# In The Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques: Michael Snow's *The Living Room*

## John Pruitt

Mirrors should reflect a bit more before sending back images.
Jean Cocteau [1]

An artist, however, should not seek security in a tidy mastery over the simplifications of deliberate poverty; he should, instead, have the creative courage to face the danger of being overwhelmed by fecundity in the effort to resolve it into simplicity and economy.
Maya Deren [2]

For a number of years, Michael Snow has been working painstakingly on a long film, *Corpus Callosum*, which will largely contain digitally manipulated imagery. Even after close to 50 years as a filmmaker, at age 71, Snow is *au courant*. The "poetic scientism" of his sensibility has meant that he is not one to shy away from technological innovation.[3] Indeed, in one sense, the very alacrity with which he thrusts himself into exploring new formats only makes his work more difficult to execute; for, in the case of *Corpus Callosum*, had he not been such a pioneer, presumably he could have taken advantage of more sophisticated, i.e. time saving, computer programs which were developed only after he began executing this ambitious project.[4] His works thus remains 'visionary' to the extent that what he wants to do has often exceeded the practical means at hand. Snow embraces technology, but said technology in and of itself is not really the dominating factor.

 The Living Room is a self-contained twenty minute section from *Corpus Callosum*. As a brilliant, playful study of the ambiguous status of the digital image, it is a forward looking work. But what surprised and moved me most of all was how far back the film seemed to reach at the same time. For instance, as an 'animation' (the title puns on this aspect of the film), the work recalls Snow's introduction to cinema, his working for the animator, George Dunning, out of which came his first film, *A to Z*, 1956. Up until now, most commentators have treated *A to Z* as an apprentice work, as a composition without an opus number so to speak. *Corpus Callosum* may change that reading of Snow's *oeuvre*. The new film will reputedly end with a wholly animated section and thus will most likely reconstitute an age old dream of the avant-garde that stretches back to the early decades of the last century, namely, a convergence of cinema and painting. There are other suggestive clues, too, within *The Living Room*, that point to a reaching back and seizing a moment of origin. In the opening of the film, accompanied by a familiar electronic drone, the trajectory of the forward zoom in *Wavelength* is briefly reversed. We zoom back from a close shot of an abstract 'skyscape' to reveal a TV set within "the living room" that contains the opening image, and then eventually to a wide-angle full shot of the interior space. Rhetorically, we have moved from a dreamy, artificial image, to the 'reality' which surrounds it, although from the outset it should

*The Living Room*, 2000
16 mm film
21 min, colour, sound

*Recombinant*, 1992
Slide projector with 80 slides, cylindrical painted plastic stand, wall relief of painted wood
108 x 74 cm wall panel, 104 x 42 cm cylinder, 165 x 230 x 74 cm installation
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
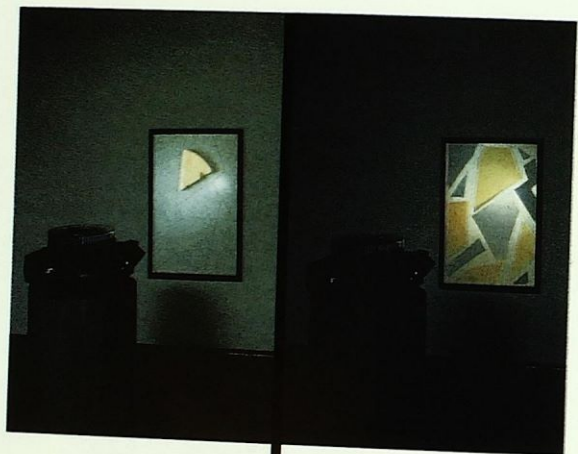


*Authorization*, 1969
Black and white polaroid photographs,
adhesive cloth tape, mirror, metal frame
54.5 x 44.5 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

be said that this reality is depicted in such kitschy tones and plastic textures, with such flat lighting, the atmosphere is wholly one of a TV studio set design out of the 1950s. Here is our first visual paradox. At any rate, the camera will remain in this static position for the rest of the film. Reminiscent of *Wavelength*, too, against the rear wall, there will eventually be a metal chair and images that recall Snow's early *Walking Woman* series.

