

SNOW

Storms
SNOW STORMS ITALY
Italy

THE BAFFLING WORKS OF CANADIAN DIRECTOR MICHAEL SNOW – ALCHEMIST OF THE MOVIE CAMERA

In his films he gives the sensation of playing with the 'veering' which gives tonality to color

Corriere Adriatico – Perhaps Pinocchio was not given birth to by the fantasy of Collodi. Perhaps (in an event that would send all the principles of gynaecology flying out the window) the wooden puppet had a 'natural' birth. What makes us suspect this is the film of a vanguard artist of the cinema, the Canadian Michael Snow, who – in a mute, five minute 'flash' – has shown us how two chairs can shamelessly make love. It is quite plausible, once two chairs have given in to their 'resinous' desires, that the fruit of their love be a wooden log, like the one from which Pinocchio was born.

A to Z is actually a cartoon that flashes between the tonalities of two colors: white and blue. Snow amuses, rather than surprises, us. But we will not take on the responsibility of defining as art a 'funny' piece of work, such as this one. Another four minutes are spent in *Short Shave* where Snow presents us with the various possibilities for tricks. *New York Eye and Ear Control* finally enters the canons of better comprehension: a woman's silhouette that does all the things a normal woman would do, with one exception. 'Walking Woman' is in reality a woman's silhouette cut off at the thighs. And finally *Wavelength* – a room decorated only in its essentials, and an incredibly slow zoom. Continuous. Inexorable. Forty-five minutes of a tracking shot to end up swallowed by the waves of the sea.

Michael Snow can, without doubt, define himself as the alchemist of the camera. He plays with oscillations, giving tonality to color to the point of contrast. There can be no doubt that he is a vanguard artist. But forgive our narrow-mindedness, the cinema must also be founded on a few 'classical' concepts. It must not make such an abrupt break with the past.

MICHAEL SNOW'S CINEMA

Inevitably, even in the news media, tastes and motivated preferences come into play. We, unlike many of our colleagues, will therefore stress the importance of the 'personal show' that the Eighth International Festival of the New Cinema at Pesaro, has dedicated to Michael Snow.

Snow is a Canadian, of whom we have written more than once in these pages, because wherever he goes his films fascinate and disturb. He is 43 years old, has a background in the plastic and figurative arts, and is considered a reputable musician. Ten years ago, through Jonas Mekas, he approached the type of film that is commonly termed 'underground'. He discovered the immense, practically limitless possibilities of this type of film that takes refuge in a codified and standardized language. He also discovered that the too-customary distinction between modes of expression (or, as it is inappropriately used, of the arts) is without meaning when brought to the personal level of expression. A not too excessive series of films results – at Pesaro, 10 were presented, embracing practically all of his works – of which the culminating points were *Wavelength* made in 1967, and *La Région Centrale* made in 1971.

We recorded the impressive experience of the first film in these pages when that singular work first appeared, receiving recognition at the Belgian festival of Knokke-le-Zoote. The film is an extraordinary 'zoom' to an internal wall, articulated by four large windows, on the other side of which – with significant repetitions and in the most banal fashion – life unwinds. Inside, while the camera relentlessly closes in on a small photograph hanging on the wall (the zoom lasts for 45 minutes) the combination of lights, sounds, and a few words, creates sketches of human vicissitudes and hint at human drama.

In *La Région Centrale* – the auteur's only feature-length film which reaches the excessive duration of three hours – the combination of space/light/dyna-

mism introduced previously develops and exceeds itself in the sense that it rejects the 'story' and the human element, concentrating exclusively on those three essential ingredients. It is a first-rate piece of work that fuses elements of architecture, sculpture, painting and cinema in a combination dominated by various coherent rhythms, exquisitely interrelated in a superior vision. The only variable left is its length. However, it is inevitable, either in reference to its singular rhythms or to the universality of the whole. The inexhaustible preference for space and time that constitutes the personal element is characteristic of all the works. "The structure of this film" says Snow (and we cannot contest the fundamentals or the seriousness) "is somewhat classical, like a symphony, where a few themes are introduced at the beginning, and a few in the variations. There are movements repeated in varying tempos or combined with other movements. The film gives the impression of greater movement at the beginning and at the end; while in the middle, where the sky predominates, it seems that the movement loses all its dramatic quality, that it comes closer to the way the planets actually move and that a longer time span passes. However, there is no mathematical or geometric type of structure, describable in those terms. There is, rather, a series of variations that exploits every possible speed and combination of rotary movement of the camera."

With this personal show on Michael Snow, Pesaro has brought a contribution of extraordinary cultural interest, and has wisely continued the presentation of the 'underground' which has already been in review for two editions. After all, experimentation at Snow's level or at the level of very few other lovers of the experimental cinema, are perhaps the most important in order to understand the aesthetic possibilities of film-making.

