



Michael Snow: Wavelength (Afterall Books / One Work)

By Elizabeth Legge

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In 1966, at the height of minimal art in New York, artist Michael Snow chose not to make another object to be placed in a room but instead spent a year planning a film of a room: *Wavelength*, a forty-five-minute more or less straight-line zoom from the near to the far wall of a loft space, accompanied by a rising sine wave. In this illustrated study, Elizabeth Legge describes *Wavelength* as a film of virtuosically managed tensions, sensuous beauty, subtle light and color, and recession into perspectival depth. At the same time, she points out, it is also austere: the loft space where the action unfolds could be the last clerical outpost of a defunct business. The zoom is punctuated by what Snow laconically called "4 human events": a woman directs two men who carry in a bookcase and place it against the left wall of the room; two women come in and listen to the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields" on the radio; a man briefly appears after protracted crashing and glass-breaking noises, wheels around, and drops dead; a young woman comes into the room and makes a frightened telephone call reporting the dead man ("And he doesn't look drunk, he looks dead."). *Wavelength* won the grand prize for experimental film at Knokke-le-Zoute in 1967, and it was crucial to critics' efforts to establish a vocabulary for temporal art. It was a "wavelength" that could stand up to the French new wave, and it has functioned ever since as a touchstone for art and film studies, and as a blue screen in front of which a range of ideological and intellectual dramas have been played.

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Editorial Review

Review

Elizabeth Legge's book is an admirable documentation of the film and its making...

The book is an enjoyable and lucid account of a major artwork and its context.

--Mike Leggett, University of Technology Sydney, LEONARDO REVIEWS ONLINE, August 2010

...this book is rich in ideas and deserves our attention.

--Rinaldo Censi, Il Manifesto (Italy), 14 January 2010

About the Author

Elizabeth Legge is Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Toronto. She has written on Dada, Surrealism, and contemporary Canadian and British art, including articles in Art History, Word and Image, and Representations. Michael Snow is a Canadian artist, film-maker, and musician.

D. Graham Burnett is an assistant professor of history in the Program in History of Science at Princeton University. He writes on geography and natural history, with an emphasis on the connections between science and imperialism. He is the author of "Masters of All They Surveyed" (2000) and "A Trial By Jury" (2001), and a co-editor of "The History of Cartography" (1987--).

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