of the work. Secondly, since these references are embodied in recognizable images, they necessarily refer to times past. The restriction of the references of the imagery such works as **Authorization**, **Midnight Blue** and **Red**<sup>5</sup> to the process of the making of the work itself in fact means that the "only Other" with which they deal are "times other" than the present, (i.e. the times in which they are perceived). Here again, then, ideas concerning temporality seem to take a central place in your work. Self-reference in your work becomes references to the production process, references to the work's past and a means of bringing this past, this history, into the present. Sometimes this self-reference becomes paradoxical, when the finished work is contained in the depiction of one of the stages in the making of the work, as it is, explicitly, in **Cover to Cover** and, as an invited conjecture, in **Imposition**. Furthermore, by making the work — and its production — its own subject, image and reality interpenetrate one another.

MS: Tried to described the general way I think about all this already but would like to add that my sequential photo-works (**Authorization**, **Red**,<sup>5</sup> **Glares**, **A Wooden Look**, etc.) are made additively like a painting. In viewing a painting, the observer doesn't know which stroke was first but wanders (directed by the composition) over the surface. However, in these photoworks, the order of accumulation can be experienced.<sup>8</sup> **Morning in Holland** was made subtractively by taking elements away, gradually revealing.

RBE: In **Rameau's Nephew**, someone comments: "There is no doubt that technology is expressing and answering a human desire by working towards systems of greater and greater illusionism. It is easy to project this to arrive at stages of representation of absolutely convincing illusion till eventually the difference between subject and facsimile may be eradicated." The claim interests me for several reasons. For one thing, it is staunchly antimodernist in conviction. Modernists believed that there was an ontological gulf between an image and object that could never be overcome. And since they believed the "reality value" of an image was less than that of object, a work of art should strive to avoid becoming representation — avoid being an image — and become an object instead. But the comment interests me, too, because it states something related to my previous comments. Among the striking devices of your recent photographic works are strategies which bring about the interpenetration of reality and the image. Thus some of your photographic works (e.g. **Authorization** or **Red**<sup>9</sup>) reveal that they were generated in a number of stages and that each stage involves the re-presentation of the previous. Thus, the production of images is shown to change the real, but this change then becomes the reality reformulated in the next image. The real becomes the image which then becomes the real.

MS: The image in that section of **Rameau's Nephew** is a group of people seated in a moving bus. They stare ahead, at the fixed camera and at the spectator seated similarly, at the screen and sometimes at sprays of tiny pin-prick holes that appear in the film/image. The "voice-over" which (with no evident picture source) speaks the statement is male and lisps. What you quoted is a section, and the complete scene/statement is about 6 minutes long. There are several distinct claims on the spectators' attention and it all produces an interesting perhaps brain hemisphere division. It seems to be difficult to follow the sense of the spoken statement (which is quite conventionally phrased) and see/think about the image at the same time. To make connections between the sound and picture or grasp them simultaneously also seems difficult. Writing this made me think about the development of your own work. Both **The Art of Worldly Wisdom** and **1857** could be described as polyphonic. While in both, the sets of "lines" used cluster around autobiography or around death and destruction, the complexity of the choices (e.g. simultaneous references



to different times) for spectator emphasis results in a very powerful and rewarding experience. I think this will be one of the most fruitful areas of cinematic investigation.

I wouldn't say it's "wrong" to discuss modernist tenets with reference to film, but I have a feeling that if Clement Greenberg were asked he'd think of the movies and say "Yes, films should be representational; after all there's no object involved, only an image." **Citizen Kane** would be one of his acquaintances. During the 60's, living in New York, I was frequently surprised at how little certain major American abstract artists could "apply" their aesthetic thinking to film. Their sense of it and ideas about it were "average."

I wrote the statement you quoted for its use in the film but separated it's an interesting subject. Talk about extraordinary verisimilitude is a part of many ancient writings, re-emerges from the Renaissance on and, in our time, has been aimed at by 3D movies, Imax and holograms. Just to keep the speculation going: if "progress" continues a scientific elite will continue to do the investigating and inventing and entertaining (the trip to the moon was a TV show) and the rest of the population, progeny of those who now spend 23 hours a day at their TV sets, may "participate" through wholly convincing representations which will perhaps bypass the sensorium and be inserted directly into the brain. Talk about an opiate.

For its use in **Rameau's Nephew**, the futurity of the statement and its references to verisimilitude were set against other temporal/material layers in the hopes that it would make one "see through" the images as a particular representation, a **filmic** representation still very far from the "reality" it represents, a "reflection" of the spectator.

RBE: A well-known frequently commented upon, feature of your work is its concern with the effects of framing. While modernists conceived of the frame as a device for creating a bounded, enclosed space, your use of the frame is different. Again, it seems to me to have dual features that reflect the way in which image and object, reality and illusion interpenetrate one another in your work. You seem to suggest that by putting a frame around a part of reality, you make an image of it. (This seems to me to be partly the significance of **Sight** (1967)) But, then, because the thing that results is circumscribed, bounded and definite, it has the characteristics of an object.

MS: Frames on paintings tend to minimize their objectness and emphasize their "imagicity." Concrete or "abstract" paintings often don't have frames. There's a big difference between seeing **extant** and looking through a mask. "Shaped canvases" and the work of Don Judd come in here. Framing in films is actually masking in both shooting and projection. In the opening, video-altered section of **Presents**, I tried to work with establishing a malleable image with edges. When the white line which opens the film became a small screen-proportion rectangle against "black," it doesn't seem as if it's masked or that there's more beneath the black — it's a little like an unframed representational painting. When this small image finally fills the entire screen, it hovers between readings till, as the image moves laterally, it becomes more "realistic" and it is revealed that there is indeed an off-screen space under the mask.

**Sight** is a black plastic plane with an incised white line diagram with a small (in relation to the amount of surface) shape cut-out making a hole. The work is to be installed in a window and incorporates aspects of flux in a static 2-dimensional "container" by invoking a relationship between these 2 elements. The view through "Sight" becomes part of the work, by its becoming an image in a determinate setting. I don't think that what's seen through the aperture has the characteristics of an object. The scene (a street, in most installations, or another room in the gallery) becomes less "solid" and actual and more of an image under the influence of its context. The circumscribing boundaries are definite, an object, but what is seen is not a "thing."

RBE: The quotation from **Rameau's Nephew** which I gave above seems to harbour yet another, and possibly even more profound meaning than those already stated. The so-called "common sense" belief about the world distinguishes sharply between images and objects, granting to the latter a reality denied to the former. You seem to me to be suggesting the opposite is true. In several of your works, the reality of "the object" seems to dissolve in time, while "the image" because it is eternal, and, often, because of its minimal objective shape, seems very real, very concrete, very definite. In a somewhat similar way, in **Wavelength**, the reality of the room and the windows comes to be transformed into a metaphor for consciousness, while the film itself in the course of its time more and more becomes concrete reality. In sum, the concrete and eternal image becomes more real than a transient and fleeting reality.

Can I remind you, that the quotation from Sartre given above, concerning a being which is directed towards an Other, which "is what is not and is not what is" is a statement about consciousness.

MS: The shifting you describe reminds me of a suggestion of Duchamp: If a 2-dimensional rendering of a 3-dimensional object can be as efficacious as it can, perhaps 3-dimensional entities are representations of 4-dimensional models and so on.

Alas, the image is only "eternal" for a few minutes. It's hard to prove the present exists but, if it does, it is eternity. Or a sample thereof.

One of the aspects of the film which makes its existence as an "apparatus" as important as the development of the piano in Western music is that image is produced and presented (reconstituted) in the same way that we see, by means of light reflecting off (a) surface(s). Reflection!

A projection!, a moving representational image composed of light falling (how thin it is!) on a surface is also (nearly!) "what it is not and is not what it is" to (nearly) submerge Sartre in Heraclitus.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Snow objected firmly to my use of the term "material" here, insisting that I was mistaken, that light is not the **material** of which a photograph is made but rather the **agency** through which it is made. Having given the matter further thought, I now agree with him, though I believe the argument I am advancing here could easily (in obvious ways) be reformulated to take into account his objection. (R.B.E.)

2. Snow had originally written "similar" where I have put "comparable." His point he claimed is that photographs, like Renaissance paintings are structured by a set of conventions. On further thought, he was not sure whether the conventions were really all that similar to those of Renaissance painting. The salient point is that camera-derived imagery is informed by a set of conventions, as was Renaissance painting. (R.B.E.)

3. Snow is here making a reference to conversation between himself and me on the subject specified between parenthesis. Specifically, I had mentioned the modernist historiographic assumption that each successive development in the progress of art is characterized by the successive identification and elimination of features accidental to the medium in which the work was realized and, thus, that progress in art is marked by the movement, similar to that of phenomenological reduction, from an art which included contingent features which mostly derive from what I call centrifugal concerns (i.e. concerns about things outside the art object as a simple material construct — concerns that move us from the actual forms of the object to what it represents, from the Individual sounds in poems, their meanings and our association with them) to essential features which derive from the actual material of which the object is constructed. It is worth noting that against this reductionist reading of history, and the reductionist practice that followed from it (or it followed from, depending upon what one construes the nature of the relation between theory and practice in the modernist tradition to be), Snow seems to valorize the synthetic tradition, which exploits all the possibilities of the medium. (R.B.E.)

4. The articles Snow refers to here are part of the current (rather fashionable) debate about whether painting is reviving or dying. Hennesy argues that the claim that photography has rendered painting obsolete is incorrect, while Crimp argues that painting by the 1960's "painting's terminal conditions seemed impossible to ignore," and that, since the passing of modernism, art works can no longer actually **be** paintings, but only, at most, represent them.

Hennesy's argument makes several claims that Snow might have found interesting. One is that painting directs our attention to important facts that might escape our attention in the "immense sea of sensorial information" (p.22), and, by calling forth acts of contemplation, respond to the fear that the clue to the mystery that surrounds our lives might pass unnoticed. (Painting he claims, organizes impressions and directs our attention more effectively than photographs.) A second claim is that painting is a synthesizing and constructing activity, and, since it is made by the hand, makes use of all modes of sensorial knowledge — the tactile, the oral, the auditory even the olfactory; the photographer, on the other hand, divorces the eye from the hand (This quasi-religious claim that painting integrates mind and body, matter and soul, might have appealed to Snow). And finally, Hennesy makes the (also quasi-religious) claim that artistic taste (read "the spirit") has begun a "relentless" and "remorseless" decline (p.23).

Crimp, needless to say, argues against painting on the grounds that it is "unavoidably (tied) to a centuries old idealism" (p.75) and mocks what he calls Hennesy's "revivalist spirit" (p.76).

5. Compare this comment with another Snow made to Pierre Th  berge: "I think I'm stuck with certain contradictions about not being 'at home' in the movement of time because the future and the past are contents of the mind and you can't say the word "present" fast enough to have it fit the present. (in **Michael Snow** (Catalogue) Kunstmuseum Luzerne, 1979.) Compare also his response to my ninth comment.

6. The Buffalo pictorialists were a group of photographers working in Buffalo and upper New York State in the years 1906 (the date the group 'The Photo-Pictorialists of Buffalo' was founded) to 1914 (the date of the last exhibition in which the Photo-Pictorialists participated as a group) and included W.H. Pesterfield, C. Albright, E.B. Sides, A. Thibaudeau et al. inspired by the work of the Photo Secessionists (E. Steichen, Clarence H. White, Gertrude Kasebier, et al.), whose work was exhibited in a huge exhibition at Buffalo's Albright Art Gallery in 1910, the pictorialists wanted to establish the legitimacy of photography's claim to the right to be accepted as a "high art." They believed that all "advanced" (to use a favoured term of the period) artistic practices were closely related inasmuch as the aesthetic worth of all artistic works, whatever the medium in which they were realized, should be judged by a common set of standards, using the same critical mechanisms.

Specifically, the pictorialists attempted to model "art-photography" after the most widespread and influential tradition in the art of the late nineteenth century, Symbolism, as exemplified by such artists as Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavanne. Pictorialists' photographs generally used soft forms, diffused light, centripetal forms of composition, which give them a rather ambiguous and hermetic quality, as though suggesting another reality, just as the Symbolists had often used Synthetic devices — devices for Juxtaposing objects which in the "real" world have no natural connections, but belong to "separate realities" — in order to suggest a "Higher Reality."

In fact, while Snow's "quip" owes something of its motivation to the fact that Buffalo Photo-pictorialists were the subject of a recent exhibition in Buffalo, as well as to the fact that a major topic of our discussion was the relationships between art, photography and the cinema, it probably has a deeper meaning, for, as I suggest in my third remark to him, I believe that Snow's work, like that of the Symbolists, is based on the idea that a picture suggests an Ultimate Reality that is different from the subject matter it depicts. Indeed, I believe that the use of rigorously formal devices, for which Snow's work in film and photography is so justly celebrated, are in the service of his desire to suggest a timeless Reality beyond the reality actually depicted in the photograph/film. I

believe, and Snow seems to imply in his reply to my sixth comment, that the sadness his works so often evoke frequently arises from the pairing of this nostalgic for the absolute with the recognition of the impossibility of fulfilling the aspiration. The synthetic aspects of pictorialist practices (their use of the Juxtaposition of different realities to convey a "Reality" of a higher order), might, too, be of interest to Snow. (Compare, for example, his responses to my second and sixth comments.) (R.B.E.)

7. Snow here introduces a term which I think is **very** revealing, for it suggests that different forms of representation/construction represent different forms of belief about the subject/object. This claim would seem to me to have idealist underpinnings.

8. Here, again, (compare this with his response to my second comment) Snow stresses the constructive and synthetic character of most of his work, which he must believe (if we are to reconcile these claims with his response to my fifth comment) must balance analytic and materialist concerns; once again, then, the same duality we have been discussing in a different form. (R.B.E.)

# FRAMEWORK

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# BEFORE "LUCIFER": PRETERNATURAL LIGHT IN THE FILMS OF KENNETH ANGER

*by William C. Wees*

"I'm an artist working in Light..." — a statement many avant-garde filmmakers might have made, but only Kenneth Anger could have continued, "...and that's my whole interest, really. Lucifer is the Light god, not the devil, that's a Christian slander. The devil is always other people's gods. Lucifer has appeared in other of my films; I haven't labeled him as such but there's usually a figure or a moment in those films which is my 'Lucifer' moment..."<sup>1</sup> Coming shortly after the release of **Invocation of My Demon Brother** (1969), these comments mark a significant change in Anger's way of "working in Light": from an implicit expression of light's visionary powers, to an explicit illustration of a mythology of light, in which Lucifer is the reigning deity.<sup>2</sup>

Though the precise role of Lucifer is obscure in **Invocation of My Demon Brother**, Anger has said that his own ceremony as Magus is consumed in that film when "the Bringer of Light — Lucifer — breaks through."<sup>3</sup> In both versions of **Lucifer Rising** (1973 and 1980), Lucifer is a clearly identified character, whose presence is, again, the result of a magical ceremony performed by Anger as Magus. Taken as a whole, that film is less about Lucifer, than it is about the symbols, rituals and direct manifestations of energy (natural, supernatural and extra-terrestrial) that accompany his "rising," but there can be no doubt that since Anger began planning and shooting material for **Lucifer Rising** in the late 1960's, Lucifer has held the center of his concerns as a filmmaker.<sup>4</sup>

The earlier films do not show us Lucifer, but they have, as Anger says, "'Lucifer' moments." These are moments when the special power of light manifests itself directly, without the mediation of Lucifer or the signs, symbols and rituals of his worship.<sup>5</sup> They are evidence that long before Lucifer became the personification and visual correlative of light, Anger was aware of light's visionary powers, and was capable of embodying these powers in images that any viewer might respond to — that is to say, images whose significance is not buried in the works of Aleister Crowley and the occult traditions he espoused. This is not to deny Anger's indebtedness to Crowley — evidence of which abounds in interviews with Anger, his notes on his films and the films themselves — but it **is** to argue that the most powerful "magic" of Anger's films is there to be seen by anyone whose eyes are open to the light of the films, and whose mind is open to the visionary traditions of art and religion which both East and West have harbored.

