

If you sit down to speak with Andrew James Paterson, an interdisciplinary time-based artist who lives and works in Toronto, you will hear about everything. This is because *everything* is in the nature of Andrew James Paterson. When I asked him what his relationship with the audience is, he naturally replied, "I'd say I'm an observer. In some circles I'm considered inarticulate because I'll say something and immediately contradict myself. I live in a world where that should be everybody's right. But that's not what a lot of people are looking for. A lot of people are looking to an observer for [because] they're the ones that can say the obvious that we can't articulate. There that's it, we just want the one bite. That's not me. If you are going to go into that world, be a pundit, you have to be good at that. I'm not good at that because, I can be like, 'well, no, on the other hand.'"<sup>1</sup>

Paterson is interested in creating a space without artificial limitations. He speaks directly to his audience, which for him is never a homogeneous community, since he does not believe that that situation is possible. His primary focus is avoid imposing arbitrary boundaries for the viewer. Andy Paterson creates tension through binary contradiction in order to allow a space to form in which a multitude of perspectives can co-exist.

As he moved into the 1990's, Paterson dealt with this problem through a formal treatment. The videos titled *Immortality*, from 1987 and *Who Killed Professor Wordsworth?*, from 1990, use formal elements of the video medium to create a subtle tension between what is real and what is fake. In the space of this tension, the audience can at once be entertained by what seems real, and can be made to question what they are viewing. Paterson composes scenes through chroma-key techniques. However, the viewer is not only engaged with the content of the scene but also its formal construction. "The idea is that it is slightly off. But if it looks too obviously off, then just, who wants to watch this, it looks like shit." Another technique, that is employed in *Who Killed Professor Wordsworth?*, is the absence of bodies in front of the camera, where figures are replaced by talking heads on television monitors. Here the reality of the situation is reversed and the viewer is given contradictory situations that are presented without being reconciled. "That character [the detective's boss] only exists in the monitor but he is ten times livelier [than the detective character] who is almost like some kind of deadpan." By deliberately disobeying and playing with the conventions of the medium he is working in, Andy Paterson allows the audience to form their own perspective and be open to different perspectives simultaneously.

In *Controlled Environments*, a thirty-three minute tape from 1994, Paterson plays the roles of A and B, two telephonic 'Art Bureaucrats'. The video consists of conversations between A and B, whose relationship establishes a contradictory nature by blurring social boundaries. As Paterson puts it A and B "are largely off the job except that they never quite go off the job," thus blurring the line between public and private space, or existence. Further contradictions, like their high-class lifestyles contrasted with their outdated low-technology, contribute to this confusion, or actually the multiplicity of identities. Paterson's A and B present a uniform contradiction in a binary dialogue to

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations in this essay are excerpted from an interview with the artist that I conducted on February 18<sup>th</sup> of 2005.

allow for multiple perspectives. “The thing with those self dialogues is that A and B hopefully can produce not only C but also D, E, F, G, and H, other points of view.”

As Paterson moved out of the 1990s, he began to work with Super 8 film. *The Walking Philosopher*, made in 2001, aims for the same goal as *Controlled Environments*, but achieves it on a more personal level. In this work Paterson has moved behind the camera (for the most part), though he is ever present as a narrator delivering a monologue. The viewer follows his route through familiar Toronto paths, but the viewer exists parallel to Paterson, not as restricted audience in a separate existence. “And *The Walking Philosopher* again, you know, it’s like different spaces, but it’s like spaces that various citizens can pass through. And the way different citizens pass through these spaces is all idiosyncratic. I don’t know. That’s the story of my life. How does one critique notions of homogeneous community without just sounding like a complete relativist, or like a complete bourgeois individualist. It’s like, well, everyone is different.” The piece exists through its contents and as a sort of meditative drone where the viewer is aware of their existence in contrast to Andy’s in the video. “I hope my work allows some space [for the audience]. What’s the relationship between a monologue and a dialogue? I would hope that a monologue would encourage a dialogue.”

In 2004, Andy Paterson returned to video with *Eating Regular*. It is a new direction in his work, although it consists of a re-composition of familiar techniques. The tape consists largely of shots of the artist engaging in activities that are necessary for eating against a monologue by Paterson. The narration describes the eccentric habits of notorious ‘regular eaters’ such as Glenn Gould and Howard Hughes. “Most of that tape is this sort of documentation of the everyday as performance, and what could be more everyday than eating?” Here Paterson presents the mundane reality of food to posit a notion of the ‘regular’. But in the absurdity of these regular eaters, for instance the fact that Gould ate the same course in the same restaurant everyday or Andy who is shown preparing and slurping up a dish of videotape, the viewer is forced to ask, ‘what is regular?’ This of course shows that there is no regular, since individuals are by nature completely different.

Of course, no accurate portrait for Andy Paterson only looks at one aspect of his work. However, his desire to create an open public space of discourse and social interaction in his work cannot be denied. Paterson sees the co-existence of many different types of people and thinking to be the quality of a just and healthy society. And even Aristotle can agree, for he says, “The many, of whom each individual is not a good man, when they meet together may be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of excellence and practical wisdom, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, so too with regard to their character and thought.”<sup>2</sup> This is what happens in the work of Andrew James Paterson.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle. *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (1281a40 – 1281b9)