

C and C to B to A: i.e., I guessed at one month (I do believe that one month is the extent of possible human interest in the permutations but what is actually possible is, unless my math is off, 7,784,722 days 5 hours). See Xerox of figuring AxBxC's frames.

Much Cheer. Paul

SYNCHRONOUSOUNDTRACKS, then, is not wholly a film, nor even a projected work, but rather an environmental complex structured about three 7 by 9 foot images produced by three projectors. These are mounted in black boxes, each six feet tall. At the extreme opposite end of the space for which the whole is designed, mounted on the wall five feet above the floor, are three speakers, situated five feet apart. One perceives, as one enters, three images of film strips, contiguous and moving at different and constantly varying speeds, producing, in the pulsation of superimposition at work within each separate strip, a constancy of change in color, vibrating, blurring, clearing, intensifying, pulsating in a movement of such constant shifts in speed and direction of lateral oscillation as to defy description and temporal location. This defiance is, in its extremity, an extension of that radical redefinition of temporality toward a consistency of presence, which works, from Brakhage on, to entirely redefine as well the spatiality of film.

From the three speakers arranged on the back wall, one hears the sound of sprockets passing over a projector sound head, with a frequency whose oscillation stands in direct relation with the sprocket hole images seen upon the screen. The dominant impression, then, is of a synchronicity whose terms are articulated with a definition that derives from a complex phasing, itself the product of a generative technique of recording and re-recording. Optical curvatures, reversals of direction, fluctuation in speed, pulsating of color are all comprehended within the continuity of a loop structure, characteristic of Sharits's mature work. The loop itself is composed of analytic variations upon the "specimen" generated by analytic testing of primary material. Loop structure, then, systematic permutation as analytic of the temporal and spatial aspects of the filmic material, *generate*, in turn, this work which has a particularly, a curiously, hybrid nature. For, one is free, as one is not in theaters, to move about; one has, as in the experience of some advanced sculptures of the Sixties, the sense of inhabiting the physical field of the work; there is an

optimum, but not enforced distance from the projectors.

The evidence, the knowledge that one can impede projection, forces upon one the acknowledgment of a spatial situation closer to that of sculpture than to that of film. One can, nevertheless, choose one's distance, varying as one recedes or moves forward, closer to the screen, the intensity of optical curves. One is viewing and hearing the concrete evidence of the recording processes themselves, the phasing of sound and image projecting questions: "What is the time of a work such as this? What is its directionality? What is its space?" Sharits, having moved from cinema to film, passes, through an objectification of a filmic ontology, into a hyper-space whose nature and limits remain to be defined.

PAUL SHARITS

By Rosalind Krauss

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What is it like to be convinced by a work of art? Our model for the aesthetic experience is drawn primarily from encounters with objects that have already been validated—where the question is not of establishing the status of the work, as art, but of internalizing its significance, re-affirming for ourselves its manner of meaning. But with work that is really new, there is a different problem, and the model for established art does not serve. Instead, we are more likely to find ourselves interested, or in-

trigued, by what we see, without that interest carrying with it the claims of aesthetic certainty until, like a puzzle we have stared at for a long time, the pieces suddenly fall into place and the work's aesthetic status is irrevocably part of our experience.

The films of Paul Sharits come from that kind of uncharted territory. Not that they do not connect to the relatively brief history of American Independent Cinema; they do. It will be the task of this essay, in part, to describe the manner of that connection. Yet they emerge from that tradition in a way which challenges and extends some of its presuppositions. And so, for a while, they have the quality of being suspended in one's consciousness—a visual fact, surrounded by questions: why those choices and not others; why those self-determined limitations; why the expansions in that direction, now? And then, the pieces fall into place. One realizes that one is not only looking at work of obvious filmic interest, but one is also in the presence of an extraordinary achievement of cinematic art.

