



Ellie Epp

Coming belatedly to a great filmmaker's work can either be revelatory or mortifying. My recent 'discovery' of the sparse canon of Vancouver filmmaker Ellie Epp was both: revelatory because her work is so astonishing, mortifying because I had never encountered any of her work though her first film (and her masterpiece), *Trapline*, dates back over a decade. To call Epp a structuralist, as so many commentators have, is as seductive as it is reductive: it tends to deny the lyrical impulse in her work. To my knowledge, Epp has not been claimed by feminist film critics, and, ironically, the best commentary about her three short films (the others are *Current* and *Notes in origin*) is by Bruce Elder and Bart Testa, neither of whom are known for any automatic sympathy for women filmmakers. I would dare not venture an analysis of Epp's work, having screened each of her films only once, amidst a seven-hour, non-stop marathon preview of some recent Canadian experimental work. Suffice it to say that, amidst the unearned emotion, facile ideas, undigested cultural tradition and the slavish derivativeness of much of the work I saw, Epp's films stood out as works of bracing, resolute intelligence and purity. I would trade dozens of features I could name for the final shot of *Trapline*, which has the kind of heart-quickenning beauty which makes you want to stop a screening and be alone for the rest of the day.

JAMES QUANDT

The background of the image is a clear blue sky with soft, wispy white clouds. In the upper right corner, there is a branch of a tree with small, light-colored leaves or flowers.

FILM

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THEORY

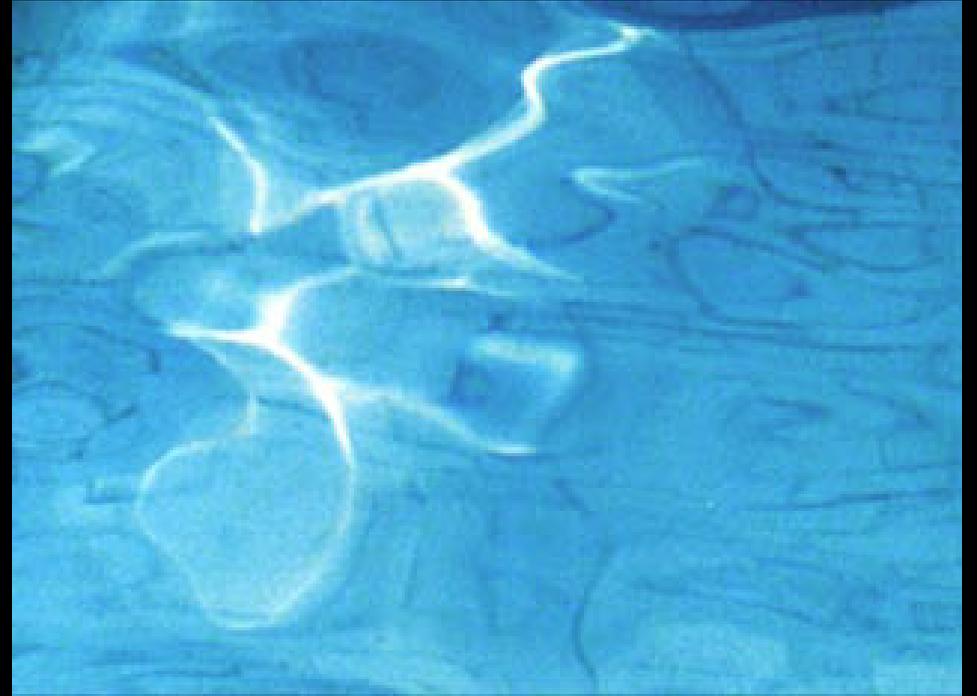
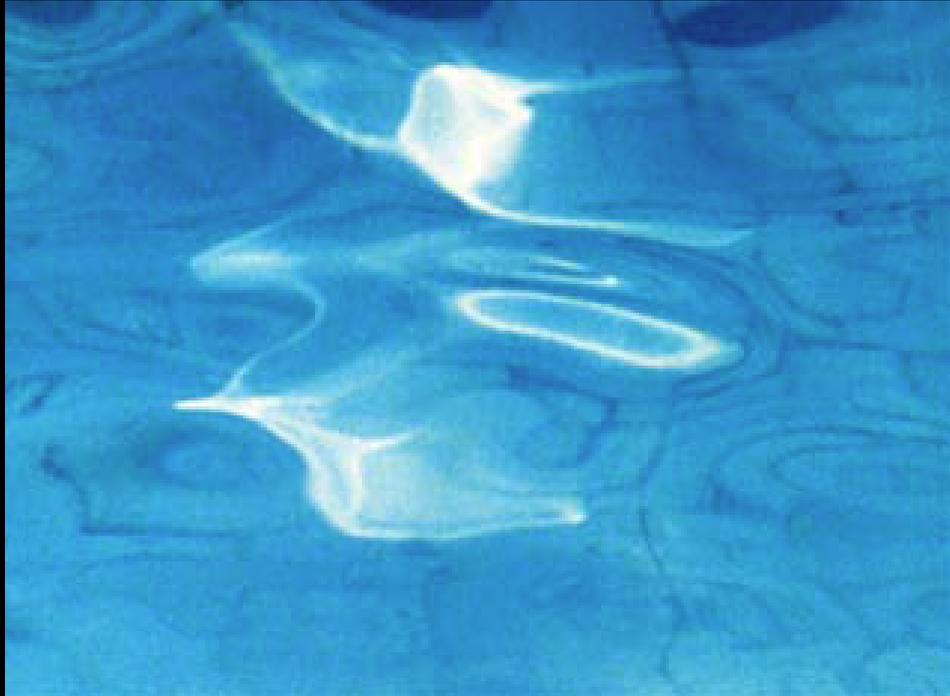
VIDEO

NOTES



FILM

TRAPLINE 1976 16mm 18 min sound



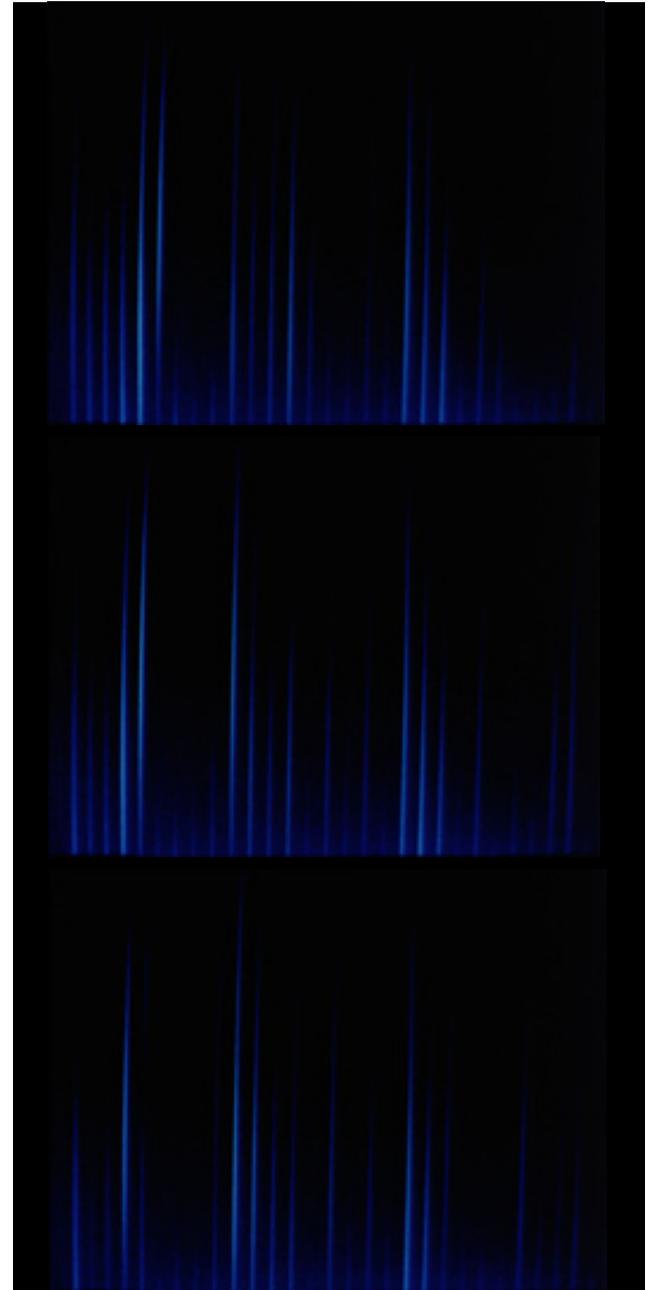
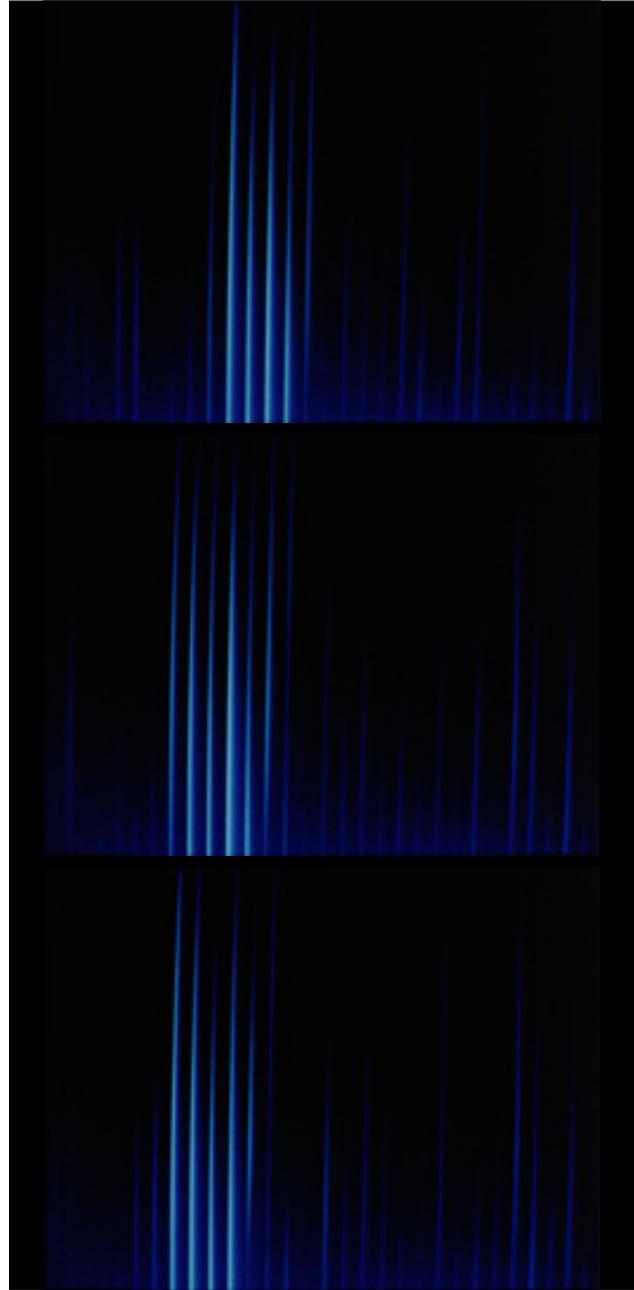
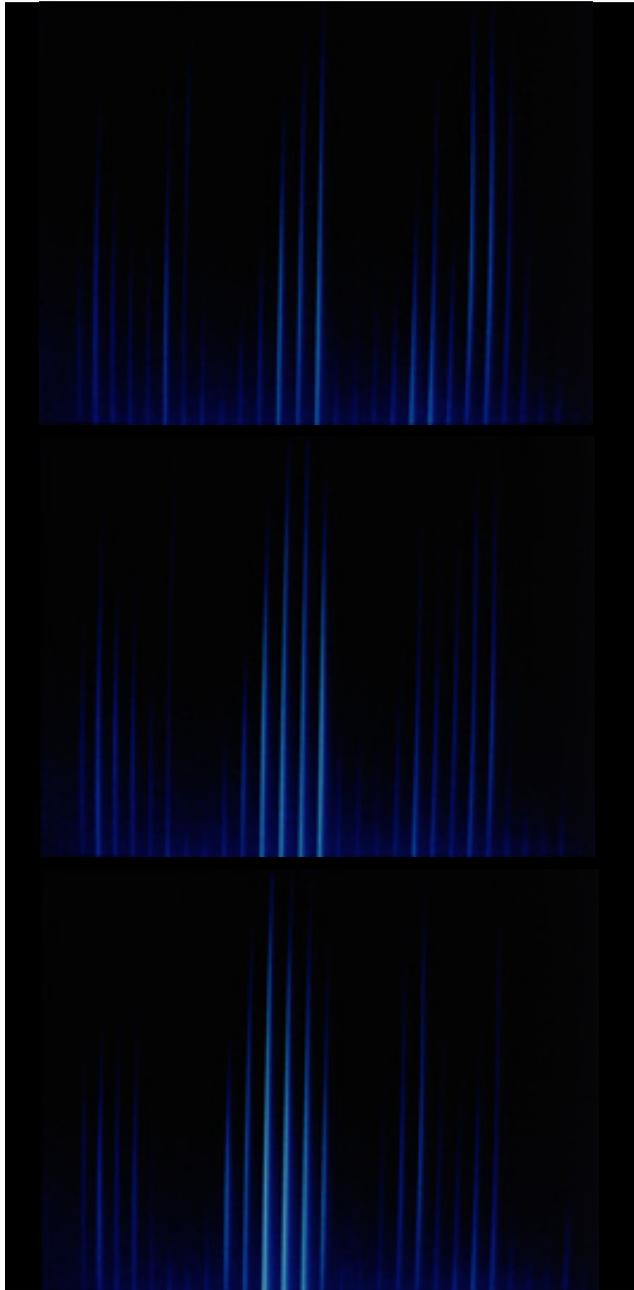
TRAPLINE



TRAPLINE



CURRENT 1986 16mm 3 min silent





- 1 quiet.  
downlight the swan  
gives her mood.  
frost feathers say  
yes the whole of the image is the swan  
looking toward you and away.
- 2 anxious and released.  
has the film begun?  
an ember on the left side of the screen  
struggling comically to get into the picture.  
sprung loose and broadly sailing,  
kindling her air.
- 3 interested.  
figure and ground  
keep rolling over.
- 4 startled.
- 5 physical.  
the heart of the image  
calms down.
- 6 comprehensive.  
a window and 'a window'  
in a window.
- 7 thinking.  
something behind us  
participates in what is in front of us.  
bits of the image  
have a flight of their own.
- 8 not overwhelmed  
by how much we can see  
though it comes down thicker every minute.
- 9 holding still and moving.  
breathed. a light beat.  
swarm in the grain.
- 10 flooding. if you stay near  
it lifts you.

NOTES IN ORIGIN



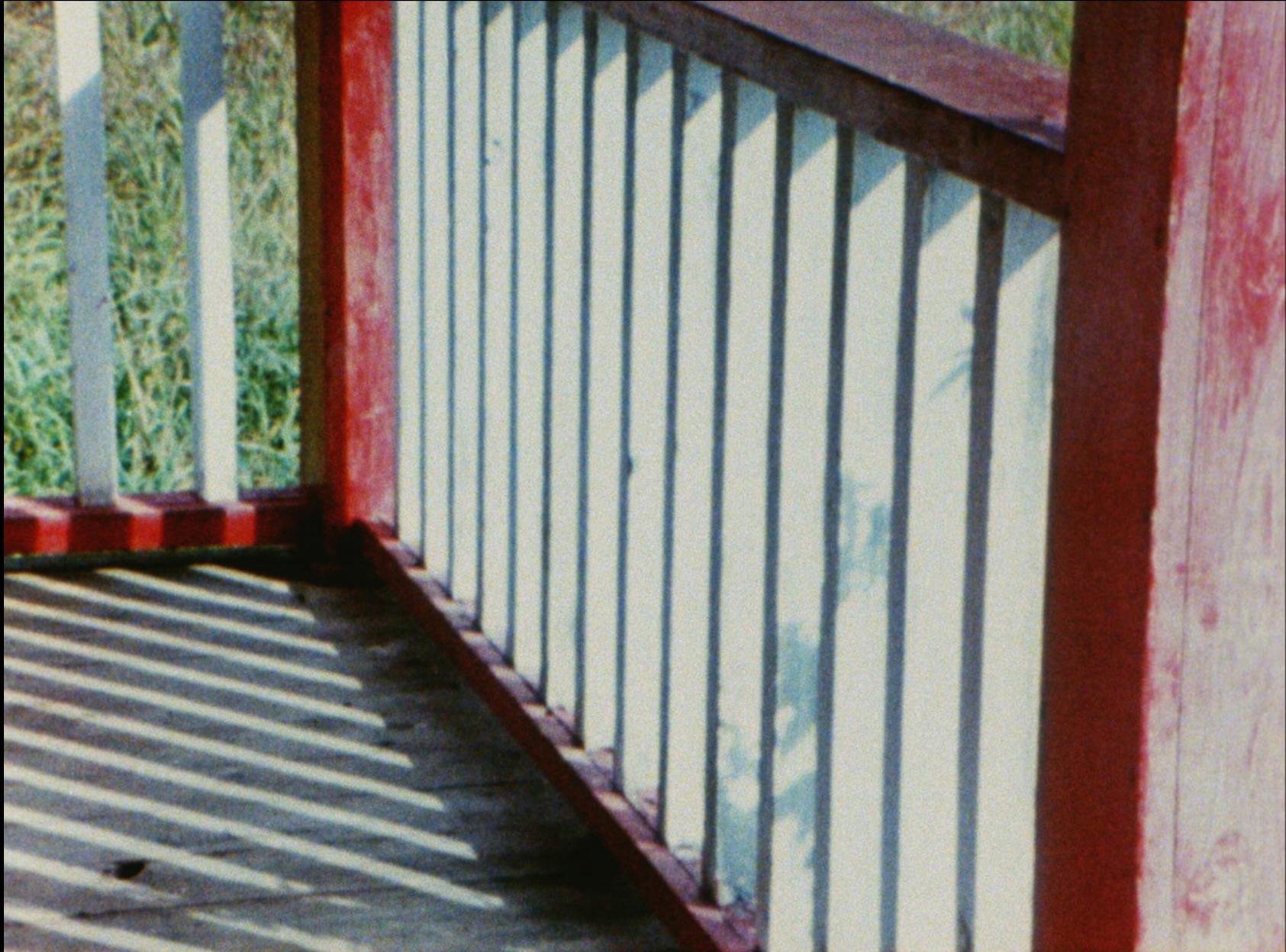
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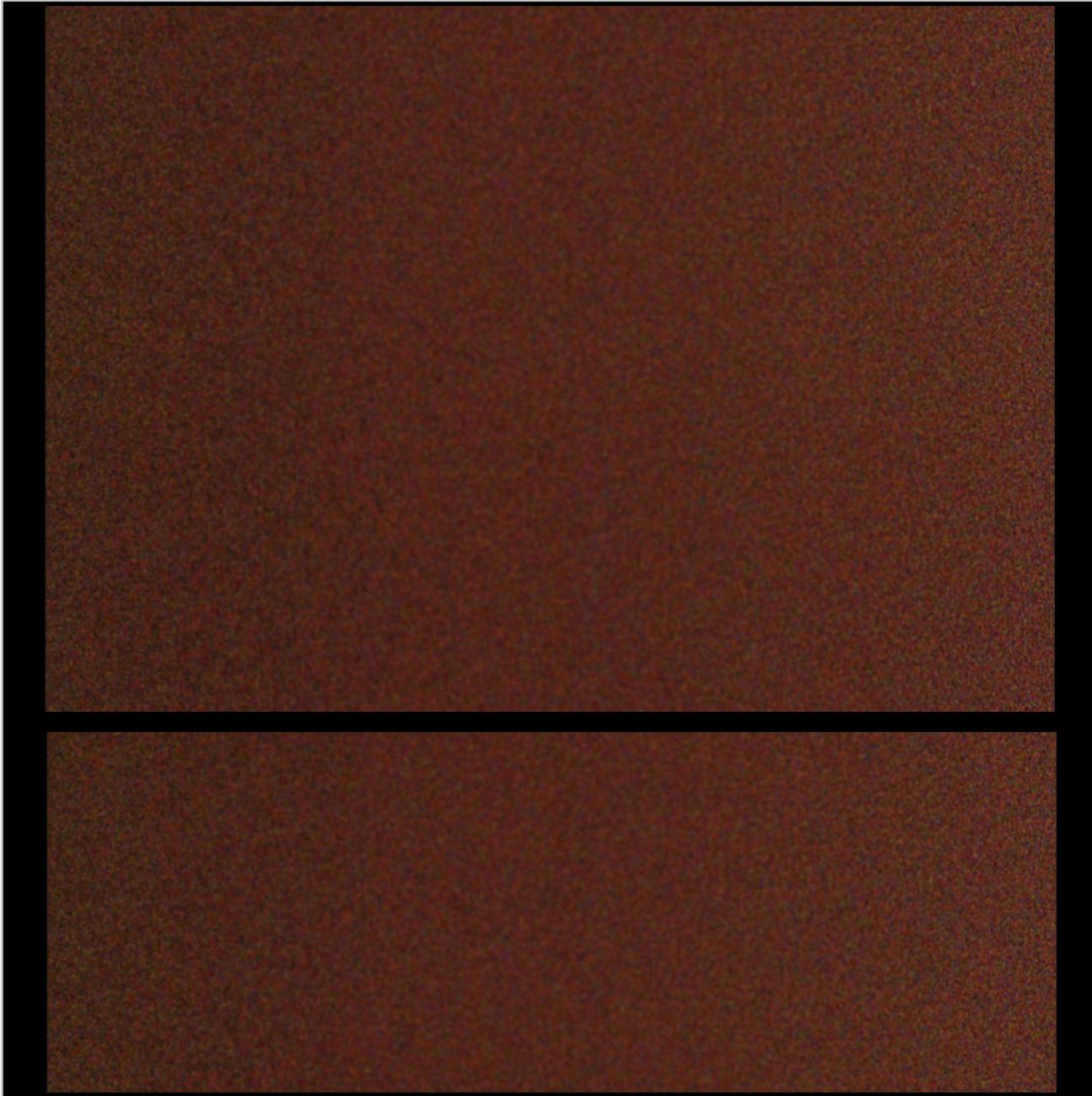


NOTES IN ORIGIN



NOTES IN ORIGIN





i'm touching her with every surface i can

there are columns of light standing in my palms

this is the place to go on from if i can get there

the way a hand on an arm is a contact that allows a flow so bright so soft it must be fluid love

the downy aura of my hand on him anywhere

lying with him in sun after we went to look at roses, body full of a slightly pulsing white light that is desire satisfied to be desire

waves of invisible light will be running through our chests

this immaterial field of perception

the inside of the body remains unborn, remains as it was, a night with the lights of sensation

das fliessende licht

das fliessende licht

your gifts with which you touch me without pause and which cut through all my bones and all my veins and all my flesh

the art she sought was not a communication but a reception

as the sun shines into water and yet leaves the water undisturbed

## BRIGHT & DARK notes

*Bright and dark* was made for a Cineworks anthology produced by Mary Daniel – *Coming to her senses: 6 women, 6 films, 6 senses*. I chose the sixth sense.