This 'reaching back' leads one to more peculiar considerations, for instance, to the way that *The Living Room* recalls the first film of Jean Cocteau, *Le sang d'un poète*, a work whose sensibility in most respects couldn't be more removed from Snow's own concerns.[5] Cocteau and Snow are strange bedfellows indeed, but one needs to bear in mind that like Cocteau in 1930, Snow burst on the film scene in the mid-60s as a multi-talented outsider, in Snow's case as a painter, sculptor, and jazz musician. At the time, Snow's astonishing originality as a filmmaker rested in part on his not really having been primarily a 'movie' person, this despite his uncanny sense of how the medium worked. Cocteau's initial film, as its famous verbal preface and dedication to Pisanello, Paolo Uccello *et al* makes clear, was an attempt to generate a continuity of moving images which would bypass cinematic tradition and serve as the equivalent of painterly signs. This is the very crux of *The Living Room* (and presumably of *Corpus Callosum* as a whole).

Snow's digital manipulation of the cinematic image, as it develops over time, pulls that same image away from its mechanical status as a photographic document (where the world itself ultimately 'stamps' its trace on the film surface) and towards its status as a 'painterly' document which

bears before all else the trace of the artist's own presence, a presence which crucially breaks that indexical link of reality and image. Snow's hand on the computer keyboard, controlling the film surface at will, is not unlike a painter's brush hand on canvas. This dynamic between a photographically conceived space and its painterly counterpart is a means of comic play throughout the film, perhaps best illustrated in those moments where Snow's directorial voice, off-camera, instructs his production assistants to enter the room and either remove or set down various objects (a chair, a painting, etc.) against the back wall. Snow's voice (with a lot of room echo) and the apparent sync sound of both his directions and the assistants' activity entering from off-camera, emphasise 'the living room' as having material presence amidst a time-space continuum which, as with any photographic image, extends beyond the frame. Yet, with apparent serendipity, often in sync with artificially generated electronic signals, Snow will digitally make these same 'material' objects appear and disappear in a way which affirms their status as mere light and shadow on the screen. As viewers we are placed into a kind of perceptual conundrum: what space do these objects lie in? Although we always know that any film is ultimately a series of projected

images on a two-dimensional screen, our perceptual habits, especially if aided by various clues, can't help but read that same screen as a window onto another 'room' adjacent to the one we are sitting in.

The comic entrapment of film perception brings us back again to Cocteau. *Le sang d'un poète* begins with a static shot of the artist himself, his face painted as he gazes in the direction of the camera in a portrait-like composition. His verbal introduction via titles has already warned us to expect a film diametrically opposed to the photographic realist aesthetic and one which treats the world which cinema presents as if it came into being solely as a direct result of the artist's creative imagination. It is a work which would wield a great influence over avant-garde film in North America. Yet most likely due to the fact that it was Cocteau's first venture in cinema, he seems merely to will his images against the cinematic grain and as such there is much in it that feels static and stagey – which seems to emanate from a forced iconography whose impact and meaning has little to do with the presence of the camera *per se*. It is a brilliant work by a poet and painter who hasn't felt his way through cinematic territory yet – except in one telling sequence where the theme largely concerns cinema itself. Here, the poet hero, having dived into the world beyond the looking glass in his studio, finds himself in the "Hotel des folies-dramatiques". He floats down a hallway where he peers through a series of keyholes, behind which there occur a number of events which seem to recall the images of early cinema: a newsreel of a political execution in Mexico, an exotic documentary of opium smoking in China, and the sadistic beating of a young girl which recalls the early melodramatic films of, say, D W Griffith. But in witnessing these alluring events,

