

# MICHAEL SNOW AND BRUCE ELDER IN CONVERSATION

## Introduction:

Last Fall, Michael Snow proposed to me that we undertake what he called "a conversation" about our films, our artistic beliefs and certain of our "philosophical" ideas. As appealing as the idea was, because I found myself immersed in a very large film project that produced unremitting torment for nearly a year, I was unable to carry it out. When a financial setback forced me to suspend the project temporarily, I became eager to take up the idea and contacted Snow. Snow suggested we begin with my writing down some comments or observations about his work. The theme of this issue being what it was, I began by querying Snow about his ideas on photography specifically and on representation in general. Snow took my comments away with him to a northern "retreat" and returned a week later with a series of what I believe are most remarkable responses. Like most of Snow's published "comments," they are extremely dense, punning, deliberate and allusive. For this reason, I have made some notes on his responses.

RBE: Concerning the mammoth exhibition of your work assembled by the Centre Pompidou, you commented that it was composed of "camera-related works, or at least things which have to do with the effects the camera has on perception." (Pierre Théberge, "Conversation with Michael Snow" in **Michael Snow** Catalogue for exhibition at Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1979). I understand this to mean that you believe that the kind of experience afforded by the camera (the "camera's vision") occupies a central role in your work. Could we begin with your explaining what you think the most significant features of that type of experience are and why you have accorded them so central a place in your work.

MS: My attention was directed to the camera as a director of attention from considerations of Art itself being (in another situation) a director of attention. Similarly cameras both intensify and diminish aspects of normal vision and they "set apart" those aspects for possible examination. By the object-memory which they produce (photos, films, tapes), they give a locus for and evidence of selection, of choice. The rectangular camera frame/mask of course continues the human intervention of architecture and sets up the possibility of a perhaps edifying dialogue between the rectangle and all its specifically human content with the nature (that might be) pictured through the camera or in the rectangular result. That the photographer/viewer is hidden in this architectural paradigm also becomes interesting. On the other hand, fishing and photography are very similar. The result of framing in photography is always a fragment, making the camera potentially analytical, an epistemological tool. That's to say (to repeat?) that out of the universal field, knowledge isolates, selects and points out unities or differences which were not previously evident. Identification, definition is a matter of limits, of recognition of limitations, bounds, boundaries. There are ways of indicating the depth of implication of this human viewer instrument between us and the rest of the universe. Lenses extend, expand or contract vision (abstract it) in both the optical and chimerical senses. I'm interested in the way that the products of cameras are ghosts of their subjects. Less than desiccated, wonderful as the relic is, it has (almost) only two dimensions. Still photos are suffused with nostalgia seconds after their taking/making. Cinema ghosts are more active, Flying Dutchmen.

I don't know why I became interested in these things. It gradually became evident to me that more was to be done in this area, that I was especially interested in time, that I might learn something about it, myself and what-it-all-means. No doubt it has something to do with my childhood (ha ha). My father, who was a surveyor then civil engineer during most of my life had only one eye, then lost the sight of his other eye during my teens, which made us both very interested in vision.

RBE: In a seminar at Visual Studies Workshop, Garry Winogrand made the following pair of comments about photography: (1) "My only interest in photography is photography"; (2) "when you photograph — there's (**sic**) things in a photograph, — right? So this can't help but document or whatever you want to call it. It's automatic. I mean if you photograph a cake of soap, in the package or out of it, it goes without saying...(If you were to photograph in Arizona or Alaska) then that's what your pictures would look like; whatever those places look like" (Dennis Longwell "Monkeys Make the Problem More Difficult: A Collective Interview with Garry Winogrand" in Peninah Petruck ed, **The Camera Viewed**, New York, E.P. Dutton 1979 p.120). These comments seem to me not very interesting taken individually, but their juxtaposition I find extraordinarily interesting. The first comment simply affirms the modernist credo about the values of purity and of being truthful to the materials of one's medium — values which were generally understood to have no part in, — and indeed, sometimes, antithetical to — the referential or representational potentials of a work of art. The second, on the other hand, affirms that **mimesis** is inevitable condition of photographic works. Taken together, then, the comments seem to imply that **mimesis** is the proper end — a kind of Aristotelian final cause, if you will — of photography, essential to it very being.