Cineworks gave me my 400 foot roll of color neg just as I was leaving for San Diego. I put it in the trunk of my car and took it with me. I was gone for three months: I left the film in the trunk and it went everywhere I went – to UCSD, to the hills, to the ocean. The sun shone every day but two. I fell in love. I learned freeway driving. Some days the car sat all day in a parking lot on G street. I knew the film was baking slowly in the heat, but I kind of ignored it.

When I got back to Vancouver in January I missed my friend and I missed the sun. It occurred to me that if my filmstock was visibly fogged it would be a sort of cumulative record of a time I had liked. Scared moments on the freeway, days and nights at G and Fourth, road trips with my friend, would all have contributed their heat to the film.

I also liked the idea of filmstock transforming continuously over a long time and as a volume, not frame by frame in split seconds. That way it would seem to keep a privacy like the inside of the body, because the film would have responded to the light without ever having been exposed to it. The film in its taped can would be like tissue sealed in the skin, sensitive, but in a slower and different way than skin is.

When the fog test came back I saw that the film was not only fogged but fogged in such a way that it shows big cellular-looking clumps of grain that squirm biologically in projection. The color timer at the lab found me an un-lit looking dull red I thought looked like intracellular fluid. Instead of cutting the image track I gave the timer a score for printer lights. I tried to time the opening and closing of the shutter so it would be like a breath, brightening in and darkening out the way sensation does inside the body when you breathe.

There is no one sixth sense. The sense I wanted to talk about doesn't have a name. It's not much discussed. It is esoteric in the sense that we don't have cultural markers for it though other times and places do. I call it electric

touch, but in fact I don't know whether it is either electrical or touch. It's a bit like subtle internal forms of other kinds of touch – the sense of temperature, the sense of pain, the kinesthetic sense. It might have something to do with electrical or magnetic fields, because sometimes it seems to work at a distance. What it reports is currents of connection between bodies and within bodies. When the connection is pleasant it is like a subtle flow of light. When it is unpleasant it can be like an electronic buzz in the shinbones. It takes a while to notice you're feeling it, but it isn't subjective. Sometimes you end up with people who aren't paying attention to it, but with other people it's a perception as mutual as sound. 'Do you hear that?' 'That faint hum?' 'Did you feel that?' 'The current between our knees?'

The soundtrack of *Bright and dark* has a couple of very short stories about electric touch. Most are personal but at the end of the track I quote Mechtild von Magdebourg who wrote in medieval German about a light of touch that flows through bones and flesh. When we know more about the subtle senses we may find that what we have called mysticism was in fact sensory research. The work of the women mystics may be research into senses particular to or more usual in women.

One more thing I wanted to say in *Bright and dark* is that when women's eroticism is described as passive a stupid equation is being made between attention and passivity. Close attention is intensely active. Receiving a touch is as active as giving it – sometimes more active, more skilled and more consequential. Erotic attention isn't an empty bowl touch is poured or pushed into; it is more like a living antenna with a million fibers actively searching the space of the touch for its shape and meaning.



MULTIMEDIA

NOTES IN ORIGIN: the performance (various dates) 35mm slides 16mm film audio tape live performance 90 minutes



**the first quarter section    july 1977**

camped on an old site  
back pasture/acid/the dugout  
father mother daughter son washing machine  
my mother has lost track of herself (or have I)  
her song about him

slides and audiotape  
slides and audiotape  
audiotape  
audiotape  
audiotape

**gust olson's place    july 1978 – april 1979**

spirit battle with a father  
width of the moon is 2 minutes  
frog  
field evaporating  
old songs, sub-audible  
wild oats

slides and audiotape  
film  
audiotap  
film  
slides and audiotape  
audiotape

**the tofteland house    may 1979 – january 1980**

red and black, children, a mouse  
the night horizon  
from the ice/roselight/heartbeat  
red and white, the lake house  
screens  
window  
heater  
nettle

slides and audiotape  
audiotape  
film  
slides and audiotape  
film  
film  
film  
film

**as a person woud say it    1981–1983 vancouver**

field & field or field & pasture meeting  
what will we know

audiotape  
live reading







## the night horizon

grass, nettle, the colour of gas-lantern light  
no, it's grass brick stone with the black clear  
behind it. it's the black of no thing

the top of the tree in shadow and moving more. lit wall,  
webs, breath steams. a line of web was shining between  
me and the lamp. moth doing something on the raspberry  
leaf, wings blurred

spider went up between two stars in the dipper's handle

lying on my back under the stars, roof corner and edge,  
and then the distance

### *dans le detail*

outer space. suddenly i had seen it. i felt myself in face  
of it. it was because i was on my back but as if upright  
looking out. i mean i was on the galactic plane, the  
stars were on my horizon. i felt i could step out and walk  
toward them. they were there, places. the extent of  
space between me and them was there. i saw how far  
i could see.

it was a moment of shrinking back and at the same time  
holding still, like holding a frame while what's in the  
frame quails. i saw it is always daylight out there. and  
that night is the window on it, a curtain removed

what i was marveling at was just the understanding that the  
axis of space is turned at night, vertical and horizontal are  
reversed. being held onto earth by the back or feet

then i remembered the speed of light, which is to say that  
looking so far is looking upstream, as if the sightline to  
any star is a time axis. then being in shells of times, being  
able to see to and through many times at once

i've never succeeded in telling anyone, yet, what it was  
i saw. but months later I came on something i'd read in  
vaughan and thought a metaphor. i saw eternity the other  
night, like a great ring of pure and endless light





## what will we know

everyone was a long time in a womb  
what was it like there?

was there mathematics            yes  
geometry, trigonometry            yes  
differential calculus    yes

the movement of the water taught us math  
our own growth was teaching us the progressions

the placenta taught us kindness            the attentive tree  
the placenta taught us listening & the companion's face

uterus taught us room & house  
the membrane taught us window  
cervix taught us door  
if the penis visited it taught us to knock  
oviducts taught us small corridors, ante-rooms, outhouses  
cell by cell taught us city

our hands in front of our faces taught us elephants & dogs on leashes  
the cord taught us snake  
the cord taught us stem            we were the plant or its shadow  
substances through the cord taught us drugs



the sun taught radiance & thus optics & thus logic  
the sun taught us straight lines pressure & penetration  
the moon taught us swelling-toward & thus wanting  
the stars taught us straight lines, convergence

the water taught us curves  
our hands in the water taught us fish  
our feet were quick-moving

coming out taught us weather  
coming through taught us fire  
the air in our lungs combusted them  
the smell in the air was assault

forgetting makes us interested in dreams we think the dream is in us like a baby  
forgetting makes us want to believe in ghosts  
forgetting taught us suicide: forgetting again (to remember)  
forgetting makes us tell stories

the water taught us ocean but it was coming out taught us abyss  
from one cell to two to four cells we learned engineering  
our growth taught us the eons  
coming out taught us zero

implantation taught us earth seeding & burial  
fertilization taught us the sequence for romance – taught us to lie down together  
and exchange knowledge through from belly to belly

the water taught us tears

placenta & water together taught the mother  
rough catching taught the other

the movement of the water taught thinking  
sound coming through the water taught words to ride on thinking

it is not that we come from the Mother : there is no mother until we are born  
we come equally from the two travelers in a landscape  
they teach us mother & father but they are not  
the one teaches moving slowly with many provisions,  
the other teaches moving fast  
what they do when they join is marriage there is a different marriage in every child

is there any teaching before they meet? i don't know  
when they join they teach joining

it is not that we come from the Mother: the mother is one of those who meet us  
she teaches resemblance metaphor she is something like . . .

from each of the travelers we learn arriving  
from coming out we learn dying  
from coming out we learn coming

from coming out we learn the flower  
from the way we fall we learn fruit & vegetables

from labour we learn massage    massacre    mass  
from labour we learn violence & war excitement

from the light in the body we love twilight

from the legs we fall through we learn post & beam construction

at the perineum we learn lintel    limen    limit  
it threshes and it holds

coming out taught us abandoning our beloved  
coming out teaches us being abandoned

all along we are learning space  
loss & increase are teaching us time

what we are before we are born teaches us universe  
what we are after we are born teaches us                    what?





INTERVIEWS

## LIVEABLE MARGINS - interview with Mike Hoolboom

**EE:** My family are Mennonites. During the Russian Revolution their lands were confiscated because they were *kulaks*. That's when my grandparents on both sides came to Canada with their many children. They settled in northern Alberta and homesteaded through the depression. My parents were married during the war. After the war both sets of grandparents moved to British Columbia, but my parents stayed behind because my father was attached to the land. I don't like my father, I think he's quite malicious. But there are times I'm grateful to him because he stayed and so we had the farm, and I loved the farm.

It's only recently I've realized how much of a shift my parents made. I thought of them as tied to an old culture, but they made important breaks very young. When they married he was twenty-one, she was nineteen. They insisted on being married in English, not the German they'd been raised in. That was unheard of in their congregation. As I grew up I was still hearing German preachers ranting about hell. Later, when I heard tapes of Hitler, I recognized the tone. Maniacal. My parents never left the church but they softened it for us kids.

I got my first Canada Council grant when I was sixteen. They had a program that sent high school students across the country to see plays at Stratford. We would sit in our berths on the transcontinental train and talk, and some of the wiser heads told me about Orwell's *1984*. I read it when I got home and it de-converted me overnight from my family's Christianity. I thought, "I know doublethink." That was an amazing thing for the Canada Council to do. It wasn't the plays, it was finding other people like me.

After high school I went to Queen's University because I wanted to go as far as I could from home. My parents hadn't been to university. I'd no sense of where to go until I saw a pamphlet that had managed somehow to get to my little high school in Sexsmith, Alberta. There were pictures of the university's ivy-covered buildings next to a lake. I won a scholarship and got onto a train in September 1963. My whole family came in the grain truck and stood on the platform eating ice cream cones. The train arrived and I got on with my portable typewriter and my blue suitcase and went three days and nights to Kingston. They had a program where you could have three majors so I did philosophy, psychology, and English. It was great. After two years I went to Europe and hitchhiked around for a year. Then came back and finished. In the dorm there were all these Toronto/Montreal kids, and for them it was all old hat, but I thought it was really interesting, though socially hard. I had a lot of cultural catching up to do.

I thought I was going to be a child psychologist. I'd started working at a children's centre called Sunnyside. What I discovered was that I didn't want to socialize the kids; I liked them as they were, especially the wild ones. So I got fired and had to figure out a different career. I was in the library and opened a *Sight and Sound* magazine, a new publication at the time, and there was a full-page ad for the London School of Film Technique. I thought I might do that. Peter Harcourt came to Queen's in my last year and taught courses on European and American film. He had just come from London and was full of the discovery that you could actually say what you thought. That was a radical discovery in those days. I couldn't but he could. He's the same way now but it was more unusual then. It wasn't so much the courses but I liked Peter. We became friends and he liked my film writing. I thought I would be a documentary filmmaker because I'd seen

work from the NFB that I liked. You remember *Skating Rink*? It was just a rink with people skating circles in some small town. There was no story or narration, just a film showing someone looking.

The year after I finished at Queen's, I worked long enough to buy a still camera and began taking slides. There's one taken in a crouch from behind a bush. I'm looking through a fence at a horse, and when I see it now, it's like understanding you can make a picture of your present situation. In the sense of being hidden. The picture showed the person who was taking it, rather than what was in it. That was the discovery.

I left for London with Peter. He was going to a conference. When he went home again I stayed. He knew about the Slade School of Art and said I should apply.

**MH:** Did you see any experimental films while you were there?

**EE:** This was in the early seventies and the London Filmmakers Co-op had regular Wednesday night screenings. They had just moved to the Dairy, which was always cold, with old mattresses on the floor to sit on. Anabelle Nicholson was doing performances and Malcolm LeGrice, Peter Gidal, David Larcher were around, but it took a long while to get to know anyone. They would have these films that would go on a long, long time, and eventually I caught on to what one could be doing with this time. There was a lot of performance work and expanded cinema. If I wasn't going to movies at school, I was seeing them downtown, six or eight films a week usually.

I was living with a man who was friends with the anti-psychiatrists Laing and Cooper. That was a disaster. I had a child in December 1970. It was a really difficult time personally; the man I was living with was clobbering me and I had this little child to look after.

There were no transition houses then. I had to find somewhere to live. I found a place and then daycare, which was the great salvation of the time. And then feminism was reinvented in London. It actually arrived from America. *Time Out* was a new magazine, with an entire section devoted to consciousness-raising groups; you'd find one in your area. I was very poor, on welfare. I didn't have money for babysitting. Sometimes I would leave my child asleep and slip out to a meeting. I'd walk into a roomful of people who were basically friendly and interested in each other. It was a moment when something turned around, when a whole era turned around. I went every week, made friends and began a political life, marches and demonstrations. On Women's Day we dressed as brides for a march to Trafalgar Square. I carried a sign that read "I won't," because in England the vows are not "I do" but "I will." I was marching with my boy in a push chair and had a chain around the waist of this bride's dress. All of a sudden there was a community and an understanding of politics, that it has to do with what takes place between any two people at any instant.

**MH:** Did it all seem like unrelated moments — the Co-op, the women's movement, the child?

**EE:** I still didn't know anyone at the Co-op. I hadn't taken my first step. There wasn't any way to be a part of that until I was a filmmaker. There are an awful lot of people in London. Why should anyone be interested unless you'd already demonstrated you were capable of doing something? In 1972 my child was two and began spending alternate weeks with his father, who was living in a commune. I knew the commune would look after him even if his father wouldn't, so I had those weeks free. I found a kundalini yoga class which was very intense. They did very hard postures and held them for a long time. It really did something. It gave me a little more gumption, a ferocity. Then

we had the Experimental Film Conference and Rimmer was there and Joyce Wieland and Michael Snow. David was famous in London. He was so beautiful they put his face on the cover of *Time Out*. And he had those beautiful films. I saw Chantal Akerman's *Hotel Monterey* and that was the one that lit the fuse. I saw what I wanted to do. It was the sense that you could use film to engineer a change in consciousness. During the festival I stayed in Ladbroke Grove near Notting Hill Gate. It was quite a fantastic place I stayed in. There were a couple of sculptors living in a condemned house; most of the neighbourhood had cleared out except for some artists. On Silchester Road there was a swimming pool scheduled for demolition. It was attached to a Victorian laundry that had a huge room which housed washing machines of the time and nine-foot doors that sealed drying closets. I knew I was going to make a film there, my life depended on it. While I was at the Conference there was a feeling that unless I did something soon, I would never have any contact with anyone I wanted to know.

First I had to figure out how to get hold of a 16mm camera and sound equipment, so I signed up for a course that Mike Dunford gave at an adult education institute. I did it out of pure calculation because I knew he had a camera. When I asked to use it he said half of it belonged to his girlfriend, Sally Potter, who I met and liked. She was a dancer then at the Place. I was terrified of breaking their Beaulieu and couldn't always get it. The sun is very rare in London winters, and I needed both the camera and the sun on the weeks I didn't have my child. There was a lot of tension waiting for these things to happen. My mother had given me some money for the film stock, and in order to get it processed, I worked as a domestic cleaner. Every two or three weeks, I'd get 100 feet of film and go stay in Ladbroke Grove with Tony Nesbit, the sculptor. We were lovers at the time. That

was the winter I shot *Trapline*. One of the things I see in it is what a good time I was having with Tony in bed. It was the first time in my life that I figured out what it was supposed to be like.

I had signed up to do a PhD at the Slade but ran out of funding and dropped out. I was still trying to use the Slade's Nagra but they caught on and James Leahy, the new boss in the film department, would scream at me. There was always a fight at every level for the equipment; the barrier was learning how to do it as a timid female person. But suddenly I knew the film community, Sally and Mike and Anabelle and others. To look at developed film I had to go to the Co-op. There was nobody who would teach me anything, or if there was I was too diffident to ask. Finally I found this eleven year-old boy who used to hang around the Co-op and he showed me how to use the Acmade. That was in 1974. Then I took my footage to the Arts Council of Great Britain to get a completion grant. David Curtis was running the program. I just came off the street, he'd never heard of me, but they liked it and immediately gave me £400. I used it to come to Canada because I was frightened my child's father was going to kidnap him and take him to South Africa. I had to get away, so I came to Vancouver.

**MH:** Did you know people there?

**EE:** I'd been to Vancouver as a child because my grandparents lived up the road in the Fraser Valley. I got a job to get the money to finish *Trapline*, which wasn't cut yet. I didn't have access to anything but then I got to know some of the students of Al Razutis, who was teaching at the Emily Carr College of Art. They snuck me into the cutting room at night and I would lock myself in. I had to be quiet when the security guard went back and forth. I'd come out in daylight.

I cut it with rewinds, a viewer, and a squawk box. It was quite terrifying because it was like cutting blind. When I got the answer print from the lab and showed it to Razutis's class AI said, "Well, it's got soul."

The film represents a battle between structuralism and beauty because at the time there was a great mistrust of beauty. But what drew me to the swimming pool was the way it looked — it was like being inside a crystal. And the sound was like life before birth. But I didn't know any of that then. It was made very intuitively. I knew you'd never see the whole space, that it would be developed through inference. I knew it needed a lot of black in it, spaces where you were only hearing the sound, to ensure you could really hear it. There was something I learned from Marguerite Duras's *Nathalie Granger*. Two women spend an afternoon in a house, and at the end of the film they look out a window and see a man, a stranger, walking on the street. He walks out of frame and the film stops. What I understood was that you could make the motions in the frame do what the film was doing. In *Trapline* the first image shows the surface of the pool and an ambiguous reflection. While the reflection appears right side up, it's actually upside down. There's a person at the far end of the pool who dabbles a foot in the water and this sets up a movement that comes down into the frame from the far end. It was like this image saying, "Here is the film starting to move. This is the rate of flow of the film." All the pool's spaces — the far wall, the water's surface, the ceiling — appear on a single surface. The opening shot summarizes the space in two dimensions.

The last shot shows three kids sitting in a warm shower, sitting and talking. You can't see the water coming down, but you infer it. Next to them there's a booth closed with a blue curtain, and something inside is jostling this curtain; it's quite comical, and

just before the film cuts out you see a pair of bathing trunks hitting the floor. Because someone is changing. The gesture inside the frame is the gesture outside the frame.

**MH:** Was *Trapline* the beginning of a public life for you?

**EE:** It was a very quiet acclaim. It's done all right lately but for years it seemed surrounded by silence. Then a couple of years back I discovered it's a classic. It wasn't until ten years after it was finished that it started to get shown in schools. I think if I'd been turning out more it would have been different. If someone called from the newspaper and wanted to do an interview I would say no. I didn't feel ready. I think that was the right decision.

What was satisfying was that I had people to talk to, and that's what I wanted in the first place. In Vancouver there were a lot of women artists doing multimedia work, a very intense community of writers and photographers. There were readings and Sunday afternoon salons with exquisite attention and devastating judgments of each other's work and being. These small groups of people worked ferociously and competitively, driving each other on. You always have particular groups of people who are your points of tension, that you feel you're up to in your work. What was wonderful about it was that you could bring in anything as far out as you could find to do, and there would be fine attention for it. It was also a drug scene and I was never very regular with drugs — I didn't get to them at all until 1979. I remember someone gave me a block of hash as big as a cigarette package for my birthday, and I forgot it was there and threw it out. Even a little bit of drugs went a long way, and I had to spend years thinking about it, rebuilding and reshaping things. I know that sounds strange to people for whom it's like coffee, but for me it was like a demon, a very powerful demon.

**MH:** Did you think of yourself as a writer, an artist, a filmmaker?

**EE:** I always felt my difference. I was rural and they were very urban. People who grow up with that kind of space around them have a different relation to everything, I think it goes quite deep. I was frightened of those people. They went out of their way to frighten me. Because I was frightenable. I was kind of a hick. I discovered gradually what kind of hicks they were, but it took a while. I was hick enough to be gullible, but it gave me a push.