It was Aldous Huxley's little book, **Heaven and Hell**, that led me to this conclusion, and it is Huxley's expression, "preternatural light," that I will use in discussing the visionary experience evoked by Anger's pre-"Lucifer" films. Therefore, I will begin with a brief summary of Huxley's exposition.

"Preternatural light" is Huxley's term for the peculiar luminosity of objects seen during a visionary experience. In **Heaven and Hell**, Huxley makes a comparative study of such experiences, drawing his evidence from reports of experiments with sensory deprivation and hallucinogenic drugs (including his own experience with mescaline), as well as from the testimony of seers and mystics, poets and visual artists. He finds that visionary experiences have certain visual features in common. "First and most important," he says, "is the experience of light. Everything seen by those who visit the mind's antipodes is brilliantly illuminated and seems to shine from within. All colours are intensified to a pitch far beyond anything seen in the normal state, and at the same time the mind's capacity for recognizing fine distinctions of tone and hue is notably heightened."<sup>6</sup> Whatever is seen in "the remoter regions of our mind" seems characterized by "preternatural light, preternatural intensity of colouring, preternatural significance" (p.82).

The writings of visionaries, Huxley notes, make repeated reference to gemstones, pearls, gold and silver, crystal and glass; in other words, to those materials in our normal, non-visionary world that are most luminescent, most intensely glowing with colour, and therefore most like the "self-luminous objects" seen by the visionary. As a characteristic example, Huxley quotes from the Hindu **Ramayana**: "The country all around is covered by jewels and precious stones, with gay beds of blue lotus, golden-petalled. Instead of sand, pearls, gems, and gold form the banks of the rivers, which are overhung with trees of fire-bright gold" (p.83). A Biblical counterpart to this vision of the "Other World," is found in the Book of Ezekiel: "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald and the carbuncle, and gold... Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire" (p.84).

What, asks Huxley, is the reason for this abundance of precious stones and metals in visions of "Other Worlds"? The usual "pie in the sky" explanation — that the masses believe their Heavens and Edens to be decorated with objects of wealth and luxury because they lack such things in this world — does not satisfy Huxley. It does not explain why "precious stones should have come to be regarded as precious in the first place." The correct explanation, Huxley suggests, is that "precious stones are precious because they bear a faint resemblance to the glowing marvels seen with the inner eye of the visionary" (p.86).

Furthermore, Huxley argues, "Whatever, in nature or in a work of art, resembles one of those intensely significant, inwardly glowing objects encountered at the mind's antipodes, is capable of inducing, if only in a partial and attenuated form, the visionary experience" (p.87). Hence the gleaming altars and glowing stained-glass windows in the cavernous gloom of medieval cathedrals; hence the gold and silver, the bejeweled and pearl-encrusted art and artifacts at the shrines throughout the world. "Polished metals and precious stones are so intrinsically transporting," says Huxley, "that even a Victorian,

even an Art Nouveau jewel is a thing of power. And when to this natural magic of glinting metal and self-luminous stone is added the other magic of noble forms and colours artfully blended, we find ourselves in the presence of a genuine talisman" (p.88).

Kenneth Anger draws upon the same "natural magic of glinting metal and self-luminous stone" to create cinematic equivalents of the "talismans" Huxley so eloquently describes. The basis of that equivalence is **light**: light with the gem-like intensity of a visionary experience. Anger's most literal and unambiguous association of light with the vision-inducing power of precious stones and metal appears in the opening sequence of **Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome** (1954, revised 1960, 1966, 1978). From a glowing "horizon," soft beads of light climb slowly upward. Then, as the focus sharpens, the lights are revealed to be a string of diamond-like gems rising from the floor to a bed. Supine on the bed, Lord Shiva (as Anger identifies his protagonist) slowly wraps the string of gems around his hand. After languorously selecting several sumptuous rings from his bedside table and slipping them on his fingers, he lowers the dangling gems into his mouth, and swallows them.

This strange opening is echoed three times in the film. Lord Shiva subsequently swallows a large crystal pendant, a pearl, and a gold-link snake — each a gift ceremoniously presented by one of his guests. In a description of the film, Anger identifies each gift as a "talisman,"<sup>7</sup> which calls to mind Huxley's description of a Victorian or Art Nouveau jewel as a "genuine talisman." For Anger, as for Huxley, the source of this talismanic power is **light**. The soft focus opening of **Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome** makes the gems look like small spots of light. By sharpening the focus as the shot continues, Anger cinematically "explains" that the light has taken the shape of precious stones. Although he hardly belabours the point, Anger has opened his film by demonstrating the source of the gem's potency (in terms that Huxley's discussion makes even clearer), and has provided a clue to the symbolic significance of swallowing the string of gems, the crystal pendant, the pearl and the gold snake. In material forms resembling the self-luminous objects of the visionary experience, Lord Shiva is ritually ingesting light itself.

These rituals suggest a Eucharistic ceremony, and in a headnote to one of his descriptions of the film, Anger quotes Aleister Crowley: "A Eucharist of some sort should most assuredly be consumed daily by every magician, and he should repeat it as the main sustenance of his magical life. It is of more importance than any other magical ceremony, because it is a complete circle... The magician becomes filled with God, fed upon by God, intoxicated with God. Little by little his body will become purified by the internal lustration of God..."<sup>8</sup> Through this association of the jewels with the Eucharist, Anger implies that it is not enough simply to possess and contemplate these "talismans" of light. They must be consumed, if their vision-inducing power is to be released. Then Lord Shiva may be "purified by the internal lustration of God."<sup>9</sup>

If preternatural light may be taken internally — so to speak — it may be administered externally as well. It may be put on the body and worn like the rings Lord Shiva puts on before swallowing the string of gems, or the three large silver rings the protagonist of **Scorpio Rising** (1963) chooses for himself before going to the motorcyclists' party. Other motorcyclists cover themselves with vision-inducing ornaments, as Anger memorably records in the "Blue Velvet" sequence of **Scorpio Rising** — a sequence which may be more fully appreciated if we first examine the dressing scene in the early film fragment, **Puce Moment** (1949).

Anger introduces that film with a parade of elaborately sequined dresses. As each dress approaches the camera, it passes in and out of focus, and as it does so its sequins become dancing dots of light against colored backgrounds. That effect is most striking when the last dress appears: a black gown whose sequins flicker and gleam like a myriad of stars in a black sky. This is the dress the film's heroine puts on. She raises her arms above her head and laughs ecstatically as the dress descends, enveloping her in a sheath of glinting lights. To don the dress is to enjoy a "transporting" experience — as the pop songs on the sound track clearly announce: "My mind will listen to the stars... my mind is in the air..." and, "Yes, I am a hermit, my mind is not the same. Yes, I am a hermit, and



ecstasy is my game." Parts of **Puce Moment** appear in the superimposed material at the climax of **Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome**, giving further evidence that the dresses are "talismans" of "preternatural light."

In **Scorpio Rising** the clothes of the motorcyclists take on a similarly visionary significance. Against black leather and deep blue cloth the silver studs, chains, buckles, amulets and trinkets shine with exceptional brilliance, and in some shots flash their reflected light directly into the eyes of the audience. During this "dressing adagio," as Anger has called it,<sup>10</sup> camera movement and montage meld the slow, studied gestures of the men into a continuous flow. The result is a mood that rises above mere sensuality and self-indulgence. It suggests reverence for these light-bearing garments.

The same mood and movement accompanies Anger's presentation of those objects most radiant with "the natural magic of glinting metal": the motorcycles themselves. A chain becomes linked lights in velvety darkness. The rounded edge of a gas tank emits brilliant rays of light. The bars, tubes and cylinders of polished chrome gleam like intricate jewelry. In the nighttime streets, the motorcycles not only glitter with reflected light, but shine their headlights blindingly into our eyes as we look at the screen. Decorated with blinking lights, the motorcycle presides over the cyclists' revelry like a sacred effigy. Throughout **Scorpio Rising**, the motorcycle is shown to be a "genuine talisman" and "a thing of power," not because of its size, noise or horsepower, nor because of its popular associations with speed, gangs and violence, but because of the gleaming luster with which it hints at "the glowing marvels seen with the inner eye of the visionary."

If **Scorpio Rising** hints at the supernal power in gleaming metal, **Kustom Kar Kommandos** (1964) dwells on it. If preternatural light is glimpsed against the darkness of deep-shadowed garages, black leather and night in **Scorpio Rising**, it boldly and steadily shines forth in **Kustom Kar Kommandos**. If parts of the motorcycles are sometimes jewel-like, the customized car is, itself, a single, complete jewel. Placed on display in a clean, well-lighted room, it is attended by a blond young man in pristine blue, who worshipfully dusts it with a feathery white puff. Anger's gliding camera movement and smoothly articulated montage turn the car's polished surfaces into silvery streams of light, leaving no doubt that we are being shown a "genuine talisman."

In **Heaven and Hell** Huxley complained that modern technology, along with advertising and the mass distribution of manufactured goods, had made intense light, gleaming surfaces and brilliant colors so commonplace that they had lost their visionary powers. But Anger understands — as Huxley apparently did not — that even the products of modern technology can be transformed into vessels of preternatural light. By carefully capturing their brilliant flashes of reflected light, Anger turns them into visual equivalents of precious stones and metals. Then, to make the "precious" become "preternatural," he gives the light a life of its own, and while our attention is attracted by the sensuous beauty of sequined dresses, studded black leather, or chromium motor parts, he slips the light past our conscious awareness and into "the antipodes of the mind," in Huxley's phrase, where all experience is visionary.

The work that most completely exemplifies this process is **Eaux D'Artifice** (1953), where water is the "medium" for preternatural light. Fountains, pools, streams and falls glitter in the deep blue shadows of the garden, and even stone surfaces gleam as the water glazes them with liquified light. In one particularly elegant sequence, slow motion transforms thin sprays of water into streaks and beads of light that glitter like gems strung across the deep blue darkness. It is a triple transformation: water into light into gems. These gems could, indeed, be swallowed by Lord Shiva, but they are consumed by our eyes instead.

Similar, if briefer, images appear in close-ups of the motorcycles in **Scorpio Rising**, the customized motor in **Kustom Kar Kommandos**, and the black sequined dress in **Puce Moment**. The flow of light in **Scorpio Rising** and **Kustom Kar Kommandos** follows the intricate structure of mechanical parts. In **Eaux D'Artifice** and **Puce Moment** the light is less tightly patterned, but in every case the flickers and gleams shine out against a blue-black background — not like disembodied, abstract designs, but like patterns of energy shimmering with a peculiar, mercurial solidity. They are the purest and most autonomous expressions of preternatural light in Anger's films.

They are not there simply for visionary delight. They are directly related to a major and recurrent theme of Anger's work the deep yearning to unite with the light; to swallow it, wear it, ride on it, or — like the young man in **Kustom Kar Kommandos** — climb inside and enclose oneself within it. All of Anger's films develop this theme, to one degree or another, even those that lack sustained images of preternatural light. Examples would be the two films that have, so far, gone unmentioned in this discussion of Anger's work: **Fireworks** (1947) and **Rabbit's Moon** (shot in 1950, released in 1972 and revised in 1980).

In **Rabbit's Moon**, Pierrot repeatedly and fruitlessly grasps at his source of light, the moon. He then pursues, with equal lack of success, the lovely Columbine, whom he has "created" with the light of his magic lantern. At the film's end, he falls lifelessly to earth, destroyed by his unsatisfied yearnings. In **Fireworks**, the protagonist, who is played by Anger himself, also "goes out in the night seeking 'a light.'"<sup>11</sup> Unlike Pierrot, however, he succeeds. He finds a sailor-lover whose penis is a Roman candle sizzling with sparks and ejaculating flares of light. In response, the protagonist wears a headress made of a sparkling Christmas tree. Finally, as the lover lies in bed, a corolla of light (scratched by Anger into the film's emulsion) surrounds his head. From head and from loins has come evidence that he is, indeed, the bearer of light sought by the protagonist.

The two themes of the film, the sexual and the visionary, reinforce each other (a mutual reinforcement that is not without precedent in the history of magic, mysticism and the more esoteric practices of some religions). Anger emphasizes his double theme in the over-heated prose of a Prologue: "In **Fireworks**," we hear Anger say, "I released all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream. Inflammable desires damped by day under the cold water of consciousness are ignited at night by the libertarian matches of sleep, and burst forth in showers of shimmering incandescence. These imaginary displays provide a temporary relief." In recent prints, Anger has replaced the spoken Prologue with a single flash of lightning, perhaps to emphasize the visionary over the sexual implications of his search for "a light."

By the time he made this change in the opening of **Fireworks**, "a light," for Anger, had become **the** Light, Lucifer, but the theme of yearning to unite with the Light had remained essentially the same — as **Invocation of My Demon Brother** proves. Instead of going out in the night to find an incandescent sailor, Anger performs a magical ceremony to produce a smiling Lucifer with moiré-like patterns of light playing over his naked torso. During the ceremony, Anger's own image flashes with preternatural light — a result of spotlights reflecting from the glitter on his face and the sequins on his white robe — and as the ceremony nears its climax, rays of (superimposed) light stream from his forehead. However, his manic expressions and frantic movements (produced by an under-cranked camera) convey none of that serene sense of fulfillment which accompanies the images of preternatural light in **Puce Moment**, **Kustom Kar Kommandos**, the early sequences of **Scorpio Rising**, and preëminantly, **Eaux D'Artifice**.

Anger's most flawlessly realized film, **Eaux D'Artifice** brings theme, imagery and mood into perfect harmony, as the mysterious figure, whose gown and headress duplicate the sparkle and flow of the water, emerges from the plumed jet of a fountain, passes through the garden, and re-enters the water light — literally becoming one with it. For a moment, the human shape seems to remain within the patterns of falling water, and then it is gone, absorbed into the down-flowing light.

With its direct revelation of preternatural light, and its triumphant fulfillment of the yearning to become one with the light, the conclusion of **Eaux D'Artifice** can also be seen as Anger's symbol of the visionary experience he wishes to induce in his audience. As the protagonist becomes one with the light, so we, by watching the film's play of preternatural light, may experience a similar union between our vision and the light that animates it. Huxley suggests that contemplating the "glinting metal and self-luminous stone" of a beautiful jewel can transport us "toward the Other World of Vision." Perhaps our contemplation of Anger's cinematic jewels can lead us in the same visionary direction. At the very least, these cinematic manipulations of light are more convincing evidence of Anger's much-vaunted skills as a "magician," than are his displays of magical symbols and ritual invocations of Lucifer.

