Trois bandes vidéo de Noël Harding et la narration par illusion visuelle / Three Videotapes by Noel Harding and the Visual Illusion of Narrative

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Avant de se consacrer à la vidéo, Noel Harding a été opérateur de télévision, et un certain nombre de ses premières œuvres apparaissent comme un résumé de l'art de la production télévisée. Les effets obtenus par le jeu de la caméra et l'enregistrement du son, qui agrémentent l'ambiance, l'accent et le rythme, sont isolés du contexte habituel pour fournir le contenu documentaire ou dramatique et acquérir une indépendance de structure que la présence coordonnatrice de la caméra nous permet de discerner. Trois vidéos de 1973, Kathy's Room, Clouds et Table and Chairs — probablement parmi les meilleurs de la production de Kathy — présentent une solution structurale commune : la caméra, installée dans une position fixe, tourne autour de son champ d'opération et le scrutte afin d'y découvrir le détail piquant ou touchant. Cette formule atteint la perfection si, à l'immobilité du point de prises de vue, l'on ajoute la régularité et la répétition des mouvements de l'appareil, mais le succès dépend de réactions plus subtiles à l'égard de situations bien caractérisées.

L'œuvre la plus ancienne et, en même temps, la plus complexe nos est offerte par Kathy's Room. Au début, la caméra est placée au centre de la chambre et tourne autour d'elle. La mise en place des objets présents une certaine étrangeté et est marquée par un goût juvénile pour le dépouillement qui pourrait bien n'être qu'une réaction audacieuse contre le manque de sentiment de passage du temps et de sa signification humaine, mais il n'y a pas d'intrigue ; seulement une allusion continue à des potentiologies narratives imminentes qui ne se matérialisent jamais en une action due à l'imperfection de la présence coordonnatrice de la caméra elle-même, déboule, qu'on aperçoit par la porte ouverte, ou assise dans l'ombre du soir qui s'allonge sur le cadre de la fenêtre.

Le son joue un rôle important. Le tic-tac cadencé d'un métronome couvre les bruits légers et intermittents de la chambre, le froissement des câbles de la caméra elle-même, le dialogue étouffé et les paroles indistinctes de Kathy, une sonnerie de téléphone qui cause un tournoiement hors foyer de la caméra.

Tout au long de l'œuvre, règne un extraordinaire sentiment de passage du temps et de sa signification humaine, mais il n'y a pas d'intrigue ; seulement une allusion continue à des potentialités narratives imminentes qui ne se matérialisent jamais en une action suivie. Pendant que la noireur tombe, les lumières sont allumées en même temps qu'est mis en action le dispositif électronique antifading qui rétablit l'intensité lumineuse originale. A la tombure du jour, la clarté incertaine du paysage, aperçue à travers la sombre silhouette de l'armature de la fenêtre, cède la place à des moulures bien éclairées, se détachant en relief, d'une manière également théâtrale, sur la noireur grandissante de la nuit approchante : les modes d'expression ont la même vigueur mais ils sont contradictoires. Les lumières sont allumées et étincelantes à plusieurs reprises ; on ne saurait échapper au côté mécanique fondamental de la transformation. Dans d'autres séquences, de brusques passages d'un détail à un autre donnent à
For Beckett, the darkness is come again, and the dream of creation is an obscene joke, the permanent separation of an infinite being in time and space from the disgustingly real,summum bonum. **I once knew a madman**, says Hamm to Clov in *Endgame*, "who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand, and drag him to the window. Look. There. All that raising corn. And there. Look. The sails of the herring fleet. All that loneliness. He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes."

The writer moves towards a final, ruthless vision, one void of humanity, yet, granted the time, surely, the possibility of renewal, and not words:

"...structures and become symbols of people and their bleak vision, leave us with nothing save creation springs. And the creations themselves, work of Christopher Pratt."

**Setting is gentle, almost rural in the English ordinance.**

"...the muddy stirrings of alternatives that them­..." (Endgame).

As a friend and fellow artist I marvel, and am full of joy. Life, not death is the proper business of art, and in his continued drive for the encyc­..." (Endgame).

For Beckett, the darkness is come again, and the dream of creation is an obscene joke, the permanent separation of an infinite being in time and space from the disgustingly real, the logical conclusion to the absurdity of suffering.

"...It's my dream, A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the dust." (Endgame).

I make these comments because perhaps in Beckett more than any other artist, in any form, one can find at times a parallel vision in the work of Christopher Pratt.