**MH:** How was your work received?

**EE:** Ungenerously. I had to learn to hang onto my own sense of it. That was the exercise. I applied for a Canada Council grant to make a landscape film and sent them *Trapline* and they gave me \$10,000. Many scrambled years later that turned out to be *Notes in Origin*. I bought a car, a 1962 Studebaker, and learned to drive. I was thirty-two. I drove up through the mountains, taking ten days to move eight hundred miles. I headed for the piece of land I'd been raised on in Alberta. It no longer belongs to my family; it's owned by a lawyer who bought it for an investment. But I drove straight on up to what used to be the yard about two o'clock in the morning and went to sleep.

Woke up in the morning and camped for a while. I just sat there and saw this amazing space; you could see weather systems passing hundreds of miles away, moving through the sky. Why had I come? I'd gone away and learned attention and now I was bringing that attention back to a place where I had all these physical connections. When we were little, the three of us kids walked a mile and a half to and from school, through whatever weather or colour changes were happening. I rewalked that path, stopping at the halfway bridge to look at my reflection. I was going round taking pictures of things I used to look at. Like the dirt road with the weeds coming in between the tracks, the

rock piles and fence posts, the bush and cow paths. It was all interesting. It was bringing the London Film Co-op to La Glace, Alberta. Taking the attention that had come from those stoned artists in Vancouver to my family. It was fairly overwhelming. Sometimes I had to just sit still and remember to breathe. And in some of those painful times I would go out with my camera and there would be incredible things, like the slide where there's a rock suspended in what looks like the sky.

I asked some people if I could live in a granary in their barley field, and they said okay. I left when the combine started harvesting. I had my typewriter in the car and took to sleeping outside — I did that a lot in the next years. In the evening I saw the northern lights, this incredible curtain going across the sky, and when it got to be winter I found a farmhouse and rented it for seventy bucks a month. I didn't want anyone to know where I was.

I had a tape recorder and would read into it at night, learned the constellations, watching the changes. Then I had to go away and find work. There was a lot of oil activity in Alberta so I went to Edmonton and got jobs as a substitute camp attendant and moved all over the province. Every job would last a week and I would stay in my room and drink coffee. It was so quiet. In the years between 1978 and '81 there was never enough money to stay in the country but it was getting harder to leave. After a while it was like being sunk in meditation the whole time. The physical place was so powerful, the most ordinary life of the land. I would come out the door in the morning and just be staggered. I felt it was paradise, that paradise was a matter of slowing your attention down so you could see it instead of talking to people in your head. Being more at large. In Vancouver I lacked continuity; I was really a different person and felt drawn back to Alberta to make the connection between the new person and the one I'd been before.

**MH:** Tell me about *Notes in origin*.

**EE:** The film that came out of that time was a pile of hundred-foot rolls. I really loved them that way, that's how I wanted them to exist. They were their own shapes. But there was never any way to show them. *Notes in origin* is a kind of compromise because I think the hundred-foot rolls are better.

**MH:** There's a number that precedes each scene.

**EE:** I guess that's a literary convention. It's saying that these things are quite separate from each other.

**MH:** There's a time-lapse shot of the moon.

**EE:** It took two and a half minutes for the moon to rise into the frame. Exactly one roll of film.

**MH:** Why two images of the porch?

**EE:** The porch I could watch all day. It works from inference again; there's a nettle but you never see it. You see its motion and the colour of its shadow — where does the green of its shadow come from? The first time it appears there's more happening, the way the nettle moves is nice in itself. The second part shows little going on except that the sun goes behind a cloud and comes out again. I suppose it's slight, but it feels powerful, the way the exposure changes and the nettle's shadow disappears and returns. And then the bars of the porch start strobing. Because you have these white bars going through your vision, something starts to happen in concert with this changing of the light and the quality of attention evoked. The bars grow quite intense; it's as if they go into another dimension and your brain takes over from the film. It goes into another domain, which is what I wanted for the end of the film because it was true for the time.

**MH:** Why the long shots?

**EE:** Technically, duration is something quite particular — when you keep seeing something that doesn't change very much you stabilize into it, you shift, you get sensitive, you cross a threshold, something happens. It's useful for anyone to learn to do that. It's an endless source of pleasure and knowledge. And yet it's often what's hardest for people who don't know it as a convention. It's the central sophistication of experimental filmmakers. We all had to learn it. We probably all remember what film we learned it from. I learned it from *Hotel Monterey*, which Babette Mangolte shot for Chantal Akerman. Almost an hour, extremely slow. I made the crossing. It was ecstatic. What it is, is that deep attention is ecstatic in itself.

**MH:** Did it take a long time to collect the footage?

**EE:** A couple of years. I'd been so many years without anything to show for them, and there was no way to exhibit the individual rolls. It was during a bad time in Vancouver, a dead time. I just went to Cineworks [film co-operative] one day and asked Meg to have a look at it, because the only thing that made sense to me were these hundred-foot rolls. That was the end of my career, those rolls sitting there, and she said to just put them together. As notes. So that's what I did. I've never really had a feeling of satisfaction about the form of that film like I did with *Trampoline*. But maybe something of the hundred-foot rolls has come through in the end.

**MH:** Do you ever worry about the mainstream stealing your work, converting it into ad styles for instance?

**EE:** I've had the opposite worry, that no one would ever use my work, that I was too isolated in my intuition to be taken up at all. I have sometimes seen films, even commercials, I could see

*Trapline* in, and I liked that. I'm quivering now. Is it fright? I don't think there's anything in my work that's stealable. I would like commercial moviemakers to copy my work, because then there would be more people like me, I'd feel more at home.

I don't think I want to complain about financial marginality. I've always supposed I could make money if I chose to. It is an extraordinary privilege to have been able to choose. The margins have been livable — even the margins of the margins have been livable. I've been poor. I have sometimes actually starved. I've lost teeth. But I've had a lot of freedom. I've had time. I've been able to track things in myself. Every once in a while there's been a little burst of money from a grant, or a trip somewhere to do a show. I haven't been able to imagine being more famous. I don't like being booked up, it spoils the day. I feel quite rich. I'm rich because I can go places I know no one has been able to go. I'm well stocked. I have my own life probably more than any woman in the whole history of my family. It is amazing to have been able to choose the margins. I'm not just marginal in work. I'm personally marginal. I can't separate the two kinds of marginality. I might do marginal work because I'm used to the margins. My work might not be seen as marginal if I weren't personally marginal. I'm marginal because I'm a woman, too. The boys of the community haven't taken me in either. And I haven't taken them in. I don't have the social complexity to be able to schmooze. What I'd most want to talk about is the working process, but there isn't much to say about it. Making films is stressful, handling machines is stressful. Making films is machine-based to a horrible extent. The machines are so ugly and the images are so beautiful. The projected film image is the most beautiful image there is — pure coloured light. The colours of reversal stocks like Ektachrome. Coloured light is just bliss. Projected light is like light in the sky.

**MH:** Framing seems important in your shooting.

**EE:** Composing an image is a strange knowledge, you have it or you don't. I know I can compose. I think cinematographers are born, you see it in the image as a kind of authority. When you are setting up a shot it's by feel. You feel the balance in the frame. It's very precise. You can't approximate it. I learned something odd about composition: I've always shot with my right eye. When I tried to shoot with my left eye I had no sense of composition at all. I had no feel. I don't know what that means. I've always shot on reversal. It comes from shooting colour slides, which I liked for the discipline. A slide's framing is absolute, you can't fix it later. People have said they can see in my work that I'm coming from still photography. I can see that, too, but I think the fixed frame is appropriate to the kind of film I make, that sense of someone standing and staring. The fixed frame says that I've given the stage to the thing I'm looking at, I'm letting it take me. It is a kind of erotic.

**MH:** What happened after you were through living in farmhouses?

**EE:** I went back to Vancouver. Five hard years. A long time to be nowhere. My son was living in England and I didn't have money to go see him and that was difficult. I was working very hard to learn to write but it never came together, never turned into anything. It was a time of complete isolation and misery and a long, slow breaking up with a woman lover. She was an Ezra Pound scholar, an exquisite writer, and I was there to learn something about writing. I endured this endless breakup on account of not being ready to leave what I was learning. I had another child. Which is, in a way, the last thing I wanted at forty. I was ill for nine months, miserable, malnourished, and broke. I hadn't wanted anything to do with the child's father. He was a smoker and the smell made me sick. So, this baby was born

and his father turned out to be a marvelous parent. He said he wanted to look after his child, who turned out to be colicky, crying for hours every day. And he did. Rowen is okay. I say that with amazed gratitude that mistakes are not always final. Mistakes and irresponsibility. But I had to cast myself into the opposite of what I wanted for it to turn out well. From that point everything began to turn around again. It was very mysterious. Having to pay dues to life again. It was like saying you've been esoteric long enough, now you have to join up with human beings again and do your work in the community.

I went on and designed and supervised construction on a three-and-a-half-acre park on the downtown east side in Vancouver. It's a community garden. We have worked with this land for sixteen years now. It is an established garden, a sort of people's estate. There is a large formal herb garden, a heritage apple collection on espalier, a grassy orchard, a wild area with willows and species roses, two hundred allotment plots, a long vine walk with grapes and kiwis, and a kids' area with a thirty-foot reflecting water tank made of reinforced concrete. Last summer we finished a house for our garden. It was built by young women who learned carpentry in the process of building it. Working with a community has been a revelation to me. Isolated art is not the only kind of life. It's possible to have fun. I got this community life where I could be a general and a polemicist, a farmer, an architect, and a designer.

In 1989 I went back to school. I've been using connectionist neuroscience to try to build a way of talking about perception and representation that would support my actual working interests. The theory we have doesn't at all. My films have been beyond me. They are my best work in any medium, and yet I have thought much more about writing and I've been much more noted for making gardens. In film I have been as if respected

and suppressed. I've been easy to suppress. It's as if the work most of the time is nothing. Then sometimes there's a moment when I'm in awe of it. I've worked so simply that there might be nothing there. It is always that I want to show something I love or to show my love itself, but even for me I can never know it's really there. At public screenings, I might feel it, or I might find the film unbearable and empty. It's not robust work. And yet the sort of liking there has sometimes been for it is very satisfying, as if it is an unfailing test both of people and of moments. I think my films are erotic. Or maybe my sense of erotic, which is that kind of complete attention, entranced attention, to nuances of contact and motion. My films, when I am able to see them, are total pleasure. They're light-fucks. David Rimmer talks about the erotic quality of the film image and the way people often can't stand it to be that, basically can't stand to be fucked in so tender a way.

It's occurring to me that I was a child who often stood still watching other people move. I couldn't skate. I'd be standing on the edge of a lake, filled up with the beauty of other people's motion and the pain of not being able to do it myself. I took a strong imprint of those shapes of motion. I can unreel them at will. This is to say that maybe my films are marginal because people feel too much of the isolation in them. Its sting as well as its gifts.

## NOTES IN ORIGIN - interview with Corinne Cantrill

**E:** I shot *Trapline* in London in 1974 and finished it in 1976.

**C:** What is interesting is the relative absence of people, but the human presence is suggested with the voices. It has a haunting quality, as if there are traces of people who have passed through, leaving some evidence of themselves. (My notes on it read: "Lengthy shots of deserted swimming pool with voices, alternating with black screen with sound such as shower effects. Other shots: close reflection on water, glass roof, cubicles with mirrors, stairs, boys sitting.")

**E:** I was conscious of wanting a lot of the film to be outside of the frame, that it had to be inferred. I was interested in inference. I still am interested in inference.

**C:** Did you use the London Film Co-op's facilities to make it?

**E:** Not very much. I shot it and took the footage to the Arts Council and they gave me completion money. I came back to Vancouver in January of 1975 to finish the film.

When I came to Vancouver the film scene was dominated by Al Razutis and David Rimmer, and it seemed that it was hardly worth even joining it, because as a female with no reputation there was no way to join on equal terms. I would have had to become a sort of hanger-on and I was not willing to do that, so I worked on my own. Kirk Tougas and Tony Reif were running the Cinematheque, and when I finished *Trapline* I asked Tony, "Can I bring this film over to show you?" because they were buying

things for the archive. They looked at it and agreed to buy it. So that was its public beginning: the Cinematheque screening.

**C:** *Current* was the film made after *Trapline*. It has a rather primeval sort of rhythm that one responds to.

**E:** It reminds me of the way the northern lights move as curtains of light. At the Anthropological Museum there's a set of vertical blinds, and an air-conditioning current runs through it. It's shot on a tungsten stock in daylight, which makes it blue. I shot it in 1978 and didn't put it out until 1986. One reason why it didn't come out sooner was I was thinking about whether to put sound on it, and it just seemed in the end that it wasn't necessary.

**C:** When did the next film, *Notes in Origin*, appear?

**E:** That was the same story, really. I was shooting it in Alberta between 1978 and 1981 and the film didn't come out until 1986.

It starts with shot one, which is a swan sitting by itself on a frozen lake with frost tufts coming out of the ice, sitting in the evening light and turning its head. In shot two it seems nothing is happening, then a little rim of light comes on the left edge, then the moon rises into the frame at its own speed. Number four goes by in a flash – birds fly up with red light on them. Shot five is a longer take across the lake. The lake has frost on it, it's greenish, and there's a bluff of trees on the far side with a pink light and pink sky behind them. The frame moves slightly because my heartbeat is being transmitted through my feet into the ice and up through the tripod; it's being amplified by the membrane of ice. You see that it's faster at the beginning and slows down; I always get scared when I'm filming.

Then there's a shot of light on the wall, inside the house. Because of the way the trees move, the shadows from outside move in two strips of light coming through two windows. Then there's a shot of the wall next to the wood stove. It's hard to see it's a wood stove except that the hot air above it is making very slight shadows move on the wall. There are three flies, they were inconspicuous, and then they suddenly dart out. They were warming themselves in the little bit of light that was shining on the wall, and they suddenly take off and they go one way and their shadows go the other way, and then they join their shadows again.

The last two shots are on the porch. There's a nettle that's being moved by the wind. You can't see the nettle but the shadow is coming through the bars of the porch railings, so you can see this broken-up shadow, which is green for some reason, it has the colour of the plant in it. You also see the part of the shadow that isn't intercepted by the railing on the porch floor, and a bit of grass. The light is changing because it was one of those days when there are small clouds moving fast, and clouds would come over the sun and the shadow would vanish.

The last shot is close-up and shows the railing again. The verticals are so strong you start to get optical effects – they start to pop at you a bit and then the light fades out gradually and it comes back gradually. When you give attention to the slight motion of the nettle and the changes in the light, the optical effect starts to do something to you.

And that's it. There are ten shots, and the film is fifteen minutes long, silent.

**C:** The film is integrated into a performance work, also called *Notes in Origin*, together with the slides and text you've written.

**E:** This two and a half hour piece was the summary of all the work I did in northern Alberta. There were slides and a lot of writing and sound, for example a recording of a frog. It's the only time I've heard a solo frog singing, and it's percussive. Every time he does it, it's slightly different. It's like a drummer doing this incredibly intricate thing. I also included a thunderstorm for one performance. There are also conversations with my parents. There's one about wild oats, and my father is showing off for the tape recorder and is trying to come off like an expert on agriculture. He's going on about wild oats, and my mother and I are subverting the thing. There's this wild oat talking to her father about wild oats.

Some of the other texts I read give brief descriptions of present scenes. The first is from sitting in the tent and talking about what the weather is like, and what the thunderstorm sounds like. The second part of the text is much denser and is about coming to realize how these observations relate to being in that place. It's more obscure. The first part of the writing is about a quite simple young person being there and the second part is when that young person is being integrated into the sophistications of the person who has been trying to develop through all these years. The last piece, "what will we know," is the telegraphing of the message so it can be accessible to anyone. It is very simple writing. I call it an essay because it's really for information. The second part of the text is genuinely experimental writing, and some people find it difficult. It is very inward. It was written as though nobody is listening.

The slides are shown in small groups, in silence, furnishing images so the people in the audience can make their own pictures when they hear the text. The film was broken up as well, so there would never be more than a hundred feet at a time, with the text

in between. I come out and read the end piece live, but the rest of the writing is recorded, because it's private and inward and not a public voice. It has to sound as if I am by myself.

*Notes in origin* is shown in the order the components were made. That's the organizing principle. In some performances *Current* was included, called "Curtain" in the program rundown.

(Ellie Epp shows the slides used in the *Notes in Origin* performance)

**E:** These are slides from northern Alberta. I got some Canada Council money to make a landscape film, and I learned to drive and I got a car and drove it up through the Rockies.

I lived there for parts of three years in a farmhouse – that's what these images are from. It didn't become a landscape film as I thought – it was finally a lot of slides and a lot of writing, and there was tape, and there was some film, and all of that became the performance piece. The film *Notes in origin* is a compilation of some of the film footage that came from the same time. The landscape looks quite different in the film than in the slides. The slides are on high speed Ektachrome. They had just come out with 400 ASA Ektachrome when I started working and I was happy to have it.

In this slide those red little buildings are granaries and they're very characteristic. You'd just drive the combine up and pour the grain through the window. Beyond them is a kind of bluff of trees and that's where I grew up, our house used to be just by there. They're growing this yellow flowering stuff called rapeseed. In Italy they use this plant as a vegetable and it's called rapacini – that's where the name rape comes from. It's in seed in the photo-

graph. It's very open country and the cloud ceiling is very high. You can see the weather passing by miles away and in summer there are many electrical storms. It's not so flat, it's quite rolling, but somehow you can still see quite a long way.

When I first went back I set up a tent on the old farm site and lived there with a fire at night. The house was put on a truck and moved away – they had to lift up all the electric wires as it passed.

**C:** It's like stone flying through the air in this slide. The cloud reflection in the water is so sharp.

**E:** The other thing I like about this one is the streaky cloud. It's as if it's moving in the same direction as the light.

Some of these I took as if unconsciously. There were things in them that I didn't see for years, and in this next slide it's right in the centre, it's a little yellow person with a nose and an eye and a hat. I think the composition is arranged round it, but it's like a sub-visual seeing. I think that happens in composition.

This is just a ditch and some of the pinks and reds you're seeing are Alberta wild roses.

**C:** I'm very interested in the way the flowers of childhood make such a deep impression.

**E:** This time was particularly like that because I had been living in England for six years and gone away to university somewhere else entirely and so had seen very little of this country since I'd left it at 18. You go away and you learn so much and you come back and see it in such a different light. Most of the people I grew

up with knew nothing about plants. They knew half a dozen incorrect names of things that grew in the pasture. In England people are interested in gardens and there's such a plant knowledge, so I learned gardening in England and came back and could see the plants really for the first time.

That's the house that got put on a truck. It moved with my parents and they used it to store tractor parts.

**C:** What sort of trees grew there before it was opened up for farming?

**E:** Small trees. Large trees didn't grow here because the winters are harsh. Small aspen poplars, spruce along the creeks. I think a lot of it was open grass prairie.

**C:** Were there American Indians there?

**E:** There was a group of Assiniboine people called the Beaver. There were some Cree, but mostly it was the Beaver. We would find their arrow heads. They had been there very recently. It wasn't until I grew up that I talked to an anthropologist who knew something about them, and he told me about their beliefs and customs. I was crying in his office because I felt that I had been more of them than I had ever been a Mennonite, because that somehow never took, and the landscape was always the real religion.

I was living alone in a farmhouse most of the time. I was constantly amazed at how dark it could be and you could still take pictures. From the stubble in the next slide it looks like it was oats or barley ... I think barley. They have this fire that goes quickly over the land because there's little to burn, so it moves at a tre-

mendous rate and you can be standing on the field right after it's passed, it's such a thin fire. They're burning stinkweed and whatever other weed is going to seed. They're flashing a fire over it.

When this slide of the snow is dimmed down it almost looks like the night sky. I was fascinated watching how the snow moved and how it would run on the surface. The way it organized itself. Because of the angles the crystals hold themselves to the light, they are all different colours. It is very cold and the crystals form into clean plates. And sometimes on a very clear day you can actually see crystals forming in the air a little way up from the ground – these flickers falling out of the clean air.

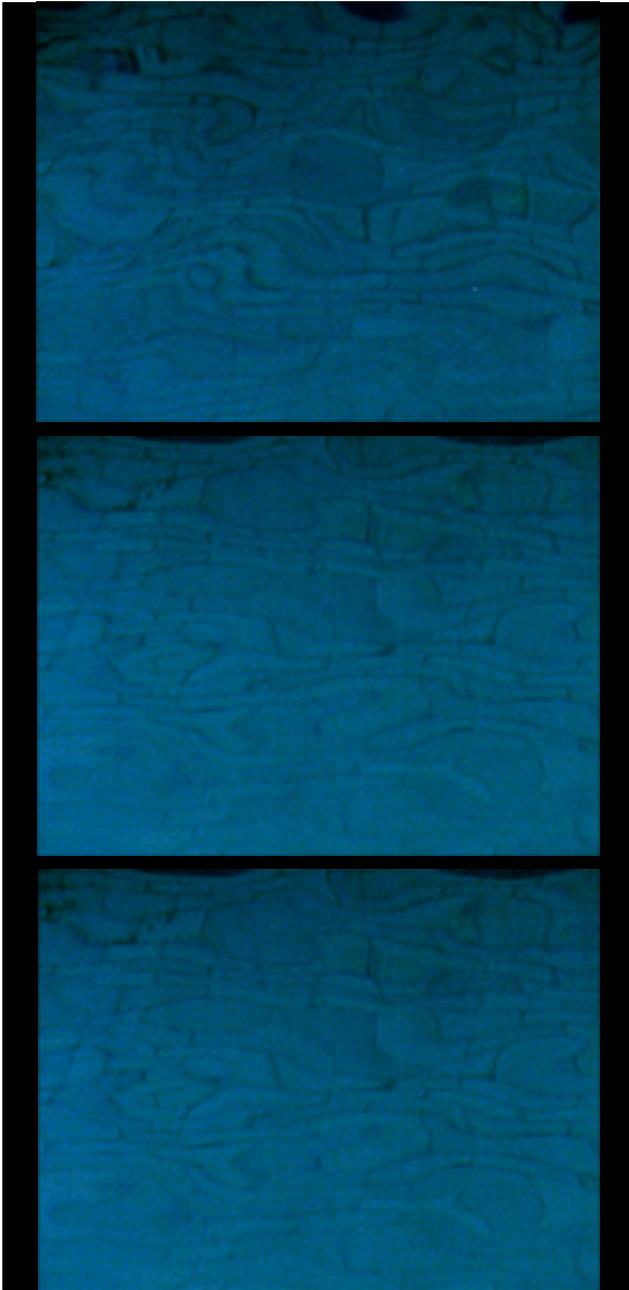
This frost happens sometimes when the air is saturated and gets cold suddenly and it just deposits this on everything. Sometimes at night it will happen that you will find a deposit, about two inches deep, of this loose kind of frost on top of the snow. It's very wonderful. It's on all the branches and you see the first breeze come along in the morning lifting all these sparkles into the air.