You yourself belong to that select group of advanced artists, which also included amongst its members both Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, who working in

New York City in the middle and late sixties, an era of high abstractionism, reformulated artistic practices by insisting that representational elements be allowed a place in advanced art. It seems to me that somewhere behind this insistence is that near paradox inherent in photography, that in photography we discover a medium whose essence — or perhaps better, whose very being — defies self-enclosure, a medium which refuses to become isolated self-contained entity, without reference to the world. Rather its nature seems to spill outward, for a photograph is destined to become like the Other which it depicts. (Thus mimesis is its final cause.) Yet, even as it is informed by the Other and incorporates the Other into itself, it remains distinctly itself, for the form of the Other is incorporated in the photograph by becoming embodied in the photograph's own proper material, namely light (sometimes coloured light).<sup>1</sup> But it is not just a question of the relation between the matter and form of a photograph or of the photograph having at once some of the features of objects and some of the features of images. Rather, the fact that the photograph necessarily takes its being from the form of the Other means that the photograph, **qua** object, is an image.

When writing this, I think of Sartre's discussion of a form of being that "is what it is not and is not what it is." It seems to me that a similar paradox is inherent in your work. Thus, while modernism had proposed that through the devices of abstractionism there could be achieved an alignment of the form of work with its material nature, in order to achieve a work of which it could be said that it possessed a consolidated and solid form of being, — had aspired then, through abstraction to make a work (e.g. a painting) truly be what it is (i.e. a painting) — your works, even while they are true to the media in which they are realized, are nevertheless straightforwardly representational. Thus many of your photographs (e.g. **Midnight Blue** and **Red**) are constructions, are self-contained, at least in the sense that the imagery of the works is restricted to the chronicling of the making of the work of which that imagery becomes a part, yet at the same time, **are** representational. It's as though representation, indeed, illusion belonged to the very objecthood of the photograph. And certainly, your work seems, in relation to the modernist tradition, the history of which is the successive repudiation of one after another of the accidental features traditional paintings possessed — from representation through deep space, to the record of expressive gesture, to relief credited by thick painting — extraordinarily catholic; many of your pieces (e.g. ???) seems given over to the task of reconciling diversity. ??? balances features like flat space, references to the work's construction, and anti-illusionistic devices, features modernists praised, with deep space, narrative allusion and illusionistic constructions, features which modernists strove to eliminate from a work of art.

MS: I don't find Winogrand's comments too interesting at all but your use of them is terrific and as you can see I got pretty excited and involved in these issues already while trying to answer your first question, probably by telling you mostly stuff that you already know. Another aspect of interest is that the camera makes conventions that are comparable<sup>2</sup> to those developed by representation in the Renaissance (perspective, etc.). The camera and its products involve as many eccentricities in relation to "truthful" representation (What?) and the way we and our eye/brain see. The use of the **camera obscura** by Dutch 17th century painters and simultaneous work on lens optics might be a factor in all this.

Once in conversation<sup>3</sup> (subject "modernism," "postmodernism" in which I suggested that "post-modernism" was more of a wish than an actuality), I also suggested this perhaps interesting distortion of the history of western art. Once there were "Whole" paintings that made a rich and unified use of all the possibilities of the medium: e.g. Velasquez, the Tiepolos, Vermeer, Chardin. Modern Art has been an analysis of such works, progressively isolating and reifying single aspects and ending recently with, in this order: concept, decoration and finally context. This is a monstrous generalization with perhaps a photographic grain of truth to it which might be a motivating factor in the current attempts of certain Neo-expressionists.

Another perhaps edifying generalization is this one: evidence of process has been most clear in the expressionist "line" of Tintoretto, Grunewald, Rembrandt,

Courbet, Van Gogh, De Kooning. There is another, less "humanist," less tactile, more "scientific," more imagistic line which seems to give evidence of a long-standing yearning for photography. Compare to the foregoing the qualities of image, but especially of surfaces, of the paintings of Leonardo, Vermeer, Ingres, Duchamp. Here an attempt has been made to do away, as much as possible, with any evidence of the hand's activity and the nature and qualities of the materials employed in order to attain the effect of an instantaneous, non-physical **image**.  
Click.