the poet is trapped on one side of a locked door. He can't really test or judge the reality of any of the images. In fact, Cocteau contrives their treatment in a way which underscores the tawdry artifice (e.g. the executed Mexican revolutionary is immediately re-animated via reverse motion). The last keyhole reveals an image which is the most directly contradictory of all, a half-real and half-painted portrait of a reclining hermaphrodite, with genitalia discreetly covered. The film will cut away at the very moment when we expect to see the hermaphrodite's mystery revealed and then, when we are given a second chance, the cloth veil is lifted only to display another covering, a hand-scrawled sign that reads "Danger de mort." In the light of his failure to achieve authentic vision or insight, the poet commits an appropriately cinematic and hence phoney form of suicide with the 'false' laurels of public acclaim. Thus having disposed brilliantly with all that is inadequate about what we would today call the power of mainstream, illusionistic cinema, Cocteau's film moves on and reverts to its stagy, emblematic artifice in the name of more ennobling forms: poetry and painting.

But the seductive realism of cinema's photographic imagery is perhaps not so easily dispensed with. In 1946, Maya Deren would critique

the animated and abstract image wing of the experimental film movement by calling such films "animated paintings" and not true films, for film, she insisted, must embrace both imaginative imagery as well as the so-called reality-linked presence of photography. The power of cinema lies precisely in the tension between these two potential directions as they come into an unresolved conflict with one another. Perhaps Deren's guidelines strike us as too restrictive, yet her polemic had prophetic power. For example, the later work of (arguably) the two major American animators, Harry Smith and Robert Breer, contains a turning away from a highly achieved abstraction and pure painterly artifice towards the very dialectic Deren called for.

It could be argued that all of Snow's films embrace the complex and unique status of the cinematic image as Deren understood it. To comprehend this in terms of how *The Living Room* recalls *Le sang d'un poète* and yet diverges from it, one must only recognise that once Snow places us in his own equivalent of "The Hotel of Dramatic Follies", unlike Cocteau, he never lets us get out of it. His particular room comes to life precisely because he revels in the indeterminate nature of the objects and images in space which we watch for 20 minutes from our fixed camera position (i.e. through our keyhole in Cocteau's rendering). Snow has said that the various transformations of his visual elements are part of a belief system, by which I think he means that there can be no knowing on what plane to read the space of the living room with any kind of certainty. We can only think in terms of what we believe we are seeing. And Snow will constantly turn the tables on us.

The instances of this dramatic foolery infuse virtually every moment of the film. The three central human figures, presumably a father, mother and son (itself an inevitable conclusion on our part which, in turn, will lead us to the familiar melodrama of the dysfunctional family), are sometimes rigidly still as if in a painterly pose, a factor which the static camera gaze only underscores. Whether they remain motionless as a result of their being a fixed digital image inserted into the picture, or as a result of Snow's stage directions to his actors is hard to determine at any given moment. Their stasis is mirrored by the presence of another 'animal', a stuffed fox, whose fixity presents an alternative comic option for how to read the representations. The fact that we first glimpse the mother wholly nude and pregnant is a highly loaded visual distraction whose mild shock rhetorically pushes our gaze away from a cartoon-like sense of the image (despite the painterly allusions) and into a voyeuristic, photographic space in which we look through the material status of the image as it were, and at the object itself. Here we are under an all too familiar fetishising spell, the eros of the movies and star-gazing; and, then Snow will digitally undermine real presence by deflating the mother's belly in a matter of seconds and having her 'give birth' to a cartoon image of the father, who, having earlier been digitally erased, has thus come back to life, as it were,

as a live actor on the film set. As one might expect with Snow, the interpretative options are dazzlingly complex and purposefully elude any easy reading. For instance, the stage hands, who aren't playing any particular role except to be themselves, as it were, and execute Snow's intentions as director, inhabit yet another layer of 'reality'.

