

BARBARA STERNBERG

"And now for something different: a lineup of new artists' video, film and performance that treats it all like, well, ART and not just a one-shot, ad hoc special event."

J. Bentley Mays, Globe & Mail, October '87

Mays is referring to a new programming direction undertaken by YYZ (one of the approximately 80 nonprofit artist-run centres across Canada which exhibit contemporary artworks). The first film artist to be exhibited under this new programme at YYZ is Annette Manguard, who has printed, successively, three short films on one reel which is available for viewing in the gallery throughout the three-week exhibition period. Due to the relative fragility of film, the screenings are scheduled (daily at 1:00 and 3:00 p.m.) as opposed to the view-on-demand approach that has worked well so far in exhibiting videoart. However, Doug Sigurdson, film and video coordinator at YYZ, acknowledges that this being their "fledgling" venture with film, there may yet be bugs to be ironed out.

The gallery's board has made the basic decision to venture into this area - though they feel less knowledgeable to select both individual works and a particular area of focus for YYZ than they do in the visual contemporary art field. Sigurdson explained that, at this point, they are experimenting more in terms of the mode of presentation - exhibition versus event - than in the risk level of the work. Now that YYZ has created the opportunity for exhibition, input will no doubt come from the community as well, and in a year's time they will be better able to state opinions and choose directions.

Sigurdson is very interested in the movement back and forth between visual art and the broader visual culture. He doesn't feel that the gallery is in any way doing the independent film artists a favour, but is rather incorporating within the gallery the fulsome tradition of avant-garde film.

So far, Sigurdson reports the response has been very good. Gallerygoers do seem willing to take a half-hour to sit with time-based art. By regularly having film or video on exhibition, YYZ is forging in the public a habit of viewing time-based work in the gallery context.

And now for the local Snow Report: Michael Snow has just returned from a four-city tour in Japan, screening films (*Wavelength*, *Back and Forth*, *One Second in Montreal*, *So Is This*, *Seated Figures*) and playing a series of concerts with the 'new music' group CCMC. The tour arose from interest expressed by the Japanese when they were asked by the Ontario government who they would like to see from Canada. Fern Bayer worked on behalf of the government to set things up. A large retrospective of Snow's work is also being planned for the fall at the Hara Museum in Tokyo. There was already some familiarity with Snow's films which have had screening in Japan (*Wavelength* has been purchased by one of the universities).

Michael was very impressed with Kyoto, the former capital city, with its hundreds of monasteries and shrines. One 15th century garden has framed an area for viewing and is very formal in its laying out of the simple elements of rocks on white gravel. "It sets up your interest in speculation," remarked Snow, "and was very moving". One can understand Japan's affinity for Snow's films!

Did you notice in the films listed above an unfamiliar title? *Seated Figures* (colour, sound, 42 min., 16mm.) has just been completed by Snow. It is a trucking film: tracking shots from a rolling vehicle, shot at various speeds, sometimes blurring the image in the frame, alternate at irregular intervals with freeze-frames. The interest is in the direction and speeds through the frame - "it is really a motion picture." How the viewer accommodates this speedy movement and experiences it physiologically varies. Sometimes with the cut to a still frame there is a ricochet action, sometimes you get almost a supering effect due to the retinal after-image at the base of film's ability to create the illusion of motion, sometimes you see the screen as a field and forget that there's actually something moving. The film uses only horizontals, verticals, and the two diagonals.

"It is pretty formal," says Snow, "It comes out of *La Région centrale*. I had wanted to pursue some aspects of that film in other ways. *La Région centrale* is circular motion in one space, this film covers a lot of ground!" The camera tracks over modern asphalt, then a gravel road, rocky roads, paths, streams, fields. As appropriate to the trucking movement, "we start with where we are - and go away. It is also," adds Snow, "like narrative to 'go away'". The progression from asphalt to fields of wild flowers could have been edited in the opposite direction. This was considered, but then Snow opted for a "happy ending".

The seated figures of the title refer to both the audience seated in the real space of the theatre and the truck driver of the film's space. The sound track reproduces the projector sound and other audience sounds often heard during screenings, especially of experimental films - coughs, yawns, baby cooings, muttered arguing before leaving - thereby mixing the fictional audience with the real. "It's an objective use of the disturbances that usually happen anyway." This mixing of real and film space is brought into the image as the film ends with hand shadow-play, as if someone from the audience was making bird-hands in the projector's beam.

Snow wanted to make an experience that the viewer can't have in any other way (but film) and states that this kind of purity is refreshing to return to after his two previous films, *Presents* and *So is this* - though neither of these were strictly commentary (versus real) films.

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