How susceptible one may be to Anger's "talismans," and how far one may be induced to go into "Other Worlds of Vision," depends, no doubt, on each viewer's susceptibility and willingness to follow Anger's lead. But even a viewer unsympathetic to visionary aspirations should find the concept of preternatural light useful in analyzing Anger's work. It reveals the inter-connected meaning of images that range from jewels, to objects that seem jewel-like in the intensity of their reflected light, to images of "pure" light. In the context of the films themselves, these images are consistently associated with a special — "paranormal," "non-ordinary," "visionary" — state of mind, which the protagonists of the films seem to be seeking. In the context of the audience's relationship to the films, they are images that permit the preternatural light of that mental state to break through the invisible wall of the film medium and shine directly into the eyes and minds of those watching the films. (Anger has said he would prefer to "project the images directly into people's heads.")<sup>12</sup> In the autobiographical context of Anger as "an artist working in Light," they are evidence of a visionary approach to filmmaking that is more positive and constructive than one might expect from Anger's ominous references to film as a "magick weapon," and filmmaking as "casting a spell."<sup>13</sup>

To conclude by pursuing the autobiographical implications a bit further, I would suggest that there is a good deal of truth in Anger's comment that he has been "on a firelight trip" all his life<sup>14</sup> — though, I would give "light" greater emphasis than "fire." He has recalled that as a child, he used Roman candles, silver fountains and other fireworks to create "volcanos" in his back yard. He also liked to play what he calls "light games," using fragments of mirrors to reflect sunlight into the windows of nearby houses and to exchange signals with his brothers. (Here, perhaps, is a source of the sequence in **Lucifer Rising** in which Isis and Osiris produce flashes of lightning by signaling to each other with the light reflected from their golden staffs.)

Anger has often contended that the most formative event of his childhood was playing the role of the changling Indian child in Max Reinhardt's and William Dieterle's 1935 film of **A Mid-Summer Night's Dream**. Dressed in a shiny satin costume and jewelled turban, the three-year-old Anger cavorted with fairies and elves in a sparkling, make-believe forest. He is carried about and caressed by the ethereally gleaming Titania, and then taken away by the ominous Oberon, whose black costume glitters with sequins, and around whom the darkness flashes with crystalline lights. This was his "rite of passage," Anger has said, and his memory of it remains cast in images of light: "Scampering in spangles and plumes through Reinhardt's enchanted wood remains the shining moment of my childhood."<sup>15</sup>

Anger says that Reinhardt's "enchanted wood" was the inspiration for the forest in **Rabbit's Moon**,<sup>16</sup> but **Eaux D'Artifice** comes closer to recreating the spirit, as well as the imagery of that childhood experience. The "heroine" (who is, in fact, a male dwarf disguised in a sparkling gown and headdress<sup>17</sup>), could easily be that child "scampering in spangles and plumes" through a garden as "enchanted" as Reinhardt's wood. The "return" to the watery light in the final moments of the film must draw some of its visual and emotional power from Anger's profound nostalgia for his childhood's "shining moment."

Huxley observes that "the best vision-inducing art is produced by men and women who have themselves had the visionary experience" (p.88). Kenneth Anger seems to have had that experience, and he belongs in the company of visionary artists because he also has had the skill to translate the "shining moments" of his life into the preternatural light of his work.

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Aleister Crowley and Merlin Magick," **Friends**, XIV (September 18, 1970), p.16, quoted in Robert A. Haller, **Kenneth Anger**, Filmmakers Filming Monograph No. 5 (St. Paul and Minneapolis: Film in The Cities and Walker Art Center, 1980), p.8.
2. Although occurring at the same point in Anger's career, the change I am referring to is different from that identified by P. Adams Sitney as a "stylistic change" from "the closed form of (Anger's) early films to a more open form." See **Visionary Film**, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp.128-9.
3. Quoted from Anger's program note reprinted in Sitney, p.130.
4. No full analysis of **Lucifer Rising** has yet appeared; however, some useful discussion, which does not pretend to be definitive, can be found in Caryl Rowe, "Illuminating Lucifer," **Film Quarterly** XXVII, vi (Summer 1974), 24-33 (reprinted in **The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism**, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp.110-19; Linda Dubier, "Identifying Anger," **Atlanta Art Papers**, IV, ii (March-April 1980), 1-3; and Haller, pp. 8-11. Haller also reprints Aleister Crowley's "Hymn to Lucifer" (p.13), the poem on which Anger based **Lucifer Rising**. The most detailed analysis of **Invocation of My Demon Brother** is in Sitney, pp. 130-3. Sitney's chapter on Anger in **Visionary Film** is the fullest available discussion of Anger's career up to the early 1970's.
5. Insightful, but brief, discussions of light in Anger's work appear in Haller, *passim*, and Tony Rayns, "Lucifer: A Kenneth Anger Compendium," **Cinema**, No. 4 (October 1969), 23-31. Neither pursues the line of argument I will present here.
6. **The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell** (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972). p. 75. Subsequent page references are incorporated in the text. **Heaven and Hell** originally appeared as a single volume in 1956.
7. Quoted in Sitney, p. 111.
8. *Ibid.* p. 106.
9. Another, more esoteric, significance to the jewels has been proposed to me by a close student of Crowley's works. Since sexual excitement plays an important role in some of Crowley's magical ceremonies, the vaginal fluids secreted by a sexually aroused priestess are regarded as having great magical power. These fluids are given the specifically gem-like description, "stones of precious water," in Crowley's **The Book of the Law**. Thus, it might be argued that a symbolic consumption of such magically potent "stones" is taking place in the "talisman" scenes of **Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome**. Three of the four jewels are provided by priestess-like women who later take part in the ritualistic **orgia** that concludes the film. In this connection, it is worth noting that the "Scarlet Woman" — one of Crowley's names for his priestess — is a major character in **Inauguration**, and that in **Invocation of My Demon Brother**, a procession is led down a staircase by a woman wearing a scarlet robe and hood, and carrying a wand tipped with a large, clear jewel. As she turns and passes off-screen, the gem emits a brilliant flash of reflected light.
10. Interview with **Spider** magazine, reprinted in **Film Culture**, No. 40 (Spring 1966), 68.
11. From Anger's note on the film quoted in Sitney, p. 97. Of course, there are sexual connotations to the phrase, and the film's overt theme of sexual longing and fulfillment has attracted most critical attention, including Sitney's treatment of **Fireworks** as a "psycho-dramatic trance film" (p. 100). Only Rayns (26-27) and Haller (8) have paid attention to the visionary significance of light in this film.
12. Sitney, p. 133.
13. Quoted in Rowe, 26. Rowe, however, believes the "magic" of the films is in the presentation of magical symbols.
14. Rayns, 26. In addition to Rayns, Rowe, Sitney, and the **Spider** interview, sources of biographical information are **Take One**, I, vi (1967). 12-15; Kenneth Turan, "The Underground Man," **American Film**, I, vi (April 1976), 76-82 and a tape recorded interview with Anger conducted by Stan Brakhage, April 16, 1973, and preserved in the archives of the Media Center, Buffalo, New York.
15. Quoted in Rayns, 23.
16. Haller, p. 16.
17. Rayns (29) also compares this costume to the one worn by Anger in Reinhardt's film.

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# THE CINEMA, MEMORY AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC TRACE

*by Peter Harcourt*

For Martin Duckworth

... **when we are nostalgic, we take pictures.**  
—Susan Sontag (1978)

**There is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so  
intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory.**  
— Goethe (in John Berger, 1980)

In 1970, working at the National Film Board, Martin Duckworth completed a short film that, on the level of intention, might have been just a home movie. On the level of achievement, however, **The Wish** is really something else. Through the intricacy of its structure, the circularity of its form, and the originality of its syntax, the film becomes a disquisition on time, on memory, and on the relationship of the past to the present, of continuity to rupture, of the personal to the historical, and of the ethics of emotional involvement versus aesthetic detachment. The film invokes feelings both of desire and guilt, of presence and absence, of life and death. By intercutting direct cinema footage with stills from the past, the film achieves a dialectic between the sense of how-it-is-happening-now and of how-it-was-then.

"...art mediates between what is given and what is desired." (Berger, p.158) **The Wish** takes as its "given" a visit of Duckworth's own twin daughters, Sylvia and Marya, age about eight, to his parent's summer home on Lac Memphrémagog in the Eastern Townships. Through its actuality footage, the film captures what appears to be a series of unrehearsed events: the girls play on the veranda, they help to clean the house, they go fishing with their grandfather, they all have a picnic in a grave-yard together. On this level, **The Wish** is very much an observational film. However, whether by accident or design, Duckworth disturbs the apparent transparency of his own documentary whenever one of the twins breaks with the agreed fiction that she is not really being filmed and looks at the camera (which is, of course, at her father), Duckworth freezes the frame and cuts away to a series of stills derived from the past. Observation of the present is thus disturbed by its contiguous relationship to that which is past. The living moment is suspended as memory intervenes. As Sontag has written about **Menschen am Sonntag**: "The photographic shock, the flow of the movie — transmitting, in an instant, present into past, life into death." (p. 70) They can also create desire for what is no longer there.

It is the double-sided nature of the concept of representation — the fact that the **presence** of the original is suggested by an artistic representation even while its **absence** is demanded — that explains the peculiar course of desire a representational image — or any other form of representation — evokes. This desire projects itself towards the Other the image represents. It is this that makes the desire impossible to sate, for nothing can retain its Otherness when it is actually present; inherent in the very concept of Otherness is the idea of absence. (Elder, 1982, p.21)

Hence, a filmic record of reality is ideal for someone who wants less to analyse its meaning than to preserve its mystery. It is equally ideal for someone who wishes more to observe a series of events than (at any rate, at the moment of their occurrence) to get involved with them. "Photography is essentially an act of non-intervention... The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene." (Sontag, pp.11-12) To film an apparently spontaneous event is to establish a distance from it — paradoxically within a medium that seems to bring us closer to the surfaces of reality than any other form of the representational arts. Yet through the devices of framing, focusing and camera movement, the technology of the medium is never totally absent from the viewer's consciousness. Only the most unsophisticated of spectators would assume that this closeness to surfaces that we can experience with film eliminates the established distance from which the filmic act began.

In **The Wish**, we have both a narrative and a theoretical complexity: the mother is **wished** for by the children and **desired** by the film. Has she gone away or is she dead? The verbal expression of the children's wish is too private to be more than whispered. It is virtually too private to be shared with the audience, with the intended recipients of the film. Furthermore, the moment of wishing that both opens and closes the film is itself idealized by the selective focus detectable within the image, by the sun on the water sparkling in the background and by the distance established in our minds through the knowledge that the lens is in its telephoto position and finally by the cutaway to Duckworth and his crew — a cutaway that we later realize is diegetically dislocated.

The film begins with its ending and ends with its beginning — but we cannot know that until we get to the end. The film ends with the twins' arrival, thus leaving us with the suggestion that the **real** experience of the visit is yet to take place. Hence the nostalgia, endemic to memory — indeed, to the very essence of photography — is challenged by this final sense we get that what we have witnessed is not what took place.

While moving images might seem to represent a present, they too register an experience that has passed. In **The Wish**, what we have watched is a construct fabricated from different kinds of photographic elements derived from receding moments in time past. Reality, in the brute sense, is yet to be undergone. And for all the detail of documentation, both filmic and photographic, that we have observed in the film, the absent one, the desired one — the wife and mother — is only present in the film in the form of a photographic trace, the existence of which, by confirming her absence, preserves her mystery,

The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance. The lover's photograph hidden in a married woman's wallet, the poster photograph of a rock star up over an adolescent's bed, the campaign-button image of a politician's face pinned on a voter's coat, the snap-shots of a cabdriver's children clipped to the visor — all such talismatic uses of photography express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality. (Sontag, p.16)

Towards the end of **The Wish**, as the colour bleeds out from a freeze-frame to become a still of the two children and their grandparents standing by a tombstone and after the final expression of the wish, once again whispered, when the colour bleeds in on a still to become the scene of the twins' arrival, the effect does indeed seem "magical." This cinematic magic, however, has been designed to signal a key sequence in the film, a crucial moment of "bonding" or of "fusing," of bringing all the elements together; but it is also on another level very much the result of the film's technical polish, of its emotional sensitivity, and of the authority of its form.

By way of a more detailed analysis, one might offer three structuring principles that inform **The Wish**:

1. First of all, there is the gaze — the gaze of both of the twins as they look directly at us and of the photographs that these frozen moments in time introduce. Being lodged within a narrative, these family photographs are rescued from what Barthes has called "the vast disorder of objects." (Barthes, 1981, p.6) While they are obviously "an emanation of the referent," (Barthes, p.80) these photographs refer collectively both to a sense of the past and to a sense of loss. "The realists do not take a photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of **past reality: a magic**, not an art." (Barthes, p.88) The photographs are all self-conscious. They are all intensely **posed**, as if indeed to deliver up their "essence." (Elder, p.48) For me, however, their collective "**punctum**" resides in the fact that they all involve holding.

Although severed from the present by their place in time past, the characters in these photographs are all joined together. A little girl (is she the grandmother?) stands on a smiling man's shoulders, while hints of country music are whispered in the background. Near the beginning of the film, we see a shot of the youthful Martin holding one of the twins; then another shot of a woman whom we cannot yet know is the mother holding the other twin; and then there is a four-shot of all of them, united now in the present moment within the frame as they used to be in the past in their life together. As in all the other photographs in the film, while holding one another the characters gaze out at us like some kind of plea, as if asking to be remembered, accepted, understood — as if wanting to be freed from their entombed space in time past and merged once again with the present.

This touching motif is also strongly present within the actuality footage, between the girls themselves and their grandparents — but never, inevitably, between the girls and their parents. With their immediate past, the twins are apparently "out-of-touch."

2. There is an opposition between severance and suture that is also intimately structured into the form of the film. Throughout **The Wish**, there is a deliberate dislocation of space and time within the images and between the images and the sounds. This dislocation simultaneously parallels and kinaesthetically re-creates the disjunctive, non-linear nature of memory and dreams.

The second shot of the film provides a characteristic example. After the twins have been established with their wishbone making their wish, we cut away to a group-shot of Martin with his crew, as if presenting a point-of-view, as if shooting the opening shot. But the image cannot suture in the way it appears to be doing. It is "irrational" (in the sense that a drawing by Escher or an equation in algebra can be described as irrational). It doesn't fully match.

To begin with, although the twins have been established together by the lake, the camera in tight close-up panning from one to the other, thus "joining" them within the shot, one of the twins is also present in the group-shot of the crew. Furthermore, by the time we cut



back to the twins and hear Martin questioning them about their wish, not only is the distance implied by the sound of his voice different from the distance implied by the long-shot of the crew but the girls have changed their position within the frame. There is something in these dislocations, in this "irrational" quality (even if just **sensed** on an initial viewing) that creates a feeling of anxiety in the film, that contributes to its sense of loss and its desire.

By the end of the film, while these disjunctions are resolved in terms of the narrative (the group-shot of the crew is placed within a sequence that shows the twins arriving during the penultimate scene of the film), the anxiety remains. This longing for merger, this desire to bring the past back to the present, remains unresolved. "We don't know yet," one of the twins replies when asked about their wish. "So far," says the other. Then the Kodak punch marks flash through the image as it freezes on this note of non-resolution. The punch marks imply that an arbitrary ending has been imposed on **The Wish** (they simply ran out of film); so the mystery is preserved.

3. While there are many other examples of disjunction and dislocation within **The Wish** — most obvious is the train journey to the cottage that appears in the middle of the film — the third structuring principle that I would like to discuss as central revolves around the motif of the palimpsest. This also evokes ideas of changes over time, always with the potential of a sense of something lost.