Two aspects are particularly brilliant strokes, and curiously both recall Cocteau. One is the constant presence, except when obscured by a figure, of a small frame on the rear wall, in which we read a mirror which evidently reflects a crew member, the camera, and Snow himself. In a first screening, one can't be sure what is being reflected in the image but it is certain that it functions as a mirror and has a stability within the film frame (i.e. it is not digitally manipulated in any obvious way). This small icon, hung on the rear wall along with paintings and other assorted aesthetic objects, operates as a kind of signature of the motion picture camera (here, video) and the presumed original generation of the images in the real world. *The Living Room* (and all of *Corpus Callosum*) were originally shot on digital Betacam videotape. Wanting to make "a film of electronic effect" he transferred from digital video tape to 16 mm for public screening. I take this to mean that he wants to emphasise its traditionally cinematic and photographic aura, an aura which the mirror image of the 'reversed angle' clearly underscores. Yet reading this image of the mirror is difficult in at least one respect, for in the first half of the film there appear to be two figures within the frame. One is seen in silhouette and doesn't move – as if to say that the mirror reflects the real space of the camera's presence; but, standing next to that camera is something 'equally real' (that is, once it's

recognised for what it is or could be)—a cardboard cutout of a human figure. Snow's *Walking Woman* series should come to mind here.

The other outstanding element is the presence of an apparently half-female, half-male figure, in full frontal nudity, who makes a dramatic solo appearance after a long series of rapid, digital pixilation effects. The figure is wearing a blonde wig, has small breasts and a penis. Several things throw us off into a crisis of belief. One is that we have seen so much intrusive, digital manipulation just prior to this point in the film, that our first reaction is that the figure is merely a digital composite of some sort. We barely notice the wig (since the frontal anatomical frankness keeps us from distracted), yet, if we do, the small breasts keep us from thinking this is merely a female impersonation. At any rate, Snow has resurrected an encounter with Cocteau's hermaphrodite and the mystery lies once again in what it is or who it is we are seeing. Ironically, the last solution to occur to us is most likely the true one: Snow has hired an ambiguously gendered figure to walk across his set in high heels.[6] No amount of sophistication can free us from the seductive illusions of the movies since they are based on a re-presenting of real events, even if that event has been artificially staged. If we bother to

watch a Snow film at all, we certainly don't come to it as a naïve viewer (we're not expecting something akin to *Gladiator*) yet we can't rest smugly in an all-knowing skepticism either.

No matter what medium he is working in, Snow always manages to be a perceptual precisionist and find first principles from which to build his visual and aural structures. I think this, if anything, accounts for his uncanny ability to move from medium to medium with credibility. His method of bringing these perceptual traits to the fore is by staging a balancing act situated exactly on a threshold of two or more divergent readings whose conflict is medium-related. *The Living Room* is no exception. It's the very animated nature of this particular film (and here we should again be thinking of Deren's distinction) which performs a small miracle and makes the momentary photographic realness of the image seem like it comes as merely another equally artificial visual convention after the fact, which is to say, the human figures appear to be 'living' because Snow as artist has 'animated' them, not because they have of themselves an independent life which has been caught by the camera. At once, we see the depth of Snow's gag with the stuffed fox. All film is a form of taxidermy: something alive is first caught and frozen (i.e. metaphorically killed) by the camera in a successive series of 'dead' photographic stills, and then re-animated back into a life-like appearance by the projector for public display.

But the texture of Snow's topsy-turvy playfulness is dense; no clear representational process is discernable, for the paradoxes are never given a moment to rest. Often there are a number of actions happening simultaneously on the screen. Obviously, we can't pay attention to them all, and unlike looking at a painting, we are not at leisure to pick and choose; the film moves relentlessly on. The dialogue between painting and film is thus incessant and the more the traits of the former are emphasised the more the traits of the latter are isolated and we become cognizant of them. For instance, early in the film, the material objects in the room are "dropped into the image" as if they were stage props suspended on theatrical fly ropes and yet this is a clearly a digital effect. The first human movement in the film is not from the people 'on-stage', who remain frozen for a long time, but from a faint gesture of the camera person seen in the mirror.