Just to keep on painting, so to speak, the best painting has always been involved with the stoplights at Fact and Illusion. Or is it Mind and Matter? The 3D/2D paradox is one of the subjects of all the best painting, even Mondrian. When it's a creation of a man with a supremely sophisticated intelligence and skill, in the right place at the right time (Yes, everybody's in their era), who is able to reflect on and image an area of sensual scrutiny most appropriate to his medium, "the attention man pays to women" (i.e. Vermeer), painting can be magically suspended in space and time at another crossing, that of the artist's concentrated energy and the look of the creative spectator.

When it appeared I was very impressed with Richard Hennesy's article "What's all this about photography" in the May '79 **artforum**. Over a year after that I read with amusement the enraging effect it had on Douglas Crimp in his article "The End of Painting" in **October** No. 16 (Spring '81). Crimp's critique failed.<sup>4</sup>

RBE: Another aspect of the double-sided nature of representation is their double temporality. As an object, a representation belongs to the "now," to the instant (in fact, to all instants) in which it is perceived; it is available at hand at the very moment one looks at them. And, yet as an image, it refers to a moment (or a series of moments) in the past when it was made or which it depicts. (In photography, the moment of making of the image and the moment depicted tend to co-incide: perhaps this is what you suggest by the self-enclosure of some of many of your photographs e.g. **Authorization** (1969), **Midnight Blue** (1974) and **Red<sup>s</sup>** (1974); certainly the coincidence of temporalities is another case of the identity between a photograph's nature as an image and its nature as an object). But it is, of course, the dialectic between these two sides of a representational image's temporality that is interesting, for in this dialectic the past moment or moments referred to or depicted in the work are made "ready-at-hand" for all times — are made to belong constantly to the present. Thus, they take on something of the character of the eternal, in a way not dissimilar to the fashion in which, in **One Second in Montreal**, instantaneous events become durative. There seems to be something of a religious dimension to this.

MS: Speaking of religion, I've always wanted to hear everything said at once but while I'm waiting I must say I'm always embarrassed by what I say.<sup>5</sup> I doubt if it's sillier than what other people say, it's just that so much has to be left out! Naming that list of artists (from **all** artists!) saying that that historical line "exists," concentrating on the "modernist" attitude neglect so unfairly so much! But that's obvious isn't it? Just be interested.

I am very grateful for your insightful description of the temporal states sometimes generated from my work. I've never been able to systematically and objectively understand how it's done. I've always hoped that I and the spectator might benefit from my own attempt to apprehend and invoke a **participation mystique** with the nature of the "reality" being presented by the little things I do and be led to extrapolate (emotionally or intellectually) that situation to the larger situation to which it belongs. My own fairly obsessive attempts at resolving existential problems have always started from an attempt at realizing a specific concrete/materialist base. Successive seeming clarifications in my philosophy as in many others always head to a Mystery. I'm not a "literary" philosopher but, if we are here to name everything, it all has to build to a Transcendental Signifier. Out of facetious humility, I'm "religious." The paragraph above means that I'm resigned to begging for revelation and thus probably don't deserve it. But Who's to say?

More-or-less back on more-or-less land I'd like to return to this path for a moment: in my work with still photography I've tried to consider the nature of the surface, the way the shot-of-image is mounted, presented (it should be "integrated" with some compositional/content job to do), the size of the final print in relation to the subject, the source of illumination. In many works, I've made the subjects themselves (**Midnight Blue, Glares, A Wooden Look, Morning in Holland, Waiting Room, Times**). In some cases the subject is in the final work (usually partially), as you mention. I've tried to control the "distance" from the here-and-now of the spectator to the times and places in the past when the photos were taken. This gap is closed quite tightly in some works which try to achieve the presentness and lack of deflection elsewhere, more fact than fiction, of the best abstract paintings (ideal of "modernism!"). I was very influenced by Mondrian. I haven't much time for representations that want to take me totally elsewhere. Rather sleep.