"...I stated earlier that Pratt was an artist of his time and place. Newfoundland is an elemental environment, with an elemental history as turbulent as that of any Greek state. It is not possible for any artist living here to avoid the ancient metaphysical and physical problems of humanity struggling to assert a dependency against a blind and pitiless Universe. Pratt's art has reflected this process, moving from trees crying out for identity into the eye of the storm and its murderous calm, knowing that to move, to create, would bring chaos, but coming out then into the sunlight of Lake Ontario — the smudge of smoke. I think the process illustrates that he has rejected the final abstraction, the empty stage of the world, and is embarking on another journey which will allow the private poet and the visual artist to fuse and melt into one."

As a friend and fellow artist I marvel, and am full of joy. Life, not death is the proper business of art, and in his continued drive for the encyc­..." (Endgame).

So there is a more manifest than in *The Sheep*, and Parish Hall. The sheep is a dirty and rather unintelligent beast whose principal image is as a rather confused symbol of Christianity. And ownership warps and confuses buildings; they lose their identity as structures and become symbols of people and their subsequent history. But if one could bring them back to our consciousness in an Eden state, to bring them to us, in Dylan Thomas' words:"

"...as it must have been after the birth of the simple light in the first spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm out of the whining green stable on to the fields of praise." (Fern Hill)"

then, surely, the possibility of renewal, and not words: a single potted plant that can yet be made to yield a sense of horticultural opulence — a fragment, and this results, at once, in the sense of a landscape; from its idyllic recesses, over and over again, one can find at times a parallel vision in the work of Christopher Pratt.

To return to the paintings. That Greek sea, that Aegean sky are the genesis from which creation springs. And the creations themselves, work of Christopher Pratt.

**The Visual Illusion of Narrative**

**By Eric Cameron**

Noel Harding was a television camera-man before he was a video artist, and a group of early works emerge as an abstraction of the craft of television production. Those effects of camera work and sound recording that provide embellishments of mood, accent and pace are isolated from the habitual context of documentary or dramatic content and achieve a structural self-sufficiency through an awareness of the coordinating presence of the camera itself. Three tapes from 1973, *Kathy's Room*, *Clouds*, and *Table and Chairs* are probably the best of the lot, and they form a single fixed position whose variously pans and scans its environment, hunting out the poignant or emotive image. Add to the fixed view-point regularity of camera movements and the fact of repetition, and the formula is complete, but resolution departs from more selective responses to specific situations.

**Kathy's Room** is the earliest and also the most complex. The camera sits in the middle, and in the early part of the tape it winds regularly round the room. The setting has a certain oddity about it, a sparse youthful taste that might well be a bold response to youthful lack of funds: a single potted plant that can yet be made to yield a sense of horticultural opulence when the camera fixes tightly on it; against the window in the opposite wall, the date in large, bold figures looking more like a road sign than a signal; pictures leaning against the wall, not hung up; old-fashioned radiators under­..." —
arms outstretched towards us, but at the last minute, she would turn aside and embrace a Volkswagen truck. The girl in Clouds just keeps on coming, until her face, as large as life, completely fills the screen.

She just stands there, available to our gaze and the projections of erotic imagination. No one else is about. Eventually she says "I love you", but we have to read the words on her lips; the microphone is placed far away, collected on the enclosed space between the twirling birds, chirping crickets, distant traffic and a neighbour's lawn-mower. We continue to read the words in the muscular contractions of her abdomen as the camera pans right down to her feet. Twice she appears in different dress; in one episode she lets her hair down loosely about her shoulders.

The clouds are real enough to tinge the summer joy with melancholy (at times the camera looks directly up at them) but they forbode no great tragedy. As they pass overhead, the light changes and so the mood. As the girl approaches from a different angle, so the illumination of her features varies, as does the emotional connotation of the image. Her expression seems to change too. Once, she is unable to say "I love you" with a straight face and bursts out laughing — in silence. The totality is a medley of male-oriented voyeurism. One can have it whichever way flatters the male ego: either as an inferiority complex (almost as a joke) or with sweet nostalgic sadness.

Table and Chairs is simpler and also more stark. It is more regular than either Clouds or Kathy's Room, and its one actor is male. If Kathy's room was plain, the setting here is raw: a rough wooden table, two wooden chairs and one solitary pear poised in the centre of the table that serves the technical function of a visual stop to the camera as it pans repeatedly from side to side.

Two chairs placed at the table bespeak a social situation. When the camera moves from one to the other it creates a dialogue even in the absence of people. The one actor, when he does appear, is a good match for the room. Overweight, hairy, stripped to the waist, with his own arms outstretched towards us, but at the last minute, he would turn aside and embrace a Volkswagen truck. The girl in Clouds just keeps on coming, until her face, as large as life, completely fills the screen.