An actual palimpsest is present in the film in the form of an old French manual from 1850. It has been transformed into a cook-book. Similarly, in one scene we see the girls dressing up in old clothes and in yet another we see that someone is using the grandmother's old house in a new way. Artefacts from the past are utilized to bring about transformations. So Martin Duckworth has utilized his own past to bring about this film.

This transformational process is most intricately associated with the use of two stills. Let us call them "the Tombstone still" and "the Arrival still." For it is not true (as I have implied) that all the stills in **The Wish** are derived from the past. Some of them are stolen from the actuality footage, their colour erased, and they are introduced into the film's structure, once as a recapitulation (the crew-shot still) but generally as anticipations of moments yet to come.

Both the Tombstone still and the Arrival still appear several times in the course of the film; and like the cutaway to the crew at the opening, these stills can create anxiety because, if we are watching the film closely, we can recognize that they do not fully match the "real" stills that are derived from the past. These freeze-frame stills, on the contrary, anticipate the future — or at least a future moment in the narrative when their purpose will be resolved. Furthermore, this sense of anticipation which builds in the film also contributes, kinaesthetically, to the film's desire. As spectators, we too want these tensions of anxiety to be resolved.

The graveyard sequence is rich in the twin associations of death and life, contrasting as it does the immobility of the tombstones with the energy of the children; and like the still photographs, the tombstones also contain traces of the past, of the local family history. They refer to what is absent (those who have died) and what is yet to come (those who will die). Indeed, it is largely because the girls' wish is associated with this sequence that we might defensibly assume that their mother is dead.

"Will you come home?" or "Will you come home again?" This wish has twice been heard before in the film (if our ears are attentive and the acoustics favourable): once over an earlier shot of the Tombstone still and once again over a still of the mother. This time, it is slow in preparation.

After their lunch, during which Marya had asked her question about dying and burying, the children have been playing about the graveyard, looking for signs of the grandparents' past. Marya discovers the Ball tombstone which is the burial site of the grandmother's family. Sylvia runs off to fetch the grandparents, and then they all gather round it in contemplation of this collective trace of death. The action ceases, the image freezes, the col-

our bleeds out, and it becomes the Tombstone still that we have seen several times before; and once again we hear one of the twins whisper: "Will you come home?" Then the four-shot that we have also already seen of the young Martin and his wife and children, and then we cut to the Arrival still (which also restates the "touching" motif) as the colour bleeds in and the arrival scene begins.

This bleeding of the colour, here very much like a palimpsest, out and in again, framing the final references to the past and the whispered hope for the future, recapitulates with enormous formal authority both the death/life oppositions that inform the film and the statement of the children's wish and of the film's desire. Furthermore, this formal authority helps to create the extreme delight (indeed, **une jouissance** (Barthes, 1975, p.4)) that we can experience from an art work in which an aesthetic problem has been so innovatively resolved.

Arguably, it is also the formal authority of this film that helps to imply a loss beyond that of the actual mother, the loss (in fact) of a whole way of life. "No fish!" one of the twins exclaims when they return from trolling with their grandfather; and during a later moment when the grandfather goes out alone, all he brings back is "one medium perch." Next time, as he says, he hopes to bring back "something worthwhile." There is thus throughout this film a generalized feeling of something-that-was-there-then that-is-not-here-now. All these connotative details re-inforce the sense of loss and absence; and it is through the authority of their deployment that personal nostalgia can initiate an art work, that empirical film practice can (as Goethe has suggested) itself imply theory, and that — indeed — traces of the physical can suggest the metaphysical: that which lies beyond.

"These ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives." (Sontag, p.9) Will the mother return? The twins cannot know. But other questions are suggested by the film to which there are no easy answers. They too become part of its mystery, part of its generalized sense of **angst**.

While not wishing to get trapped in the intentional fallacy that would involve Martin Duckworth the man, I might nevertheless approach this matter another way by asking a highly speculative question: why was this film made? Could we suggest hypothetically that, like most family photographs, the making of the film initially had something to do with the preservation of memory?

Memory implies a certain act of redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. What is forgotten has been abandoned. (Berger, P.54)

Kracauer also believed that through its articulation of the natural, photography could "redeem" reality, that it could atone for past sins. How it may be an extrapolation to speak about the feeling of guilt that one may derive from **The Wish** (i.e., the feeling may be my own); at the same time this feeling is re-inforced by another "personal" film that Duckworth made at the Film Board in 1973.

Although perhaps less finely nuanced, **Accident** is structured in much the same way. While simulating a crash sequence for a film about flight that Duckworth was making with Pat Crawley, the plane actually crashed. The pilot was killed and Pat Crawley, who was filming from inside the plane, was seriously injured. Crawley's footage of the crash survived as did Duckworth's (of course) who was filming from the ground. Although the flight film was cancelled, Duckworth went on to make **Accident** which basically investigates Crawley's feelings during the crash, indeed the "vision" that he experienced during what he was sure would be the moment of his own death.

It would require another paper to investigate this film. I mention it briefly, however, simply to suggest certain parallels between **Accident** and **The Wish**. **Accident** also alternates black-&-white with colour sequences and it also makes use of interpolated photographs. If the structure of each film implies a dialectic between how-it-is-happening-now and how-it-was-then (as I have said), one might also sense a more speculative tension at work in each film.

In **Accident**, Duckworth might have been in the plane. He might have been killed. In **The Wish**, the mother might not have left; and if the children's wish is to be honoured (it is honoured in the film with the delicacy of a prayer), she might come home. Thus there is in these films the additional dialectic between how-it-was-then and how-it-might-have-been. It is the possibility of perceiving in these films this more speculative tension that makes each film, whether in Berger's or Kracauer's sense of the term, seem like an act of redemption. And where there is a need for redemption there has always been a feeling of guilt.

This feeling, finally, is inescapable for all photography and all actuality footage that draws its raw material from actions of living concern. All images of real people are in one sense predatory. They can create simultaneously a feeling of extreme pleasure and of moral unease. If all images are emanations from the referent, then in a certain sense something from the referent has been taken away. Even the extraordinary form of **The Wish**, a film that literally tells its story backwards, on reflection can create an aftertaste of personal manipulation — perhaps all the more serious if we think of it in terms of a father "manipulating" the reality of his two daughters. "Reality is summed up in an array of casual fragments — an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way to deal with the world." (Sontag, p.80) And later on Sontag suggests that "photography inevitably entails a certain patronizing of reality." (p.80) Actual people and actual events have been utilized to create a cinematic reality in which, finally, they have no part.

While endemic to both the photographic and the documentary process, these moral considerations scarcely detract from the achievement of **The Wish**. With its fragmented form, its richness of connotation, the sense that it conveys of a past that can barely be heard (the hints of gigue music) and of a future that can scarcely be hoped for, **The Wish** is finally a philosophical poem about the nature of time and memory which celebrates the precariousness of the living moment within an irrational world pervaded by loss and need. The film is unique within the history of cinema. It ought to be better known.

Peter Harcourt  
Ottawa, September, 1982

### Sources

First of all, I would like to thank Kaja Silverman, Ron Burnett, and especially Bruce Elder for the many helpful suggestions that they have offered me in the course of preparing this article. I have also gained direct insights from the following texts:

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# "ALL THINGS IN THEIR TIMES"

*by R. Bruce Elder*

**(Continued from Cine-Tracts No. 9)**

The transformation in the characteristics during the transition from the modernist to the postmodernist era of art work, which I have described in the previous installment of this article, are so profound and far-reaching that they suggest there occurred a change in the very programme which artistic endeavour was understood to carry out. This, I would argue, is true; in fact, I would argue the change was so profound that it reached down into and radically altered the theoretical context which subtended the practice of making art.

The theoretical underpinning of the earlier stages of modernist art (abstract expressionism, for example) were drawn from the aesthetic philosophies of expressionism, Jungian psychoanalysis and existentialism. With the development of minimalism, notions drawn from these fields were replaced with notions drawn from perceptual theory, phenomenology and linguistics. As one would expect, the effect of replacement was to shift the primary concern of artistic practice away from essentialistic and ontological problems to phenomenological and epistemological problems.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, minimalism represents a turning point in recent art history: in some of its formal strategies, it manifests the enduring effect of the modernist tradition; in others, it reveals the profound transformation which occurred in the conceptual base underlying artistic production and which continues to affect post-modernist art as it has developed up to this point.

As for other post-modernist artists, for Snow questions of perceptual theory are paramount: as evidence one need only consider that the titles of several of his works — for example, **Blind, Sight, A Wooden Look, Scope, Glares, Hearing Aid** and **New York Eye and Ear Control** — themselves reveal an interest in the nature of the perceptual response.

But what, we must ask, are the specific modalities of experience with which Snow deals and what is the relation between his analysis of perception (for his works are decidedly analytic in character) and the form which his art work assumes? Let us begin our response by noting the evident fact that most of his films, and much of his art in general, possess very simple predetermined shapes. While such simple shapes are undeniably correlated to the simple **gestalts** which characterized minimalist art, they have, in his works, a specific and unique function. This uniqueness of this function depends upon the fact that film alone, of all the visual arts, is also an art of time. For this reason, the simple shape of a film can, and in Snow's work usually does, act as a diagramme of its temporal form.<sup>2</sup> It serves, then, to convert a temporal into a spatial form, giving to that temporal form the same precision and definiteness of a form existing in space. One is tempted to say, with only the slightest degree of hyperbole, that such simple shapes, by converting fluid temporal forms into diagrammatic spatial forms, act to arrest the flow of time, making of time an enduring thing.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, a diagrammatic shape acts to hypostatize the experience of time. The radicalness of such an enterprise can best be understood in relation to the temporal features of innovative cinema at the time when Snow came to make film. The temporal rhetoric of that cinema had largely been developed by Brakhage; the speed of his cutting, the intensity of his camera movement, the continual displacement of one sort of imagery by imagery of entirely another sort (for example, flat imagery by deep, hand drawn or scratched images by photographic etc.) acted to deny the sense of temporal continuum and to provoke a gaze that is so intense and fascinated that it can properly be called ecstatic. Thus, one feels, when watching a film by Brakhage, that past and future have been eliminated (one neither engages in recollection of past events nor in anticipation of future events); the primary temporal impression afforded by these works is that of a continuous present.<sup>4</sup>

The modality of temporal experience elicited by Snow's film is of a very different character. Far from being caught up in the flow of time, one is, by the hypostatization of the experience of time that the diagrammatic shapes of his films elicit, as well as by the **longeurs** which characterize them, encouraged to stand back from the experience of time and to inquire into the manner in which it is constituted. His films, then, elicit an analytic rather than an ecstatic response.

The analytic act, obviously, is one that depends upon identifying and splitting apart differentiated units. For this reason, it is essential for Snow's work to create a temporal form which includes a variety of characteristics (pastness, presentness and futurity) rather than singularity of the continuous present found in the work of Brakhage. Moreover, the analytic act involves by its very nature the division of object into "static" parts. Thus, the mode of experience elicited by Snow's work has as its object a static object of reflection constituted by an intellectual act.

I am, however, being a little too casual about the description of the experience of watching a film by Michael Snow, — or at least too one-sided, inasmuch as I am failing to indicate the double-sided nature of that experience. For, in a sense, Snow also re-instates the sense of the continuum of time, of the flow from past to present to future, into film. Thus, in addition to hypostatized and static object of reflection, there is a second object, the object of perception, the temporal character of which is uniform and identical in all its parts, and which smoothly unfolds in a cohesive field of time. The opposition between these two objects suggests the difference between an object existing in space and an event which unfolds in time. The duality between these two suggests the duality between the **object** "film" (a strip of celluloid) and the **event** "film" which plays out on a projector.<sup>5</sup>

As we also noted, correlated with each of these two objects is a specific mode of experiencing the object.<sup>6</sup> This duality is important for several reasons. In part, its importance depends upon the manner in which the distinction points out a fundamental tension that

exists in all aesthetic experience. For the aesthetic experience itself involves both an engrossed and fascinated response and a detached, distanced and critical response. To further explore the importance of each of these modes of response, some further clarity about their nature must be attained.

In a quotation given in the introduction to this issue of **Cine-Tracts**, Husserl notes the way in which self-reflection by stepping outside of the flow of impressions, reveals the existence of the transcendental subject. Similarly, I would argue, the effect of the reflexive mode of experience elicited by Snow's films is to reinstate the transcendental subject in film, or at least filmmaking of independent persuasion. Brakhage's hallucinated gaze had disrupted and dismembered spatial and temporal continuity, leaving no place and time, **no site**, for the subject, particularly, no place for the transcendental subject, for the intensity of gaze Brakhage's films elicited demanded a subject totally occupied in perceptive rather than apperceptive acts. Snow's cinema, in re-establishing a coherent space and thus, re-establishing a site for the transcendental subject was, for many, particularly gratifying, since the sense of transcendental subject is that of a point of stability, of an enduring centre underlying all change. This point, of course, is "the central region" referred to in the film of that title.

We have, then, in Snow's cinema, two subjects, the perceiving and the reflective transcendental subject related to two objects awareness, the film in flux and its hypostatized relative. The various interrelations possible between these two pairs of objects becomes, for Snow, an important resource to be explored. In this way, his work becomes a consideration of the modalities of aesthetic experience itself.

No one, at this point in the history of the avant-garde film could reasonably contest the importance of its place in the history of cinema is secure. But it was not for this reason alone I chose to deal with the film at some length. It was also because the film has played an important role within the history of the avant-garde film in Canada. That particular film, as well as the theoretical context within which it exists, and which it helped to define, have had many profound and far-reaching effects, but none of them is, in my view, more important than the creation of a duality of objects of awareness and of modes of experience. The strategies by which this was achieved have been absorbed into the work of so many other Canadian experimental filmmakers as to have become somewhat commonplace.

In tracing this influence, let us begin with work of the West Coast filmmaker, David Rimmer, and in particular, with his best known film, **Surfacing on the Thames**. That film is based upon a ten-second piece of "found footage" of two ships passing each other as they move in opposite directions along the River Thames. Each film was rear-projected and filmed for several seconds, then lap-dissolved into the succeeding frame.

Like Snow, and unlike the generation of modernists who were largely committed to abstraction,<sup>7</sup> Rimmer's work has, as a kind of ideal, the inclusion of representational imagery. Like Snow's, it aspires towards, (in Snow's words) a "balancing of illusion and fact"; in his works, we find the representational illusion both presented and subverted. In **Surfacing on the Thames**, as in others of Rimmer's films, (for example, **The Dance** and **Waiting for the Queen**) the importance attached to representation is indicated by the use of found footage.

Furthermore, in Rimmer's work, as in Snow's, the non-illusionistic aspect of the work does not displace the illusionistic; it simply, again Snow's words, "balances" it. This can be seen in the fact that neither filmmaker typically uses teleological structures based upon the film's progress towards abstraction or structures which formally suggest the film's movement towards recovering its essential purity.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of Rimmer's more admirable qualities as a filmmaker is, in my estimation, the extraordinary delicateness of the means by which he subverts the illusionistic effects of cinematic imagery.

This quality is much in evidence in his handling of motion in **Surfacing on the Thames**. That film, of course, based on the reduction of the film's kinesis to an almost, but not quite, imperceptible level. This reduction is accomplished primarily by extending all movements represented in the film across greater periods of time than they would normal-

ly occupy. Indeed, the freeze-frame, the device upon which the film finally rests, gives the film lengthy periods of complete stasis.