**Iris-Iris** is a recent piece which tries to contain a set of pyramidal stages of readings of different times and places with (an attempt at) almost measurable temporal distances from the concrete here and now to remote theres and thens. Trying to make the inevitable nostalgia of photos palpable.

First; the work is two equal sized squares side by side. One panel includes a postcard of Mont Blanc on a painting (wall?). The other is a photo of a bedroom somewhere which shows the same (?) post card same size on the same wall (painting?) in a late afternoon (?) light. The self-referentiality of this work might keep a spectator moving around in a perception/thought cycle. By comparison **A Wooden Look** keeps you (relatively) in the now. A past glance causing a present glance. My photo-works continue the mistakes of the Buffalo Photo-pictorialists!<sup>6</sup>

RBE: The diagrammatic shapes some of your films (the conical shape of **Wavelength** or the interlocking, nearly sinusoidal shapes of **???**) seem to me to possess temporal features analogous to those of representations. The shapes of both those film, for examples, suggest the passage of time and yet the diagrammatic shapes arrest the flow of time by converting time into a spatial form. These forms, then, like representations, seem to have aspects of both time and eternity.

MS: I'm sure you can imagine how pleasing to me this paragraph is. Thank you. To shape time (actually it's mind) seems to me to be the quintessence of cinema. In **The Republic**, Plato has Socrates describe the levels of Being of Table (last long sequence of **Rameau's Nephew** involved in this too). He says that qualitatively a representation of a table is inferior to a real table made by a carpenter but superior to that is the idea of table which is necessary before the other 2 can exist. Pythagoras is no doubt behind this and would have added a supstage; the cube. I think it is unusual to be guided to sense time as a particular shape and that it is a refreshment with eternal implications if you will. Also, Plato banished poets from the Republic not only because (as above) they trafficked in falsehoods but also because they seem to dwell on sorrow and make efforts to keep loss fresh.

RBE: The spectator constructed by your early films has a similarly dual nature. One part of him "entranced," mesmerized by the simple form; another part, a transcendent, reflective consciousness, is outside that experience reflecting upon that first part in the course of its experience. A duality similar to those described above seems to be involved here, since one part of the mind seems involved in the temporal experience and to participate in it, another part stands outside that experience and reflects upon it. And many of your photographs ask for a viewer that is at once involved in illusion and a detached, critical analyst of their conditions as objects.

MS: Film images are more hallucinatory (dream was the favourite paradigm of one period of avant-garde film) than still photographic or any others. This kind of drug-related pleasure has to be considered too. I like to have ecstasy and analysis. An ecstasy of analysis is an odd state alright! And an analysis of ecstasy seems a waste of a good time. Or is film the only occasion for this meeting?

I believe this dual state (simultaneous or oscillating fast or slow from "one" to "the other") is provoked by all my films in different ways and should be the spectator's intellectual and emotional recognition of the convergence of fact and illusion previously mentioned.

**Presents** continues this "duality" quite explicitly by making wide separations of elements (carrying the distinct sections of **Rameau's Nephew** further) and setting each element against what is (or seems) most remote from it or is **extremely** different from it. Nothing exists in isolation, and in works of art salient elements are made such by being set in or on environments. Narrative: protagonists do something somewhere. In order to see, among other things, the sculptural/theatrical artificialities of staging, these are set against a background of, or perhaps more accurately in a context of their opposite: "documentary." However, they can be as reasonably considered the other way around: "documentary" in the context of "staged." Two forms of construction. This is all made more complicated by the fact that all photography that's unaltered "graphically" is "realism." Then, within each of the 2 major sections, there are fluctuations of emphasis from the "concrete/materialist" to the "naturalistic/realist." In my own monologues about my work, I call these changes in "type of belief." Within the possibilities of hand-held 16mm, each shot in the montage section is set in a context of (between) extremes. Each shot involves a different kind of belief generated by the nature of the subject and its treatment by the camera (it's all handheld pans, varying speed, varying source of the gesture involved, varying direction, etc.). Because of the frequent cuts the shots all become objects for at least 1/24 of a second but like the changes in **Wavelength** they all insinuate different kinds of belief related to themes in the first (staged) section, but now in the language of "documentary" realism. The speed of cutting and variety of shots can at times undercut (ha ha) the realism of the image.