In my own experience of Sharits's films, the moment when this certainty dawned was in the encounter with *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*, a work he made in 1972. Sharits's mature career begins much earlier, of course. By the time of *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* he had made several works which are securely established in the canon of experimental film. *Ray Gun Virus* (1966), *N.O.T.H.: I.N.G* (1968), *T, O, U, C, H, I, N, G* (1968), *S. TREAM: S. S.ECTION: S.ECTION: S. S.ECTIONED* (1970), all precede *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*. It may therefore be a bit eccentric to begin an account of Sharits's art at a point that is closer to the middle of its development rather than at its inception, yet I do so because *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* summarizes the ideas and directions of the previous work and in that summation renders them profoundly abstract. It is in his capacity for abstraction that I believe Sharits's strength is to be found.

Soundstrip/Filmstrip muralizes the field of projection. In the installation where I first saw it, the image filled the entire long wall of a gallery,¹ giving it the effect of that kind of panoramic spectacle we recognize as cinemascope—which is only fit for the presentation of snakes and funerals as Godard has the film-maker Fritz Lang say, in *Contempt*. Yet cinemascope is by now the standard field of viewing for the commercial film. This is because it more forcibly promotes the effects of illusion than the academy ratio of the normal movie screen. By more nearly filling the viewer's field of vision, the panoramic screen has a tendency to oblit-

erate the fourth wall of the room in which the audience sits, waiting to be transported to another place. And for *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*, where illusion is part of its subject, the launching-pad of this wide-screen field is a necessary ingredient.

Yet the plane of illusion is undermined, or bracketed, almost immediately, for the space of *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* (the gallery in the case I'm describing) contains the implements of its projection. The four machines from which the composite image emerges are mounted on four monolithic bases, and these are placed, free-standing, within the room, like furniture or objects around which we are free to move. Right away, then, we realize that we are not in the middle of the filmic illusion, as we would be when seated in a theater, oblivious to the hidden machinery in the projection booth mounted behind us. We are, instead, at a tangent to the illusion, forcibly aware of the generative pair: projector/projected; aware, that is, of the mechanisms that are closer to the birth of the illusion. Indeed, the experience of film in relation to that pair has a history within the very beginnings of cinema. We are told, for instance, that in the earliest screenings of film in Japan, the theater managers set up rows of seats parallel to the line of projection, so that some of the audience, if it wished, could look not only at the filmed image, but also at the beam of light transversing the space between projector and screen.² Somewhat later, in Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), this need to acknowledge the agent of the image's production impelled Vertov to include a filmed "overture" of the starting up of the arc-lamp and the threading of the projector itself.

In *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* the presence of the projector in our space does not simply qualify the experience of the illusion by stating, "This is a projected reality." Through the sculptural isolation of the projectors and their stands, it establishes the work's involvement with its own material basis.

The filmic image is carried on a strip of celluloid coated with emulsion. That, we might say, is the *material* support of the image. Yet the simple fact of that strip is not what we could call the *mechanical* support of the experience of film. For the latter to occur, there must be a sense of motion, and the mechanical basis for that is located in the material correlative to the physiological fact called the persistence of vision. Everyone knows by now that what we experience as motion in film is in reality a sequence of separate still frames, fired at us at the standard speed of twenty-four per second. Both the camera which took those stills, and the

projector which fires them onto the screen, have revolving shutters. Opening and closing, they capture and release intermittent intervals of darkness and light. The filmstrip's connection to the shutter is the bridge between the still image and the moving one. The filmstrip's testimony to that connection is the row of sprocket holes it must carry on one side: the material witness to its passage through the mechanical registry of time. Emulsion, strip, sprockets, shutter, frame, are the complex reality which comprises film's material basis. It is to this complex that Sharits addresses himself in this work.

In *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* the major portion of the screen is taken up by an image of the film's emulsive coating: a plane of colored light disturbed by two parallel stripes, each stripe the evidence that Sharits has marred the fragile surface of the film with a scratch-mark: a furrow with particles of matter clinging to either side. These two lines of scratches, however, do not come from the same point of time in the process of making the film. For with each strip of film, the celluloid was scratched once, and the film projected and reshot onto another strip which was scratched again, in a different place. There are therefore two generations of scratches, one rather blurred and the other extremely distinct. The first is a recorded image, distanced from us in time. The second is an actual presence on the strip of film we are now looking at, a fact of the presentness of projection, much the way our hand raised to intercept the beam of the projector's light, and casting a shadow on the screen, would be the intervention of time-now onto the image of time-past.