Perhaps the best way of getting to the heart of this aspect of Snow's method is to look at a few of his gallery pieces and see how, conversely, cinematic properties are brought to bear in a context from which they are normally excluded. There is an argument here that to appreciate Snow one must try as best as one can to see him in totality. Three examples in particular contain intriguing parallels to *The Living Room*. Perhaps the easiest to grasp quickly in such an essay is an older work, *Authorization*, 1969, a construction of five black and white Polaroids glued to a mirror. The composition inscribes within it the

*Immediate Delivery*, 1998 (detail)
Back-lit transparency
116.2 x 200 x 16.5 cm

strict temporal process of shooting each snapshot in succession and then pasting it to the mirror until (with the fifth snapshot) the reflection of the figure of the author in the mirror has been blocked. A play of photographic presence and absence has been expanded in two directions. One is to witness a cinematic expansion of the moment of taking a single still photograph so that we see a progression of images over time and watch the true visual subject (the author) disappear. But there is a sculptural aspect as well since the snapshots we are looking at have, evidently, been taped to the very mirror whose actual material presence is right before us (in opposition to the mere image of the mirror and of Snow as photographer in the Polaroids). Snow has poised the photographic moment between cinema on the one hand and sculpture on the other to create an intriguing and pleasurable dynamic of perceptual options.

Of Snow's more recent gallery work, two in particular rather overwhelmed me in a retrospective of selected works at The White Box, New York City, in December 2000. One is *Recombinant*, 1992, a slide installation piece consisting of 80 images projected at regular intervals onto a screen which is itself actually a relief sculpture of painted wood with sawed incisions cut into the flat surface. These incisions face the projector and inscribe several irregular geometric shapes. In short, the two-dimensional screen has actual material depth cut into it, yet these same cuts, depending on the visual context which Snow will devise via the projected slides, might also suggest, as mere oblique lines on the surface, classic illusionistic depth (in which case we cease to read them for what they are: saw cuts into wood). A stunning series of visual variations unfold one after another as we watch the succession of slides. The lines on the screen appear and disappear to varying degrees; they suggest states of flatness and depth, abstraction and concreteness. Sometimes they hover above the image, sometimes below. Sometimes they blend so well with the projected image, they appear not to be physically on the screen at all but as part of the slide. The effect is witty and ingenious, and again, like *Authorization*, the work is perhaps best summed up as a three-way dialogue between the perceptual modes of sculpture, photography and cinema, but not in a way which suggests a grand Wagnerian synthesis, as I am afraid so much multi-media work is apt to do, but rather in a way in which various formal distinctions remain distinctions and engage with each other in a kind of representational debate. Thus a dramatic tension is maintained which leads, in turn, to a special kind of viewing pleasure.

*Immediate Delivery*, 1998, afforded me the same amount of pleasure over time despite the fact that it is a single image, a backlit photographic transparency in a wall-mounted light box. The composition is a complex array of various objects (light stands, tubing, gels, clamps, etc.) so densely interwoven as to suggest an abstract composition with many tricks of perspective in which

the relative flatness or depth of the image is ambiguous. But what interests me most about this particular work, its hidden 'cinematic' aspect, if you will, is the fact that the image is actually a transparency. We can't really be sure of where its surface is as we look at the lightbox. It's so 'thin' it appears almost not to be there at all, as if it were projected. Snow has found yet another 'threshold'. This perceptual problem is emphasised by Snow having pasted actual transparent gels onto the photographic surface which already includes images of similar gels. We don't know which is which – which actually physically constitute the object's surface and which inhabit the surface only as an element in the photographic image. In addition, many of the long and narrow objects (e.g. the clamps which seem to be holding the image itself in place) are seen in a radically foreshortened space and thus seem to extend forward right up to the surface, i.e. as if resting on the photographic plane itself (an obvious impossibility). This creates an old fashioned *trompe l'oeil* effect as in the paintings of the Americans John F Peto or William Harnett, I think *Immediate Delivery* ultimately raises a classic question of cinema because Snow has brought into the gallery space environment, where we are used to seeing material things before us, a very large three-dimensional object whose actual presence is called into question to the extent that we can't actually see the surface which contains the image. What constitutes the true presence of the filmic image: the celluloid film strip in the projector or the image projected on the screen? One can actually have a deep appreciation of many films and yet never gaze on the film strip itself or have a notion of what a projector is. One might think it one's moral duty (as Dziga Vertov did) to contemplate the object itself,

