

## Rectangular Worlds Chatham

These two videos...*Rectangular World* and *Typical Morning for Green and Blue*....were conceived and then executed three to three and a half years apart. They do share some commonalities.....split frame, Photoshop drawings referencing modernist painting and sculptural practices, and also two-way dialogue.

*Rectangular World* was commissioned via a residency at Trinity Video in Toronto, in tandem with Videographe in Montreal. The theme for the residency was *Fraternite*. I wrote a script for the application deadline as I have always been interested in definitions and boundaries involving neighbourhood and community and similar words.

The dialogue in *Rectangular World* refers to the Instant Coffee motif *be social or die*. That motif is I feel a descendant of General Idea's maxim *remember, if it doesn't sell, then it's not art*. When I first heard that line... in *Test Tube* and then in *Shut the Fuck Up*...I thought how Thatcherite. But 'sell' doesn't necessarily refer to economic exchange. The word sell can be a euphemism for entering into play, for engaging in dialogue with audience, for being social. However, not all art is social in character. There are abstract painters and sculptors who GI satirized and disdained, although they themselves were quite conversant with those very practices.

The images in *Rectangular World*, with the exception of a photo scanned from a book on black leather jackets of a man who may or may not be 'Adam Parker', consists of drawings I made in Photoshop that suggest minimalist painting and sculpture but also social housing. The dialogue between the two artisans occurs during a persistent thunderstorm. Is the lightning visible in the windows of many of the images strictly weather-related lightning? Is the nasty weather indicative of some larger malaise, or power failure?

The dialogue references tensions in 'the gay community' about who belongs and doesn't...who rates an obituary and who doesn't because they're unknown to the editors or their sexual preference is unknown as their art doesn't scream out capital G gay or queer. During the height on the AIDS pandemic, there were many individuals whose deaths were not noted for a variety of reasons. All of the individual's friends were already dead, or the individual did not work or mix in 'the community'. Well, be social or die, or else go unnumbered or unnoted.

Looking at *Rectangular World* for the first time in eons, I do recognize much of the dialogue being akin to that among programming committees or boards of directors of artist-run or perhaps public galleries. I myself have served my time in such institutions.

In the 2009 video ...*Typical Morning*..... the dialogue is sparser. The voices are older. In *Rectangular World*, two different people are talking on the phone. In *Typical Morning*, there are two people of unspecified gender in the same room or apartment or house. An artist friend criticized me for falling back on language as a crutch, which is a valid

criticism. There is a mood without the dialogue, so....? I feel there are traces of a screenplay or stage-play....the structure preserves even while it internally erodes, perhaps?

*Typical Morning for Green and Blue* is a result of merging two videos I made on my home computer at the time...the green one and the blue one. I added the dialogue later, along with the audio, which is meant to be on a borderline between music and ambient sound...think of the refrigerator with pitch. Think that there is something not quite calm or comfortable underneath the seemingly well-rested surface. Perhaps a virus or even multiple viruses? Do we mean human or computer viruses? Have they in fact merged, by this point in time?

Green and Blue wonder if they should be attending a memorial for a recently deceased friend or perhaps working colleague. The cause of death is not specified...it could be cancer, HIV-related illness, or other. It's probably not suicide or murder...more likely 'Robert's death was an inevitable conclusion to a long-term illness. But what is referred to by 'community' here? Are the deceased's friends a singular community....was the deceased a different person to different communities or sub-communities, or what? Green and Blue are worried that competing individuals will claim the dead man, which typically happens at memorials as those making tributes are so often really referencing themselves.

Both videotapes refer to the strains and limits of 'community', or 'the community'. *Rectangular World* refers to the sudden death of somebody whose community affiliations were murky. When people die, suddenly or otherwise, who claims those people? In parallel, an upcoming memorial is referenced in *Typical Morning*. I have been to so many memorials where different people claim to be talking about the deceased but are really talking about themselves; and it is annoying. But I am fascinated with lists and systems....who rates to be eulogized and then where? Why this person and not that person? Race and class of course also factor into record-keeping and gate-keeping. Who is in a power position and how exactly did they get there?

*Typical Morning* is arguable even more rectangular than *Rectangular World*. In the latter video, at least one of the two women has recently been outside. In the former video, the two characters don't seem to need the world outside of their box. Perhaps this typical morning is on a weekend, or perhaps the two of them are both retired. In both videos, the speakers or characters live in boxes. But boxes are hardly the only confined spaces in the world. Circular structures can be just as closed, if they do not permit any openings... or fresh air. And 'outside' is a word that should not always be taken literally. It may indeed refer to public space outside of private property or commercial enterprises or galleries of all varieties. It often refers to moving outside of or beyond one's confines... outside of ourselves.

So, both videos refer to acknowledgment and memorials... who is acknowledged and who is not. Sometimes relevant decisions are made politically or aesthetically. As people age, the capacity for memory enters into play. People confuse names and dates. *Oh, I didn't realize that he was still alive. No, that happened in 1985, not 1986.* Too often, the people

in power positions to write history rewrite history as their own memories are suspect. The more committed historians, the better. But again too often, many self-appointed chroniclers of histories have sketchy memories....too much weed, too many petty unresolved grudges, et cetera. And too many ageing artists and people are assumed to have faulty memories. Maintaining a sharp memory is useful and advisable. *No, that did not happen. That is not how I remember her or him or them.*

*Are we going to said person's memorial? Yes, on condition that we are able to speak and correct well-meaning or malicious individuals who propagate inaccurate histories.* People write histories of cultural and other institutions and these histories are too often accepted as gospel truths. Shit gets handed down generationally. That is more than unfortunate.