These real scratches, passing sometimes over the image of sprocket holes which occur at the top of the fields of color, help us to recognize that two generations of process are combined within the single image, for the sprocket holes are from the first (recorded) generation. The sprockets of the film we are viewing now are, of course, invisible, meshed within the mechanism of the projectors. One must emend, then, the statement that the content of the film's image is the emulsion made present to one's vision, because this image of emulsion is as well an image of recording, of film's condition as document. As document, seen through projection, it holds past and present in a strange synthetic relation to one another. We realize that the material support of film is being shown to us from within the context of Time.

And with film, of course, time is motion. I have said that *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* uses four projectors and is a composite

image. What we are actually looking at are four separate loops of film, the projected edges of which meet to create the illusion of a single continuous band of four film-frames passing before us from right to left. The separateness of the frames is marked by the differing colors and by the random interrelation of the scratches each frame contains. In the sinuous glide of this image of movement there is contained a further commentary on the nature of film's relation to time.

The image of the strip of film is about seeing what is never seen in the theater of our ordinary experience. The filmstrip—its separate frames distinct and visible, its sprocket holes flanking one of its edges—is the object with which the film-maker works as he edits. It is what he holds between his hands as he manipulates the object later to be projected and, in this projection, to be seen as a single, animated picture. The quadrupling of the frames, by referring to the filmstrip as a physical object, also refers to it as a static object: film *in potentia* because film not-yet-projected. This static object—the filmstrip—which we might be tempted to call the “real” film or the film-itself, in fact establishes its essential being only in relation to the intermittent time of projection, because only through projection does it gain the illusion of continuous movement. In this movement the individual frames are erased as separate integers; they are subsumed within the condition of continuity. Thus, in relation to motion, *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* offers a double-level image parallel to the double-levels of the treatment of each separate frame. It provides us with the image of the static, material object of the strip, coupled with its continuous glide into the condition of time.

The sound track of the film parallels what I have been describing as its visual impact. From each projector the separate syllables of the word “miscellaneous” are emitted. Each syllable is of course a phoneme without meaning, an inert building block in the auditory structure of language. “Sense” comes only with their temporal coupling and combination, made possible in this case by the viewer who physically traverses the space of the room of the film.

Time, then, is the subject of *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*: time, in relation to what might be called the analytic mode of consciousness. The experience of film is normally about being caught up in the flow of time, of being so emmeshed within the process of duration that one suspends all sense of the fusion of past and present occurring within that experience. The analytic act—the standing

Sharits's will in *Soundstrip/Filmstrip* is to give us that moment of reflection without destroying its object: to give us at one and the same time the abstract components of film and the reality of its experience. So that what we see, then, are two "objects" of tremendous beauty: the powers of thought to reflect on its own process; and the unified field of our cognitive reality.

That will towards abstraction runs deep within the tradition of Independent Cinema. Its most aggressive, because single-minded, emergence has been the work of the last ten years in what P. Adams Siney has called the Structural Film. With this title Siney refers to the work of Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr and Joyce Wieland, as well as that of Sharits. By this term he means to indicate "a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film."³ In speaking of the "shape" of a film, Siney alerts us to the fact that for this group of film-makers there will be a concern for the tension between motion and stasis which I have described as the central effect of *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*. There will be, that is, an attempt to find a very simple gestalt, or outline, of the type that objects have, and to impose that outline of the filmic material in such a way that the course of the temporal experience acquires the profiled precision of an object in space. That outline is, of course, not arbitrary. It is, rather, a diagram of some essential ingredient of the filmic experience—a kind of unified image which continually flashes before us the compressed information that we might call a concept about the nature of film. The reduction and synthesis that is needed to arrive at such a diagram is what we recognize as the process of abstraction.

