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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Trois bandes vidéo

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 que fournirait le contenu documentaire ou dramatique et acquerrait 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 l'art visuel de la décennie — présentent une solution structurale commune : la caméra, installée dans une position fixe, tourne autour de son champ d'opération et le scrute afin de découvrir le détail piquant ou touchant. Cette formule atteint la perfection si, à l'immobilité du point de prise 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 nous 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 présente 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 jeunesse. Une seule plante dans un pot, un écran vide au lieu d'un mur. A cause de sa position centrale, la caméra ne peut jamais saisir qu'un détail isolé, et il en résulte aussitôt des vides neutralisants de même qu'une exagération des intentions à cause de l'impression de claustrophobie produite par le cadrage du contenu de la chambre. L'emploi du zoom amplifie ensuite cet effet. A travers une fenêtre, la caméra observe dans le lointain des branches d'arbres dépouillées, puis le plan focal est ramené à la fenêtre, qui devient maintenant une barrière impénétrable. Le plan change de nouveau, et tout se brouille. Quand les arbres sont au foyer, les petits-bois des battants de la fenêtre se perdent dans le néant. Tout cela nous indique qu'un bouton de réglage de la caméra a été tourné, mais chaque phase pourrait indépendamment traduire un état de tension psychologique, introduire le point critique d'un drame qui n'est jamais précisé. Ensuite, le chien de Kathy fait son apparition — puis, Kathy elle-même, debout, 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 froissage des câbles de la caméra elle-même, le dialogue étoffé 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 noirceur 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 tombée 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 noirceur grandissante de la nuit approchante ; les modes d'expression ont la même vigueur mais ils sont contradictoires. Les lumières sont allumées et éteintes 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, survival's pitiful parody.

"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 rising corn. And then, 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 name of death and decay, the logical conclusion to the absurdity of suffering.

"I love order. 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.

To return to the paintings. That Greek sea, that Aegean sky are the genesis from which creation springs. And the creations themselves, timeless and abstract, stand on the rim of time, perfect, yet uninhabited, a vision of order unconfounded by the indignity of death and decay. But having made the comparison I now have to undo it to some extent for, whereas in the theatre Beckett's characters, having articulated their bleak vision, leave us with nothing save 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 encyclopedic path of perfection, Christopher Pratt celebrates it.

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**THREE VIDEO TAPES BY NOEL HARDING AND 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, and space 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 those early works. What is the possible solution? The camera is in a single fixed position whence it 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 depending on more subtle 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 strange sense. One might feel that in some way the image is not complete. It is transformed into an extension of one of his pictures. There was space, order, light, meticulously arranged. Abstraction with a living purpose. And later, looking through his most recent work in the air cell of a studio I considered particularly Cape St. Mary's and Lake Ontario. Perhaps it is too simplistic to suggest that the very essence of a light sense the artist had begun to move towards a clarification of the vision of renewal, but, in *Lake Ontario* the idea asserts itself with great force.

The codas are all there, the perfect vision of sky and water, and central to it the perfect object, the boat. But drifting from the stack, trailing life across the Universe, is a stream of smoke.

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 archetypal 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 encyclopedic path of perfection, Christopher Pratt celebrates it.

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Three video tapes by Noel Harding and the visual illusion of narrative.
The goal of the National Film Board is to bring a living image of Canada to Canadians and to the world. (John Grierson, founder and first commissioner of the NFB.)

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 Lismer'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 Ladoucette 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 hopscotch. How were we to make the material fit to be seen? For greater coherence, we had to achieve a uniformity of style. That 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.