Sometimes it's a glance or a blink or peripheral vision, sometimes it savours, lingers, sometimes it's an exchange (there are many portraits) sometimes it's "too fast" but sometimes it's "too slow" and though the editing tends to isolate individual shots there are many widely separated connections and an accretive developing continuity. This section (montage) contains many references to the nature of and terminology used in film. In various ways it emphasizes the ghostlines of film and makes "realism" questionable. The most powerful film subjects for everybody are human sexual organs and the mutilation of people or animals. It has been said (J. Hoberman) that my painting treatment "trivializes" these subjects. I don't think so. It films them. Film **is** trivial compared to them. Their images are used to make this film. It's like the difference between the word "surgery" and surgery. Watching this section, what one experiences are the facts (of illusions) and, after the laughs of the first section (the "Presents" of the entertainment industry represented), the difficulty of contact with what keeps on seeming to be (often mundane) "reality" but keeps on disappearing (like "reality") makes entertainment retreat and tragedy appear. But what were we laughing at anyway? Fugitive.

Perhaps related: I think a lot of people in the "experimental" film world are being strangled by the Entertainment-Ideology mobius strip.

RBE: It seems to me that if I am correct about these ideas, the self-referential features in your works have a different use than they orthodoxically do. The purpose of most self-reference in a work of art is to eliminate any reference to or involvement with anything outside the work of art itself. Self-reference enforces the self-enclosure of a work, since it restricts the reference of the imagery in an artwork to itself. The motivation for this seems to have been to align the references of a work of art with the work's own being: that is why the references are so frequently to the "pure materials" of the medium itself. But while you have, in some of your photographic works, worked with self-enclosed forms, (i.e. with works whose imagery makes no reference to things outside the work itself), your use of these forms seems to serve different than the usual ends. The orthodox motivation for self-reference would be, on your view, pointless, since "The Other," you seem to believe, is necessarily involved in the image; and, if "The Other" is necessarily involved in an image, restrict-

ing the references of the imagery to the work itself would not eliminate the references to some "Other" outside the work itself; references to the work itself would involve, inevitably, references to an Other, your use of self-reference seems to me to have a dual motivation. Firstly, it reveals the stages in the process of the construction of the work, and so affirms (since what one constructs are objects) the objecthood of the work. Secondly, since these references are embodied in recognizable images, they necessarily refer to times past. The restriction of the references of the imagery such works as **Authorization, Midnight Blue** and **Red**<sup>5</sup> to the process of the making of the work itself in fact means that the "**only Other**" with which they deal are "**times other**" than the present, (i.e. the times in which they are perceived). Here again, then, ideas concerning temporality seem to take a central place in your work. Self-reference in your work becomes references to the production process, references to the work's past and a means of bringing this past, this history, into the present. Sometimes this self-reference becomes paradoxical, when the finished work is contained in the depiction of one of the stages in the making of the work, as it is, explicitly, in **Cover to Cover** and, as an invited conjecture, in **Imposition**. Furthermore, by making the work — and its production — its own subject, image and reality interpenetrate one another.

MS: Tried to described the general way I think about all this already but would like to add that my sequential photo-works (**Authorization, Red**,<sup>5</sup> **Glares, A Wooden Look**, etc.) are made additively like a painting. In viewing a painting, the observer doesn't know which stroke was first but wanders (directed by the composition) over the surface. However, in these photoworks, the order of accumulation can be experienced.<sup>8</sup> **Morning in Holland** was made subtractively by taking elements away, gradually revealing.

RBE: In **Rameau's Nephew**, someone comments: "There is no doubt that technology is expressing and answering a human desire by working towards systems of greater and greater illusionism. It is easy to project this to arrive at stages of representation of absolutely convincing illusion till eventually the difference between subject and facsimile may be eradicated." The claim interests me for several reasons. For one thing, it is staunchly antimodernist in conviction. Modernists believed that there was an ontological gulf between an image and object that could never be overcome. And since they believed the "reality value" of an image was less than that of object, a work of art should strive to avoid becoming representation — avoid being an image — and become an object instead. But the comment interests me, too, because it states something related to my previous comments. Among the striking devices of your recent photographic works are strategies which bring about the interpenetration of reality and the image. Thus some of your photographic works (e.g. **Authorization** or **Red**<sup>5</sup>) reveal that they were generated in a number of stages and that each stage involves the re-presentation of the previous. Thus, the production of images is shown to change the real, but this change then becomes the reality reformulated in the next image. The real becomes the image which then becomes the real.