Thus, in *Wavelength* (1967), Michael Snow imposes a shape on the forty-five minutes of his film by using a single, continuous zoom through which the viewer of the work is very gradually propelled across the expanse of an eighty-foot loft space, coming to realize that when the camera's lens finally "arrives at," is entirely filled by, the wall at the far end of the loft, the film will have reached completion. In that sense, the shape of the film acquires the finite, perimetric definition of a bounded room. By giving the

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These works—*Ray War* (1966), *Word No* (1968), *N:O:T:H:I* (1968)—explore and film. Their basic structure extremely short spurts means anything from a sound—somehow below contain twelve frames in texture of these works black, or white. In their achromatic bursts, estrange dark pulses. The metric structures these films.

In using the flicker and analyzing the kinetic illusion of motion.⁵ As

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back from the experience in order to ask what it is and how it is made—obviously rends the fabric of duration. In tearing it apart in order to examine it, one has not duration but stasis; one has an analytic movement and an inert object of reflection.

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That will towards abstraction runs deep within the tradition of Independent Cinema. Its most aggressive, because single-minded, emergence has been the work of the last ten years in what P. Adams Sitney has called the Structural Film. With this title Sitney refers to the work of Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr and Joyce Wieland, as well as that of Sharits. By this term he means to indicate "a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film."³ In speaking of the "shape" of a film, Sitney alerts us to the fact that for this group of film-makers there will be a concern for the tension between motion and stasis which I have described as the central effect of *Soundstrip/Filmstrip*. There will be, that is, an attempt to find a very simple gestalt, or outline, of the type that objects have, and to impose that outline of the filmic material in such a way that the course of the temporal experience acquires the profiled precision of an object in space. That outline is, of course, not arbitrary. It is, rather, a diagram of some essential ingredient of the filmic experience—a kind of unified image which continually flashes before us the compressed information that we might call a concept about the nature of film. The reduction and synthesis that is needed to arrive at such a diagram is what we recognize as the process of abstraction.

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film this shape, Snow creates a spatial analogue for the experience of time. The camera becomes a machine which traverses space, according to a fixed rule: namely, that it cannot look back. What it has passed through is behind it, and what is behind it is, by the nature of its irrevocable advance, not retrievable. By mapping this image of space traversed onto a temporal progression, Snow makes extremely real and rather terrifying, the idea of time as something that extinguishes the past, something that relentlessly advances, leaving in its wake only abstractions or generalizations about the past, only the past as a 'shape'.

Wavelength is a film of far greater complexity than I have indicated here.⁴ There are human events that interpose themselves in the path of the advancing zoom to create a reduced and schematic narrative; and there are filmic events (color filters placed in front of the lens, short sections of the film in negative, superimpositions of the images) that interrupt without diverting the continuity of the movement. But I have focused on the film's abstract sense of temporal inexorability because that is the quality *Wavelength* has in common with the early films of Sharits.

These works—*Ray Gun Virus* (1966), *Piece Mandala/End War* (1966), *Word Movie/Fluxfilm 29* (1966), *Razor Blades* (1968), *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* (1968) and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968)—explore and develop the medium known as the flicker film. Their basic structure involves optical pulsations caused by extremely short spurts of visual information. (By "short" one means anything from a single frame [one-twenty-fourth of a second—somewhat below the threshold of actual visibility] to a sequence twelve frames in length.) Although the later flicker films contain passages of recognizable imagery, the predominant visual texture of these works is composed of frames of solid colors, or black, or white. In their alternation the color bursts, or color and achromatic bursts, establish a slightly varying stream of light/dark pulses. The metronomic beat of these pulses is what then structures these films.