Versatile and dynamic, Gerald Budner is a painter, decorator, costumer, historian and restorer of buildings in Montreal, Toronto and Upper Canada Village. The democratization of art? Not only does he believe in it, but he also practises it. Formerly, at the Educational Services Department of the Art Gallery of Toronto, his natural city, he was inspired by Arthur Elsler's theories as set forth in Education Through Art, aiming to make art accessible to everyone. Later, he was to pursue this line of thought in his films. For he is also a film producer. How did he arrive at the film on art?

Gerald Budner reveals the sequence of events.

Gerald Budner — Sur le pont d'Avignon (Jean-Paul Ladouceur and Wolf Koenig, 1951), from the folk song, is a film mimed by marionettes without strings. Punch and Judy, that I created for the National Film Board. They had requested my co-operation on account of my knowledge of the history of medieval art, and the figures in the frescoes at the Palace of the Popes in Avignon were my models. One thing led to another. One day Robert Verrall, who was working at the NFB, asked me to collaborate on his film, A Is for Architecture (1959). It was important to sensitize people to our historical and cultural heritage that had to be put into perspective with relation to the present. This is a universal theme, judging by the different versions that later appeared — Danish, Swedish, Finnish, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Polish and Japanese. For this film, I had to plunge into historical research, which interests me tremendously — Verrall had chosen me for that — and condense 5000 years of world architecture into thirty minutes!

René Rozon — With the exception of the two sequences on Montreal, made live at the beginning and the end of the filming, the whole picture uses animation techniques. Why is that?

G. B. — The varied nature of the documents — photographs, drawings, engravings, etc. — raised a problem: because after assembling the information we were faced with a real hotch-potch. How were we to make the material fit to be seen? For greater coherence, we had to achieve a uniform style. This is why Verrall and I adapted the visual material by creating our own drawings. I love cities and their peculiarities. I feel a genuine pleasure in wandering through their streets. To feel the past in a city is an intoxicating experience. This is what I wanted to convey in this film.

R. R. — From architecture you went to the pictorial domain.

G. B. — That is true. We were involved at first in a collaboration with Jean Palardy for his film Corelleur (1959), focusing on the camera on Otilas Leduc's pictures. Confident on account of this work, we felt ready to attack a subject dear to my heart, The World of David Milne (1963).

R. R. — An unexpected choice, but a discerning one. Because your film was to contribute to rehabilitating in the eyes of the public this artist who was in danger of being lost.

G. B. — Unfortunately, his work has always been unappreciated because he was too far ahead of his time, and rejected during his lifetime by society, including the Group of Seven, not having the support of their patron, Dr. James McCallum. And how poorly he is represented in our public collections! Only one small group supported him, among them were Douglas Duncan and Vincent Massey. Now some of his admirers were my friends. It was they who supplied me with the material for my film. Of the 800 works examined, 120 pictures and water-colours were selected for their filming qualities.

R. R. — And was it at that time that you developed your own concept of the film on art?

G. B. — Inevitably, since I was obliged to eliminate works that I greatly love. In this work, one must never lose sight of the idea that the transposing of works of art to the cinema can engender a new work of art on film. To attain this, it is necessary to respect filming reason, which demands special framing and a coherence of style, because the diversity of subjects, colours and proportions of works by a single artist can break the continuity. It is also necessary to take care not to confuse the spectator who must identify with the film, find his own way in it, and for this his interest must be sustained during the whole length of the projection. For all these reasons, we must look very closely at each of the film's elements. Finally, the film on art must be a pleasant experience, an enjoyable experience, which in no way prevents it from being educational at the same time. Conscious of the fundamental interaction between the spectator and the filmed reality, I hope to reconcile these two poles.

R. R. — After this film on one of our great contemporary artists, you went back in time to create a second film for the National Commission from the National Gallery of Canada?

G. B. — Yes, to complete the exhibition they organized, The Art of the Court in France and in England, 1259—1329. They had imported everything for this exhibition: stained glass windows, fabrics, illuminations, gold and silver plate. I wanted to show that this art was not transformable! This was the reason for the film, with St. Urban in Troyes (Yves Leduc, 1972) for France. Before undertaking this project I had to finish the animation of the films on Léonard Forest's Acadia. For Ever Since Augustus, we had to research Irish and Norse traditions because I wanted to illustrate the film with the most beautiful illuminations of the period. I drew material from the illuminated MS of Matthew of Paris, who had worked in England. I had also used illuminations by this artist before, to illustrate the medieval sequences of The Ideal City. According to Lewis Mumford (Léonard Forest, 1963). From Matthew of Paris I kept two aspects: the illustrations showing everyday life in the Middle Ages and the techniques of building a cathedral.

R. R. — This did not prevent you from giving us a portrait of the present cathedral at Exeter.

G. B. — This was because at the beginning the film had to be instructive. But upon visiting the