

Germans focus on relationship between cinema and voyeurism Filmmakers look at looking

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Abstract

M's title is a shorthand designation for the source of its images: Manhattan, where [Christoph Janetzko] is working. M shows the same eye for the margin of things as SI, though here the eye is turned toward the rooftops of the city - especially to the peaked water reservoirs so typical of Manhattan. But what chiefly distinguishes M from the frenetic SI is its elegiac tone, and its undisguised yearning for metaphoric or even mystical associations.

Full Text

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Looking at looking is one of the dominant strategies among the group of new German **films** to be screened tomorrow at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The six **films** by five directors make up the last instalment of the AGO's fall survey of experimental **film** on three continents, prepared by Toronto filmmaker **Bruce Elder**.

Looking is a complex phenomenon, particularly when it involves the high-powered illusions of the cinema. The most resilient of these is also the one most necessary to the existence of the medium: the fusion of many single images into one episode of looking. To regain the sense of the motion of pictures, as successive moments of looking, is just one of the achievements of Christoph Janetzko's sophisticated **film** *SI* (1984).

SI makes it impossible to forget about the apparatus behind cinematic illusion. From the outset, the vertical passage of frames is plainly visible, along with the perforations and manufacturer's marks (these, like the mostly clear **film** stock, become an important part of the **film's** material vocabulary). Eventually a larger perforation opens up as a tiny screen within the visual field, while the strips of **film** turn away from the vertical, rushing obliquely across each other like overlaid railway tracks.

In the context of this wild geometric counterpoint, the mostly archival images that flash by in the perforation screen have a built-in ironic edge - guilt by visual association, as it were. The more subtle irony, of course, is that the stubbornly material-conscious look of the **film** is itself built on an illusion: what we see is not the passage of **film**, but filmed images of **film** stock in motion.

Aside from its witty formal invention, *SI* makes superb use of color- printing techniques. This is also true in a different way of Janetzko's latest **film**, *M* (1986). Here, color is used to suggest a different kind of motion, as the pigment bleeds slowly into the **film's** static images.

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It will be interesting to see what Janetzko makes of his more digested impressions of the New World. On the evidence of these two **films** alone, he must surely be counted one of the most interesting experimental filmmakers working today. (Janetzko will be in attendance at the AGO screening, after which he heads to Winnipeg for a Dec. 1 showing of his **films** at Cinematheque.)

Franz Winzentsen's *Die Anprobe* (The Fitting, 1983) attends less to the process of looking than to its politically charged residue. Winzentsen rummages in ephemeral images of the German past for a stylish rumination on the repression concealed by the cheery mask of post-war consumerism. Pre-war stateroom postcards, raincoat advertisements and photos of Nazi rallies appear against a bland, descriptive voice-over and passages from Beethoven's bloated battle symphony (*Wellington's Victory*).

By using stiffly posed images (he even rocks his shipboard shots in a jokey simulation of ocean waves), Winzentsen works consistently against the fluid grain of cinematic illusion. The analytic/political message: that the post-war economic miracle has been achieved thanks to a form of squeaky-clean historical amnesia, symbolized by the raincoat that can be taken off or even discarded once the storm has ended. The closing shot, of the filmmaker's swastika-imprinted birth certificate, ties up all remaining loose ends with a needed element of personal reference - one that, unfortunately, verges on a rather showy admission of taintedness. Altogether, *Die Anprobe* reads a little too neatly, rather like the airbrushed advertising images that make up much of its visual material.

Noll Brinkman's *Upholstered Furniture on the Grass* (1984) approaches the same subject through different means: a series of close- up wanderings over dilapidated bits of furniture. The settees and

mattresses, all vomiting up their stuffing, have been set out in the open air, as if in imitation of the Romantic taste for follies and manufactured ruins - except that the ruins here are all of post-war design.

As in *Die Anprobe*, the self-debasing flavor of voyeuristic looking has been turned into an ultimately self-exalting, politically righteous form of analytic looking. The objects are simply stripped bare by the camera, which does not allow the luxury of looking away, or even looking from a less claustrophobic viewpoint. This is perhaps the ultimate in voyeuristic fantasy: being forced to look.

Tactical reservations aside, both the Brinkman and Winzentsen pieces are handsome **films** to look at. Like the other works on this program (including Heinz Emigholz's *Schenec-Tady* and Lutz Mommartz's *Eisenbahn*), they are well worth seeing by anyone with an interest in new **film**.

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