COMMENT



## PAUL GRANT *Trapline*

*-father, will you take me to the circus?*

*-yes, if you promise to see everything.*

*ee. cummings*

### 1. Introduction

*Trapline* is an 18 minute film consisting of twelve long takes with a fixed-position camera separated by sections of black leader. Both the images, aspects of the interior of a public bath house, and the black leader are on screen for varying lengths of time. The sounds heard are the sounds one would hear over time at the location described by the film's images. In only three of the shots are people seen directly, and in two more indirectly. In eight of the shots water is depicted clearly and in the four remaining shots its proximity is strongly suggested. Sometimes the film is a dark screen with sound alone; at other times, there is a visually occupied screen with no sound. Then there are times when both sound and image are present, and finally, times when neither is present. Details of what has just been described about *Trapline* are in the shot list at the conclusion of this paper.

*Trapline* is a confident and disarmingly straightforward film. It has been seen by many people and has been called one of the most important independently produced Canadian films of recent time. It gives its audience a great deal of room to go within the film and see everything.

Filmmaker Ellie Epp has described one aspect of her approach to presentation, that of seeking out within the frame that which stands for what happens over the

entire shot. In the same manner, that which happens within the duration of a shot can stand for that which then happens over the duration of the film.

This paper will accordingly follow the structural model suggested by the film. Twelve approaches to, or aspects of, *Trapline* appear in this paper, each separated by a section of blank paper. This has comprised the first section.

### 2. Form

There are twelve individual takes, or images, comprising *Trapline*. The first is introduced by a darkened screen over which the ambience of the bath house interior is heard; the last, presented as a silent image, returns to a dark screen to end the film, i.e. ends in visual silence. Although the opening sound gives a clue to the nature of the image to follow, the first thing seen is a brief, closely framed view of water below, bathers above (shot 2). Alternating black spacer with images is as important to the continuity of *Trapline* as is sound playing off silence.

The sequence of shots over the course of the film forms a cumulative awareness of place – the assembly of learning about the bath house – from aspects seen from within the interior of the building itself. Images are of essentially fixed objects such as tiling, walls or windows, or of water, possessing intrinsic internal movement. Reflected light is used to describe motion, to superimpose secondary images, or to create negative spaces within the frame. The majority of shots depict a public space devoid of people, and persons are selectively framed when they do appear.

Often images in *Trapline* will be reflective – or literally reflections – superimposed over a secondary space, creating an ambiguity of surfaces and planes. This

play of light on light is complemented by converging, intersecting and complementary lines and primary shapes defined by architecture, beams, tiles, etc.

All shot transitions are by direct cuts; no fade-in, fade-out, dissolves or continuity cutting are involved.

### 3. Structure

By the conclusion of *Trapline* we have seen and heard most of the information we would need to know about the bath house. Shots have looked down into the water, up through the skylight, around the pool's perimeter and at the changing stalls along the walls. We have seen a staircase leading up to a gallery. The room is by and large understood.

What has not been adhered to is the necessity of having come in at a certain time as *Trapline* begins and leaving as it ends, which suggests a more internal transformation unhampered by the burden of chronology for the film and viewer alike. The shots would have been made over a period of time. The first long take (Shot 3) could be read as an establishing shot, but the final image (Shot 23) need not close the experience. *Trapline* is in this sense circular in structure.

Sound (to be discussed elsewhere) is non-synchronous, that is to say is obtained and incorporated independently from any connection to the image on the screen. Its beginning or disappearance may or may not also be synchronous with the start or end of a visual shot.

Within this overall description the film's elasticity is derived from the manipulation of shorter and longer shot and sound durations, rather than from camera movement from one place to the next.

### 4. Production and Distribution

Ellie Epp shot *Trapline* over the winter of 1973-1974 with a borrowed 16mm Beaulieu camera fitted with a 12 to 1 zoom lens and sometimes a polarizing (light-shielding) filter. She was a member of the London Film Co-operative and attending the Slade School in London at the time and used part of her tuition money to purchase film stock, about \$200.

Processing the original was paid for with money she earned cleaning house. The rushes were taken to the British Arts Council to whom she had applied for a completion grant, and they supplied funds to finish the film. Work was not completed until 1976 back in Vancouver, when she was able to access film editing equipment through Emily Carr College of Art after hours, thus editing *Trapline* on both borrowed equipment and borrowed time.

*Trapline* was shot on high-speed Ektachrome stock at a three-to-one shooting ratio. The shots were planned out ahead of time, including the order in which they would appear in the film. Ellie Epp edited *Trapline* manually, using table-top hand-wind 16mm equipment.

When the film was finished she took it to the Cinematheque, and programmers bought a print for their library. The film subsequently had circulation out of the London Filmmakers' Co-op and CFDC.

### 5. Diegesis

A great deal happens in *Trapline*, though much of the time the images themselves are in repose. A study of Shot 13 provides an initial look into the broader nature of the film, at least in respect of the behaviour of its on-screen images.

The camera position will be fixed throughout this shot. There is at first the motion of an oscillating patch of light at the water's surface just left of centre frame. This particular image is interesting because the patch is itself a circumscribed entity – ephemeral though it is – and seems to take on a life of its own. But in the deep space of the pool we are able to see a second level of movement, in the tile edges on the pool floor warping and bending as seen through the (invisible) water's undulating surface. This increases the feeling that the patch is dancing in space.

A change of colour, darkening of the water, begins, and the darkening shape becomes more gelatinous, the colour of the tiles richer and more mysterious; it is as if a cloud had passed overhead.

This image is announced on the soundtrack by a cough. The sound-image connection is ruptured, as they are not one and the same situation, yet the anticipation of the possibility of sound-image confluence becomes allowable within the particular pace of the shot.

Maintaining the illusion that sound and image belong together is not a necessity for this film. Ellie Epp has thus, in this example, freed the viewer from these shackles of expectation and identification necessary to narrative cinema where something must always 'happen.'

### 6. Avant-Garde

That *Trapline* is impossible to place easily within categories of genre, even within avant-garde subcategories, is more indicative of problems of classification as it is practiced than it is of any problem with the film itself. It is difficult even to place *Trapline* within a school of filmmaking identifying it

as Canadian, for though Ellie Epp is herself Canadian by birth, the film has an ambiguity regarding its locale (admittedly a building of this vintage would be rare, but not unimaginable, in Canada).

In its straightforwardness it defies experimentalism (this is a confident and assured film, not an exploratory filmic experiment to see “what if...” It foregoes both self-identification, the point of view found in much American avant-garde work, as it does any semblance of narrative, even deconstructed, which still constitutes much avant-garde/underground film practice. As the work of a woman filmmaker it is an important document of the Feminine (discussed elsewhere) but a far cry from the work of such others as Maya Deren, who display strong links to expressionist-narrative traditions.

The filmmaker has said that the stretch in this project – that which she felt would draw the most fire – was the inclusion of black spacer. A dark screen was not viewed favourably by the film community in 1974.

## 7. Photography

Ellie Epp's previous work with 35mm slides has an interesting collegial relationship to the work of the camera in *Trapline*. It is as if the fixed-position camera travels back through the 35mm slide into the history of photography in the pre-cinematic phase. Movement within the frame in each shot of the film in one sense could be asking, how small a movement could be captured, perceived and held by the motion picture camera so as to appear as one still frame?

Put another way, the shot-sequences in *Trapline* reverse the Muybridge experiment; in the latter, the problem was perceived to be the limitation of the single photograph that in itself could not show movement. The solution was to assemble a series of stills which placed side

by side completely suggest the progressive movement they depicted. Ellie Epp has chosen to begin with the sequential-frame camera and use its movement-capturing ability to find that “still, small place” of the photograph.

The distinct cuts between shots delineate the top and bottom of the ‘slide frame’ as it were, complementing the left and right horizontal perimeters of the screen.

Also, *Trapline's* subject – a Victorian bath house – is itself a product of another era, of a time remembered. The pool is no longer there, in fact, and the filmmaker alludes to its impending destruction as one reason to film it. So there is a historic destruction as one reason to find it as a subject. There is a historic respect in the selection and framing of tiles, skylight and other surfaces whose materials and aging colours *Trapline* documents.

## 8. Apparatus

The camera is always somewhere, and something is always going on within the frame. In the dark we are the perceiver of what the camera perceives, and its point of view is our point of view. Where, then, is the camera throughout *Trapline*?

The framing of each shot is effected by extending or pulling in the zoom lens, a process of selective telescopic movement of the camera's lens to bring the image closer, exclude the unwanted, and include the desired subject material, within the frame. The camera itself remains stationary in this exercise. Looking again at the shot list it can be seen that the mise-en-scene of virtually every shot has, through magnification, been artificially brought closer to the lens. Seen through the lens, however, the effect here is of having moved the camera closer to the subject.

Shot 1, for instance (title shot): though we know full well the camera is on the near side of the pool looking across to the far side, a lateral reading of this image would suggest that the viewer is in the middle of the pool, much closer to that far side. Similarly, in shots 5, 7 and 13 (the latter two show the same subject at different times) the tilt down of the camera is flattened out by the zoom lens and no edges to the pool itself are visible, with the result that the viewer feels suspended over the water, looking straight down. The cumulative effect of the entire film, part of its mystery, is that the composite position of the camera winds up being a point not far above the water's surface, in the middle of the pool.

The ‘impossible’ point of view simultaneously orients and disorients the viewer in experiencing the film, encouraging a way of seeing beyond the literal and into the speculative.

Two other disclosures by the filmmaker are shared here; one refers to Shot 17, over the course of which an extremely slow and almost imperceptible zoom takes place, drawing us toward the skylight. This was a technical contribution of gravity, which pulled down on the heavy zoom lens as the camera was tilted backward. The lens' own weight carried it slightly back down its threaded barrel, but the result is extraordinary. The second is an intentional intervention by the filmmaker occurring in Shot 7 and Shot 13 (the pair), where during the progress of the shot the speed of the camera was increased to a slow-motion setting. Not only does the movement of the water surface slow down here, but because the film passes throughout the camera at a higher speed (slow motion is achieved by a greater number of frames photographed at high speed and projected at normal speed) there is a resultant shortening of exposure of each frame and general darkening of the picture quality as less light is admitted. The eye tends

to adjust and compensate for the change in movement speed in the image; what is noticeable is an enriching of the dark tones of colour in these passages.

## 9. Sound

Sound is non-diegetic in *Trapline*, that is, not derived from the same time and place as is the visual image. In fact, each sound block is used in the film (in whole or in part) twice.

Yet the ear tends to accept the credibility of the proximity of swimmers, the gasp of a bather surfacing, the offscreen space suggested by swimmers heard to recede in the distant part of the pool and return again; and the viewer waits with each splash for a corresponding disturbance on the surface of the water.

Sound is used orchestrally throughout, often 'announcing' the beginning or end of a visual statement, adding aural space to a visual one, and describing a very specific sense of time and place, as when a plane is heard to pass overhead.

## 10. The Feminine

That this is a film by a woman is more than significant, as suggested elsewhere in this paper. Its unitary mode of production as a work of craft, about which we know something, places *Trapline* in the stream of art made as work done within the continuum of a real day to day life, in which spirit kinship with issues of women's place is readily found.

Over and above this, *Trapline* is a beautifully articulated embodiment of the Feminine in its greater implications. Beginning with its overall repose and feeling of suspension, its placement in and around water, its sheer visual pleasure, *Trapline* is an immersion into

sensuality, into being in touch with experience beyond activity or passivity, but into awareness. It could not be more fully experienced that it is in *Trapline's* immersions in deep space – an amniotic continuum of rich colour, stretching of time, and flotation in the caverns of the soundtrack. It is ecstasy without sexuality, aliveness without dramatics, beauty that speaks for itself (Shot 23).

## 11. As Above, So Below

There is an additional affinity toward spiritual balance and equilibrium in *Trapline* that should be discussed beyond the mechanics of form and content, and separately (though related) from a recognition of the Feminine. The film presents a centering repose, as a mantric tool in the practice of meditation. Thus *Trapline* balances quiet with movement, dark with light; and turning upon an image of ambiguity (Shot 15) a balancing of visual design.

A sound repeated links one image to another; bathers seen in reflection in the pool in Shot 11 become bathers seen in the pool in Shot 9; the reflected skylight crossbeam as negative space upside down on the water's surface in Shot 5 becomes the form, right side up, in Shot 17, and so on. The amniotic ambience suggested in the discussion of the Feminine also suggests the most inner and personal of inner space. There is no questioning the over-all calm that pervades and accompanies watching *Trapline*.

## 12. Trapline

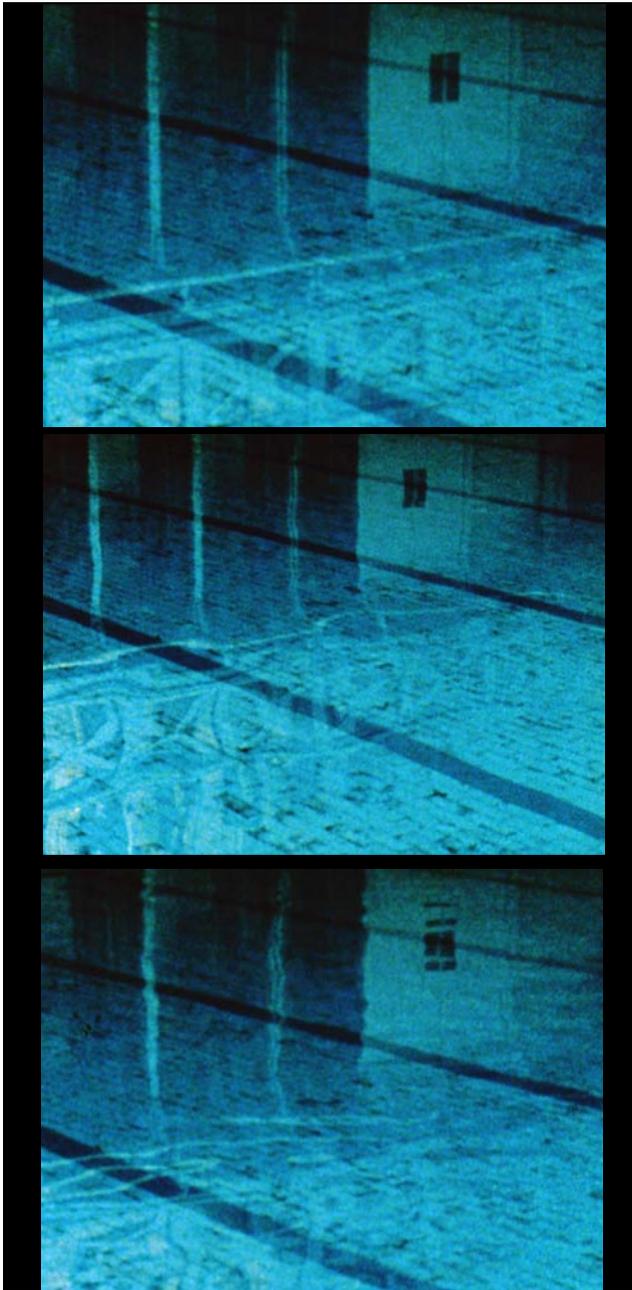
*Trapline* begins with its title; this discussion will end with it. A trapline is, literally, the path described by a fur trapper in northern countries along which animal traps are set. It is a territorial demarcation, real enough to the trapper but imaginary to the extent that it is marked

only by the points at which the trap has been set. Thus there are points of contact with space in between; the trapper will in one sense know the path very well, but in another will experience it differently every time the line is walked, depending on what has occurred since the last visit.

*Trapline* can be experienced as a map of self-awareness or attentiveness, or as a work of the filmmaker to captivate the viewer at points along the way. The very activity of light and the presence of photography, on another tack, capture lines, shapes, form and space forever in the recesses of the bathhouse, a fact of which we are reminded each time we view the film.

*Trapline* is also a titling tool, a caution against those who might find it too preoccupied with visual pleasure (suggested by the filmmaker).

It is difficult to know if we saw everything. *Trapline* is an extraordinary work. It needs to be walked through again.



## BART TESTA Ellie Epp

Recognized but rarely discussed by experimental film critics, the name of Vancouver-based Ellie Epp tends to slip onto the artistic honour roll of Canadian structural filmmakers somewhere behind Michael Snow. This is understandable for in the dozen years between her first released film, *Trapline* (1976), and her most recent *Notes in Origin* (1988), Epp has made only one other film, *Current* (1986). The total screening time of the Epp film canon is about half an hour. This modest output and long hiatus in production have kept interest in Epp's films rather silent.

Nonetheless, the situation is deceptive for within her rigorously defined arena, Epp is a remarkably complete film artist. The elegance of her style and extreme economy of means characterizes how thoroughly she has worked through her minimalist project in cinema, and the closer and more attentive to her films one becomes, the purer and more intricate they are.

In Bruce Elder's discussion of Epp's *Trapline* (the critic shows how the film exfoliates aspects of cinematic representation, and how the film plays off and subverts viewers' expectations. However, if we shift attention slightly away from Elder's analysis of viewer reception toward another of his concerns, the form of the film object, *Trapline* appears in another guise as a music-like complex of themes and variations involving filmic space. The film consists of twelve rigorously framed shots of varying durations (though all are long takes) arrayed in four interlocked series. The shots share a single location, a public swimming pool, and all but the last are accompanied by sound recorded wild at the same location. In the first two series, each shot is separated by a long passage of blank leader with sound. These blank partitions between shots ensure that the images are not contiguous and permit Epp to develop

their relations in terms of compositional themes and variations. While the sound seems to be off-screen and therefore at least potentially legible in terms of the image, the sound/image connection is never finally realized. Moreover, the distorting echo produced by the location is such that the sounds themselves are never intelligible as dialogue but only vaguely allude to some off-screen anecdote. So, like the images, the sounds become available as carriers of compositional concerns.

Serving as a thematic master image, the first shot, which begins silently, is one of the most complex: the pool's glossy water sets out a dual role of reflective surface and transmission medium. The geometry of the girdered and windowed ceiling reflected off the water sets out the theme of diagrammatic screen-surface; the pool's tiled bottom seen through the water sets out the counter-theme of modular (the tiles are small regular rectangles) deep-space geometry. When sound is added, after the shot has progressed awhile, the echo-distorted dialogue dynamizes the order of the film frame and sets the off-screen/on-screen theme into play. The next two shots isolate themes and begin the variations. The second shot only reflects, showing the flat rectilinear geometry of the ceiling. The third shot only transmits through the water, showing the pool-bottom tiles, which are distorted rhythmically in concert with the sound, which here could be rain, more likely a shower. Over the blank leader between shots two and three, the sound elaborates a sort of essay on film-space sound through a micro-narrative, someone swimming down and back the length of the pool, though what one hears literally is an aural close-up of someone breathing, the receding splash of the swimmer into long-shot and the splashing return.

The first series, then, takes aspects of the image field and sound as its themes. The second series treats the figure

in the field and realizes off-screen space adumbrated earlier: the fifth shot, the shortest so far, shows a group of children swimming across the pool – or across the portion shown in the frame. Without leader intervening, the sixth shot, showing the undulating surface of the water, ends as a reflected figure walks across the top of the frame. The seventh shot, last in the series, shows a dancing abstract figure of sparkling light reflected at the centre of the agitated water, which also transmits rhythmic distortions of the pool-bottom lines. This last shot, then, resolves both the first series and the second in a doubled dance of reflection/transmission and of field/figure.

The briefer third and fourth series develop themes in opposition to the first two: static images not moved by the water. The first shot is an indecipherable close-up of an utterly still object (perhaps a towel). The film's first shot showed a reflected image of the roof and it is closely echoed now by a direct shot of – and through – the ceiling. The theme of transmission recurs: sunlight and sky are seen through the glass (as through the pool water) and Epp repeats the rain or shower sounds of the fourth shot (which was also about transmission) to accompany this image.

The last series, three shots long, is suffused in bright light reflected off white and buff surfaces. These show, first, change cubicles which are composed in a way that flattens space and rhymes with the film frame line of the image; second, a stairwell cut off at the top and vertically by slender white boards and posts. These are visual variations of on-screen/off-screen theme that has been carried mostly by image/sound associations. The last shot of the film, the only entirely silent one, shows three little boys sitting in a shower stall. The depth of the frame, defined now by the presence of the figures within the cubicle's otherwise flattened space, recapitulates the field-figure themes of the second series. The final

image also resolves, in a surprisingly lyrical flourish, one of the tensions in *Trapline*, for it brings the human event of the off-screen sound into the image with the silent and still little boys.