This reduction of the film's kinesis has three effects. By extending any movement over a period of time of sufficient length as to make its frame-to-frame variations perceptible, even in their subtlest details, Rimmer makes us aware of the material substrate which conditions the illusion which this film also, at another of its levels, makes use of. The effect is re-inforced by other features which also serve to call attention to the film's materiality.<sup>9</sup> The film has, for example, an unusually grainy texture produced by the process of rephotography.

By so exaggerating the granular texture of the filmic image, Rimmer accords to the picture plane an additional degree of strength. This, of course, sets up a relationship between the depth of the original image and the surface of picture. Thus, he creates a balance between the three-dimensional imagery and the two-dimensional picture plane, between background and foreground. This sort of "balance" which we earlier discovered as a trait of Snow's work and of other post-modernists is uncharacteristic of the work of modernist artists, for whom the purity of the two-dimensional space and reduction of all elements to the picture plane was of crucial importance.

A second important feature of extending the recorded movement is to deflect one's attention away from the film's micromorphological structures towards its macromorphological structures, that is, towards the film's wholistic shape. This, too, tends to further exaggerate the stasis which characterizes the film, for it converts the temporal flow of the film into a diagrammatic shape.

The third effect is a consequence of the effect just described. By converting the temporal flow of the film into diagrammatic shape, Rimmer elicits a particularly analytic mode of consciousness, making it possible for the view to subject the vagaries of temporal experience to intensive analysis. Thus, in a characteristically post-modernist fashion, Rimmer's work engages with epistemological questions for his concern is with analysis of questions concerning temporal experience, of how experience evolves in time.

Another feature of this work that situates it within the context of post-modernist art is his inclusion of "accidents" which inevitably occur in the process of creating a work, in this case, in the process of rephotography. Rimmer did not rework or exclude those portions of film in which particles of dirt or hair appeared, as they seem always to do, in the process of reprinting. In allowing these "accidents" to reveal themselves, Rimmer is reminding us of the process by which the work is generated.

This reference to production process is distinctly post-modernist rather than modernist in character. Modernism had conceived of the art work as totally autonomous; its ideal was a structure which would be completely comprehensible apart from any consideration of any "genetic factors," whether those factors be features of the artist's personality, of the social formation in which he lived or of the production process itself. A work of art, one often heard it alleged, was capable of being completely exhausted in the act of perception itself. The reference to feature of the production process acted to break the work of art out of that sort of self-containment so highly prized by artists of modernist persuasion.

Wieland's early film work, too, shows the influence of the post-modernism which Snow pioneered. One of the most important features of her work is the relaxation of the rigours of formalist/materialist work. This is indicated in the way in which her work often includes anecdote, symbol and sentimental references. Most important, however, is the way in which she has used a diversity of material in her film work, including representational imagery and written texts. **Solidarity** is exemplary in this respect: the film is composed primarily of images of the feet of marchers at a strike-bound plant, filmed with a hand-held camera, with the word "solidarity" superimposed over the images exactly in the middle of the screen. On the sound track, we hear the off-screen voice of one of the strike leaders.

The image is resolutely realistic. The ideal of abstraction, so important to many formalist filmmakers is nowhere accepted. Even the meaning of the written text is of considerable

importance. Previously, when written texts had been incorporated in a film,<sup>10</sup> they had been used to affirm the two-dimensional plane upon which it rests.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the "illusion-defeating" potential of the written text, its ability to subvert the illusion of depth, is only a secondary reason for its use.

Written texts in Wieland's films are used partly in order to make possible complex relations between foreground elements (including the text which lies on the picture plane itself) and background elements (the image or at least those portions of which lie in its illusory deep space). Even in this regard, the post-modern character of Wieland's work is apparent, since the category of foreground-background relations had been rejected by modernists since they depended on the articulation of depth.

But there is an even more important reason for her use of the superimposed lettering in this film. The imagery of this film was taken with a mobile hand-held camera; thus the shots of the marchers involve nearly continual movement. The word "solidarity" superimposed so as to appear in the foreground, in fact, right on the picture plane itself, remains static, fixed in the centre of the screen. Now, as gestalt psychologists have proven, a shot with a moving background and a static foreground will appear to have a moving foreground and a static background. Thus the word "solidarity" appears as though it is sliding over the marchers' feet, in precise correlation with the camera's movement. Thus, this construction suggests the actions of the cameraperson herself.

The implication of this is clear. The hand-held camera, brought into prominence by the use of the superimposed lettering, suggests the filmmaker's presence. The word "solidarity" is used to provide evidence of the filmmaker's presence, of her complicity in the act being filmed, and of her support for their cause. It makes clear, then, that the making of this film is a gesture of solidarity for the striking workers. This openness to other than formal concerns, a characteristic feature of Wieland's work, is again not modernist by nature.

In other films, Wieland has dealt with the relation of word and image in other ways; indeed, she has virtually catalogued the possible forms this relationship can assume. The nature of the relationship between word and image in the film **1933** has already been commented upon. In **Reason over Passion** a printed text of the words to "O Canada" appears on the screen for rather extended length of time. This section of the film was followed by one depicting a person mouthing those words. Somewhat later in the film there occurs a section devoid of any image whatsoever but with sound track consisting of re-recording of phonograph disc of a French lesson; the person who gives the lesson is supposed to be speaking to someone named Pierre. While this name at first refers only to fictional character, it is later attached, in a marvellously parodic manner, to Pierre Trudeau. The French lesson thus transformed into an oblique reference to Trudeau's bilingual policies.

The tension between word and image in all of these passages we have described is based on the opposition between the literalness of the words — their potential "specificness" of meaning — and the ambiguity and "polysemicness" of the image which a word restricts through the process of anchoring. This process of anchoring would, of course, have been abhorrent to modernists.

Like the works of Snow and Rimmer this work, too, has the idea of the frame as one of its central concerns. The fact that voice heard on the sound emanates from an off-screen space, as well as the peculiarly restricted reminds the viewer of the presence of a space lying beyond the frame-edge. Wieland points out that frame is not what it was conceived to be in modernist theory, i.e. as a device of containment which, by isolating the space to be filled with forms, defined the perimeters of the total space the constructed forms must fill and so the nature of the forms to be constructed. Rather Wieland points towards a more pluralistic conception of the frame: the frame-edge, it is suggested, insofar as it demarcates in a somewhat arbitrary fashion on-screen space and off-screen space, operates as a transitional rather than a boundary device. It also, Wieland points out, acts as generator of metaphor and thus of meaning.

Like Snow, Wieland, too, cycles material she uses from medium to medium. She has worked not only in film but also in painting, printmaking and quiltmaking. (She has even made a film, a quilt and a painting with the same title, **Reason over Passion**.) In **Hand Tinting**



(1967-68) she used the same dyes she was using in her textile works as a means of colouring film. The application by hand of the dyes led to a streaking of the colours, an effect which tends to disorient the viewer. Too, the irregularities of the hand-tinting, the variations in their intensity and the placement of colours from frame to frame foreground the intermittency of the projection apparatus. These hand-tinted sections occurring between "realistic" shots, create effects of a purely abstract and material order and so foreground film's material substrate. The "descriptive" imagery make a similar reference to the film's materials; in some of the film's images, the grain appears to have swollen, drawing attention to film's emulsion, and occasionally a sprocket perforation appears, drawing attention to the physical properties of the film strip itself. Thus, the film includes purely descriptive imagery, descriptive imagery which has been reworked and purely abstract imagery. I have suggested previously that incorporation of imagery of such a diverse nature has become characteristic of recent filmmaking.

These "illusion defeating-devices" operate in concert with other devices in the film. The film was constructed from material from a Job Corps documentary on which Wieland had worked as cameraperson in the years 1965 and 1966. In making **Hand Tinting**, Wieland edited the footage to emphasize qualities of disjunction and repetition; no action, depicted in the footage is allowed to complete itself, material unrelated to the recreational activities of the poor women is incorporated into the film and certain actions are repeated several times. The effect of this is to distance and to ritualize the depicted actions.

These "illusion defeating-devices" operated on the level of the dismemberment of pictorial continuity. The use of dyes operates on a somewhat different level. The tinted sections between the shots creates no illusion of depth whatsoever; the colour appears to lie on the picture plane. Thus, they make reference to the surface of the screen.

My own early work shared several traits with the works already discussed. **She is Away**, for example, is a work whose form is that of compositional matrix incorporating material as diverse as pure colour frames, representational imagery, dream imagery and empty frame. The film employs a very simple structure whose shape, if not exactly diagrammatic is, at least, readily perceptible. The **longeurs** of the film, created through the use of prolonged sections of imageless material serve to remind one of the fact of the film's duration while the minimalization of the "content" evokes a reflective mode of consciousness. As a result, the duration of the film becomes a subject of analytic inquiring.

The use of flares at the frame edge, of abrupt and arbitrary changes of hue and saturation of colour alerts one to the movement of the film through the projector. This, together with the fact that imageless frames articulate no depth at all reminds one that the film is strip of every slight thickness that, in regulated period of time, passes in front of the projector's lamp modulating the light passing through it in accordance with colour characteristics of the strip itself.

## FOOTNOTES

1. This period (1964-1971), was, remember, the era in which Robert Morris produced "Notes on Sculpture," Smithson several texts on entropy, Judd "Specific Objects" and Shartis several texts (including the extraordinary piece "Words per Page").
2. This is most evidently true of **Wavelength**; the well-known conic shape of that film can be understood to stand as a diagramme for our experience on the "flow" of time. The camera movement in that film like the movement of experience of time, is entirely forward directed.
3. In his discussion with Pierre Théberge, Snow makes a comment which probably goes some distance in revealing the impulse behind the act. He told M. Théberge "I think I'm stuck with certain contradiction about not being "at home" in the movement of time because the future and the past are contents of the mind and you can't say the word "present" fast enough for it to fit into the present. One of the interesting things about a still photograph, in the same way a certain painting is the spect of fixing a moment in time which, of course, is also an illusion since like everything else its slowly changing. Experiencing this stopping of time seems to be a refreshment that is demanded occasionally and I suppose it's in the infinite. In that sense, it's slightly religious." Pierre Théberge, "Conversation with Michael Snow," in **Michael Snow** (Kunstmuseum Lazein, 1979), p. 20.
4. This reduction of time to the present is paralleled by the reduction of space to a two dimensional surface in most of Brakhage's work. Hence Snow when he restored the sense of past and future to film also restored deep space to the image.
5. in pointing out the plural character of the filmic objects, Snow's work has obvious affinities with that of Paul Shartis.
6. in the same conversation with Pierre Théberge cited above, Snow remarked "I am interested in trying to direct the spectator to an experience of an image as a "replaying"; as you put it of a past event but also with the present sense of critically seeing this representation that is involved with an image." Snow has thus acutely pointed out how his work moves back and forth between two kinds of perceptions.
7. Rimmer has, at times, veered towards abstraction, as in **Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper**, towards collage, as in **Square Inch Field**, and **Migration**. These works, however, are not generally considered, by those competent to judge, amongst Rimmer's most highly accomplished I believe that any measure of Rimmer's importance must take into account that at a time when other filmmakers around him were still basing their work on the principle of abstraction (consider for example, the work of Keith Rodan), Rimmer began exploring forms of cinema that could admit a greater diversity of types of imagery than merely the abstract.
8. Snow's **Wavelength** might appear to suggest such a movement, in its transition from a three-dimensional image to a two-dimensional one. This simple reading proves on more careful consideration to prove untenable, for the film form is also that a circle, as perhaps more accurately a spiral. The film ends with an image of waves which suggests a similar illusionistic depth to that of the opening imagery. At the end, however, our sense of this depth is altered by the recognition, educed by the film's structure as by the fact that we recognize that we are looking at a photograph on a wall, that the image's illusionistic deep space is conjoined with an essential flatness of the plane.
- Admittedly, Rimmer's **Variations on a Celophane Wrapper** does have a teleological structure. I consider this film not to be typical of Rimmer's work as a mature filmmaker; indeed, I consider it to come at the time of his transition between his early and more derivative work and his later more individual work.
9. At the same time the minimalization of movement at the recorded filmic event also serves to focus attention on discerning what the film actually records, i.e. on its **legibility**. This splitting of attention between the recorded profilmic movement and the film's material substrate is another instance of that sort of dualism we found to be characteristic of the work of Snow.
10. it should be noted that Wieland has also used printed texts in such a way that the meaning of a text, and of its relation to the image, is ambiguous. Her film **1933**, for example, consists of a shot taken from a second storey window of the street below. This shot was looped and reprinted so that loop appears a total of ten times. The numeral "1933" appears on the first, fourth, seventh and tenth loop (i.e. every third floor, beginning with the first). The meaning of the numeral and of its relation to the street remains enigmatic and unclarified by many of the film's formal structures, including that system of its occurrence just described.
11. A significant exception is the use of the written text in Landow's work; Landow uses written text to explore semiotic dimensions of film.

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# **BRUCE ELDER'S 1857: FOOL'S GOLD**

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF MEANING**

*by Carole Zucker*

Reality is in the artist, the image only in life...

Wyndham Lewis

When Lewis, as a primary advocate of the Vorticist Movement, made this statement, he invoked the artist's quest: to filter the external world through one's personal vision, and to recover, in an act of private creation, the life of an image. This is Bruce Elder's accomplishment in 1857: FOOL'S GOLD. It is a complex montage of sound and image, moving poetry, and a virtual study in the use of counterpoint and isomorphism in cinema.

The film consists of a series of landscape shots which are exposed to an astonishing variety of optical treatments. These shots are intercut or co-exist with written lines of poetry, spoken narration, music and sound effects. The intricate aural and visual permutations require the spectator synchronously to read, view and listen. In this, FOOL'S GOLD serves Eisenstein's precept that film should "...draw the spectator into a creative act in which his own personality is not dominated by that of the author, but fully develops in harmony with the author's conception."<sup>1</sup> The film is a strong address to the process and the powers of perception that is at once materialist and transcendent.

The first level of discourse introduced is a voice-over narration — spoken by Elder — and derived from Daniel Defoe's **The Journal of the Plague Year**. Our expectations of the role of the first-person narrator are confounded because the words spoken by the voice neither precipitate, accompany, nor comment on the images that constitute the film. The primacy of the narrator's voice is subverted not only by the unclear relationship to the visual representations, but by the de-dramatizing monotone. The oscillation of the sound mix — electronic music, electronically manipulated percussive noise, singing, and unadulterated natural sound — often threatens to overwhelm or efface the narration.

The filmmaker withdraws the narration from authority in a further way — by reconstituting Defoe's book, an account of the Great Plague of London in 1665. Defoe's report might be taken to be accurate by a reader unaware of Defoe's age — six — at the time of the actual event, and that he wrote his "journal" nearly half a century after the cataclysm. The book serves largely as a vehicle for the social, economic, philosophical and religious tracts that make up the author's personal meditations concerning the causes of the plague. The unreliability and subjectivity of the book is underscored by Elder's decision to cite passages out of sequence or incorrectly juxtaposed and to expunge, by and large, Defoe the doctrinaire. The filmmaker re-writes the text, removing it from an already questionable authenticity. Elder re-interprets an interpretation, thus contesting both the capacity and validity of art for mimesis, recalling Wyndham Lewis' injunction that "Reality is in the artist..."

Even as Elder undermines the integrity of the text, the issue of fidelity is all but extinguished by the immediacy of the passages recited in the film. Only the most gruesome, horrifying and violent descriptions of the epidemic are set forth. The words describe unbearable physical and mental suffering, grief and madness — scenes of apocalyptic intensity. In this force and excess, the descriptions included in the narration correlate to and heighten the film's sensuous and ecstatic imagery; they stand in an intimate relationship to the form and subject of **FOOL'S GOLD**.