MS: The image in that section of **Rameau's Nephew** is a group of people seated in a moving bus. They stare ahead, at the fixed camera and at the spectator seated similarly, at the screen and sometimes at sprays of tiny pin-prick holes that appear in the film/image. The "voice-over" which (with no evident picture source) speaks the statement is male and lisps. What you quoted is a section, and the complete scene/statement is about 6 minutes long. There are several distinct claims on the spectators' attention and it all produces an interesting perhaps brain hemisphere division. It seems to be difficult to follow the sense of the spoken statement (which is quite conventionally phrased) and see/think about the image at the same time. To make connections between the sound and picture or grasp them simultaneously also seems difficult. Writing this made me think about the development of your own work. Both **The Art of Worldly Wisdom** and **1857** could be described as polyphonic. While in both, the sets of "lines" used cluster around autobiography or around death and destruction, the complexity of the choices (e.g. simultaneous references

to different times) for spectator emphasis results in a very powerful and rewarding experience. I think this will be one of the most fruitful areas of cinematic investigation.

I wouldn't say it's "wrong" to discuss modernist tenets with reference to film, but I have a feeling that if Clement Greenberg were asked he'd think of the movies and say "Yes, films should be representational; after all there's no object involved, only an image." **Citizen Kane** would be one of his acquaintances. During the 60's, living in New York, I was frequently surprised at how little certain major American abstract artists could "apply" their aesthetic thinking to film. Their sense of it and ideas about it were "average."

I wrote the statement you quoted for its use in the film but separated it's an interesting subject. Talk about extraordinary verisimilitude is a part of many ancient writings, re-emerges from the Renaissance on and, in our time, has been aimed at by 3D movies, Imax and holograms. Just to keep the speculation going: if "progress" continues a scientific elite will continue to do the investigating and inventing and entertaining (the trip to the moon was a TV show) and the rest of the population, progeny of those who now spend 23 hours a day at their TV sets, may "participate" through wholly convincing representations which will perhaps bypass the sensorium and be inserted directly into the brain. Talk about an opiate.

For its use in **Rameau's Nephew**, the futurity of the statement and its references to verisimilitude were set against other temporal/material layers in the hopes that it would make one "see through" the images as a particular representation, a **filmic** representation still very far from the "reality" it represents, a "reflection" of the spectator.

RBE: A well-known frequently commented upon, feature of your work is its concern with the effects of framing. While modernists conceived of the frame as a device for creating a bounded, enclosed space, your use of the frame is different. Again, it seems to me to have dual features that reflect the way in which image and object, reality and illusion interpenetrate one another in your work. You seem to suggest that by putting a frame around a part of reality, you make an image of it. (This seems to me to be partly the significance of **Sight** (1967)) But, then, because the thing that results is circumscribed, bounded and definite, it has the characteristics of an object.

MS: Frames on paintings tend to minimize their objectness and emphasize their "imagicity." Concrete or "abstract" paintings often don't have frames. There's a big difference between seeing **extant** and looking through a mask. "Shaped canvases" and the work of Don Judd come in here. Framing in films is actually masking in both shooting and projection. In the opening, video-altered section of **Presents**, I tried to work with establishing a malleable image with edges. When the white line which opens the film became a small screen-proportion rectangle against "black," it doesn't seem as if it's masked or that there's more beneath the black — it's a little like an unframed representational painting. When this small image finally fills the entire screen, it hovers between readings till, as the image moves laterally, it becomes more "realistic" and it is revealed that there is indeed an off-screen space under the mask.