*Current* recalls some of the patterns and compositional themes of *Trapline*, but Epp's second film greatly reduces the elements of play by replacing representational images with abstract metallic blue bars that rigidly divide the frame in a flat and perfectly even surface. The bars seem to be illuminated either from within or from behind by an intense and mobile light source.

At first, this composition appears as an ideality of presence, of pure light and surface that recalls minimalist painting. However, as *Current* develops, that ideality breaks down into an articulated temporality as the initial homeostatic image develops compositional tensions. In terms of verticality: the absolute hue and the position of the blue bars are upset by a sudden squeezing motion that changes the uniformity and stasis of the image. In terms of horizontality: the illusory movement changes from a musical pulse into a horizontal movement literally across the frame, but it suggests a 'from and to' somewhere in terms of depth; the movement of light across the frame soon indicates a source under the blue bars, disturbing the flatness of the image and consequently its pure presence. Because this source becomes compositionally mysterious and it is never revealed (like sound in *Trapline*, the light source remains off-screen), only its trace appears and it becomes an absence.

The dimension of time in film assumes a different type of mystery in Epp's most recent film. She did not make *Notes in Origin* as a free-standing work but as a component in her autobiographical performance piece of the same name. While nothing of the textual nature of the film recalls autobiography, the images are for

the first time explicitly concerned with acts of looking and with the placement of the artist and viewer in a space, an aspect of cinema Epp had previously skirted. In other ways, however, some of Epp's strategies recur. Shot in northern Alberta, where the artist grew up, the film consists of ten long-take shots of various lengths divided by black leader bearing a number for each successive shot. Like *Trapline*, *Notes in Origin* can be divided into series, three in this instance, and they can be labeled "landscapes" (shots 1-5), "interiors" (shots 6-8), and "the porch" (shots 9 and 10). But instead of a theme and variation structure, *Notes in Origin* develops a loose progression from static long view (shot 1 looks like a still slide until it is almost over) to an intimate gaze at elements in delicate motion. Perhaps the most fascinating is the "interior" series that, like parts of *Trapline*, play off reflection and transmission of light. Although a slighter and less intricately woven film than *Trapline* (though doubtless the performance dimension makes a great difference), *Notes in Origin* realizes the subtle lyricism that appears in the last image of its predecessor. Here Epp intimates a mysteriously shared and personal complicity of artist and viewer without, however, abandoning that purity and extraordinary elegance that mark Epp as one of the most accomplished of film artists.



**FELIX THOMPSON Notes on reading of avant-garde films: *Trapline*, syntax**

Consider Ellie Epp's *Trapline*, a film made in 1976. It is composed of a series of discrete fixed shots within a swimming pool. These shots are interspersed with black leader. The soundtrack contains ambient noise consistent with a swimming pool: splashing, lappings and muffled shouts, the sound of running water. This accompanies both image and leader. Some of the shots include in order: the title over swimmers' feet standing at the end of the pool / reflections on the still surface of the water, with, in one case, the lines of the glass roof's frame laid across the turquoise brick pattern of the bottom of the pool / in motion the water's undulations distort the brick pattern into sympathetic curves / boy swimmers cross the frame and back in the choppy waters / a shot of the glass roof, source of the reflected image – a plant is growing absurdly in the angle of the frame / the changing cubicles with small mirrors which reflect swimmers in the pool / next to the cubicles a worn staircase with the varnish coming off its wooden steps – at the bottom of the frame, which cuts off at the water's edge, splashes from invisible swimmers / the swimmers out of the pool, pink and indistinct, not in the centre of the frame, against blue tiles.

Immediately, perhaps, the spectator will begin to work against the apparent arbitrariness of such a succession of images, will feel impelled to establish a position for comprehension. This kind of activity on the part of the spectator is frequently associated in critical discourse with avant-garde cinema, in formulations such as the "need for constant reflexivity," or "open-endedness," in the film's structure: "The perceiver, rather than the artist, is made responsible for the production of meaning..." (Al Rees, "Conditions of Illusionism," *Screen*, Volume 18, No. 3, p. 49). But although the

images on their own are shorn of the sure matrix of meaning across which a conventional narrative film can move a spectator, the activity allowed to the spectator does not amount to a complete freedom of interpretation. *Trapline* as a succession of arbitrary images intersects with the 'wider' practices of the avant-garde, that is to say that *Trapline* will be surrounded by polemic, debate, theory and criticism while being exhibited in circumstances which are rather different from those of dominant cinema. It is the effects of these practices on the positions available to spectators in relation to *Trapline* that I wish to examine. Will differences in these practices result in a variety of spectator positions, a variety of interpretations of the film? To what extent is the meaning produced by practices 'external' to the film?

One source of such differences within the avant-garde derives from the terms in which its practices are conceived as oppositional to those of dominant cinema. This can take the form of a complete rejection of dominant cinema in an extreme gesture towards aesthetic autonomy. Or it can take the form of direct engagement with the practices of dominant cinema, an attempt to challenge and change 'from within.' An example of what critical discourse has described as the aspiration for complete autonomy has been described by Deke Dusinberre as "the English project of 'purifying' cinematic signification" (Deke Dusinberre, "St. George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde," *Afterimage* 6). Here autonomy is exemplified by a "complete rejection" of narrativity. This is attempted by questioning the very illusionism of the image through which the narrative might unfold. Narrative is to be completely displaced by a concentration on the image track in such a way as to "subordinate image content to image production." The inherent linearity or successiveness of the 'pure' signifying substance of film is foregrounded. As a result the films described by Dusinberre are said to employ

a “literalness” “which denies an ending which can be predicted or construed as a goal;” or which presents the “content” of the film as an index of filmic duration rather than the other way round.

How will *Trampoline* be read within these terms of reference? Clearly it is a film which concentrates on the image track. The concatenation of events in the film into narrative or towards a goal seems somewhat undeveloped. This could lead to the judgment that the film is literally about what can be in its fixed frames, about the sum of its referents. These referents cannot be connected by any significant causal relations, save for those suggested by the banal knowledge of swimming pools that the spectator brings to the film. *Trampoline* does not attempt to question the status of its images. Referentiality of the image appears to exist for its own sake, not to be turned back reflexively to index the process of production of the illusion (as in the landscape films described by Dusinberre) (Dusinberre, op cit). Instead of experiencing the ‘pure’ time of filmic duration we are presented with a diegetic circle of events involved in ‘going for a swim’ – from the edge of the pool to the water and back to the edge of the pool. The untroubled images of *Trampoline*, the simple circle of its events are sufficiently laden with resistant detail to invite the spectator to search for a ‘higher’ meaning in the film. What can be made of the inclusion of the boy swimmers, of the overlaid patterns in the water, of the plant growing in the angle of the roof, or the worn-ness of the wooden steps? *Trampoline* read within the terms of this program for ‘purifying’ cinematic signification is seen primarily as a film which is still susceptible to narrative interpretations even though the grounds for such interpretations are not explicitly present within the film.

As I have noted, however, both *Trampoline* and the films which can be said to try to reject the slightest trace of

narrative to achieve the ‘truly cinematic,’ concentrate on the image track. This concern with the purely visual elements in cinema may be connected to the significant role that fine art, particularly painting, has played in the development of the avant-garde. Dusinberre (Dusinberre, op cit) suggests that the reflexive concerns of the structural film in America coincided with a more general interest in the reflexivity of art developed by art schools in this country. And, in their article, “The Avant-Garde, Histories and Theories,” Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom both argue for a connection between formalist American cinema and what they term the ‘art world,’ as opposed to art house cinema or Hollywood.

“The avant-garde cinema is almost always seen – especially by its own historians – in terms of a development completely separate from that of the history of cinema. It is seen in terms of the ‘art world’ (painting, poetry, sometimes architecture) rather than the ‘entertainment industry.’” (Janet Bergstrom in Bergstrom and Penley, ‘The Avant-Garde, Histories and Theories,’ *Screen*, Autumn 1978, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 120)

The sense of ‘otherness’ that this connection gives to the avant-garde in relation to dominant cinema is particularly important in the context of the concern with the phenomenology of vision which Bergstrom and Penley both point to in the American avant-garde. Penley suggests that “Cinema replays unconscious wishes the structures of which are shared by phenomenology: the illusion of perceptual mastery with the effect of the creation of a transcendental subject” (Constance Penley, in Bergstrom and Penley, op cit, p. 178). But it is necessary to take account of the differences of inflection of this phenomenology of vision between dominant narrative cinema and Bergstrom’s “art world.” If the terms of a narrative reading are set aside, how does *Trampoline* relate to this phenomenology of vision?

*Trampoline* can implicate the spectator in a play in what is seen and what is not seen, a play with the “pure act of perception” that Metz argues is at the centre of the processes of identification with the cinematic apparatus (Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” *Screen*, Summer 1975, v. 16, N. 2, pg. 51). The film redoubles the play of water in its fixed shots by the very operation of the immobile frame against the movement of the water, and by playing the sound of moving water against its presence/absence in the image band. The black leader also acts as a frame, and, with the help of some indeterminacy and diffuseness of the soundtrack, the constant return to framing acts against any horizontal or narrative development (which is not to say that the film actually prevents them being read in). Stephen Heath has argued that framing is a fundamental part of cinema:

“Framing, determining and laying out the frame is quickly seen as a fundamental cinematic act, the moment of the very ‘rightness’ of the image: ‘framing, that is to say, bringing the image to the place it must occupy,’ a definition taken from a manual for teachers written in the 1920s. Quickly too, and in consequence, it becomes the object of an aesthetic attention concerned to pose decisively the problems of composition of the frame, of what Eisenstein calls ‘mise en cadre.’” (Stephen Heath, *Narrative Space*, *Screen*, Autumn 1976, V. 17, No. 3, pg. 82)

A compositional problem is presented in the cinema however by the need to contain movement within the frame. Heath argues that it is precisely the work of narrative to contain such movement so that “space becomes place – narrative as the taking place of film.” Though where narrative has been set aside, and the spectator is content to be caught up in the play on the edges of the static frame, more general questions of spatial relations between shots become redundant.

From this point of view the framing of the film plays on what is beyond its edges without in any way trying to contain what is beyond within a narrative framework. For instance the reflection of the roof in the still water is so clear that there is little sense of revelation or narrative development in the subsequent shot of its source. We already know the source of the splashes at the bottom of the frame in one of the later shots – the splashes are a specific play on the immobility of the frame which refuses to encompass their source. Heath quotes Metz: “the rectangular screen permits every type of fetishism, all the effects of ‘just before’ since it places at exactly the height it wants the sharp vibrant bars which stops the seen” (Heath, op cit, p. 83). In asserting the pleasure of “just beyond” *Trapline* remains static in time rather than suggesting the temporal movement of Metz’s “just before.” In this respect its strategies appear to reproduce the immovable frame of painting.

The way in which the spectator begins to work in relation to *Trapline* will vary just as the terms of reading of the avant-garde vary. If the terms are those held within recent English avant-garde practice, the film may be judged susceptible of narrative readings. But within practices of reading apposite to painting, narrative possibilities may not be relevant. This is not to say that *Trapline* offers a challenge to dominant forms of reading. Rather it exploits a homology in the practices of reading of dominant cinema and painting in the use of the frame, a homology which is explicated by Heath in terms of historical developments from Renaissance perspective. The “illusion of perceptual mastery” remarked upon by Constance Penley is exactly something that Heath describes in the development of the frame in painting – “the fascination with the rectangle of tamed light, the luminously defined space of vision” (Heath, op cit). Though *Trapline* shows the kind of fetishism around a “primary identification” with perception which Metz has argued is a central characteristic of the filmic

apparatus, an apparatus developed primarily for narrative, it is possible to separate the act of framing from narrativisation because of the film’s rudimentary syntagmatic development. This separation may be exploited in exhibition contexts depending on whether deciphering narrative is a relevant practice in that context ....



WRITING

1.

charm, value, ethic tactic and gender, in writing

2.

what is always transmitted is the quality of a mind

precisely transmitted is the quality of the moment writing

revision mixes times revised writing is writing by more than one person

3.

reading scans through to the rules someone is writing by

the writing isn't done in language, it's done in something like gesture, from a hovering behind, like 'noting'

what's noticed is experience (political, erotic, sensory), nerve, acuity, solitude

the rules i write by, those i'm in reference to now, those i remember struggling in, undiscussed: familiar unspoken

suspension in a space of charges

rules keep up with ability so they're next to impossible

that is tactical but not felt as tactical; it is felt as ethical/technical absolute other writers are judged by

4.

certain other peoples' work is there alongside like a terminal whose other pole is what i have to write, my own time

unending tension in relation to home language and school language

5.

wanting everything to be what it is

anger to be anger given to the person desire to be desire given, seduction to be successful

memory to be precisely memory, fantasy to be precisely fantasy

the intuition in fantasy to be known for what it is

writing to be whatever it can be when it is no longer a displacement

6.

'built by the extremely delicate decisions of conscience'

the whole of the writer

'writing inside the hologram already formed'

'an embodiment of values & responsiveness'

7.

structuring concerns having to do with the history of a genre are a death

8.

any phrase contexts itself  
a phrase has a world implied

9.

if writing grips there is something real in it, but look carefully the pleasure in attractive writing is information like the information in sexual attraction it signals that something there is worth perpetuating; but it can be perpetuated without ever being recognized

10.

it is better for a meaning to be read than to be passed on unread as a striking or 'beautiful' thing

11.

what attracts in writing is often an unconscious recognition, unrecognized homology, underreference

to: body parts or function, sexuality, the life span, undiscovered physical law, unarticulated experience structures (these may amount to the same thing)

imagination likes what refers to itself  
experience structures (these may amount to the same thing)  
imagination likes what refers to itself

12.

the sexuality writing works includes powerfully: birth and the long consciousness before birth, which was previous to language and now, stranded behind language, tries to make its way through into the sort of memory that is made in language

13.

the personal body, the interpersonal network, the locale, maybe the larger bodies, whole earth, universe and further, seem to transmit in the writing of some who experience themselves as persons, writing as persons

writers can write what they themselves don't know or misread

i want to know what is being said through me and by whom, for whose use

i also want the elation of writing beyond myself

14.

the glammers possible in writing are used politically as seduction: to slip (unconsciously) the image of the self (unconsciously received) into the other to install one's own time in the other

the image and knowledge of oneself installed in the other is a transmitter, receiver vitality and information can pass through i.e. it can be used vampiristically or perhaps benevolently

15.

those who are connected 'psychically' whether or not they know each other seem to work for or with each other and to have information about each other's work and state

the information may be oddly coded and is often misunderstood

16.

there always has to be more precision in writing than i know the reason for, because another range of consciousness can see what i can't now see

there's no possibility of getting it all, but if the few traces are accurate the rest will be accurately implied

17.

the relation of hand and voice, voice and undervoice, when these separate: i know hardly anything about this except that there is a dialogue in writing where it happens,

## holding one's own in an unfinished system

it simply stresses the multiples at play

and that in them there is a leaning

by the intimate rightness of interaction

with such precision in her body

the gorgeous interplay from moment to moment

expansions and contractions of the scale of congruity

thought of it as a travelling rhythm going thru points or barriers  
of pitch and pitch combinations

the original rotation from which it condensed and sorted

from indications too slight to be explained

the most subtle and intricate narrative art

sheets of sound

thru a scale

single lines

small very precise statements

whose notes are tiny elements of contact

microtones

and the smaller swarms in them

residua

by transforming a surface into a tissue of colors

structures of remarkable fluidity with natural & supernatural  
seeming continually to commingle

from **the play of the weather**

- 8

wanting to move respectfully in the whole condition

that odd exquisite graciousness

a room with particles & refracted color  
a room full of refractions in the midair

*aefnian* to approach evening

and then there is a light walking

in magic the one body

the shining looms of vegetation

the shining looms of stone

ceres cerebral

often nocturnal cactus very tall  
nightblooming cereus

ceric cerium

only when a clear sky looks down thru broken ceilings

from **the play of the weather**

- 11

ligament

ligature

the lilac nile      nilac

the night carried me away into its protection

how

it took my atoms in

from **field & field**

- 6

the alone i wanted was to have slipped my referents

what's there is not a figure but a few lines & a sense of figure

then what was that delicate seeing, already i can't resee it

who is there when i'm not i am the shell  
of it i want to see it

bonnard : to show all one sees on entering a room

birds seemed tossed up out of them trees turned up  
undersilver their feelings

'knowledge is similar to an enclosed but active body of water'

in the garden cold  
under the sumac roofer's debris laid down in fallen leaves  
telling leah this summer's research sky says mom is this  
like an eclipse?

it's an eclipse of the clouds, sky

fear, the intention cd go to the morning & more firmly  
on, you, anguish, tuesday, knowing what to write down,  
firmly knowing,

wishing writing down about not knowing,  
out to the white light has green leaves shining down from it,  
somewhere loving fear,

all the stirring, wind down thru,

back room work green notebook looking for local  
country notes what i find is descriptions of life before birth,  
that's all i was collecting ie having left it, the country i left  
is that. it compiled structure

the equations, conversions, the math i cd read from how, if i've  
solved them, the clues are distorted

her knowing geometry is from the experience of growth

the way it's looking like a closed system

a fright as if by following myself w/o resistance as i have  
been the method & material found in the same way w/o feel-  
ing 'will' i have found my way into a closed universe

immediate answer was that the lever is here, the carat of  
pressure in the attention making the sentence

from **field & field**

- 10

*well we very quickly found - the particular thing for instance that a cell is a detector of a feature in the outside world - it just was more complicated than that, a particular cell's output is determined by a whole set of variables, so that if we change for instance a color, in the input to a cell, through the visual system of course, we might find - a particular cell sensitive to green - that same cell might be sensitive to the orientation of lines at a particular angle. Another variable might be the intensity or luminance of that line; or how many lines; or what the spacing between the lines is.*

lines of the same 3 colors, one makes a solid, the other a lovely shattered rain

things being what they are

things resembling

things being what they are

things resembling

from **field & field**

- 11

lentils. there may be no money next week either

the garden & oh the russian winter garden                      the table,    the  
red withes,    dark red,                      the thin shadow of the water poplars  
standing right across to the wall                      the order & being of the  
garden now it has grove    table    bench    & winter light

the water is clear black from leaves fallen in                      more

the garden itself what it wasn't before                      it is an estate & time  
thin light & shade    height of the trees                      few stiff large leaves  
swinging    the ground scatter black & yellow that makes the  
woods, the creek

my japanese

not about but from

i have been with you as if you were a room

3 weeks. the light    steady    wave    on the stone

i miss you

(i'm here)

are you really

(gather it)

but i will

(yes you must)

it's very dark                      sunday

the rain from one shingle to the next

when i am in the considering a thing to describe is when i'm  
mediumistic                      -                      what does it mean that attention looks  
at one thing to get a message about another                      -  
mediumistic in that tiny way                      -                      especially when the  
message may be one i could have had direct, it is ordinary enough  
is it a developed doubling                      -                      more  
than in earlier days of having an 'outer' life

in which the fine shade came as an angling of a word

what do i want

i don't want it to be a marginal life

i don't want to be a stupid spirit

from **winter notes**

- 9

she held the book toward the window and read aloud

she said eternity & i said yes.          i could describe it firmly

at the table feeling that with that knowledge i would like to be  
alone,   seeing the jokes obscure and break the thought

lying here body lighted and pulling

it, she, the pretty girl, humorous, wanted me, perhaps wanted  
me to,   what?

'i used to know a lot'                  she seemed to be crying behind  
the stair rail

at night hearing the rain pouring over the house

'i could do it because i could feel their vision of it'

                the suspension in my chest a slate of perception  
racked waiting to know whether she'd come through

the two days    a grey light    released                  sea light

she walked into the river with stones in her pocket

it was when you were telling what you'd heard in the poem

climbing up into the company of your perception

i took that image as a center



THEORY



## LEAVING THE LAND: perception and fantasy

*- transcript of a talk given at a symposium accompanying Sandra Semchuk's exhibition How far back is home*

I want to start by trying to talk about land in a simple way that remains connected to what land is in childhood - I'm going to try to speak as if I were still there, in some ways.

I haven't lived there since I was eighteen, when I left to go to university, but I think my relation to a particular piece of land is the core of what I do, and what I look for and what I go on being related to as a central value.

For anyone who has grown up in the country, I think 'the land' is always some particular piece of land, their piece of land - what land means to them. The particular piece of land I see is a farm in northern Alberta, three miles from the nearest village. When I think of it, there it is. There's the ridge of hill in the east; there's the slough in the south; there's a poplar bluff behind the house in the west; and the feeling of north is always as if it goes on as bush forever.

To me this word 'land', I realize, has a kind of shine. It is a shine that has something to do with love. When I think of land, in the childish root of it, I think land loves me, land is something that loves me. Community, not necessarily.

Land loves me by extending all around and shining and being beautiful. It never fails to be beautiful. And it's something else which is hard to name.

When you are connected to a particular piece of land it is as if every summer you go farther into it. You start out and you don't go any farther than the yard. After that you get as far as the neighbour's creek. And after that you might get into the neighbour after the neighbour's creek. And so there is a way that the space becomes real, and it becomes real in that progressive way. The parts you see on the horizon you eventually get to but you don't get to them immediately. And so all of it is very particular. And then you have that particularity built into you as a kind of order.

The sense that I had of the community wasn't like that. It wasn't as if there was a natural way to begin close to home and keep going without limit. The limits were there very quickly. The community was a place that was uneasy.



There was rivalry, there was bullying, there was oppression, exclusion, betrayal, failure.