The incidents represented in the narration are specifically marked by their resistance to human intervention or knowledge. The plague ends not "...by any new medicine found out, or new method of cure discovered but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of Him that had at first sent this disease as a judgement upon us..."<sup>2</sup> Defoe's text — informed by the "Theory of Divine Wrath" — is counterposed by the world Elder creates on film in which human intervention — represented by the diverse modes of formal manipulation — is dominant. Defoe invokes a natural order subject to divine direction; Elder imposes his own order on "divine" creation. Yet both Defoe and Elder acknowledge that in contradistinction to the manifest regulation carried out by the divine and the human agent in their respective works, there exists the fugitive, the random, the aleatory — that which escapes the structure of reason and control. Further, the beliefs of the author and the filmmaker converge in their shared sense of awe in the face of nature's power.

The second principle strand in **FOOL'S GOLD** is woven from Ezra Pound's **Cantos**. Phrases and sections from the poems are inscribed between and superimposed over the images. The Defoe/Elder narration is heard in conjunction with Pound's verse or alternately, one hears (Defoe/Elder) or reads (Pound) discretely. Elder utilizes the same strategy with Pound's **Cantos** as with Defoe's **Journal**; he "tampers" with the written word. He initiates or arrests lines in mid-phrase or situates lines from different **Cantos** in contiguity, creating his own sense of meaning and rhythm. Elder re-composes Pound just as the poet recast a melange of texts (e.g. verses from such disparate sources as Homer, Browning, Mallarmé and Mussolini), in his **Cantos**.

The deployment of the **Cantos** is analogous — on the level of calligraphic rather than aura inscription — to the use of the narration. Defoe's journal speaks of an order; the text by Pound confers order on the images — it is used to organize the film. Consider the direct correspondence between poem and image in the line "that the body of light come forth from the body of fire," which is intercut with a rapid montage of shots of lightening printed in brilliant red, or "light fighting for speed" imprinted during a flicker passage. On the other hand the Defoe **Journal** elicits the idea of **hazard**, of chaos (in the epidemic's chance election of its victims); in a like manner, the disjunct rhythms of the slashed and spliced lines of the **Cantos** summon forth the uncertain and accidental. But perhaps the most im-

portant effect produced by the two texts is found in their quality of immediacy. The horrors recited in the Defoe/Elder narration seize on the "mind's eye," while the poetry (in the specific context of the film) bypasses intellection in its direct evocation of sensual imagery.

In this powerful claim on our perceptions, Elder appropriates the beliefs of the Vorticist Movement. The Vorticists — represented primarily by Pound, Lewis and Eliot — advanced the theory that the artist should not seek specificity in his imagery, but rather "...a radiant cluster..."<sup>3</sup> that has the capacity to engender a mood or feeling. The recurring shots in FOOL'S GOLD, of trees, waves, a wind-blown hillock, and wheeling birds (in an homage to Vorticist iconography), lack particularization; they are not related to a larger context, nor to one another. The film commences with "natural" or lightly tinted renditions of the shots. As the film progresses the coloration becomes deep and vibrant; the details of the shots disappear. A breaking wave is transformed into an undulating pattern of colour; there is no distinction between object and ground. The scenes of nature are deprived of their representational status, only the feeling evoked by the intensity of colour and movement remains; the spectator "...experience(s) the meaning..."<sup>4</sup> of the artist's vision. The iconicity of the object is supplanted. Elder has penetrated the natural appearance of things in order to present their "essence," or as the Vorticists would have it: "Images are abstracted from (a) scene and act as equations or formulas for the emotions the artist derives from it."<sup>5</sup> Pound compared Vorticist art to the abstractions of mathematics when he wrote: "...the equation  $(x-a)^2 + (x-b)^2 = r^2$  governs the circle. It is the circle. It is not a particular circle... It is the circle free of time and space limits."<sup>6</sup> The filmmaker periodically inserts algebraic formulae among the film's images. He asserts the resemblance between the abstract symbols that comprise the language of mathematics and the abstracted forms that constitute his film — both designate an idea of something rather than the thing itself.

Further, after several minutes of film time have elapsed, Elder inscribes a frame count in the upper right quadrant. These numbers do not begin with the film's opening, nor do they continue for the film's duration. They cease as arbitrarily as they begin. Numbers then appear at irregular intervals, but they no longer accurately reflect the frame count. Elder establishes the materiality of the film — the frame — and its existence in time. He performs a deconstructive act only to release the film from the confinement of a structuralist mode. FOOL'S GOLD may be perceived as an attempt to **transcend** the material basis of film and its temporality. Elder acknowledges the phenomena of film, thus liberating the viewer from the meagerness of the banal; the spectator is free to experience the intensity of feeling elicited by the imagery — both visual and aural.

Each of the shots undergoes permutations that manifest the technical repertory of the filmmaker: slow, fast and reverse motion, multiple superimposition, flicker, animation and vivid changes in colour. One's attention is drawn to the film's transitions; disjunctiveness is valorized above "seamlessness." At the same time there is also a sense of momentum, an inexorable "pull." The dense layering of the soundtrack, the metrical editing, the violent shifts from muted to brilliant colour build to a crescendo and diminish as the film draws to a close. Elder's film is an act of celebration — both of nature and the power of the artist. The filmmaker celebrates nature not by replication, but by creation. He reproduces — with light and colour, sound, stillness and movement — the ineluctable rhythm and energy of the natural world. Pound's exultant imagery is interfaced with Defoe's dread; they coalesce with Elder's vision of control and ecstasy. FOOL'S GOLD is a product of intellect and mastery that reaches "the naive consciousness";<sup>7</sup> the power and beauty of the film resides in the breadth and concision of its embrace.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Sergei Eisenstein, **Notes of a Film Director** (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p.78.
2. Daniel Defoe, **The Journal of the Plague Year** (London: G.M. Dent and Co., 1908), pp.238-239.
3. Ezra Pound, **Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir** (New York: New Directions, 1970), p.92.
4. Peter Ackroyd, **Notes for a New Culture: An Essay on Modernism** (London: Vision Press Limited, 1976), p.114.
5. Timothy Materer, **Vortex** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p.112.
6. Pound, **Gaudier-Brzeska**, p.93.
7. Gaston Bachelard, **The Poetics of Space**, trans. Maria Jolas, for. Etienne Gilson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xv.

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# THE EXPERIMENTAL FILMS OF JOYCE WIELAND

*by Lianne M. McLarty*

The forms adopted by experimental film question traditional notions of cinematic representation and offer alternatives to the forms of construction of mainstream cinema. In their tendency to use self-reflexive devices, they represent a conscious reaction against dominant cinematic expression. Experimental filmmakers deny the pleasure derived from easy access to information; they react against a Hollywood model which seeks merely to entertain us by using a conventional and straight forward plot structure. Experimental cinema is a cinema of "awkward access." In its reaction against conventional narrative film, experimental work may even eschew reference, presenting us instead with abstractions which can be understood only as pure aesthetic form.

In these respects, at least, Joyce Wieland's are typical avant-garde films, for they are self-conscious works that define themselves as being film. They are distancing, for they prevent their viewer from being drawn in by illusion and made aware of the filmmaking process. Like most of the films within the experimental tradition, Wieland's films attempt to reach a clearer understanding of the nature of cinema. To a certain extent, they are instruments with which investigations of cinema are conducted. Yet within the experimental film world, Wieland's films are unique. Unlike some of the work within that tradition, Wieland does not resort to pure abstraction, to a complete denial of reference. Nor, however, does she surrender to mainstream expression. Wieland's self-reflexivity is not on-



ly a "device" to explore the nature of cinema. She makes the viewer aware of the film-making process in order to sharpen perception for a greater end. Wieland's work is indeed about film, but also considers concrete political issues. It is not a cinema only of itself; it is rather a cinema that is aware of the society that gave it birth.

My intent is to first situate Wieland within an experimental film tradition, to establish that her work is self-reflexive, to characterize the strategies of self-reflexivity, and then to determine what Wieland is "saying" about film. Wieland's movement beyond the purely aesthetic and into a political/social realm will then be explored. This filmmaker's desire to make the nature of the medium manifest, so that the viewer becomes conscious of the cinematic materials rather than being transported away by the illusion the film offers, is evident through her use of devices to subvert that illusion and to make us aware of the dichotomy between spectacle and spectator and through her refusal to disguise the cinematic process.

### The Subversion of illusion

**Solidarity** opens with the following credit:

May 26, 1973 5,000 People Demonstrate  
in Kitchener, Ontario to Support  
the Striking Workers of the  
Dare Cookie Factory

The accuracy of date, dimension, place and purpose of the strike elicits the expectation of a mainstream documentary which, traditionally, would purport to deal "objectively" with the event that is its subject matter. Yet, our expectations are subverted by Wieland's unconventional treatment of the subject matter. For the most part, her camera maintains a high angle, revealing only the feet of the participants. The fragmentation created by this "device" refers the viewer to the space outside the frame; in so doing, it serves to remind us of the film frame, and so of the fact that the image, as a cinematic construct is illusory. This is a reaction against the claim that documentary film is a representation of reality. It furthermore works to deny the traditional claim of objectivity. Wieland can only see from her perspective (the one angle establishes the notion of one perspective). She cannot reveal the whole, the complete story; consequently, we are presented only with fragments, a partial view, a subjective view.

**Pierre Vallières** also resembles, in certain aspects, style of documentary filmmaking and, like **Solidarity**, subverts the style after which it is patterned. This film's predominant image is that of Vallières' lips. By emphasizing Vallières' speech, the image appears to capture his subjectivity, yet the fragmentation achieved through the use of the close-up — a fragmentation similar to that in **Solidarity** — stresses the cinema's inability to capture reality completely and objectively. Indeed, Wieland opposes notions of objectivity by making her presence known as the creator of the illusion; between each section of the film there is a break during which we are made aware of Wieland, for we hear her questioning Vallières. In articulating the questions, she **directs** the action the film purports simply to **document**. Moreover, the slow pan over Vallières' mouth serves to undermine the codes of dominant cinema as pans are traditionally used in order to include vast areas in a single shot. This tension, then, between what we are "encouraged" to expect and what Wieland presents, serves to enhance the self-reflexivity of the work as well as to make us aware that Wieland is conscious of the cinematic tradition.

A further tension is evident, that between the spectacle and the spectator. Wieland establishes a dichotomy between the female speaker and the strikers in **Solidarity**. Through making us aware of the women's position on stage by revealing the microphone and the elevated platform, Wieland suggests the notion of performance. The strikers, then, become the audience; confirmation of this is the applause of the sound track. The opposition between spectacle and spectator is thereby established, reminding us of our positions as spectators in the cinematic experience.

This position is further alluded to in **Catfood**. During the opening shot of the film, Wieland's camera focuses on the head section of the fish, making its eyes a prominent element of the image. The eye is open and directed at the viewers, making one conscious of his position as spectator. There is another dimension to this construction. Our gaze is unanswered as we see the fish but the fish does not see us. This reflects the relationship between the real world which the spectator inhabits and the illusory world the images of the film inhabit. This awareness of watching is evident in **1933** as well. The image in the film consists of a street scene, shot through a balcony railing. This notion of looking through something to a street below enhances the sense of the voyeuristic gaze, reminding us of our positions as spectators. Indeed, the very decision to position the gaze behind the window is a reflexive device, alluding to the camera and its lens.

The scenes which deal with the dance in **Hand Tinting** consist of women dancing, becoming the spectacle, and women watching, becoming spectators. Wieland, in frequently cutting from one group to the other, stresses this dichotomy. There are, furthermore, several shots of women observing their images in mirrors. In **Water Sark** the camera appears several times, and is occasionally directed at the viewer; here we occupy a complex position as both spectator and potential spectacle. Moreover, in a splitscreen-like shot, Wieland reveals both a table and a mirror image of the camera, making us aware of both the image and the image creator. Again, the camera is directed at us producing yet a third dimension, that of the audience. Thus a complex series of tensions between table/spectacle, viewer/spectator, and camera/source is created.

For the duration of **Reason Over Passion**, we are looking out of the car window as Wieland includes its frame in the shots. As in **1933**, this encourages a sense of watching, of observing, and so we are again conscious of our positions as spectators in the cinematic experience. During the train sequence in part two, Wieland includes the image of a woman gazing out of the train window and thus reinforces this sense of an enclosed observation. Relating to this are the shots of Trudeau among a crowd of people. This political figure is, by his public nature, defined immediately as spectacle. Wieland emphasizes this by framing his face in a cameo shape and by recording the sound of "audience" applause.

Yet another device used by Wieland to establish that this self-reflexivity is the allusion to the cinematic process. The titles of the films **Solidarity**, **Sailboat**, **1933**, and **Reason Over Passion** appear in the film as "images," for the whole duration of the film in the former two, and at regulated intervals in the latter two. This self-reference within the films serves to remind the viewer of an aspect of the filmmaking process, namely the titling of the work. The use of titles elsewhere in Wieland's work can also be seen as self-conscious because it creates an awareness of the camera by reminding the viewer of the various distances between the subject(s) and the recording device. **Solidarity** uses a second, parallel device; often a leg will come into view at a distance closer to the camera than its nearest plane of sharp focus. This serves to remind the viewer of his position, and so the presence of the camera. In **1933** the railing and the street are at two different depths; here again, we are made aware of distance and camera.

Wieland's use of fragmentation in **Solidarity** and **Pierre Vallières**, and the strong sense of an off-screen space in **1933**, **Sailboat**, and **Dripping Water** (in **1933** and **Sailboat** the subjects move out of the frame and in the latter neither the source of the water, nor the drain that carries it away, are included in the frame), both work to make the viewer conscious of a world outside the frame and therefore of the frame itself. This concern with framing indicates an interest in the features specific to the film medium. In **Reason Over Passion** the boundaries of the car window (and the train windows in part two) draw our attention to the frame around the image and consequently to the cinematic nature of the image. Occasionally, we are even made aware of the reflection of the camera in the glass which multiplies this "effect"; both the use of depictions of the camera and of actual reflections make reference to the cinematic process.

Indeed, in some of Wieland's work we are made aware of the camera both aurally and visually. **Pierre Vallières** begins with what could be defined as prefiling preparation. Shortly before the first image appears, we hear the camera starting. The sound of the camera is also heard between each of Vallières' three monologues. This alludes to the no-

tion of process, the act of filming; we see the product (the image) and hear the source (the camera). Moreover, Wieland herself speaks on the sound track, firmly establishing her role in the process.

The acknowledgement of a directorial presence is emphasized in **Water Sark** and **Reason Over Passion**. Of her appearance in these works, Wieland comments:

This idea makes the audience  
aware of the filmmaker and  
especially in **Water Sark**, where  
the whole film is about me  
making the film. In **Reason**,  
the self-portrait says I predict, I make the film, I am a character  
in the film.<sup>1</sup>

**Water Sark** opens with a shot of a lamp swinging back and forth. After a few moments we realize that what we see is not the lamp but a mirror reflection — — an image — — of the lamp. Over this "image," Wieland superimposes the film's title. Because of this relation of "image" and film title, we are made conscious of the cinematic process. She then cuts to a table and tilts the camera upward to reveal herself holding the camera. This image is also seen through a mirror; the notion of "image" is again associated with cinema by this demonstration of the presence of the camera. Wieland also presents herself as the creative force in **Water Sark**, as well as in **Reason Over Passion** where she appears holding the camera while silently singing "O Canada." Here her actual presence serves to allude to the presence, usually concealed in a film, of the filmmaker as a force giving shape to the whole. This awareness is also expressed in **Hand Tinting** when she includes footage from an earlier film, **Catfood**, to disrupt the action, forcing us consider what the two films have in common — — their "creator." Titles such as "this film is against the corporate military structure of the global village..." which appears in **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, stress that the film is conscious of its themes. It also suggests Wieland's con-  
ditions, her motivation for making the film. Furthermore, the title serves to alert the viewer that actual incidents which are depicted in the films (actions performed by the animals) are allegorical; it is, then, a directive for reading the film.