**Sight** is a black plastic plane with an incised white line diagram with a small (in relation to the amount of surface) shape cut-out making a hole. The work is to be installed in a window and incorporates aspects of flux in a static 2-dimensional "container" by invoking a relationship between these 2 elements. The view through "Sight" becomes part of the work, by its becoming an image in a determinate setting. I don't think that what's seen through the aperture has the characteristics of an object. The scene (a street, in most installations, or another room in the gallery) becomes less "solid" and actual and more of an image under the influence of its context. The circumscribing boundaries are definite, an object, but what is seen is not a "thing."



RBE: The quotation from **Rameau's Nephew** which I gave above seems to harbour yet another, and possibly even more profound meaning than those already stated. The so-called "common sense" belief about the world distinguishes sharply between images and objects, granting to the latter a reality denied to the former. You seem to me to be suggesting the opposite is true. In several of your works, the reality of "the object" seems to dissolve in time, while "the image" because it is eternal, and, often, because of its minimal objective shape, seems very real, very concrete, very definite. In a somewhat similar way, in **Wavelength**, the reality of the room and the windows comes to be transformed into a metaphor for consciousness, while the film itself in the course of its time more and more becomes concrete reality. In sum, the concrete and eternal image becomes more real than a transient and fleeting reality.

Can I remind you, that the quotation from Sartre given above, concerning a being which is directed towards an Other, which "is what is not and is not what is" is a statement about consciousness.

MS: The shifting you describe reminds me of a suggestion of Duchamp: If a 2-dimensional rendering of a 3-dimensional object can be as efficacious as it can, perhaps 3-dimensional entities are representations of 4-dimensional models and so on.

Alas, the image is only "eternal" for a few minutes. It's hard to prove the present exists but, if it does, it is eternity. Or a sample thereof.

One of the aspects of the film which makes its existence as an "apparatus" as important as the development of the piano in Western music is that image is produced and presented (reconstituted) in the same way that we see, by means of light reflecting off (a) surface(s). Reflection!

A projection!, a moving representational image composed of light falling (how thin it is!) on a surface is also (nearly!) "what it is not and is not what it is" to (nearly) submerge Sartre in Heraclitus.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Snow objected firmly to my use of the term "material" here, insisting that I was mistaken, that light is not the **material** of which a photograph is made but rather the **agency** through which it is made. Having given the matter further thought, I now agree with him, though I believe the argument I am advancing here could easily (in obvious ways) be reformulated to take into account his objection. (R.B.E.)

2. Snow had originally written "similar" where I have put "comparable." His point he claimed is that photographs, like Renaissance paintings are structured by a set of conventions. On further thought, he was not sure whether the conventions were really all that similar to those of Renaissance painting. The salient point is that camera-derived imagery is informed by a set of conventions, as was Renaissance painting. (R.B.E.)

3. Snow is here making a reference to conversation between himself and me on the subject specified between parenthesis. Specifically, I had mentioned the modernist historiographic assumption that each successive development in the progress of art is characterized by the successive identification and elimination of features accidental to the medium in which the work was realized and, thus, that progress in art is marked by the movement, similar to that of phenomenological reduction, from an art which included contingent features which mostly derive from what I call centrifugal concerns (i.e. concerns about things outside the art object as a simple material construct — concerns that move us from the actual forms of the object to what it represents, from the Individual sounds in poems, their meanings and our association with them) to essential features which derive from the actual material of which the object is constructed. It is worth noting that against this reductionist reading of history, and the reductionist practice that followed from it (or it followed from, depending upon what one construes the nature of the relation between theory and practice in the modernist tradition to be), Snow seems to valorize the synthetic tradition, which exploits all the possibilities of the medium. (R.B.E.)

4. The articles Snow refers to here are part of the current (rather fashionable) debate about whether painting is reviving or dying. Hennesy argues that the claim that photography has rendered painting obsolete is incorrect, while Crimp argues that painting by the 1960's "painting's terminal conditions seemed impossible to ignore," and that, since the passing of modernism, art works can no longer actually **be** paintings, but only, at most, represent them.