When I was asked to give this talk the image that came to me first was an image from probably midsummer of the year that I was maybe eight or nine. It's an image from sitting in church on a Sunday evening. The church I had to go to was a small Mennonite church three miles out. It was on the main road, which was a gravel road. It was right next to the road and it had two big windows that looked west onto it. In northern Alberta in summer the evenings, as you know, are very long. What I remember is sitting there in the pew and a pickup truck went past. It went as fast as it could, and what it left behind was this cloud of gravel dust. The dust was backlit, so there was rising into the bottom of the window frame this wonderful cloud of luminous dust with all the curls and swerves in it. You know the way dust gets kicked up and it slowly rises and expands and it lingers and hangs there in the air. It was completely lit up.

So the memory I have of it was of sitting in this cooped-up congregation looking at what I wouldn't have known to call but what I certainly felt to be the real thing. Because, in church, there we were, the men in the back on the left side, the boys in the front of the left side, the women in the back of the right side, the girls in the front of the right side, and there was this guy always in front of us. The feeling that I certainly had was that this guy was unentitled. He was unentitled to be preaching at me because he couldn't see me, and he had never been interested in seeing me. And, moreover, he was telling lies, because he was saying that what creates and sustains us is a father in the sky. This did not make sense because obviously what sustains us is where we are - the world itself. The vegetables are coming from the garden not from god. And my mother made me.

So I was at odds with the creation myth of my community, let's put it that way. Correctly so, because that was not a creation myth that had any place for me. Or for what I loved and believed in.

There was the congregation singing about staying near the cross, or the blood of the lamb - what seemed to be peculiar displacements of the facts. There were people who suffered; we didn't have to look as far as the sky to find them. Our parents suffered, and we were suffering. We suffered at school, and sometimes at home too. And it was our mother who bled. Where was the mention of real pain, and where was the love and praise for what was really wonderful and beautiful around us? I



remembered the hymns as having more in them about the world than there was; I remembered things about green hills and golden waves of grain and holy nights and starry skies. But when I went back to the hymn book recently and combed through it, those few mentions were just about it.

The gods I believed in were creek, poplar, willow, road, hill, moon, snow. The gods I feared were the Hereford bull and my father. And the lifting dust - although I couldn't exactly know this, I could feel it - the lawful motion of the lifting dust, the universality of that motion: that was true, visible cosmology.

So there was the land and there we were in the midst of it, in most direct daily contact with it, and yet living in unremitting effort to base community on something else. There was something mysterious to me about the fact that my community was organized around what I would now call a shared fantasy. Why was the community putting so much effort into being unreal?

It was partly that it was an immigrant community. Even the people who'd been there longest had only been there since 1912. In the fifties, that was only forty years. And the people in my church community had come from Russia only twenty years before. Maybe if you are a displaced people it takes sense to base your community on something other than where you are.

But it wasn't just them, it was us too. There were three of us kids and we had to walk a mile and a half to school. We would often do the whole mile and a half from the school bus with our heads in a story book. So I have to think, since I did it too, that there must be some good reasons for doing it. One of them of course was hurt feelings. You don't want to spend your whole time feeling the insults of the day and the ways in which you're being kept out of things, and so on. Another reason is boredom. The land is just lying there and shining.

When my brother and sister and I were walking home from school with our heads in story books we were like kids in any of the small places in any of the parts of the world discovering that better things are happening somewhere else. It's right to want action and creation and learning and newness and virtuosity and even fantasy. We wanted to be part of the best human possibilities going. Our hunger in story books was escape and evasion, but it also had something to do with looking for those best possibilities. We were wanting out in order to get *in*.



We grew up and left the land as fast as we could. We left because we were looking for better company. The company we had didn't love us and it didn't love what we loved. We didn't have any real scope. We couldn't tell the truth and be honoured for it. We couldn't make what we'd like to make and have other people like it. We had to leave because we needed to find better community. But we were attached to the land, and so we were in trouble. Could we go on living in true relation to land we hardly ever saw? Can there be grounded community among landless people?

The three of us partly solved this trouble in different ways. I'll just talk about several of my own.

Land isn't the same thing as landscape. A real community in land has something to do with common work, land held and loved in common, through work with that land. A beautiful form of community I've found has been the group of people who've made and look after Strathcona Community Garden. These are inner city people, people without backyards, who have attached themselves to three and a half acres of scrub in a warehouse district, and have loved those acres so passionately, so energetically and so cunningly that they have given themselves effective ownership. They are no longer landless.

There has been another way, too, that has to do with friendships of a certain kind. Leaving the farm had to do with finding people who could teach me, or be interested in learning with me, always specifically also in relation to the feeling I had about the land I grew up on. I wanted to find people more capable of being where they were.

There are such people, who are communities in the sense that they have found each other and are friends. The ones I know are mostly women. These are communities based on a sort of unspoken common project. The project is this: they work every day and in very disciplined ways to find and enlarge something like an art or science of perception. Some of them are artists, but what they think of themselves as working at is not necessarily the objects they create. It is as if they have a sense of building their own brains. There is technical exchange: people say, have you read this, have you seen this. People show each other photos or videos, or listen to tapes. They study their dreams. They do yoga. All of these really, in some informal way, are for the purpose of learning to perceive - I'm including feeling with perception, here - as if perception is a resource they believe we haven't learned the full resources of. All



of this is informal and intuitive and in no way institutionalized, it just strikes people as the right thing to do.

When these sorts of friends are together looking at something, they sometimes really do notice they're in heaven. Driving in silence down a road whose ditches are flowing with every color of grass. Sitting together seeing every shred of a cloud. Looking each other in the face.

Wanting this kind of attention often begins with attachment to a particular piece of land, but people who learn it have given themselves an ability to be quickly in touch, anywhere. A puddle in asphalt can be their land base, when there's nothing else.

I have a friend of a different kind, a computer programmer, who to me is a parable of a certain temptation. Jim made his fortune in software and then lost it again, and when I met him he was spending his days on the net looking for ways to abandon his body and get himself jacked into the net permanently. He wants the scientists to download what he thinks of as his brain code onto the web. He wants to live there. He believes it's possible. He doesn't expect to be immortal he says, but he'd like to live five hundred years.

The faith that it's possible to live off-earth, that there's somewhere else to go and it's somewhere painless and deathless, is something Ursula le Guin wrote about in *The Wizard of Earthsea*. Everywhere on the planet where the story takes place, there is a loss of community and of skill and attachment to place because an evil wizard is whispering to people that if they take his drug they'll be able to follow him into everlasting life.

Our little church dreaming of absent heaven and ignoring the heaven they were in, and Jim's virtual community of cyberspace, are alike in the way they choose to be landless by ignoring the body that is their place on earth. The evil sorcerers here are anyone instructing us to bail out.

I'm thinking also of kinds of cultural theory and philosophy of mind - ideological communities - that describe land, perception and community in ways that can't support a distinction between real contact and fantasy. There is something familiar about the way it feels in these arenas. Here again is a community that doesn't love what I love and that doesn't want to see me. Here I am again, looking out the window while someone tries to convince me to bail out of what I'm surest of. This time I'm in a seminar room on Burnaby Mountain looking at the glow of a bank of



alders while someone tells me the land is a cultural construction.

So another way I work to stay in touch with my original piece of land is that I work to defend the very idea of it. One of the things that means is defending a description of perception that supports peoples' ability to be and stay in contact with the here and now which is their land.

In the last ten years a lot has happened in neuroscience, and subsequently in the connectionist philosophies of mind that track these findings. We have discovered things about the brain that have instantly revised centuries of error in the ways we've talked about perceiving and about the relation of perceiving to thinking and knowing. There are a number of new ideas that seem as if they can be really helpful, and I want to describe some of them briefly.

The first one isn't new, of course. It's evolutionary theory, which is our form of creation myth. It's one I like a lot, because it says that the universe, rather than being created from outside, by some outside guy or some outside force, is self-creating. It's self-creating from the beginning, and we are part of its self-creation. Human beings have this lively and minutely organized, not at all chaotic, but exquisitely complexly organized, history and actuality as self-structuring entities in a universe which is also that. What it amounts to is that we are made by the land, we are made as part of the land. The implication then is that perception is the complement of the land. It is the complement in human beings, of the land. Perception is how the land itself has constructed us capable of being in contact with it.

The second idea is a correction of the more recent academic fad for talking about perception as if it and every other kind of mental action were a kind of computation. Perceptual computationalism is a new variant of old forms of representationalism. Hume's version talked about perception as involving images "in the mind"; a 1980s version talked about codes in the brain. Both have a kind of brain-in-a-vat feel, as if perception is a purely internal transaction. What they leave out is the sense of a living creature in active contact with a world.

*Contact* means two things: a person or animal who is perceiving is often acting on the world, going up to something, touching something, poking its nose into something. At the same time it is entered by parts of the world, deeply altered, structured by the world. When we are attending to where we are, we're spatially and temporally entrained by patterned energy - we're synchronized with what's with us. A perceptual state is



a physical state that's relevantly, responsively organized; perceiving is relatedness. It is more like *feeling* than it is like calculating.

Suzanne Langer and James Gibson were making these points in 1942 and 1956, but they weren't understood. What's different now is that brain science has got more of the detail of what can be meant by saying a sensory system like vision or audition actually resonates with something happening in the world.

Another very old misunderstanding about perception - it goes back to Plato or before - says that perception is simple, animalistic and primitive, and that the really sophisticated, evolved and important capabilities of human beings belong to some other faculty, like 'Reason'.

In fact perception in any organism is as complex as that organism is. A human brain in the act of perceiving is probably the most finely organized kind of complex structure in the world. Perception doesn't even have to be specialized to be virtuosic. Think of a day when you drive for twelve hours through landscapes you haven't seen before, sixty miles an hour on two lanes with oncoming traffic, different colors of light and times of day, towns, all kinds of terrain. Think how much you've seen in such a day. Think of how much you've had to do, as an organism, to see so much.

We get it right, we get it right in the most complicated circumstances, and the ability to get it right is stable through hunger, sickness, lack of sleep, great changes of locale. We get it right because we're aboriginal to this planet; we're all aboriginal to the real.

The misunderstanding that says perception is simple is usually the same one that says that other capabilities, which are thought to be the truly human ones - like thinking, speaking and imagining - or doing math or designing jet engines - are accomplished by 'faculties' or parts of the brain other than perception.

The recent evidence is that all of these abilities necessarily and centrally depend on structures formed in the processes of perception, for the purposes of perception. What we see in PET scan and magnetic resonance imaging is that when we think, imagine, speak and dream, it is sensory cortex that lights up. When we talk about a bird we're using some of the same tissue we use when we're seeing a bird. Reasoning and imagining, rather than being apices of some hierarchical progression, are actually subabilities of a more general ability to perceive.



Another related misconception is that perception is only of particular things, and we need a 'higher' faculty to give us categories and other kinds of abstraction. Kant for instance said categories have to be applied to the materials furnished by the senses by the faculty of Understanding.

But the world builds the brain so we see things immediately *as* kinds of things. Eleanor Rosch, a perceptual psychologist who was first writing in the 1970s, worked something out that has been used a lot since. Her discovery was that, at a base level, which is to say at the level most relevant to the survival of animals and humans, perception is automatically categorical. In other words, we see categories before we see particulars. Categories are the easy part of perceiving. The world builds the brain so we'll run away from all tigers. As we get smarter and more experienced we're able to see differences within a category. As we get to know someone better, we begin to see that although they're still them, they look different every day. It's the same with the land, anything. The deeper we get into something, the more we are able to see the particularity of it, so that the higher function, the more experienced or the more educated or the more evolved function, is to see particulars *as* particular.

Our notions about the relation of perceiving and abstraction also need to be turned around. The new evidence is that abstraction has to do with using parts of the brain in a segregated or dissociated way - literally abstracting from the normal completeness of perception.

For instance, the parts of the cortex we use to see are quite widely distributed. Primary visual cortex is in the occipital lobe, right at the back of the skull. Premotor cortex, which controls eye movements, is in the frontal lobe. Color vision and visual object recognition happen in temporal cortex, behind the ears, but the parts that have to do with space perception are in parietal cortex, higher up and more toward the back of the head. So in ordinary vision there is a kind of wide net of interconnected activity, which I sometimes imagine as a kind of tree or 3D lacework made of light. As we see different things the light structures shift.

If we are thinking about space in an abstract way, when we're doing math, for instance, we use the area in parietal cortex that's used for space perception, without using the other vision centers; we're using just one quadrant of the tree. Color field painters presumably are isolating the temporal area that does color perception. We can learn



to segregate sensory areas in endless different ways, but none of these ways are 'higher' than perception. They are just culturally supported ways of using parts of what in everyday perception is an integrated whole.

Another misdescription of perception - I think this is number seven - is that we perceive with our outside edges, that we see with our retinas, feel with our skins, hear with our ears. That isn't how it happens. Perception starts at the sensory surfaces, but goes on being accomplished by structures at all levels all the way up to the cortex and then looping back down into the muscles. And the senses aren't functionally separate from each other on the way up: vision, hearing and muscle proprioception are collaborating as early as the midbrain, and they go on feeding back onto each other all the way to the cortex and beyond. Space perception in the parietal for example is heavily visual but also has converging fibers from auditory and motor cortex - which is why blind people can do math.

So it's not that there's one place in the brain where it all comes together and perceiving happens. We see and hear and touch with our entire nervous systems, and any moment of ordinary contact with the world will be a standing texture of simultaneous micropereceptions, normally integrated but sometimes, transiently, separable.

Another thing that isn't generally known - this is my last point - is that our brain can change quite a lot depending on what we do. People who practice playing an instrument, for instance, massively increase the number of neural connections available for fine finger movement. We customize our brains. Someone interested in certain kinds of perception can actually increase the amount of cortical tissue they use for that kind of perception. This explains how people can develop unusual kinds of skill.

A physicist called Evelyn Fox Keller wrote a wonderful book called *A Feeling for the Organism*, which is about a corn geneticist, Barbara McClintock, who got the Nobel a few years back. It is the story of the development of McClintock's ability to perceive the genetic structures she was tracking. Out in the field, she knew the plants individually. She knew the shapes of their leaves and their growth habits and the colors of their kernels and so on. So then, when she looked at slides under her microscope, she got so she could see the individual genetic components of a plant. She could tell which plant the slide was from.



McIntock did science by working up an always more informed integration of theoretic knowledge and eyesight. Keller called it erotic science, because it was science based on contact. It was not science done as if by aliens: it's science as done by someone who knows the land has made scientists as well as corn plants, so a scientist can adapt herself to a corn plant well enough to be able to really know it.

The world exists and we're made to perceive it. We're also made to act and make. One of the things we can make is our own ability to be with where we are. We begin instinctively, but then we can work at it more deliberately. The perception of a mature, smart, brave, adventurous, experienced person has great virtuosity, great idiosyncrasy, and also great *contact*. Such people can be in community because they have formed themselves to be deeply in contact with a common world.

And, since it's the perception-built brain that's used for everything else - even for dreaming, which is fantasy at its limit - people who are or have been in good contact with land will also be well-founded when they're making it up - writing novels or designing jet engines.

I have often dreamed about the land I grew up on. I've thought its layout is built into my brain as a kind of basic orientation. When I dream that something happens in the south, in the slough, it always seems to have to do with sex or birth or prebirth. When something in a dream happens in the northwest, it seems to have to do with a spatial sort of intuition or quest. It's as if the arrangement of land around the farmyard has been taken as a kind of basic map both of my own body and of its psychic capabilities. And presumably also of the body I lived in before I was born.

Sometimes, and I think it might be times when I'm deep in theory, I'll dream that I come up the road to the home place and find it's completely overbuilt with high rise towers. In these dreams I don't like not being able to see the land as I used to know it, but I'm not sure it's a bad dream.

If original contact with the land - whether it's ongoing or historical - is our cognitive base, then sanity, cognitive virtue, has to do with building correctly on that base. That is, with building on as complete and accurate a perceptual capability as we can make. Building towers coherent with their ground. And not building crazed theoretical towers on a non-base of evasion, trauma and alienation.



The more I read in the history of the philosophy of mind, the more I read of what my tradition has to say about perception and thinking and mind and rationality, the more I feel what an early civilization we are. We are living in the vast penumbra of a hideously primitive religion which lied about our origins and which had some vested interest in doing do, and which is being perpetuated in obscure ways in many theoretical disciples that think of themselves as secular. There doesn't seem to be any way to make it change quickly. I don't feel there has ever been a culture that was adequate to the land. I feel as if we are at the beginning of the beginning of the beginning, and maybe if we manage to make it for many more thousands of years we'll have communities that know how to live with the land and still be the other things that I think we rightly want to be - things any kid growing up on the farm rightly wants to be.

So what I want to say about going to the land is that I really do not think it is going back. There is a sense of backward connection - it would be wrong to forget how much of childhood and even pre-birth there is in our feeling for the land. But I don't think we should be naive or sentimental or in any way backward-looking: we are required to understand what I call our mammal fantasies, for instance that there is a father in the sky, because when we were in the womb there was a father who came from outside and banged around.

My feeling about it is that perception goes on not being the first thing, but the third thing. We leave the land and we go on a long adventure to find out how to be with the land.

But for the time being what I also know is that it's always safe to measure my brain against the land. If I'm in a good state the land is going to look beautiful. If I'm in a good state my connection with it will feel like love and bliss and rightness. If I'm not in a good state I'll be thinking ... no, I can't get it, I'm not there.

- That's it. Thank you Sandra, thank you Karen and Maria.



## BRAIN AND METAPHOR

*that most exquisite net at the bottom/sandy + pebbly river, all whose loops are wires of sunshine, gold finer than silk, beside yon Stone the Breeze seems to have blown them in a Heap* Coleridge *Notebooks II, 1489 f57*

When I try to think about metaphor, what I really want to know is how to think about the fact that some of what I am is in the dark.

It's not just that I don't know how I know. Metaphor can also be a way I know more than I know. It is as if the part of me that is in the dark knows but I don't, and metaphor is a name for one of the ways unknown knowledge makes itself present and active.

### I. landscape and shadow

I have a slide taken in Alberta that looks southeast across a field of canola. We can see about a mile, to the rim of a hill on the horizon. Midway into the scene are two granaries and the dark tufts of several copses. The picture is being taken from a roadway bordered with brome grass; the sun is halfway down and directly behind me so that it throws my shadow into the image along with the shadow of the strip of grass.

When I took the picture I was liking the color of the light. But mainly I was wanting to show the landscape I'd seen every day in childhood - open fields with stands of poplar and saskatoon, and that rim of hill across the east.

When I was taking the photograph I did notice the shadow in the foreground, but it was several years before I saw the way my shadow joins the shadow of the strip of grass to make what looks like a childishly drawn outline of a bird with its wings stretched across the field. I didn't see the bird when I took the picture, and yet the bird is positioned as if I did see it. It is as if I felt its presence when I was framing the shot.

The shadow is just a shadow; I don't want to make too much of the fact that I can see it as a bird. We can call that a metaphor, but it doesn't seem important.

What does interest me about this photo is the other way it is metaphoric. That bird isn't very birdlike - it is more a posture than a bird. In fact it's a kind of embrace. The photo includes within it as if an image of a feeling attitude. It's the feeling I was when I took the picture. I was intending to show my childhood landscape but somehow I managed to show also my childhood feeling for that landscape. How did I do that - how did it do that?

I can only show a feeling by showing a body in the posture of a feeling. The shadow bird is a way of supplying a body to carry the image of a feeling present but unnoticed in the real body taking the picture.

### 2. metaphor's embodiment

*I am not so much stating a belief or advancing a thesis or doctrine as proposing a categorization or scheme of organization, calling attention to a way of setting our nets ... What needs to be shown is not that it is true but what it can do.* Goodman *Ways of Worldmaking 1995, 129*

"My horse with mane of short rainbows": the phrase gives me not only the horse, but also the weather - bright sun - and a position - on horseback and leaning forward so I can see each hair iridescent against the light. I got it by seeing it and I got it instantly. There was a conjuration. The line (from the Navajo, cited in Abrams 1996, 230) touched something off. I know what happened but I don't know how it happened.

Eventually we are going to understand metaphor from within a unified theory of cognitive function. Jakobson wrote in 1960 that rhetoric is a subfield of linguistics, and linguistics a subfield of psychology. We can extend the derivation; rhetoric is a subfield of the theory of representation, and theory of representation is a subfield of neuroscience. When we know how our minds work, we will know how words and pictures work; we'll know how we use words and pictures. It will be more obvious than it is now, that language and perception, knowledge and pleasure, art, science, love, therapy and theory are functions of the same organ. I am all of those things by means of one brain, but that brain will have to reorganize itself deeply before I can begin to think of myself in a unified way. We don't yet have the neuroscience to do it right, but we can begin by imagining the physical ground of our cognitive selves. If I think of

perception, imagining and speech as functions of the same, or adjacent, or interdigitated fibers, then I can begin to revise the conceptual habits that make me think them in different vocabularies. I'd like in this paper to begin to set up a way of thinking about metaphor that doesn't have to stall at disciplinary boundaries and that can handle the experienced part of metaphor along with the part that seems to happen in the dark.

My sources in neuroscience and philosophy of mind I have acknowledged elsewhere. There has also been good recent work in what is being called cognitive linguistics, cognitive rhetoric and cognitive poetics: Chris Collins' *The Poetics of the Mind's Eye* (1991); Eve Sweetser's *From Etymology to Pragmatics: the Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Experience* (1990); and Eleanor Rosch (1978, 1991) and George Lakoff's (1987) work on metaphor-based categorization. Barbara Stafford writing art history (1991 and 1996) and Evelyn Fox Keller writing philosophy of science (1983, 1985) have been persistent proponents of knowledge as embodied.

Earlier allies are M.A.K. Halliday whose *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994) is a beautiful rethinking of the relation of meaning and linguistic form, and Wittgenstein, whose *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) is still decades ahead.