In using the flicker effect, Sharits was, of course, exploiting and analyzing the kinetics of cinema—its capacity to create the illusion of motion.⁵ As Regina Cornwell writes:

As a fundamental principle, flicker is as old as, in fact older than, the camera and projector. Awareness of flicker is revealed in the use of the term "flicks" for films or movies or motion pictures. "Motion pictures" and "movies" are descrip-

tive names for the illusion evoked from film which is actually composed of separate still frames, whereas "flick" or flicker actually characterizes the nature of the intermittent illusion more literally. It is the intermittent movement of the film through the camera in registering the image and the shutter mechanism blocking out light as the image passes down and the next image is registered, and the duplication of these operations in projecting the image, combined with the persistence of vision which creates the illusion of a constant and uninterrupted image on the screen. At any time all one need notice is the projectile of the light beam as it travels towards the screen to observe the flicker effect created by the revolving shutter.⁶

A flicker effect, well below the threshold of perception, is intrinsically a part of the phenomenology of filmviewing. What the flicker film does is magnify this effect, raising it above the perceptual threshold, but maintaining nonetheless its rapid-fire impact. In this way, the optical information on the screen becomes the visual correlative of the mechanical gearing of lens and shutter.

In this synthesis of film optics (how we see) and film mechanics (how what we see is produced), Sharits is also combining the notions of stillness and motion, for the flicker hovers midway between a reference to the inert filmstrip, an inanimate object of discrete frames, and the realization of movement caused by blurring the distinction of each frame through the agency of speed.

And indeed it is a sense of breathtaking speed that forms the basic impression of most of Sharits's flicker works. The extraordinary forward momentum of films like *Ray Gun Virus* or *Razor Blades* (where the use of double-screen projection sets us a kind of visual metaphor for a race between the two sets of images) creates an abstract correlative for the relentless passage of time. It is this production of an image of forward motion—reduced to the concept of "pulse"—that joins the early aspirations of Sharits and Snow. Added to which is their shared attitude towards stillness as the antithesis of speed.

In *Wavelength* I said that each moment of the film was informed by an image of its shape-as-a-whole, and that there was a tension between the static, diagrammatic nature of this shape and the experiential flow of temporal motion. This tension between time flowing and time stopped is given an almost visceral presence by Sharits's flicker films. His use of the flicker makes it

seem that one can catch the single frame as it comes by projected; that one can actually see each single moment of which motion itself is composed. This feeling of being able (almost) to stop the flow of time in order to "see" it, promotes an extraordinary tension within the viewer.

In our ordinary experience we have, through our capacity for reflection, the ability to stand off to one side of our lived experience. We can, that is, analytically regard our own processes of cognition. Yet that act of standing outside experience in order to observe or dissect it stops time, interrupts experience, changes it. It leaves one with a sense of the tension between analytical reflection and a consciousness fully embedded in the drift of experience. Consciousness is thus involved in a situation of paradox—a battle between experience and reason. Deep within the very grain of film is the same tension: between the sinuous flow of movement through time and the single frame whose potential for analysis is realized only by interrupting that flow. If one tries, in the flicker, to catch the 'reality' of each frame, one is left with the diagram of movement, the analysis of film's components, the absence of kinesthesia. One is left, that is, with an abstraction and not with film. In Sharits's work there is a dual experience of what it means to be film (in motion) and to analyze it (in stasis). The emotional impact of the flicker films, and their success as art, arise out of this evocation of the dual terms of consciousness.

The later flicker films, as I have said, weave strands of recognizable imagery through the fabric of solid frames that had been the exclusive medium of *Ray Gun Virus*. In doing so, Sharits explores, in his own way, yet another aspect of the grammar of cinema that was of general concern to the experimental filmmakers of his generation. The very titles of *N:O:T:H:I:N:C* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, with each of their letters bracketed by marks of punctuation, create a visual/verbal analogue for the idea of montage.

Montage is another word for editing, or physically joining separate segments of film. The editing process could be used, of course, to create a complete visual miscellany, and some of the experimental films using found-footage have done so (for example Bruce Conner's *A Movie* [1958]). But the normal task of editing is to correlate separate shots of reality—to break down a sense of their disparate nature, and to create a unified field of action, or a single physical space. The cut-away, the reaction-shot, the change of angle as one moves from far- or medium-shot to

close-up, the cutting back and forth between two parts of a single locale, are all parts of the editing process, by which one can fashion a sense of dramatic or psychological continuity.