Hennesy's argument makes several claims that Snow might have found interesting. One is that painting directs our attention to important facts that might escape our attention in the "immense sea of sensorial information" (p.22), and, by calling forth acts of contemplation, respond to the fear that the clue to the mystery that surrounds our lives might pass unnoticed. (Painting he claims, organizes impressions and directs our attention more effectively than photographs.) A second claim is that painting is a synthesizing and constructing activity, and, since it is made by the hand, makes use of all modes of sensorial knowledge — the tactile, the oral, the auditory even the olfactory; the photographer, on the other hand, divorces the eye from the hand (This quasi-religious claim that painting integrates mind and body, matter and soul, might have appealed to Snow). And finally, Hennesy makes the (also quasi-religious) claim that artistic taste (read "the spirit") has begun a "relentless" and "remorseless" decline (p.23).

Crimp, needless to say, argues against painting on the grounds that it is "unavoidably (tied) to a centuries old idealism" (p.75) and mocks what he calls Hennesy's "revivalist spirit" (p.76).

5. Compare this comment with another Snow made to Pierre Th  berge: "I think I'm stuck with certain contradictions about not being 'at home' in the movement of time because the future and the past are contents of the mind and you can't say the word "present" fast enough to have it fit the present. (in **Michael Snow** (Catalogue) Kunstmuseum Luzerne, 1979.) Compare also his response to my ninth comment.

6. The Buffalo pictorialists were a group of photographers working in Buffalo and upper New York State in the years 1906 (the date the group 'The Photo-Pictorialists of Buffalo' was founded) to 1914 (the date of the last exhibition in which the Photo-Pictorialists participated as a group) and included W. H. Pesterfield, C. Albright, E. B. Sides, A. Thibaudeau et. al. inspired by the work of the Photo Secessionists (E. Steichen, Clarence H. White, Gertrude Kasebier, et. al.), whose work was exhibited in a huge exhibition at Buffalo's Albright Art Gallery in 1910, the pictorialists wanted to establish the legitimacy of photography's claim to the right to be accepted as a "high art." They believed that all "advanced" (to use a favoured term of the period) artistic practices were closely related inasmuch as the aesthetic worth of all artistic works, whatever the medium in which they were realized, should be judged by a common set of standards, using the same critical mechanisms.

Specifically, the pictorialists attempted to model "art-photography" after the most widespread and influential tradition in the art of the late nineteenth century, Symbolism, as exemplified by such artists as Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavanne. Pictorialists' photographs generally used soft forms, diffused light, centripetal forms of composition, which give them a rather ambiguous and hermetic quality, as though suggesting another reality, just as the Symbolists had often used Synthetic devices — devices for Juxtaposing objects which in the "real" world have no natural connections, but belong to "separate realities" — in order to suggest a "Higher Reality."

In fact, while Snow's "quip" owes something of its motivation to the fact that Buffalo Photo-pictorialists were the subject of a recent exhibition in Buffalo, as well as to the fact that a major topic of our discussion was the relationships between art, photography and the cinema, it probably has a deeper meaning, for, as I suggest in my third remark to him, I believe that Snow's work, like that of the Symbolists, is based on the idea that a picture suggests an Ultimate Reality that is different from the subject matter it depicts. Indeed, I believe that the use of rigorously formal devices, for which Snow's work in film and photography is so justly celebrated, are in the service of his desire to suggest a timeless Reality beyond the reality actually depicted in the photograph/film. I

believe, and Snow seems to imply in his reply to my sixth comment, that the sadness his works so often evoke frequently arises from the pairing of this nostalgic for the absolute with the recognition of the impossibility of fulfilling the aspiration. The synthetic aspects of pictorialist practices (their use of the Juxtaposition of different realities to convey a "Reality" of a higher order), might, too, be of interest to Snow. (Compare, for example, his responses to my second and sixth comments.) (R.B.E.)

7. Snow here introduces a term which I think is **very** revealing, for it suggests that different forms of representation/construction represent different forms of belief about the subject/object. This claim would seem to me to have idealist underpinnings.

8. Here, again, (compare this with his response to my second comment) Snow stresses the constructive and synthetic character of most of his work, which he must believe (if we are to reconcile these claims with his response to my fifth comment) must balance analytic and materialist concerns; once again, then, the same duality we have been discussing in a different form. (R.B.E.)