I.A. Richards whose writing since the 30s has recently been republished (*Richards on Rhetoric*, 1991), actually studied neuroscience, and wrote about writing in ways that seem to me to be based on a vision something like the one I will attempt. Valéry in the same era was writing with a similar clarity in his case based on precise attention to technical effect in poetry.

Palpable behind Richards and Valéry are the Romantic cognitivists of the 1700s, particularly Coleridge - exquisite phenomenologist of his own process, rummaging through every sort of theory that might help him discover how to think about the fact that some of what he was in the dark.

### **3. representation**

*Representation* as I will use the term always refers to our use of representational objects and events in the public world. Where other

writers talk about mental representation I will talk about cognitive structure; if we use the same term both for a picture and for the brain state by means of which we use the picture, we have lost our ability to speak clearly about their relation. In my formulation, a theory of representation would fall out of a unified general theory of cognition, but they are not synonymous.

Other distinctions I need are the perception/simulation distinction and the distinction between situational entrainment and cognitive autonomy. They are conceptual distinctions only; in practice we can perceive and imagine at the same time; and we can be cognitively coordinated with our physical surroundings to various degrees.

Perception and action are basic. We stay alive only if we, or other people for us, stay in touch with where we are. Perception is, and action requires, organizational entrainment: we are able to perceive and act because our bodies organize themselves in relevant response to our surroundings. If I am perceiving, I am in sync. As my surroundings change, I change. When I watch a cloud pass overhead I am performing a cognitive act of great responsive precision: each forming and dissolving fiber and every flowing change of shape that I make out requires cognitive coordination and then re-coordination.

When we are imagining (remembering, thinking) rather than perceiving, we are somewhat uncoupled from where we are. We're not elsewhere, but we are in sync in fewer ways. It can happen, though, that imagining is actually perceptually entrained. When I'm seeing animals in moving clouds, I am engaged in a kind of *perceptually anchored* fantasy.

The perceptual organization of simulation can be slight or extensive, and it can work in different ways. If I am entertaining myself on the fifth day of a Buddhist *sesshin* by watching a flow of Buddha-shapes generated around a stain on the floor, it's as if I'm spatially entrained but temporally uncoupled - I'm organized to see the stain, and to see it THERE, with the rest of the meditation hall around it, but the structures by which I am seeing it are unstable structures unstably organizing the means by which I'm imagining.

Or if, in more ordinary times, I am looking out the window at the top of the sumac and thinking the seed heads look like figures in red velvet

cloaks, I can use careful observation to develop illusion. That central seed head is a little tilted: it's a figure walking forward in - how should I say it - a slightly anxious manner. The pinnate leaves if I see them in scale with the figures are tropical shrubs in a marvelous strong yellow light. And so on. In this sort of moment I am more comprehensively entrained by the sumac than I would be in casual looking, but that entrainment is also organizing - and of course being organized by - the structures by means of which I am imagining.

The most general thing that can be said about *representation* is that our use of representational objects and events is perceptually entrained simulation.

It is true that people use language and gestures to coordinate their perception of physical circumstances they share. "Look at that!" is like an animal cry that coordinates an animal group's perceptual state: suddenly they are all alarmed and alert. But in human groups the flow of speech sound is more often used to coordinate fantasy. "We spent a couple of weeks in a little town in the Baja, and then in April we ...." Or "... after some delay, of course, a stimulus that was an immediate external determinant must become a preceding context and hence ..."

The flow of sound (the line of print) is the representational event. To have representational effect it must be perceived; and it can only be perceived if the perceiver is entrained - altered, organized, scheduled - by it. But it may have a triggering effect without having the kind of effect that would make us aware of it. PET scans have confirmed (Raiche et al, 1995) what doesn't surprise anyone: it is possible to respond to words without any activation showing up in auditory cortex. The organizational entrainment effected by language or other media can take shortcuts. Representational entrainment, like other kinds of perceptual entrainment, may be functionally transparent.

Representational media can be thought of as transparent to various degrees. We normally respond to postural signals without noticing them. Printed language can be handled as rapidly as it is because it invisibilizes remarkably. Subliminal effects apart, image media lose their point if you don't see them, and if you fade out on music you might as well turn it off (not everyone thinks that).

Representational artifacts may also be designed to entrain to different degrees. 'Compelling' means maximally entraining: you don't miss a frame of the movie and you hardly have a thought of your own. Another kind of film sets you up to wander away.

It is also possible to take representational objects and events in a wholly perceptual way. You can LISTEN to the sentence. You can see patterned light reflected off a screen. If you are set up to attend to what is there as such, you are perceiving. If you are set up by the presence of what is there to seem to perceive what isn't there, you are simulating by way of entrainment to a representational object.

Something more needs to be said about the differences and similarities between, for instance, language and image media. When we use patterned pressure waves to direct our own or someone else's attention to something in the landscape, we are entrained both by the flow of sound and by the landscape itself; we are jointly organized by means of an interaction of two kinds of presence, but the result is still simply perception. But when we are standing in a landscape absorbed in talk about Ursula le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, much of our cognitive organization is coming from reciprocal conversational entrainment in simulation.

When we are looking at a photograph our cognitive situation is something between these extremes. We are in a room: we are perceptually entrained by the room. We're seeing it. There is a sheet of photographic paper behind glass on the wall: we are seeing it too. The structured light by which we are seeing is being structured then and there; but the light reflected from that sheet of paper is also being structured (more or less) as it was when it entered a lens years ago. We are being entrained by a real structure of light with a fictional effect: it organizes us as if we were with an object we aren't with.

We don't want to say we are imagining the photograph. We are seeing everything else in the room, and we are seeing the photograph. The light reflected from the photographic surface is everywhere convolved with the light reflected from the rest of the room. We are seeing and seeming to see by means of the same medium. But some of the light is being used for perceptual purposes and some is being used for representational purposes. This is like hearing a dog bark at the same time that my friend's

sentence is directing me to think of Le Guin's fictional planet Annares. The photo's presence as a representational object is not illusory. We do not imagine IT but we imagine by means of it, the same way we can imagine by means of a flow of cloud or a line of type.

What I have sketched above is a basic reorientation in thinking about representation. It has the advantage of giving us a unified account of representational effect across media; it gives us flexible ways to describe the particularity of any representational instance, but it also allows us to begin to think more generally about representational effects - metaphor for example - common to many kinds of instance.

The best reason for describing representation in terms of cognitive structure is that it grounds the theory of representation in the whole of the body. Neural networks are in functional contact with, for instance, the endocrine and immune systems. When a sentence makes us blush, we can count that as representational entrainment. When reading *Anna Karenina* and drinking strong tea in a London boarding house makes us euphoric, that should count as a representational effect too - organized jointly with straightforward perceptual and directly chemical means. It is an organization of an entire cognitive mode.

The body has no difficulty convolving effects, and our theory should at least acknowledge the contextual flexibility with which we manage comprehension and articulation, even where we can't account for it in detail.

*The phonetic 'gesture' brings about, both for the speaking subject and for [her] hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence.* Merleau-Ponty *The Essential Writings*, 206

*To put it rather contentiously, language has appeared special and unassimilable to broader psychological phenomena mainly because linguists have insisted on analyzing it in inappropriate and highly unnatural fashion.* Langacker 1984,7

*... would have to be trained to see that a perceptual and affective model of knowing actually corresponds to our understanding of how the brain functions ... by a coherent and concerted rhetorical effort.* Stafford 1991, 23

#### 4. complex meaning, complex means

*O said I as I looked on the blue, yellow, green, & purple green Sea, with all its hollows & swells & cut-glass surfaces - O what an Ocean of lovely forms! - and I was vexed, teased, that the sentence sounded like a play of Words. But it was not, the mind within me was struggling to express the marvelous distinctness & unconfounded personality of each of the million millions of forms. & yet the undivided unity in which they subsisted.* Coleridge *Notebooks II*, 2344

We commonly talk as if representational objects and events *have* meanings which are their *content*. Thus we talk about finding the meaning of a difficult sentence and we wonder whether we should describe music as having meaning at all. There is a good reason why we make this kind of attempt: representational objects and artifacts are public. People are perceptually entrained by them in similar ways. At times the more complex simulacrum structure that results from this entrainment may be similar too. Since we seem to share a representational effect, we tend to say it belongs to the object - the same way we say Christmas is a manic season even though it is we who are manic. Representational objects are social objects; they are used in similar ways and we can not-incorrectly call these socially correlated uses their meaning.

But representational objects have socially-correlated effects in virtue of personal brains - wild and/or trained as these brains are. Moreover, representational effects can be idiosyncratic: we should be able to talk about personal meanings. It makes deeper and more flexible sense to say that meaning and cognitive structure are the same thing. We could go on to say meaning is something we are, not something we grasp or find.

This makes meaning rather global: it would be the whole of the wide net by means of which we are being our cognitive selves. There is a lot to include: besides the neural configurations by means of which we are perceiving or imagining the world, there are the interoceptive structures by means of which the body perceives and imagines its own tissue states, muscle tension, endocrine concentrations. And maybe the neuroceptive states by which the net senses its own shapes.

At any time, only some of the active net will be part of the integrated subnet by means of which we are sentient. If Kinsbourne is right (1995,

1324) conscious attention is hyperactivation: whatever we are sentient in will also, as a dynamic consequence, be more finely and more widely connected and readier to organize action. It will also be the means by which we are our felt sense of something - the whole copresent weave of perception, physical sensation and imagining. That will be meaning as far as I can mean it. In the context of this totality it is difficult and unnecessary to decide how much or what parts of that felt sense to call the meaning given by a sentence or an image. There will be no fact of the matter. This is even more obvious when we include as meaning the structural response of the non-sentient net which surrounds and is interfused with the sentient net.

*I have suggested that at any time in the awake individual's brain there is a dominant focus of patterned neural activity that underlies the phenomenal experience of that moment.* Kinsbourne 1995, 1324

*One of these ideas ... dispatches a flow of animal spirits to its proper trace, these spirits in the violence of their motion, run not only into the trace to which they are more particularly directed, but into several of those that lie about it. By this means they awaken other ideas of the same set till at last the whole set of them is blown up and the whole prospect or garden flourishes in the imagination.* Addison cited in Collins 1991, 417

*I tend to believe that a full account of lexical meaning will only come hand-in-hand with a far fuller understanding of cognition than is presently available.* Sweetser 1995, 16

## **5. complex entrainment**

*Much of what appears to us as 'feeling' (as is obvious in the case of a complex metaphor) will in fact be quite an elaborate structure of related meanings.* Empson quoted in Collins, 1991, 36

The neural configuration we are at any moment is very comprehensively coordinated. To see anything in its circumstance, for instance, the parietal configurations by means of which we are seeing it WHERE it is must tie across to the occipital lobe configurations by means of which we are seeing its form; and to feel ourselves looking at it as well as seeing it, these configurations must tie across to the nets in somatosensory cortex by means of which we feel tension in eye muscles.

When we are seeing, tasting and touching something the different ways we are patterned or entrained through these senses are naturally coordinated - coordinated by timing coincidence and wiring design. The evidence is that this coordination reaches even to senses we don't seem to be using. PET imaging has found activation in auditory cortex even when we are only watching someone's lips move (Zatorre, 1992, 846). Speech perception is similarly helped by subvocal movements in our mouths and throats: feeling how it would feel to speak them is part of the way we discriminate phonemes in a flow of sound. When we listen to an Australian accent we are surreptitiously trying it on - that's why we can reproduce it. Watching a bear walk we are walking like a bear: that's why we can write a sentence that walks like a bear. Perception is not only energetically entrained, it is also muscularly empathetic; we become what we see. We feel the shape of the vase by imagining we are holding ourselves the way it would be holding itself if it were a living body.

Perceptual knowledge includes these extensions into empathetic structure, and much more. The cognitive order set up by perceptual entrainment can reach deep into the brain. And it can include virtuosic abilities to support observation with simulated self-talk. Barbara McLintock could look at the germ cell of a corn plant with the whole of her theory standing active around the means by which she saw it (Keller 1983, 117). She called it *integrating the phenotype*.

When we simulate perception we may similarly induce an organization much deeper than a term like *mental image* can suggest. We set up a loom of fancy. Then we use it to think and feel with. It is more comprehensive than just sensory evocation: we can evoke a mode. Think of oratory or hymns to Venus. Or we may evoke procedures: reading Whitman's lists sets us up to generate lists. We can wake from dreams in which we have been writing pages of Victorian prose.

A representational work issues from and entrains a whole style of cognitive order. Clynes (1978) describes the differences of global *feel* in different composers. We not only recognize Mozart by his line, but we become Mozart when we're entrained by his particular organization of tension and release. There are people we like being: we could say that's what *liking* means. Hearing a spontaneous sentence is a relief even when we don't like what is said. A theorist whose writing state is energetic and

coherent sets us up temporarily to think strong thoughts beyond our usual capacity. Being able to do that is a sign of having got it.

It's a kind of mediated invasion. We don't get entrained brain to brain, but the representational event - the spoken sentence, cautious as it may be, the written sentence, reworked as it may be, the photograph processed as it certainly is, the room's decor, set us up in ways that - if they are not wholly the maker's ways - are still ways made by the maker.

When conversation is slaved fantasy rather than a way to coordinate attention in real surroundings, it has particular need for timing effects like the syllabic foot and intonational contour. Ong (1982) is interesting on the dynamics of sonic entrainment in oral cultures where public speech must be organized to touch off just the kinds of cognitive structure that will be reliably formed on the fly.

Literate cultures can use linguistic tactics (Collins 1991) that build cognitive structures of other kinds. A long sentence with many subordinate clauses can be thought of as setting up a net that accumulates subnet complexity. A complex meaning is induced by cumulative organization of complex means; this isn't in principle different from what happens when I'm in a room with Louie and then Rowen comes in wearing a black leather cap and says he wants something to eat, and Louie says let's go to the Vietnamese place. The means by which we perceive or by which we accumulate the sense of a long text will have to shift, presumably, with all the precise delicacy of a cloud's many-fibred flow - and more.

*the communication or comprehension of gestures ... as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine [hers]. Merleau-Ponty Phenomenology of Perception, 185*

*The exquisitely intricate structures and references evolved in sound can be visibly recorded exactly in their specific complexity, and, because visibly recorded, can implement production of still more exquisite structures and inferences. Ong 1982, 85*

## **6. metaphor and exit organization**

*We must consider speech before it is spoken. Merleau-Ponty Signs, 46*

When we initiate one action rather than another - when we turn our eyes to the left - some particular configuration of some particular subnet gates activation of effectors. The nervous system bifurcates. There can be copresent connections setting up incompatible acts, but the result will not be incompatible acts: it will be vacillating motion, no motion at all, or something that satisfies many constraints simultaneously. In states of unusual urgency or unusual well-being the wide net's internal coherence might organize motion of unusual force or grace.

Speech and writing are kinds of action which, like running or eye motion, are peripherally gated from centrally organized structure. The way we sometimes imagine a word before we speak it can obscure the fact that a word comes into existence only when we speak or write it; it is made when it is sounded. It does not flow from brain to lips like a packet ejected with its meaning inside it. Like a gesture, it is not transferred but enabled.

Like a gesture, it is performed by means of a wide net that is STILL THERE while the word is being pronounced. The word is produced in the standing context of everything we are as we speak it: the fine-grained multiple weave that is our meaning. We don't speak about our experience, we speak from it. We don't refer TO it, we refer from it. The system sorts toward words (Goodman 1968); we organize a wording (Halliday 1994) by means of it.

If we talk about meaning as the cognitive structure from which wordings are organized, certain things about language are less puzzling. Polysemy: different states of a wide net can sort toward the same word. Homonymy: very different states of a wide net can sort toward the same motion, the way a wink and a blink can be set up in different ways.

What happens more often than homonymy is that a word is used in conditions that vary largely but can have a range of partial commonalities, the kinds of family resemblance Wittgenstein noticed, that allows *grain* to be used for seeds, cereal plants, minimal quantities, the kind and direction of wood fibers, the size and texture of the particles of any surface, the direction of cleavage of a mineral, one's natural disposition or temperament. When we read that list we feel not complete difference but as if a series of lateral shifts. It makes sense that a net configured to remember the surface texture of leather would enable the same word

as a net configured to remember the surface texture of a cut round of wood.

Different meanings run to the same words - more exactly different cognitive conditions gate the same words - necessarily. When we're stuck for a word we feel the meaning we are but the net isn't setting up a wording. Then we'll gate off some *part* of our meaning. Jesse's dad asks him if he knows the difference between a breaking plow and an ordinary plow. Jesse is very bright but he's only two. He says "The breakin' plow has bigger ... knives." He had to sit with it for a minute. He knows the fact but he doesn't know the word. When he's sitting with the fact he knows, imagining the breaking plow, dwelling on it, he's energizing the structure by means of which he's thinking it. Some part of it, the cutting-edge part, the dangerous part, is energized enough to gate a word. He has worded from the meaning he was.

Sweetser (1990) describes the orderedness of shifts in word use as metaphoric. How metaphors are made is not so different from other kinds of talk. There's structure and it gates a word. When Jesse says "The breakin' plow has bigger .. knives" he is not making a metaphor but he is doing what people do when they make metaphors - referring from a complex meaning - gating a word that runs off the part of a net that's hyperenergized for some reason.

Metaphors are spots of licensed wildness in a discourse. They can tell you what else is going on. Haskell (1987) talks about the way words like *here*, *now* and *this* used in a group will mark constructions that are metaphoric descriptions of power dynamics in the group itself. Metaphoric wordings are being set up from structures wider than the structures set up for conversational topics.

*There is another reason for not using the term 'syntax'. This word suggests proceeding in a particular direction, such that a language is interpreted as a system of forms, to which meanings are then attached .... In a functional grammar, on the other hand, the direction is reversed. A language is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realized. Halliday 1994, xvii*

*Metaphor is usually described as a variation in the use of words: a word is said to be used with a transferred meaning. Here, however, we are looking at*

*it from the other end, asking not "How is this word used?" but "How is this meaning expressed?" A meaning may be realized by a selection of words that is different from that which is in some sense typical or unmarked. From this end, metaphor is a variation in the expression of meanings. Halliday 1994, 341*

*Behind every utterance there is a person. It is not simply the words that mean; it is a person who means; and what the person means, intends to convey or declare or conceal and for what reason, is physically imprinted into the structure and texture of [her] language .... To the perceptive ear an utterance becomes not only a declaration by the writer but also a disclosure of the writer. Whalley 1985, 82*

*On this view it is incoherent to speak of two sentences being identical in meaning despite differences in grammatical form, since grammatical structure has intrinsic semantic import. Langacker 1984, 24*

## **7. metaphor and directed attention**

*... selects, emphasizes, suppresses and organizes features of the primary subject Ortony 1993, 28*

To begin to get a feel for how to rethink metaphoric effect, it is helpful to see how it is continuous with effects we think of under different names. Anomalies of attention can happen when we are merely seeing different things in the same context. Think of a blue-eyed person wearing a blue sweater: he's counting on the effect. I can count on something similar if I collage a photo of an old stone house and another of the stony surface of the moon. The eyes will be bluer; both house and moon will look stonier. It's a basic perceptual effect. We use rhyme to increase the *auditory presence* of a stanza.

A less obvious form of the effect is if I'm looking at the beech tree and my friend, looking at a runner, says 'muscles' (or even 'no muscles'). Beech-tree-seeing structure and 'muscle'-understanding structure evoked at the same time are (something like) blue-eye-seeing structure set up with blue-sweater-seeing structure. We won't call what happened metaphor but metaphor is in the air.

Taking a further step from perception into simulation, we have a phrase that reads: “the pinto’s dazzling mane.” We have pinto-imagining structure and we have dazzle-imagining structure. It’s a bit as if we’ve stuck the dazzle on the pony by means of pony-imagining structure interwoven with dazzle-imagining structure. The phrase tells us where exactly to put the dazzle; so we have pony-imagining structure that includes a subset of more active mane-imagining structure.

Now think of syntax as a way of routing activation to subnets of simulational structures. Predication in a sentence can have the same effect as putting on a blue sweater: one part of a wide net is organizing the way another part gets hyped.

One more step and we’re at metaphor proper. My friend and I are looking at the beech tree. ‘It’s so muscular’ she says. Or the whole set-up can happen by means of a whole sentence: “Cloaked in red velvet, the sumac’s seed heads stand pensive in autumn light.” Or some such. It doesn’t always work. The blue sweater doesn’t work either if it isn’t the right shade.

If we understand metaphor as one among other ways of organizing cognitive structure so that we see particular things in particular ways by means of it, we lose some of our sense of staring at an anomaly which somehow holds the key to cognitive function. Cognitive function holds the key to it.

*a persistent, systematic, detailed inquiry into how words work that will take the place of ... rhetoric.* Richards 1991, 93

*The question why predicates apply as they do metaphorically is much the same as the question why they apply as they do literally.* Goodman 1968, 78

## **8. metaphor and synaesthesia**

*The poet must understand what Bacon calls the vestigia communia of the senses, the latency of all in each, ... the excitement of vision by sound and the exponents of sound.* Coleridge *Biographia Literaria* ch. 2, 142

Synaesthesia is a systematic but perceptually irrelevant correlation of activity in different subnets of a wide net, such that we feel a sensory quality as belonging to an object that doesn’t, or can’t, have that quality.

This goes beyond correlation. When I am exhausted a sudden noise can make me seem to see a dim round patch spread evenly with little dots. Presumably some midbrain bimodal audiovisual map is sending a split signal into auditory and visual cortex.