Although it is not his exclusive concern, many of the films of Hollis Frampton have been involved with analyzing the fictive reality created by the techniques of editing. *Poetic Justice* (1972) for example, is a film about editing, even though the space at which one looks throughout the forty-minute course of the film, never changes. A fixed camera focuses in medium-shot on a table top on which there are assembled a flower pot, a coffee cup, and a sheet (in the passage of the film to become a sheaf) of paper. On this paper, in large, hand-written letters, is the description of the first 'shot'; and as, every ten seconds, a new cut brings a new sheet to the growing stack on the table top, an imaginary filmic space unfolds—one that the viewer/reader constructs out of the script. Divided into four sections or "tableaux" (each containing sixty 'shots'), the editing grammar to which the script alludes becomes progressively complex—referring to the reproductive capacity of the photographic medium to create an elaborate self-reflexive network. So that in *Poetic Justice* the procedures of montage move from the idea of fleshing out the simple space of narrative ("You are looking out a window"; "There is a bluejay on a branch.") to the complex inversions of self-reference (involving descriptions of scenes followed by the 'shot' of someone holding a still "photo of the same scene").

In *Poetic Justice*, the "cut" is abstracted insofar as it is rendered purely imaginary—an act of mental elision—while the camera stares unremittingly at an unchanging reality. In this way the film essentializes the psychological basis of dramatic continuity, as opposed to the purely optical basis of cinematic motion.

In a very real sense, the flicker film can be said to be the ultimate exercise in montage. Alternating pulsations of light and dark can be obtained by filmic strategies that differ from the construction of the flicker, ones that do not have to do with the separate shots of which Sharits's films are composed. For example, a very rapid pan along a picket fence will produce a strobe-like exchange of light and dark (an effect that Godard produces in various ways in *Alphaville* in his shots of a revolving fan, for instance). However, the pan is an example of one continuous camera movement exploring space through a single, extended shot. The flicker film, on the other hand, produced by a single-frame technique not unlike that of animation, creates its affective

reality under the composite conditions of montage.

The psychological correlative of montage is expectancy, the anticipation of change. (A woman stands in a room; the door opens, her expression changes; what does she see?) The mechanics of the psychological condition are what Sharits begins to explore—without, however, requiring them—in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*. In those films, certain narrative 'events' occur: in the former, as punctuations in the course of the flicker, making the cyclical (or mandala) structure of the film explicit (the image of a light bulb gradually fills with black and then, half-way through the film, the black begins to drain out of the object); in the latter, 'events' work as an emotional embodiment of the abstract condition of montage.

In *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* two sets of recurrent images flash within the passages of color-frames. One set involves the action/reaction aspect of the editing lexicon: a hand passes over the frontally posed face of a young man, leaving colored tracks of scratches; the young man holds a scissors up to his extended tongue, seeming about to maim himself. The other set refers to the associative or metaphorical capacities of montage: a close-up of an eye being operated on creates a visual and emotive comparison between itself and a close-up of male and female genitals in the act of coitus. If this latter set of images—violence to the eye and explicit sexuality—reminds viewers of a particular, earlier work within the history of film, the reference thus made is no accident. The Bunuel/Dali film *Un chien Andalou* (1929) opens with an eye being slit and progresses towards images of both physical lust and violence. Within the canon of Surrealist Film *Un chien Andalou* was an early statement of the intention to create a montage space out of unconscious reality rather than one tied to the parameters of external space. By driving the offices of montage inward, Surrealist Film is an early example of cinema's exploration of the processes of association.

This mentalizing of the space of film is obviously the course that Frampton takes in *Poetic Justice*, and it is in part the course to which Sharits wishes to refer in *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*. I say "in part" because the Sharits film is a complex set of interlocking metaphors that are meant to combine to create a unified psychological field. The sexual imagery, with its roots in the unconscious, mirrors reciprocally the flicker material with its experiential basis in the involuntary network of physiological optics—the firing of retinal cells and the muscular movements of the eye. The

film is once again a powerful statement of what it is like to be caught within the gears of that phenomenological machine of our experience; and, simultaneously, to have an analytic perspective upon it.