but looking at a filmstrip isn't the same as looking at a film. If that were the case then by looking at a bottle of wine we could somehow intuit what intoxication feels like. Herein may lie a clue as to why Snow is such a powerful filmmaker. Film and video have already embedded within them a multi-faceted visual experience which his philosophical mode can so easily exploit. Incidentally, if one thinks about the nature of digital imagery in these terms, one can only conclude that we are now farther away than ever before from seeing the material status of this particular medium, for its visual content exists as an infinitesimal electronic code. In this respect, I find it pertinent that at various junctures in *The Living Room*, the representational figures (or parts of them) either emerge from or morph into what can only be described as an electronic soup of nebulous abstraction. After all, if you get close enough to a Vermeer, all you will see is meaningless globs of paint abraded by brush strokes. There's genuine material presence for you. In video, you see patterns of pixils which must first be encoded 'somewhere else', some place utterly invisible, for you to see them at all.

  *The Living Room* ends with such a moment of 'drifting' abstract pixils on the screen – as if the film were decaying and reverting back into its

original 'substance'. The filmmaker leads into this by setting up an additional representational mode: narrative. As it turns out, the hermaphrodite figure is a composite after all: s/he digitally morphs into a reconstitution of the nuclear family: father, mother and son (incidentally played by Snow's own son). Mother and son are directed by Snow off-camera to reach for various objects on a table which instantly disappear just before they touch them. In a very true sense, they can't be touched. They seem mildly surprised but not really upset by their frustrated efforts. The father on the other hand, seems genuinely upset that his necktie has disappeared and wants to know the reason (we presume). He bangs his authoritative hand down on the back of the couch to get attention – a hand which then transforms into an abstract blob. As if to assert his own reality and the reality of the world he inhabits, he picks up a large vase and crashes it to the floor (with the apparent and reassuring sync sound of shattering ceramic). Yet the filmmaker has the last say and animates the crashing vase in reverse and then re-stages its breaking without the sync sound. Through parody, Snow has depicted a family melodrama which hinges on ontological issues. Meanwhile, the mother, heart-broken that her husband has lost his temper and wantonly broken a prized vase, walks up to the camera (according to Snow's off-camera instructions), looks directly into the lens, crest-fallen, and sheds clearly false, animated tears. It's the first time we have been given a textured sense of her flesh, yet now her entire face transforms into an abstract digital surface which then 'falls' down and off the image as if it were (one last bit of illusion) dripping pigment, or the final curtain in this piece of philosophical theatre.

All of which leaves me with one last avenue to pursue in tracking down the various resonances of The Living Room, one which leads to the pre-modernist tradition of painting. The composition of The Living Room has remarkable resemblances to two major works in the Western tradition, Jan van Eyck's Wedding Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini, 1434, and Velásquez's Las Meninas, 1656. All three works portray full figures within a room and all have on the rear wall of that room a small mirror which gives us a glimpse of the reverse view.