I’m not tempted to ascribe the dim dotted spot to the sound, or the sound to the spot, so I don’t call this synaesthesia. It’s perceptually-entrained simulation of a rudimentary sort. (The Welsh woman who says ‘Mary’ is pale mauve and ‘Charles’ dull red may not really be ascribing either - just noticing that it usually happens that way, and enjoying the renown.)

When I seem to see labour pains as three-dimensional yellow shapes I half-ascribe. I’m experiencing them as yellow while knowing they’re not. I’m experiencing them as changing shapes, which they are - changing shapes of muscle tension - and experiencing those shapes as visible, which they are not. That is synaesthesia.

When I look at the beech and see it as muscular I’m half-ascribing in the same way. I’m seeing the beech and I’m imagining it as muscular. I’m not imagining muscles separately from seeing the tree. Like feeling the shapes of the labour pains and imagining them yellow, I’m seeing the long fiber-bundles of the beech trunk and imagining them muscles.

In both instances the imagining is felt as intrinsic to the sensing. Seeming to see what I’m feeling helps me feel it clearly. Seeing the tree trunk as muscular helps me see the shape of the fiber-bundles clearly. Muscle-tension-feeling structure is in some sort of helpful interaction with shape-seeing-structure, tree-trunk seeing structure is in facilitative interaction with muscle-seeing or maybe muscle-feeling structure.

*For a Thing at the moment is but a Thing of the moment/ it must be taken up into the mind, diffuse itself thro’ the whole multitude of Shapes and Thoughts, not one of which it leaves untinged - between wch & it some Thought is not engendered/ this is a work of Time/ but the Body feels it quicken with me.* Coleridge *Notebooks II*, 1597

## 9. metaphor and domains

*All the theorists agree that the metaphor has two elements related in some way. The 'some way' is the problem.* Hester 1967, 24

*My thesis is that all that goes by the name of metaphor is based in deeper neurological substrate operations generating multiple transformations of invariance.* Haskell 1987, x

*We suggest conventional mental images are structured by image-schemas and that image metaphors preserve image-schematic structure, mapping parts onto parts and wholes onto wholes, containers onto containers, paths onto paths, and so on.* Lakoff 1987, 231

*There is no non-metaphorical standpoint from which one could look upon metaphor, and all the other figures for that matter, as if they were a game played before one's eyes.* Ricoeur 1977, 18

The key to imagining metaphoric effect in a brain is to keep imagining it as happening in a wide net. We have been thinking of metaphor in ways that confuse us. When we restructure them certain mysteries evaporate.

The most elementary confusion is to talk about metaphor as if it is something about the representational object or event. This phrase, this photo, this gesture, this building, is 'a metaphor'. It's better to say that they have such or such metaphoric effect in cognitive systems that are entrained by them.

Most theorists of metaphor have passed this point, but they are imagining cognition in confusing ways. The most persistent intuition seems to have been something about superimposition: as if one picture or pattern or 'meaning' is overlaid on another and 'common features' are thereby made to 'become salient'. We can imagine it as a moiré effect: the way pattern emerges when we overlay grids oriented at different angles.

The entities we imagine superposed and interacting are *domains*, *regions*, *semantic fields*, each with their own topology, which we speak of as if they were different *spaces*. The language sets us up to imagine them embodied

in different PLACES in the brain. A mystery in the theory of metaphor then becomes how we should imagine the 'structural correspondence' that somehow obtains between these diverse domains. Is structure *transferred* from one place to another, an engram floated across the brain and touching off activity where it happens to 'resonate'? Is cognitive pattern to be thought of as *transduced* by parallel conduction, by a kind of biological *projection* or *transformation*? Or are various parts of domain topologies thought of as *isomorphic* because both are this sort of projection from some 'deeper' structure?

The temptation when we speak about structural correspondence is to think of the means by which we see or imagine different things as if they were themselves different things, which can resemble each other, correspond to each other, be mapped onto each other, or be superimposed like screens whose interaction makes 'similar features' 'stand out'.

In fact there are no domains in the brain - there are wide nets. When we are thinking of different things at the same time, we can be thinking them by means of subnets parts of which will be common. If we are looking at a room and imagining a field, the nets by which we do so will have basic orientation in common - below, above, right, left. And maybe much more than that, the way we understand field and room may be deeply interwoven in virtue of common cognitive origin.

If we can think of ourselves seeing the beech tree and imagining muscle by means of a net that is already ONE net, we do not have to transport, transfer, transduce, or project. There will be interaction, but there is always interaction - activation all over the net is reentrant, strengthening some connections and inhibiting others, allowing some parts of the working net to fall below the level of activation that makes them sentient and hyperactivating others so we are suddenly noticing something we didn't notice before.

It is tricky but essential to say this right - we are not comparing our perception of the tree and an image of muscle and finding 'a similarity'. When we put ourselves into the picture it comes out this way: I am a

structure by means of which I am seeing different things as similar. That means: I am using common structure to see and/or seem to see different things

*The eyes quietly & steadfastly dwelling on an object not as if looking at it or as seeing any thing in it, or as in any way exerting an act of Sight upon it, but as if the whole attention were listening to what the heart was feeling & saying about it/ As when A is talking to B or C - and B deeply interested listens intently to A, the eye passive yet steadfast fixed on C as the Subject of the communication*  
Coleridge Notebooks II, 3025

### **10. cognitive roots**

*such a profound Blue, deep as a deep river, and deep in color, & those two (depths) so entirely one, as to give the meaning and explanation of the two different significations of the epithet (here so far from divided they were scarcely distinct).* Coleridge Notebooks II, 2453

It's winter morning. There are smudgy clouds lit up behind the hemlock. I see with a thrill that the sky is blue above them. The sound of an airplane fading. "California is in the air," I say.

Then I understand what I mean. When I say "the air" I see sky but I mean also the transparent medium that is the brain: it means itself.

"California is in the air": I AM two places at once; the means by which I am them is a mixed means, a mixed meaning.

But what I want to know is how I came to say what I meant before I knew it. How to talk about the fact.

I've been led by recognitions, for years isolated - a sense of significance in some phrase, some image, some scientific finding, someone's way of saying something. Metaphors I took out of context.

I need to understand the sense of significance itself, whether it can be trusted, whether it is given by something coherent, a knowledge not yet able to account for itself.

We develop intuition, we don't know of what. It is perception as if in the sense of touch. As if we can feel the shapes of the structures by which we think. Is that possible? When I see, do the structures by which I'm seeing feel their own shapes of motion in the brain? Neuroception; neural self-perception.

There are two kinds of sentience: being *it*; being the means by which I am it. They are mediated by a third, who stands around them both, who is their ground, their neural air.

When I look at landscape I AM landscape. The structures by which I am landscape stretch to and enfold the structures that are how I am other things. Coleridge musing at the moon through the dewy window is seeing something, feeling something. Being the moon, being himself. But he feels what he is in the thing he sees; a kind of synaesthesia. *Symbol*, he thinks. *Of what?* he asks. (An answer comes. He writes it down.)

But nothing is PROJECTED: structures are standing together. When I see Tanya I see her partly with the same structures I used to feel my mother and use now to imagine myself. When Coleridge is the moon seen through dew he is being it with structures by means of which he has been many things, and some of the connections he sets up in his dwelling-on the moon go back to origin. He opened his eyes in what he didn't know was water. It goes back to origin by being that way again. Among other things.

The way an event is felt as emblematic is that it is being felt with structures that are feeling themselves in origin.

When I say "California is in the air" I am meaning "the air" with structures that have origin-connections with water I don't know is water - with every transparent medium - with space thought a transparent medium. When I imagine the brain I imagine it with that structure too. So there is a way, at root, that when I imagine air I am imagining the other things I imagine by means of that structure. My sentence when I speak it is gated from the whole of that structure. Consequently it refers from complex means, and means a lot.

*Saturday Night, April 14, 1805 - In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim and glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature. Coleridge Notebooks II, 2546k.*

*O not only the Moon, but the depth of Sky! - the Moon was the Idea, but deep Sky is of all visual impressions the nearest akin to a Feeling/ it is more a Feeling than a Sight/ it rather is the melting away and entire union of Feeling & Sight. Coleridge Notebooks II, 2453*

*Do not words excite feelings of Touch (tactual ideas) more than distinct visual ideas ... the Question is of great Importance, as a general application. Coleridge Notebooks II, 2152*

## **I 1. landscape and gift**

The emblematic depth of landscape we saw every day in childhood: we see it by means of the same structures we used to feel our mother's body when we were in her. Homeland. We also use that structure to see and imagine our own body: the arms of the landscape; the marsh to the south; the central yard; the lonely north.

A pagan but not a primitive vision. We understand love and gratitude to be woven into the fabric of space.

The vision is pagan because it doesn't struggle against origin. We don't try to transcend our own structure; that is impossible. The effort can only set up a structure interfering with itself.

The vision is not primitive because we know how we are sorted: by nets which are nets within our nets, primal standings-together grown wide after being close together in the nub; and keeping their connection, holding it all together - from nub to bud to rose - until it dies. Knowing what is origin in its own moment, it is coherent in depth.

*We shall do better to think of meaning as a plant that has grown. Richards 1991/1936, 108*

*How far one might imagine all the association System out of a system of growth (thinking of the Brain & Soul, what we know of an embryo - one tiny particle combines with another, its like. & so lengthens & thickens.- & this is at once Memory & increasing vividness of impression. Coleridge Notebooks II, 2373*

*... for the ordering of the circuit of our soul ... regulate the revolutions in his head that were disturbed when soul was born in the flesh. Plato cited by Richards 1991/1936, 131*

## **I 2. deep reconnection**

I began by describing a slide of childhood's landscape that carries hidden in plain sight the illusion of a figure holding out its arms. I've said it is my feeling embracing the landscape, but I see now that the embrace is ambiguous. Is the shadow figure embracing the landscape, or is it holding out its arms to me?

I'm understanding now. The shadow is in the shape of a blind spot. I didn't see it because she is what isn't there.

It's true that it's the shadow I throw. I never stopped holding out my arms.

What I can't feel is that I'm holding them out to her. What I can't feel is that the shape cut out of the landscape is her shape.

*It says, Fight. There was sudden loss of psychic organization. Slowly remake the structure. Bring together feeling and intelligence to come through. You never felt the loss. You lost it.*

What it implies. How internal to the moment its own extension can be, as if the space inside an instant takes a breath. How the body can reward its own faith in itself.

Inner gender and rescue. Theory is marrying the one who always knew.



VIDEO

## Project description from a grant application

Strathcona Community Garden is a piece of city land which since 1985 has become a people's park and commons. We have three and a half acres – personal allotment plots, wild area, greenhouse, heritage orchard, herb garden with roses and a fountain, tool sheds, vine walk, kids' area, tea fireplace – a sort of community estate devised and constructed by volunteers on waste ground in Vancouver's Downtown East Side.

*We made this* is an insider's video about the garden. It is organized as titled sections between two and ten minutes long. Some of the sections are: *Near streets*, *Childhood's estate*, *Kale panorama*, *Small pond*, *Monty at night*, *Gwen and Sel*, *Ruby's nest*, and *Working hungry*.

Although the garden is a model of grassroots ecological activism in the city core, we are not intending the informational/inspirational tone of eco-discourse. We've wanted instead to work out of the impulse that has motivated people to make the garden, a love and energy generated in people by access to land. So we've shown people as they are in the garden – private in public – and we've shown what they make and what they see. We've wanted primarily to make something intimate and lively.

Sections of the video can be in different visual styles, one of which (it could be called intimate realism) likes to see solidly and closely the way people in a weeding trance might notice the cut of an eye or the fur on a squash. Another visual style (it could be called digital surrealism) suggests a wild edge in people's feeling for the place – a sort of elfland glitter of fantasy

we indicate by further distorting a noisy signal so that we see, for instance, a blue bench standing in a dazzle of electronically burnt grass.

We will be working mostly with non-sync sound. Voices as personal as we can make them by excerpting from long interviews. Eric tells the story of his visionary meetings with poplar trees. Juan names his vegetables in Basque, and Mrs Hsu in Cantonese. Jack East is worried about railway unions. Anna Ho complains that the board is overbearing. Muggs brags discretely about having contrived a media visit. Warehouse telephones insist. The frog chorus starts up over the sound of trucks gearing down at a light. Tony Gordon-Wilson tells what happens when he rowed to Seattle and asked for political asylum. Ruby, stoned on varnish thinner, sings *Your cheatin' heart* in her nest under the bushes.

The garden has had a lot of publicity of an official sort and our own necessarily polemical material has been even worse, but with this video we would like to get at what is really interesting about the garden – the outrageous looseness and closeness with which it is managed, the love that is generated by access to land, the more or less magical ways it finds resources. What it's like to be there. The unnoticed comedy of the place. How something like this actually gets made.

Inevitably and pleasurably, the video will also be about the forms of plant life and of local faces and local sentences.



**Maxine:** I guess my favorite way is through the blackberry bushes though, you know, coming across Hawk Street and then right ... right there's that path through the blackberry bushes so you're out of the traffic right away.



**Helen:** There were people who had gotten around all the planning bodies in the city and done something to their own taste.



**Muggs:** You meet some of these old guys. They've never gone outside of the Downtown East Side. Like old Mike. His world is Woodward's and MacDonald's and the garden.



**Stella:** La tierra como cimient. No vale. Yo tene que tenir la tierra de todos partes, siempre buscando la tierra negra. Buscando, buscando.



**Mrs Hsu:** (translated by her daughter) Have to come every day or I don't feel good. She has some peas, some flowers, some kind of melon she doesn't know the name of. Sometimes if a couple of days there's no sunshine she gets worried how's her peas growing, how's her flowers growing.



**Juan:** Should be have in every communitie ... should be have in English Bay ... in the West End ... like that in the city for the people who has no his own land ... and even for the people he has shadow ... no he can't grow up because in front is building, in back is building, the sun doesn't go in it.



[Sound of a seaplane passing overhead. Gulls. Motors.]



**Joann:** People want to do stuff and they want to work hard at stuff and a lot of those ... especially those guys ... don't necessarily have a place in their life where they can do that, and we've got lots of stuff to do.



**Michael:** I love the life in my garden. It's nothing to do with eating, I'm just saying ... corn ... carrot ... beet.



**Leslie:** I look at it and say, how could they possibly have done it. ... There's nothing I've ever done that I've felt better about than this.



**Rob:** I was thinking about what you think about when you're weeding, but then I was thinking about something else. Your hands just start weeding. After a while you're not really thinking. You drift around sort of like dreaming.



**Monty:** It's really quiet at night ... quiet and mild, eh. At night I like listening to the frogs, eh. They help me sleep.



**Janis:** There's a tree frog ... isn't that what it is?



**Paul:** If I wait until the sun sets and the light gets into that half light, then suddenly you can see the shape ... the shape sort of comes back to you, everything you've done during the day seems to jump at you.



**Muggs:** So that's good, you guys.



NOTES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Comment and interviews

**James Quant** - first published in the *CFFS Newsletter* September 1989.

**Mike Hoolboom** - interview first published in: *Inside the pleasure dome: fringe film in Canada*, ed. Mike Hoolboom, 2nd edition; Coach House Press 2001.

**Corinne Cantrill** - interview adapted from *Cantrills filmnotes* 61-62, 1990.

**Paul Grant** - unpublished term paper, SFU Film Program 1991.

**Bart Testa** - first published in *Recent work from the Canadian avant-garde*, Jonasson & Shedden eds, Art Gallery of Ontario 1988.

**Felix Thompson** - excerpted from Notes on reading of avant-garde film: *Trapline, syntax. Screen* vol 20 (2)1979.

### Ellie Epp

**What will we know** - first published in *The independent eye*, edited by Mike Hoolboom 1982.

**Charm, value, ethic, tactic and gender** - reprinted from *tessera* 6, *Contemporary verse*2(11) 1988.

**Brain and metaphor** - a version published as "Landscape and shadow" in *The tenuous image*, edited by Nicole Gingras, Dazibao 1997.

**Leaving the land: perception and fantasy** - talk given at a symposium accompanying Sandra Semchuk's exhibition *How far back is home*, reprinted from *Land, relationship and community*, Presentation House Gallery 2001.

### Video

**We made this** - Beta SP digitized to HD, shot and sound-recorded with Louie Ettling at Strathcona Community Garden, Vancouver.

### Scans

Ektachrome 400 35mm slides drum-scanned by Jeff Grandy at West Coast Imaging.

### Monograph editor

Mike Hoolboom.

### Thank you

Mary Epp, David Leonard, Leslie Davis, Cineworks, Vancity, the Canada Council, the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

# ELLIE EPP topical CV

b.1945-

## academic:

- 2002 Interdisciplinary Ph.D under Special Arrangements: *Being about: perceiving, imagining, representing, thinking*. Simon Fraser University.
- 1993 MA in philosophy: *The analog/digital distinction in the philosophy of mind*. Simon Fraser University.
- 1971 Postgraduate Diploma in Film Studies, with distinction, Slade School of Art, University College, London.
- 1969 Honours BA, first class, in philosophy, psychology and English. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

## film & video:

- 1996 *Bright and dark* 16mm film, sound, 3 min.
- 1991 - *We made this* 2 hr video, in progress
- 1988 *Notes in origin* 16mm film, silent, 15 min.
- 1986 *Current* 16mm film, silent, 2 min.
- 1976 *Trapline* 16mm film, sound, 18 min.

## web design

- 2012 *Here*
- 2006 *Frank after his life*
- 2004 - *Work and days: a lifetime journal project*
- 2003 - Embodiment studies web worksite
- 1998 - Ellie Epp web worksite

## selected performances:

- of *Notes in origin*, 2-hr multimedia show: film, tape, slides, writing
- 1994 Cinema Libre, Montreal.
- 1991 San Francisco Cinemateque.
- 1990 Experimenta 1990 Festival, Melbourne.
- 1989 Pleasure Dome, Toronto.
- 1988 Canada House, London.
- 1984 Women in Film, Vancouver

## selected publications:

- 1998 Leaving the land: perception and fantasy. Talk given at Presentation House symposium on land, relationship and community.
- 1997 Landscape and shadow. In *The tenuous image* edited by Nicole Gingras, Les Essais Dazibao, Montreal.
- 1996 Brain and imagining. In *Front* magazine, Vancouver, Mar/Apr.
- 1988 Charm, value, ethic, tactic ... and gender, in writing. In *tessera 6*, *Contemporary Verse 2* (11), Toronto.
- 1982 What will we know. In *The independent eye*, CFDC, Toronto.

## selected screenings:

- 2012 *c.1983* Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver  
Courtisane Festival, Ghent
- 2011 Parallax Series, Montreal  
*The films of Anne Severson and Ellie Epp*, Indiana University  
*Images of nature, or the nature of the image* tour, Toronto, LA, Boston, Berkeley
- 2010 *Early monthly segments #14*, Toronto.
- 2009 EXIS Festival, Seoul.  
*The Western influence*, Winnipeg.  
*The wooden lightbox*, Birmingham.
- 2007 *Double vision*, Kitchener and Berlin.
- 2006 *En plein air*, Anthology Film Archives, New York.
- 1994 *Les Absences de la Photographie*, Montreal.
- 1992 *Formal Diaries* tour in Japan.
- 1992 *Independent Means: Canadian Experimental Films at the London Film Co-op*.
- 1991 *Senses of Place*, San Francisco Cinemateque.
- 1988 Opening of new National Gallery in Ottawa.  
Sask Filmpool series curated by Stan Brakhage.  
*Recent Work from the Canadian Avant-Garde*, Art Gallery of Ontario.
- 1984 *A Different Face*, Vancouver.
- 1980 Paris Biennale.
- 1978 *Festival of Avantgarde Film in Great Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London.



#### selected grants and scholarships:

- 1994 SSHRC doctoral fellowship
- 1991 Canada Council Explorations
- 1988 Canada Council B
- 1982 Canada Council project cost
- 1978 Canada Council film production
- 1974 Arts Council of Great Britain completion grant
- 1970 Marty Memorial scholarship
- 1969 Graduating medal in Philosophy, Queen's University
- 1967 General Motors scholarship

#### selected comment & interviews:

- 2010 C.Kennedy *Ellie Epp*, EMS booklet written for Early Monthly Segments #14
- 2004 S.Brakhage Brakhage at Concordia: talk given January 26 2001, *Synoptique* April 2004, transcribed Lys Woods.

- 2001 M.Hoolboom *Liveable Margins*. Interview with Michael Hoolboom, in *Inside the pleasure dome: fringe film in Canada*, Coachhouse Press.
- 1996 M.Daniel *Through the lens: Film as art* produced and directed by Gretchen Jordan-Bastow and Fumiko Kiyooka, written by Mary Daniel, WTN Vancouver.
- 1995 N.Gingras *Les images reanimées, Les absences de la photographie*.
- 1995 A.Bisaccia *Il cinema sperimentale Canadese, Rassegna di cinema sperimentale*, Rome.
- 1991 P. Grant *Trapline* unpublished SFU Film Department term paper.
- 1990 A. & C.Cantrill *Ellie Epp - Notes in Origin, Cantrills Filmnotes* no. 61-62.
- 1989 S.Brakhage *Space as menace: Canadian aesthetics*, unpublished lecture.
- 1989 B.Elder *Image and identity, The photographic image in Canadian avant-garde film*.
- 1988 B.Testa *Ellie Epp, Recent work from the Canadian avant-garde*, Jonasson & Shedden eds, Art Gallery of Ontario.
- 1986 M.O'Pray *Independent means*.
- 1984 B.Elder *Image: Representation and Object*, in *Take Two*.
- 1979 F.Thompson *Notes on the reading of avant garde films: Trapline, syntax, Screen* 20(2).
- 1976 W.Raban *Perspectives on British avant-garde film*, Hayward Gallery.