With the introduction, in the flicker films, of alternating passages of color-field and photographic imagery, Sharits created for himself a situation in which the cinematic field oscillated between the abstract, luminous flatness of the 'empty' frames of color (and the still emptier ones of after-image), and the aggressive three-dimensionality of the frames with objects. Trained originally as a painter and then as a graphic designer, Sharits is acutely aware of the problems in juxtaposing those two orders. In 1965 in a series of graph paper drawings of grids, he had experimented with the superimposition of three-dimensional objects (razor blades, hair) on the idealized and withdrawn order of the grid-space. It is therefore not surprising that *T, O, U, C, H, I, N, G* would be followed by a work which turns its attention not to the simple juxtaposition of flatness and depth, or abstraction and documented reality, but to their synthesis.

S: TREAM: S: S: ECTION: S: ECTION: S: S: ECTIONED (1970) is not a flicker film. It is instead a work that emerges from the grammar of superimposition. Each of the film's three fourteen-minute sections is composed of the same 'ground' of visual imagery. This imagery is of moving water, shot from a rapidly flowing river, taken at differing focal lengths and screen directions. At the beginning of each section six of these shots are superimposed on one another, forming a self-cancelling depth, a network of moving current that criss-crosses itself into a flat, circular rhythm. As the film proceeds, five of the layers fade out in succession, leaving a single photographic image free to enforce its sense of palpable, physical depth.

However, by the time this has happened, the hollow of that photographic space has been partially countered by a set of marks that begin to block the viewer's way to the image. Some four minutes into the beginning of the film three vertical scratches appear on the surface of the image. These scratch-marks, furrowing up the emulsive coating of the film, at first appear to stand in front of the image, like bars on a window. As each new three-part set is added (at regular three-minute intervals), one begins to realize that these scratches will gradually 'erase' the illusionistic matter that appears behind them. (Indeed, the film ends when the addition of one more set of scratches would entirely obliterate

the image of the river-stream, wholly supplanting it by the stream of scratches.)

With this realization comes an enforced sense of the fact that the scratches are literally not in front of the recessive space of the water, but within it. For they have gouged off the light-sensitive surface of the film, exposing the flat band of celluloid which is the physical support for the image. The scratches expose a ground which is in that sense behind the image, fundamental to its very being. The photographic imagery which is itself oscillating (through the strategy of superimposition) between flatness and depth is progressively trapped or sandwiched between two other layers of flatness: the first, the image of the scratch which establishes the flatness of the screen; the second, the unveiling of the celluloid which establishes the flatness of the filmstrip, the physical object moving through the gate of the projector. For film, the world of experience—all photographic experience—is trapped between these two parallel flatnesses; and the dramatization of this fact is the basic subject of *S: TREAM: S: S: ECTION: S: ECTION: S: S: ECTIONED*.

Soundstrip/Filmstrip, the work with which I began this discussion, follows logically from the concerns of *S: TREAM: S: S: ECTION: S: S: ECTION: S: S: ECTIONED*. There, a photographic representation of three-dimensional space (as in the images of the river) is replaced by the real three-dimensional space of the gallery through which the viewer circulates as he regards the film. In this move towards the inclusion of the real, physical environment, Sharits sandwiches not the images of water but the viewer's actual experience between the parallel planes of screen and projector. It is in this direction which Sharits takes towards environmentalism that he breaks with most of the work of his peers in the Structuralist Film. This attitude marks much of Sharits's recent activity: the "located film pieces" like *Synchronous Soundtracks* (1973-74), *Damaged Film Loop* (1973-74) or *Shutter Interface* (1974-75). Because it characterizes the pieces installed within the present exhibition, a detailed discussion of the premises of this type of work will take up the next section of this catalogue. But this sketch of Sharits's development would not be complete without stating the other way in which his work differentiates itself, in general, from that of his contemporaries.

Very simply, that difference is the depth of his commitment to abstraction. No matter how optically beautiful Sharits's films might be, their intrinsic difficulty for most viewers lies in the (rel-