WHEN REALITY OVERWHELMS FICTION

The Zoom-Shock of Michael Snow

AT THE PESARO FILM FESTIVAL CANONS OF 'CONVENTIONAL' CINEMA UNDER FIRE Michael Snow's personal show presently heads the Underground Movement

L'Unita, Roma — In Toronto, they threw objects at the screen. In New York's Cinemathèque, they tried to rip the film from the projector. In Amsterdam, they wanted to destroy the theatre. These were the reactions from some of the public seven or eight years ago to the experimental films of Michael Snow. But, says the director, "They were more violent then." In Pesaro today, before the ten films that made up the complete works of Snow were shown, the protests were sporadic and isolated. At the end, the applause overwhelmed the notes of dissent, although the spectators left thoroughly tested for having tried to follow spasmodic and unusual lines of logic. The Underground in Italy is available to few, and followed by very few. Only its eccentricities are known, but its course has never been mapped. Nevertheless, in "Diversa America", where it was born (not solely in the States and not solely by Americans) it has already reached the second generation. Snow's 1971 *La Région Centrale* has by now replaced that other vanguard movement of nearly ten years ago — the art of 'seeing' of Stan Brakhage (even then it was thanks to the Pesaro Film Festival that we learned of it).

Snow, 43 years old, Canadian, is an offspring of the plastic arts, and of jazz. He began his training in the film industry at the famous cartoon studios of his country. Later, he moved to New York, and in 1967 won his first international award with *Wavelength*. His experimentation focusses on presenting reciprocal identities of space and time in unusual perspectives: more philosophic than visual ("The meaning", says Snow, "is not on the screen.") Consequently, the most conventional factor in cinema — the image, rather, the moving image — is subordinated to completely new proportions of another kind. Music is no longer considered 'a musical comment', but a precise and irreplaceable 'happening'. The rapidity of filming, the rotation of color, the contemplated scenery, the human figure and the one-dimensional figure, the voice that becomes sound and sound that becomes voice — all this is taken to such a limit, that at times it seems unbearable precisely because it is absolutely real: the duration of a sunset, the crossing of a room, the wailing of a siren. Snow reflects an original way of thinking in his presentation. Certain poses of immobility are quite evidently presented for provocation, in that they frustrate the expected waiting period that the audience is used to in 'conventional' film; by imagining the play of objects, places and subjective points of view; where the 'conventional' film's attention tends to relax or distract.

—Tino Ranieri

Le Monde, Paris — How can one ask viewers, who have on the whole concerned themselves only with 'the revolution' in Latin American and Japanese films, to look seriously at the extraordinary cinematographic monument that this new film of more than three hours by the Canadian Michael Snow constitutes? No physical action, not even the presence of man, a fabulous game with nature and machine which puts into question our perceptions, our mental habits, and in many aspects renders moribund existing cinema: the latest Fellini, Kubrick, Bunuel, etc.

Former painter and jazzman, Michael Snow at first worked in New York. In 1967, he was awarded the Grand Prize at the Experimental Film Festival in Knokke-Le-Zoute, Belgium for *Wavelength*, a 45-minute zoom intercut with stops, with rare human appearances, accompanied by a synchronized sound that immediately exerts its power of brute fascination. In 1969 *Back and Forth* appeared, 50 minutes of pure movement, two thirds of it a pendulum-like movement from left to right and back again, one third of the movement executed vertically. All our perception is upset.

For *La Région Centrale*, shot with more substantial means (\$28,000 from the Canadian Film Development Corp.), Michael Snow had a special camera constructed by a technician in Montreal, a camera capable of moving in all directions: horizontally, vertically, laterally or in a spiral. The film is one uninterrupted movement across space, inter-cutting regularly the X serving as a point of reference and permitting one to take hold of stable reality. Michael Snow has chosen to film a deserted region, without the least trace of human life, 100 miles to the north of Sept-Iles in the province of Quebec: a sort of plateau without trees, opening onto a vast circular perspective of surrounding mountains.

In the first frames, the camera disengages itself slowly from the ground in a circular movement. Progressively the space fragments, vision inverts in every sense, light everywhere dissolves appearance. We become insensible accomplices to a sort of cosmic movement. A sound track rigorously synchronized, composed from the original sound which programmed the camera, supplies a permanent counterpoint.

Michael Snow pushes toward the absurd the essential nature of this 'seventh art' which is endlessly repeated as being above all visual. He catapults us to the heart of a world before speech, before arbitrarily imposed meanings, even subject. He forces us to rethink not only cinema, but our universe.

—Louis Marcorelles

THE SINGULAR EXPERIMENT FOR
MANY SPECTATORS ABANDONED THE THEATRE DURING THE SHOW
45 MINUTES WITH THE SOUND OF A VACUUM CLEANER PIERCING THE EAR
APPLAUSE AND HISSES FOR THE AUTEUR'S DISCONCERTING TECHNIQUE
OF THE CANADIAN SNOW
His films fascinate and disturb
WITH LENSES THAT ROTATE 360 DEGREES

Pesaro: Snow wins the Bet ~

but he doesn't care!

HE PRESENTS A FILM TO PROVOKE THE AUDIENCE – THAT MUST, FOR 40 MINUTES, PUT UP WITH LOOKING AT A SINGLE SHOT INSIDE A ROOM



Snow's exasperating films at Pesaro

Photo by Babette Mangolte



A FILM SHOT IN A ROOM WITH A 45 MINUTE ZOOM TO A PHOTO REPRESENTING WAVES, PLACED ON THE OPPOSITE WALL

His contribution must be ranked with the great scientific and artistic geniuses...

AT THE PESARO FILM FESTIVAL

CANONS OF 'CONVENTIONAL'
CINEMA UNDER FIRE



Translated by Gabriella Dobson