

The Long and the Tall of It

It's About Time ... and about space; The Preston Kanak "3 Minute Shorts" video project

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There is an enigmatic aspect to Preston Kanak. His videos uploaded to Vimeo over the past two years number over four hundred, each of them a shining example of technique. While many of them are demonstrations of equipment, basically mini-industrials, they all uphold a level of high craft that borders on obsessive. Kanak's desire to keep learning, to find a way to make things work, and to take risks has served him well. His employment has allowed him constant access to good hardware and has had him traveling frequently around Canada and the USA testing and demonstrating cranes, dollies, and other camera equipment. In 2010, he dedicated himself to the creation of a video every day. In 2011, he slowed himself down to a mere three per week (but increasing the care behind each) and he continues creating and posting videos on the web, driven to discover meaning of and through his craft. As his videos drew the attention of dancers, poets, performance artists, and other filmmakers, Kanak has discovered kinship with like-minded individuals who will stop at nothing to practice their art. This dedication in others has further inspired Kanak in his pursuit to create, both alone and alongside these new collaborators.

Kanak's collection of video work leads me to ask a number of questions. Why create so many videos over such a short period of time? Why commit to such a level of painstaking craftsmanship to each video? And most importantly, at the root of it all, what is he saying? To begin to appreciate Kanak's more or less twenty hours worth of videos and to assist me in answering these quandaries, I would like to discuss the work in terms of three complimentary, recurring characteristics of movement in the videos; individual, external, and universal.

Movement of the individual, as can be seen in dozens of Kanak's videos, is depicted through the literal movement of the camera. This movement, often realized with the use of motion control cranes and dollies, is more graceful than any unaided human hand or eye could produce. With machine-like precision, the camera eases forward and backward, rises and drops, or slides sidelong from one carefully chosen composition into another. Such regular use of this aesthetic suggests that Kanak identifies with the camera; not just the lens's viewpoint but the entire apparatus. That Kanak's world view is thusly tied begins to illuminate the overall thematic meaning of his collected world.

The external subject matter of Kanak's videos is often sites of urban or natural activity; of people or water. Only in some recent collaborations is this subject even aware of the camera's presence. Rather than direct this subject, Kanak 'redirects' it through manipulation of time, most notably using time lapse cinematography. Unlike the camera apparatus, the objects flowing in time lie outside of Kanak's controllable sphere. They can be altered by never tamed.

In such videos as *A Week in Montana*, *Spring*, and *Cloud Formations 2* Kanak's camera and subject unify as he turns his sights to the sky. Time laps allows us to perceive the movement of clouds and even stars, essentially of the movement of the planet itself. Our earthly rotation is entirely beyond control and is

only observable through cinematic manipulation. The universality of this action-less motion instill in us a conflicting sense of wonder and bewilderment, a detached belonging.

Kanak is constantly moving but the lack of classical 'action' reminds us that we can, should, and must move but at the same time, there is nowhere to go. The camera creeps forward, shark-like and inhuman, discovering new visions through its relentless control. The subjects move chaotically but, whether it is water or people, the flow begins to seem like a pattern; they becomes less frightening through the cinematic manipulation of them. The sky also reveals its patterns, but we are less comforted by the realization of how small we really are.

Kanak's approach to creative video is pragmatic; he suggests constant hard work if progress is desired, a goal he demands of himself. Like the well calculated progress of his cameras through space and time, Kanak's aesthetic prowess crawls relentlessly onward, testing new tools and new limits with each short work. Even in the wake of cuts to the local film industry, he remained optimistic, believing that Saskatchewan people's do-it-yourself initiative will prevail for those committed to telling their stories. In time, I expect Kanak's work to become increasingly profound and, I hope eventually, to transcend the mere beauty and wonder of a changing world to become images that change the world itself.