### Fragmentation: The Frame and the Limitation of the Cinematic Medium

The self-reflexiveness of Wieland's films indicates her interest in the nature of film. She deals with this question in her films and in them exposes the limitations of the medium and also the extent to which film can aspire in its expression. In considering the limits of cinematic expression, one may note the absence of human forms in Wieland's experimental work. When people do appear, in **1933**, **Solidarity**, **Pierre Vallières**, and **Hand Tinting** for example, they are presented in mere fragments. It is as if Wieland were indicating that the camera is unable to capture human life in its entirety. This "inability" of Art to capture human life may relate to a moment in **Far Shore** when Tom responds to Eulalie's request that he paint her by commenting that only if she were a tree would it be possible.

Just as Wieland shows us that a film can incorporate a life in part she demonstrates that a frame can enclose only a limited portion of space. Hence, in **Solidarity** we see a small fragment of a larger space in which actions of considerable political import are occurring. We are therefore reminded continually of the space outside the frame and, therefore, of all the "material" which the camera cannot record. The voice of the female speaker, coming as it does from outside the frame, enhances this sense of off-screen reality absent from the image. Wieland also reveals the restricting boundaries of the frame by showing feet exiting the frame in all four directions, moving out of our range of vision.

**Pierre Vallières** represents the most striking example of this amputation; he is visually reduced to a mouth. Shot in extreme close-up, the image is enlarged several times its normal size, suggesting that this political figure and his words are too big for the frame. The camera, and, by synecdochical implication, the film, cannot capture the complete man; the frame is, both literally and figuratively, limited and bounded. This notion of boundaries is expressed during the concluding window sequence. On the sound track, technical noises are heard and so we are invited to consider the events presented as "film." Wieland pans

the window several times, stopping abruptly at the edges of the frame. We are thereby made aware of the restricting boundaries created by the frame. This relates to the limits of cinema; one cannot visually explore material beyond the frame. Film cannot capture all of life, all of man, because it simply cannot go beyond the limits of what is observable.

This fragmentation of image also occurs in **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, which opens with a close-up of a rat's eye. Wieland then cuts to the paw. By cutting here, rather than panning, Wieland enhances the sense of amputation. Even the following pan up the leg reveals only part of the whole. Again the use of the close-up and the fragmentation of space suggest that there is much outside the frame which is unavailable to the camera. The same applies to **Catfood** where both the fish and the cat are shot in close-up, a manner of filming which acts to fragment their forms, denying the viewer a complete view of them. During the opening credits, the cat's head covers a section of the film's title, thus associating the strategy of fragmentation with the film medium itself. **Dripping Water** presents the viewer with a fragmented image that allows a view neither of the entire saucer nor of the complete sink. Shot predominantly in close and medium shots, **Hand Tinting** includes mostly the fragmented forms of women. The pool sequences, shot at medium range, involve a similar use of amputation; submerged in the water, only the top sections of the women's bodies are visible. Amputation of the human form appears again in **Water Sark**. When we see Wieland, she is fragmented; only one half of her face is visible, the camera shielding the other half. Moreover, the shot of her torso includes only one breast. Again we are invited to associate this fragmentation with cinema because of the presence of the camera. It therefore becomes explicit that filmic expression has limitations; a complete "reality" is unknowable.

Fragmentation of a different nature occurs in **Reason Over Passion** and **Sailboat**. During the initial sequences of **Reason Over Passion**, Wieland films a roadside landscape through both the window of a moving car and her moving fingers. These images of the landscape are fragmented; the flicking motion of the fingers over the lens allows us only glimpses of the image. Wieland thus associates limitations imposed by the filmmaker with limitations imposed by the nature of the film medium itself. Moreover, the boat in **Sailboat** gradually becomes smaller and finally disappears. This too relates to the limits of cinematic expression — the camera cannot "hold" the boat indefinitely; reality eludes the grasp of the camera.

The fragmenting of action is also a common feature of Wieland's work. In **Solidarity** we generally see feet either walking or standing still; seldom are we allowed the complete action, from standstill to movement and then the return to a standstill. The fact that the camera does not pan with the marchers reinforces the incompleteness of the action. The same sense of incomplete action is also evoked by **1933** as the characters move "through" the frame allowing us to see only part of the action of walking. **Hand Tinting** involves a series of shots of women dancing, preparing to swim and, finally, swimming; yet, by repeating the same action several times, Wieland creates the impression that the actions are not completed. Similarly, the rapid editing in **Rat Life and Diet in North America** serves to fragment the action by presenting abruptly discontinuous movement. In **Catfood** we are shown only selected moments of the cat eating the fish; the editing again refuses to complete the action. Since we see neither the source of the water nor the point of its escape in **Dripping Water**, we are left with only the middle part of the action — the actually falling motion of the water droplet. **Sailboat** deals with a single fragmented action, the movement of the boat. The boat moves through the frame in a manner reminiscent of the human movement in **1933**. The point here is that because Wieland's camera cannot capture the entire movement of the boat, she has to stop the camera and move ahead to recapture the motion. Even the fragmentation of the action in action in the film relates to the constituent limitations of the cinematic medium.

These strong sense of containment Wieland's films elicit also suggests the limitations of cinema. Rarely in Wieland's work are we allowed an establishing shot or a long shot of a sort. Most of her images are shot in close-up: the feet in **Solidarity**, the lips in **Pierre Vallières**, the rats of **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, the saucer and sink in **Dripping Water**, the cat and fish in **Catfood** and most of the images in **Water Sark**. This consistent use of the close-up evokes the sense of a contained and restricted world. Often, in films

such as **Rat Life and Diet in North America** and **Water Sark**, the *mise-en-scène* is cluttered. The restricted space produced by the use of the close-up and the "filling up" of the frame contribute to a feeling of claustrophobia. This suggests that the film world is a contained space.

Certain images in Wieland's films even symbolize the concept of containment. The opening shots of **Rat Life and Diet in North America** depict two rats contained in a pitcher. The idea of containment thus conveyed is then associated with the idea of film itself as contained when the film's title is superimposed on the pitcher. **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, in part, is a film "about" imprisonment; the many images of rats trapped in cages reinforces the sense of containment elicited by the beginning of the film. Similarly, the fish at the beginning of **Catfood** is positioned beside a cup of water. The cup, too, is a container, as are the sink and saucer in **Dripping Water** and the pool in **Hand Tinting**. It is in **Water Sark**, however, that images of containment figure most prominently. In that film, there are numerous images of glasses and bowls containing water. Wieland cuts from a shot of water being poured into a glass to a high angle shot of the top of the glass. The angle serves to maximize the sense of containment as we see the circumference of the glass surrounding the water. The notion of containment is explicitly associated with cinema, for in one shot we see Wieland holding her camera while filming a tank half full of water. The use of the frame to enclose a fragment of reality is well illustrated in this shot.

**Reason Over Passion** and **1933** elicit this containment in a moderately different way. In **1933**, the street scene is shot through bars which evoke the sense of imprisonment. The fact that it is the camera which is situated behind the bars conveys the idea that cinema itself occupies the site of containment. The bars, furthermore, serve to separate the camera from the action, for they prevent Wieland from getting closer to her subject. This notion of separation is also evident in **Reason Over Passion**, for in that film the camera is itself enclosed within the contained world of the car; Wieland stresses this by including two shots of the vacant car. Moreover, during the landscape passage, we are allowed to see the boundary of the car window; this device suggests both the restrictions imposed by the frame and the fact that the filmmaker is enclosed within the car, looking out a window. Thus it is implied that although the filmmaker attempts to encircle and enclose reality, she is prevented from doing so because of the limits of the medium.

## The Potentials and Functions of Film

Film, then, cannot capture reality in its entirety because of its limitations. Wieland stresses, however, that these are constituent limitations, limitations that are productive, that can be converted into strengths. It is the very restrictions inherent in the medium that prevent films from being mere reproductions of reality. This is the reason Wieland views the traditional quest to create the illusion of reality as futile, and undoubtedly why she uses forms that venture beyond the everyday experience of things.

Wieland sometimes symbolizes this venturing beyond everyday experiences as an "opening of eyes." The flickering of her fingers in **Reason Over Passion** effects the image's tonality, rapidly changing it from dark to light. One may relate this to the experience of opening one's eyes; the film invites us to see the familiar, Canada, in a new way. Indeed, images of eyes frequently appear in Wieland's films; the images of the rats' eyes in **Rat Life and Diet in North America** and of the fish eye in **Catfood** are examples. This suggests that a consistent purpose of Wieland's films is to open our eyes to a new experience. Indeed, images of the opening of eyes are a central motif in **Catfood**. At the outset of this film, the cat progresses from a state of sleep to wakefulness; it literally opens its eyes. Later in the film, during the course of the cat's dinner, Wieland experiments with light and dark; the image fades to dark and then illuminates to overexposure several times. Here, too, the viewer is confronted with an ordinary and quite familiar scene and yet is forced by the power of the film to see it in a new way. The film elicits a sense of exultation at the commonplace, which is heightened by the use of fast motion photography which transforms reality and visual perception and provides a feeling of vitality and of teeming life which is reinforced by the sounds of the fertile sea.

**Water Sark** also deals with this potential of film. One of the dominant images in the film is that of a swinging lamp. When the lamp is used to illuminate another image, its motion causes the image to grow darker and then lighter. In one instance, the image consists of a rose seen through a glass of water. The green of the leaves and the pink of the flower, distorted by the water, resemble a bizarre landscape. An image of domesticity is thus rendered "strange"; the viewer's eyes have been opened and one sees the ordinary in a new way.

Indeed, one of the most striking qualities of **Water Sark** is its transformation of perception. The viewer is witness to an ordinary world of the domestic and yet this world is rendered strange; rendered different by the production capacities of the medium. By using extreme close-ups, Wieland immerses the viewer in this world almost creating the impression that one is experiencing it underwater. In fact, the motif of water plays an important part in the film, probably because looking through water, like looking through a camera lens, has the power to alter one's visual impressions, to make us see differently, and even to create a "new reality." Wieland suggests a similar idea when she covers her face with cellophane (a "filmy" sort of material), thus causing us to see the human form in a new way. Where the idea is most clearly articulated, however, is in the scene showing Wieland playing with the disc. The disc is a device for producing "distortions," like water, cellophane and, of course, the camera (with which it is explicitly compared when Wieland is shown holding the disc to one eye and the camera to the other). Like the disc, cinema is a device for altering the ordinary world and for vivifying perception; through its transforming power, the disc enlarges, magnifies, and therefore allows one to see more clearly. Similarly, Wieland implies, the camera and, by extension, the cinema can transform the ordinary and allows the viewer to see more clearly, to see beyond a surface reality.

The ordinary is again dealt with in **Dripping Water**. Here Wieland gives the domestic a new importance by aurally associating it with the larger, outside world heard on the sound track. Thus, street noises become part of the domestic scene. Wieland's awareness of texture, the "softness" and rippling of the water opposed to the hardness of the porcelain sink gives this image yet another dimension. Moreover, the constant movement of the water in the sink conveys the idea of the vivification of perception which occurs when one sees in a new way. Wieland also shows that cinema is capable of transforming spatial arrangement. The saucer is in the upper right hand corner of the sink, yet, within the frame, appears in the bottom right hand corner.

Moreover, the use of the filters in **Hand Tinting**, as in **Water Sark**, allows the viewer to experience scenes of such everyday actions, as dancing and swimming, in a new manner. The repetition of the movement of the woman in front of the juke box creates an event which could not exist in reality. Wieland also includes some footage with pin holes, suggesting that the possibilities of film far outreach a mere photographic documentation of action and image.

Both **Solidarity** and **Pierre Vallières** take as a project the subversion of the dominant tendencies in the documentary tradition. They, too, use commonplace objects or events as their subject matter, and, by representing them within a fractured space, force us to see them in a new way. In **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, too, the use of titles and of photographs of "real-life" revolutionaries provide the work with a pseudo-documentary flavour. But the documentary quality of the work is undermined by having rats play the part of "US" draft dodgers. A real political issue is thus transformed by the use of allegorical devices in order to cause us to experience the real situation anew. The theme of escape may very well relate to Wieland's escape from traditional boundaries of cinematic expression.

**1933** and **Sailboat** alter the events they represent by the use of cinematic devices. The use of accelerated motion in **1933** demonstrates the power of cinema to transform an everyday situation, people walking on an urban street, into a frantic dance; the people become objects, at one with the regulated music and the rhythm of the city. Like **1933**, **Sailboat** makes use of commonplace subject matter, the sight of a sailboat, and transforms it into a work of art. The constant movement within the frame and image of the "fertile" sea suggest the enlivening feeling brought on by the alteration in one's perception of the com-

monplace. In allowing her viewer to experience the familiar as strange, Wieland demonstrates experimental cinema's ability to sharpen perception, to broaden experience and to enliven the mind.

### Image and Text

Furthermore, Wieland makes use of other forms of representation in her films. The cinema, Wieland demonstrates, has the ability to appropriate written language, to claim it as its own. In **Solidarity**, in 1933, and to a certain extent, in **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, titles appear. Especially in the former two, the titles, because of the regularity with which they appear, become valid Images within the film, acquiring the same status as its more conventionally cinematic "subjects," the people. Since the numeral "1933" has no discernable connection to what is seen on the screen, the viewer is forced to consider it as an image and then read it as such, as a visual symbol. Thus, Wieland demonstrates that film has the power to transform written modes of expression into cinematic modes of representation. In **Sailboat** Wieland considers the tension between written language and cinematic expression. Both the "verbal" and the visual signifiers are presented — the word "sailboat" and the image of the sailboat. For most of the film, the horizon line serves to separate these "images." As the horizon gradually fades and then disappears, the two modes of expression are united. Wieland seems to be saying that on a primary level, cinema, too, is a language, in that it too can represent. Moreover, the movement represented in the image travels from the right hand side of the screen to the left, causing our eye to move as it would when actually reading a text and suggesting that we must "read" the image.

In **Reason Over Passion**, the "image" of the written words of "O Canada" are compared to the image of the flag; Wieland suggests that the written text is as valid a representation of Canada as the image. Wieland rearranges Trudeau's words, "reason over passion" and in so doing renders them unreadable as words; like the landscape over which they appear, they can be thought of only as images. Verbal expression is also dealt with during the shot of Wieland singing "O Canada." The viewer sees the act of singing but does not hear the words. Here the image is elevated in importance; the cinematic representation overpowers spoken language.

### The Politics of Pleasure and Unpleasure

Even Wieland's investigation of film form has a political dimension, since the form she employs questions the codes of dominant cinema. Where dominant cinema seeks to disguise the cinematic process and to create an illusion of reality, Wieland exposes the process by which films are created and so allows the viewer to experience an extended reality. Wieland also questions the political structures which foster the dominant cinematic forms. To some extent her work questions capitalist values and reacts against the bourgeois order.