Van Eyck's mirror effect seems at first glance to more resemble Snow's. In it, we see what the main composition does not show, the painter and an unnamed party, entering the room to witness the Arnolfini marriage. The artist's signature, significantly just above the mirror, does not have the usual phrasing which would more or less attest to the fact that "van Eyck made this" but states "van Eyck was here". As if they were photographic records, the mirror (metaphorically) and the signature (actually) attest paradoxically to what was once truly present as opposed to what had been painted, since a painter, unlike a photographer before digital processing, can paint into a picture something not actually present as a

model before him. For instance he can paint 'into' the portrait an image of a dog (as van Eyck did; think of Snow's stuffed fox), as an emblem of faithfulness.[7] No matter how realistically portrayed, he had hardly asked a dog to sit through the arduous task of a formally posed oil portrait. Conversely, in the world of attribution as well as of wedding certificates, van Eyck's signature would serve as a sign of authentification and validation. Of all the figures represented in the painting, we at least know that van Eyck was present at some point in time to lay his hand on the canvas (unless an art historian decides that either the signature or the paint application do not bear the marks of his hand). Incidentally, the fact that both Snow's female figure and van Eyck's is visibly pregnant must remind us that the real consequences of erotic activity differ from its merely visual, symbolic, sacred, or in any other way, imaginary counterpart.

Velásquez's masterwork, like van Eyck's, often commented on as a work which uncannily prefigures the world of photography, seems to reverse the terms of stage-set and mirror – for the 'photographic' part of the double image is not the one which we see in the mirror but the one in the room itself, in which the princess and her maids of honour (among others) are caught in casual, life-like motion. The real centre of the composition (as a figure who subtly upstages the others) is the painter himself who is looking at us as if painting our portrait. But in the mirror, we see the trace of who is purportedly looking on, and perhaps having their portrait made, the King and Queen. Yet they are rendered in rather painterly terms with little detail and in a pose which is framed like a formal portrait. As if to emphasise this fact, the mirror hangs on the wall (as does Snow's mirror in *The Living Room*) with other paintings.

One couldn't possibly exhaust the rich implications of these two works, composed many years before the invention of cinema. But their meditative, critical sophistication underscores yet another aspect of Snow's 'reaching back' to origins in his latest work. These tantalising parallels, possibly unintentional, serve to re-contextualise old masters nevertheless, and remind us that to see a painting of this sort is to have a kind of cinematic experience (on Snow's terms) where the three-dimensional space of the room and the frozen human activity within it, serve as a visual experience in time, where we not only appreciate a *tour de force* of painterly technique, but by way of sustained attention, are invited into a multi-dimensional, dramatic space as a site of intellectual enquiry into the dynamics of painting and reality, art and truth. Ultimately, it is a mental 'room' ("corpus callosum" is the band of fibers which connects the two major lobes of the brain) where we engage in a continual investigative process that directs and then redirects our various and colliding perceptions of what is on the canvas or the screen in the first place. Snow's cinema finds again and again a dramatic space for vision, and my own particular emphasis here merely reaffirms that his modernist, critical dimension is experiential, not didactic.

As it is in van Eyck and Velásquez, though we should take special note of Snow's characteristically comic edge, it is moving and engaging to watch the visual elements do battle without any clear resolution. Snow has conjured up his own deep tradition, and for all the avant-garde quality of seizing upon new digital media, the apparent youthfulness of his concerns are in point of fact firmly rooted in age old meditations about image making.

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[1]  *Le sang d'un poète*, 1930.

[2]  "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality", reprinted in P Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film*, New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978, p. 62.

[3]  A term which Snow used to distinguish the work of his colleague and friend, Hollis Frampton, in a memorial talk which was subsequently published as "On Hollis Frampton" in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*, Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994, pp. 240-248. The term could equally apply to Snow's own work.

[4]  At least this is the view of someone more informed than myself, the Austrian filmmaker, Martin Arnold, who is currently working with computer programs which digitally alter film imagery.

[5]  For another example of the uncanny long reach of Jean Cocteau into the present, one which is more attuned to other aspects of his sensibility, witness the works of British avant-gardist Isaac Julien, an artist who, like Snow, works in film and video, and constructs gallery installations.

[6]  In a talk after a screening of the film at Bard College in February of 2001, Snow gave the impression the figure was genuinely a half-male, half-female figure.

[7]  e.g. Panofsky's classic reading in Irwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Vol. 1, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, p. 203.