**Catfood** clearly exemplifies this tendency. The entire film deals with consumption, the exaggeration of which is a key feature of the capitalist order. The cat is first seen in the passive state of sleep, the traditional way to see this domesticated animal. The cat is no longer "natural" because of this domestication; it has been incorporated into the bourgeois structure and is therefore a representative of that order. The sound of the waves on the sound track, a natural sound, contrasts with this domesticity. An abrupt cut to the fish; the contrast in texture between the image of the cat and that of the fish shocks the viewer, assaulting the bourgeois sensitivity which expects a seamless and pacifying form of construction. As the cat consumes the fish, the white table cloth, covering the homey-looking table, becomes more and more bloody. The defacing of this domestic setting disturbs a sensibility formed by the bourgeois order. Wieland exaggerates this effect by zooming in for an extreme close-up of the half-eaten fish, forcing her viewer to behold the unpleasant scene and to witness the destructiveness of consumerism. In this way, she tilts against the "pleasure" at which the consumer cinema aims.

**Rat Life and Diet in North America** works in a somewhat similar way; indeed, it announces itself as being "against the corporate military structure of the global village." The film is

punctuated with many images of consumption: an "IGA" sign appears, the rats are seen chewing on the American flag (which evokes Western consumerism, and, in the film's self-reflexivity, the Hollywood cinema as a consumer product), the rats are also shown nibbling on various items such as wood chips and cherries. The substitution of the rats for humans provides a humorous shock effect. Furthermore, when, as the title informs us, the rats "occupy a millionaire's house and get a bite to eat," Wieland cuts to previous images of rats in the cages in which we are accustomed to see them; juxtaposed to these images are images of rats on a table with food. This contrast raises questions about our traditional conception about the place of nature within the order of bourgeois civilization and about the effects of the manner in which civilization has "tamed" nature.

While the bourgeois sensibility finds rats on a food-covered table disgusting, Wieland makes us accept it and so shatters our bourgeois sense of decorum, of what is and what is not acceptable. Furthermore, the rats' presence on the table makes the notion of consumption literal, while the reference to the millionaire places the action in an economic context, with an added dimension of class awareness.

**Solidarity** juxtaposes two political spheres. The dominant sphere, to which the Dare Cookie Factory belongs, represents consumption and consumerism; the other sphere, that of the strike force, represents a collective action against consumerism. But while Wieland is critical of the dominant power in **Catfood** and **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, she also expresses a criticism of organized protest. The title, "Solidarity," is somewhat ironic for, while it suggests a whole, a union, the human forms we see are fragmented. Moreover, the predominant quality in the film is that of an aimless wandering, which reinforces the sense of alienation elicited by the fragmented nature of the image which separates — alienates — the workers both from one another and from their whole selves. By showing us the feet of the strikers rather than their faces, Wieland increases this sense of depersonalization, for one begins to realize that often it is difficult to distinguish a male foot from a female foot.

The strike leader is represented in a manner that suggests she is herself alienated and depersonalized. That her voice comes from an off-screen space serves to suggest her detachment from the workers. Indeed, Wieland makes it clear that this woman, who purports to represent the workers, is elevated above them. Moreover, Wieland's visual devices undercut the speaker's promises. Throughout most of her speech, the camera focuses on grass littered with garbage, a mud puddle and a broken Styrofoam cup. When she comments: "We are here because Dare Strikers, most of whom are women, are forced to accept disgraceful wages." Wieland cuts to a male foot. This tension between words and image acts to question the truth of the strike leader's words and to suggest that this organized protest against the dominant power hardly serves the needs of the workers.

A similar criticism is explored in **Pierre Vallières**. Like **Solidarity**, **Pierre Vallières** is about a political subject. Vallières speaks to the economy and to the unity of Québec using such phrases as "re-group citizens," "solidarity," "we," and "our." The notion of union, of collectivity, is strongly suggested by his vocabulary. Yet, as in **Solidarity**, the idea of unity is undercut by the fragmentations of the image, as only Vallières' mouth is visible. Wieland seems to be critical of Vallières. The extreme close-up of the mouth makes him appear grotesque; he speaks in a monotone, as if reading from a text, and so seems to be a mechanical, impersonal figure. The impression of his being impersonal is intensified by his association with the camera apparatus; between the first and the second segments, there is a shot of Vallières preparing to resume his monologue. His lips quiver in the manner of someone who is about to speak; at the same time, or slightly before, the preparatory noises of the camera and equipment are heard on the soundtrack. By comparing him to the camera, Wieland reinforces the sense that he is mechanical and impersonal.

Moreover, when Vallières discusses the women's movement he speaks of aggression and the need to use violence, commenting that he is "anxious for women to bring the world the equivalent of what men, the males, have brought it in institutions, structures." At moments during his speech Wieland includes the sound of the camera. His words are thereby defined as the product of illusion; the illusion, we infer, is his assumption that the male way of violence and aggression is the right way. In support of this inference, one may turn to Wieland's own words:



The vision of women, which may  
lack violence and big guns, could  
lead us to a new place. It would  
be nice to be allowed to see  
non-manipulative films in public  
in big theatres. Films about  
being, seeing, smelling, dreaming...<sup>2</sup>

### Wieland's Canada

An attempt to relegate Wieland to any particular political framework would be impossible, and the attempt to do so misconceived, for it would minimize the scope of her works. She is critical of an oppressive bourgeois order, but she is also aware of problems inherent in reaction against that order. Her political concerns move beyond a simple Left-Right debate; at the forefront of her political awareness is a consciousness of Canada and of what it means to be Canadian.

The tone of **Pierre Vallières** changes during his concluding discussion of the colonialization of the Native People of Canada, for here Wieland seems to present him in a more favourable and sympathetic manner. It is difficult to discern exactly what the changes are; perhaps the lighting was altered, but, at any rate, his voice becomes less mechanical and acquires a certain passion in its expression. This discussion of the French and English colonization of the Native Canadians and of the English colonization of the French, more than any other section of the film, expresses an intrinsically Canadian concern; perhaps this "Canadianness" can serve as an explanation for the more sympathetic tone. Wieland seems sympathetic to the claim that through knowing our past, our history, we can get to know our present.

The concept of "knowing our present" is central to Wieland's consciousness about what it means to be Canadian. As the conclusion of **Pierre Vallières**, Wieland pans a winter landscape, creating a tension between the passionate words of Pierre Vallières and the silence of this, the final image. It suggests a time to think, a time to contemplate the connection between Vallière's words and what Wieland shows us of Canada. There is a feeling of questioning to this section; it seems as though Wieland herself is trying to find the link, and in so doing, trying to define Canada. Wieland seems bent on conquering the problems in knowing, in defining, the nation.

Yet, the vision of Canada in **Reason Over Passion** is restricted because of the presence of the car window. In part, Wieland seems to be refuting the documentary's claim to offer us the whole of reality. Yet there is more to the strategy; we do not **know** Canada because we do not **see** enough, Wieland seems to be saying. Wieland restricts our vision even more to make us realize how little we see, how little we **know**, of our own country. Moreover, the presence of the window serves to separate the viewer from the landscape, producing a feeling that we are removed from our country — a feeling that is also expressed by the lack of human forms within the landscape. It is metaphorically a country without people for the people are removed, alienated, from their nation. Reinforcing this are the rapid pans; seldom does Wieland remain on one image of the Canadian landscape for longer than a few seconds — provoking, by these quick movements, the feeling that the country is not within our grasp, since the pans maintain a constant distance from the landscape, scanning across it without ever getting into it.

Wieland explains that the Canadian's difficulty in knowing his own nation, his own identity, is in part a result of the American influence in Canada. The comic invasion of Canada by the CIA in **Rat Life and Diet in North America** and the more serious critique of the economic takeover in **Pierre Vallières** both suggest Wieland's concern, even anger, about this influence. We are a nation denied an identity by our "Big Brother," Wieland implies. The rapid pans across the landscape in **Reason Over Passion** are frequently interrupted by the inclusion of iconic representations of the country. Wieland is here opposing the natural landscape, which has been so important in shaping our real conception of our nation (as the history of landscape painting and literature in Canada makes so clear), with artificial symbols of our country which, one might infer, have played a formative role in the

development of a false consciousness of the country. The flag, which appears at intervals, is an example of this iconography. Obviously painted on paper, it has an artificial, "created" quality. Trudeau's appearances, his words, "reason over passion," as well as the song "O Canada" (represented in various ways), make up other parts of this iconography. By juxtaposing these artificial, man-made, icons with images of the "real" nation, the land, Wieland brings us to question how representative of Canada these symbols actually are. This is particularly apparent in the shots of Trudeau. Seen through a cameo shape, he is somewhat isolated, a public figure we cannot really know. Wieland alters his image as though to scrutinize him, to analyze him, to find out who he really is.<sup>3</sup> As one is encouraged to ask, "What is the connection between Vallières' words and the landscape Wieland presents in her film?" The question remains, "What is Canada? Are these collectively accepted forms of national expression accurate representations of Canada?"

Concerning her nationalism, Wieland commented in an interview with Barbara Martineau that "Feminism and Nationalism can really go together here."<sup>4</sup> In an earlier interview she is recorded as saying: "I think of Canada as female. All that I've been doing or will be doing is about Canada. I may tend to over-identify with Canada."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Wieland's awareness of Canada is born from a feminist perspective. The panning over the landscape in both **Reason Over Passion** and **Pierre Vallières**, is a feminine approach to recording the landscape; the masculine approach would be to use the penetrating zoom. These notions of Canada and of the female are also found in **Rat Life and Diet in North America**. The Canada which provides a haven for the oppressed rats is portrayed in panning shots of the forest and rich earth over which are printed the titles "organic gardening" and "grass growing." Wieland thus associates Canada with life forces, images of fertility; in this ability to give life, Canada is female.

The title "they invade Canada" in **Rat Life and Diet In North America** also conveys the idea that Canada is female. Here Canada has become the female victim of the penetrating United States. This is reminiscent of a moment earlier in the film in which the American flag, rolled in a phallic shape, is seen piercing the flat Canada flag. Following this is the title, "Canada, which is 72% owned by the US industrial complex" which suggests that Canada, like woman, is in the role of the victim; just as women are exploited sexually, Canada is exploited economically. As Marshall Delaney writes of **The Far Shore**: "Wieland seems to see women as a part of nature and men as the spoilers of that nature; those who rape the land also rape the women."<sup>6</sup>

The equation of nationalism with feminism manifests itself in another manner in Wieland's concern for "expression." As a nation must express itself to a larger outside reality, so must the feminine voice express what is personal. **Reason Over Passion** deals with the need for expression by concentrating in part on the iconic representations of Canada; this is one way in which Canada expresses itself to the world, and so identifies itself. **Pierre Vallières** also deals with a nation's, Quebec's, need to express itself. Wieland's appearance in **Reason Over Passion** associates the feminine with national expression for when she "sings" "O Canada," she is giving expression to "the voice of the nation." Here, then, a woman becomes the voice of Canada.

The presence of the camera here also relates Wieland's feminism to her concern with the potential for cinematic expression. Wieland insists on the necessity for the real feminine voice to be heard, not the female voice which reiterates male discourse, but rather a feminine voice that is born out of her traditional environment — the domestic. In Wieland's work we find a parallel tendency — that of establishing a dichotomy between an outside reality (society) and an inside reality (the personal unconscious, the feminine). **Rat Life and Diet In North America** opens in a domestic setting with a kitchen table, a tea pot and fruit — objects commonly associated with the feminine world. Within the frame is a pitcher which is, as the high angle shot emphasizes, a receptacle, and so is symbolic of the feminine. Yet, the sound consists of exploding bombs that emanate from the outside; this expresses the assault of the traditional male world on the female world — on the personal by the impersonal. The notion of a feminine expression that might supercede this violent male expression is broached when Wieland focuses on a title "Listen" embroidered on cloth. This feminine image demands the feminine voice be heard.

Of **Water Sark**, Wieland has said that the whole film is about her making the film.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it is **Water Sark** which most clearly articulates this need for a personal, a feminine, expression. The notion of self-expression, most evident during the scene in which she makes faces at herself in the mirror, is related to the idea of feminine expression by the shot of her nude; by presenting herself in mere fragments, she avoids giving an erotic sexualized portrait of herself as a woman. As the presence of the camera in the shot shows, Wieland is conscious of traditional ways of photographing the sexuality of a woman, and wants to provide an alternative representation, one suited to a feminine manner of expression. As in **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, this personal, feminine expression is juxtaposed to a larger outside reality for in a few shots, the mirror reflects a cityscape seen through an open window; thus the domestic, representing the inner world of the feminine is opposed to the outside, male world. This opposition expresses the need to reconcile one's self with one's world and the need for a feminine voice to be heard.

The use of water in **Water Sark** is particularly interesting in this context. The frequent references to water can be read as references to the subconscious. The silence of the film enhances the notion of the dream world, of the personal unconscious. Water, too, is a feminine image, relating perhaps to bodily fluids. Thus the unconscious represented here has as feminine nature. In **Dripping Water**, too, the feminine is expressed by the use of the domestic setting, as well as by the use of receptacles (a saucer and sink) and water as the central image. Here, too, the water suggests the feminine unconscious. Juxtaposed to the feminine is the larger world, represented by the street noises and car sounds, indicative of the traditional male world. The association of these two realities suggests that the personal feminine is in some way connected to this larger reality; there is an attempt to reconcile the feminine and the larger society which is the male world. The sound of the footsteps, however, connote an aural penetration into the lyrical sound of the dripping water — the male invasion of the female. The opening and closing of the door further suggests this sense of the invasion of the female. The film, then, becomes an expression of the relations between the feminine and the masculine.

**Hand Tinting** also deals with a feminine expression. The word "hand" in the title connotes a personal expression and the devices, such as the needles Wieland uses to create her world, connote the feminine. The dance, a communal activity, is opposed to the activities that take place in the pool, such as the dunking exercises, which are mostly individual and personal, and thus closer to the feminine consciousness. And here again, we see Wieland attempt to reconcile the personal with a larger world represented in the community established in the dance. The inclusion of a brief section of footage from **Catfood**, altered by pin marks, bespeaks a rethinking of personal expression, and in the rethinking Wieland stresses the importance of a personal feminine expression.

Joyce Wieland is true to the "tradition" of experimental film in her use of self-reflexive forms of construction and her concern with the nature of the medium. Yet, she moves beyond most experimental films in her refusal to rely on mere abstraction and aesthetic concerns. Her political, national and feminist consciousness defines her as a filmmaker with a broad scope, using the medium to its fullest.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Joyce Wieland interviewed by Kay Armatage, **Take One**, Volume III Number 2 February, 1972, p. 24.
2. Joyce Wieland interviewed by Barbara Martineau, August 2, 1975, Cinema Canada Collection in National Film Archives.
3. Like the sailboat in **Sailboat**, the street scene in **1933** and the landscape in **Reason Over Passion**, Trudeau eludes the cinema's grasp; he refuses to be contained within the film.
4. op, cit.
5. Joyce Wieland interviewed by Kay Armatage, **Take One**, Volume III Number 2 February, 1972, p. 24.
6. Marshall Delaney, "Wielandism: A Personal Style In Full Bloom," **Canadian Film Reader**, Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson (eds), (Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), p. 280.
7. Joyce Wieland interviewed by Kay Armatage, **Take One**, Volume III Number 2 February, 1972, p. 25.

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