

FrameWork 5/18

Jessica Karuhanga on Oliver Husain

An unannounced arrival is our point of departure. We enter and exit through the same frame.



In a dark space we wade through our solitude. We sometimes do this in collective strides. This space is illuminated by a moving image in the distance. A single green light bulb hovers on a stand and a projection of alternating coloured patterns cascades across the contours of the space. The pace of these patterns are determined by the fan of a low-lying machine. It flutters tirelessly. I unearth these moments after revelling in the vestiges of my initial encounter with Oliver Husain's *French Exit*. These encounters thrust somewhere into the wave of voices grunting, sighing and humming in his video-installation. These vocal sounds alternate with the musical cadence of the video's score in beautiful discordance. A visual undulation of alternating images seem to mimic the patterns of flaps and flipping billboard signs alongside highways and vibrant intersections.

Herein lies a multitude of suggestive entryways and deviations. As a performer invested in the poetics of movement I could not divorce the various modalities of witnessing from the physicality of the installation itself or the effect of the performers onscreen. Viewers become significant players in generating meaning in the poiesis of this work. I leave the space less certain of where a frame ends and begins. So I resign myself to return.

The coloured shapes of a spectral projection roll along the walls, ceiling and corners. They bend at the room's edges. These forms fade into tonal hues weaving through the punctured sheets of partitions that hover above the ground. These partitions are supported by lighting or speaker stands positioned at angles that cut diagonally through the space. They gently push your navigation alongside the periphery of the room. These forms hint toward signification. Perhaps they are clues toward the production and infrastructure behind the filmic references and components on the installation. The placement of these walls suggest a scattering of orientations. These structures can be experienced from all sides. However, they still direct our movement, like a beam of light, toward a sonic syncopation accumulating in the far stretches of the room. These gentle barriers become physical and aural breaks echoing the tempo of the undulating musical sequence. Mindful of this rhythm, slowly passing by other viewers, I notice how the bars composing the curtains rupture the cyclical cascade of the coloured light. The blue becomes green and then red. These curtains subtly sway from the incidental wind of our passing bodies. It is as if these structures were responding to the immediacy of our stride and with that reflecting our varied vantages and ways of witnessing.



A second partition guides us across a threshold to a third space, a new moment, and positioning. Looking back to these hanging structures I step onto grey carpet to face a row of seats that act as both aesthetic prop and support for the bodies they temporarily hold. Together these elements stage a space. Their form is as deliberate as any other moment we have experienced so far. The sound has grown louder and seems to envelop the room at the height of those who are seated. I choose to lean against the wall. I start somewhere in the middle of the video only to watch it for several loops, turns and revolutions. I lean my body downward to press my ear towards one of the four speakers. I move along the contours of the carpeted zone as though each speaker were a designated trace of an agent within the chorus.

The video begins staged before a revolving door at a familiar location in Toronto, Canada. The first performer, dressed in a winter coat and boots, appears to make instinctive yet deliberate movements. They seem to reach, twist, and extend toward and away from the spinning panes of glass. There are myriad reflections on and through these sweeping sheets. With each successive pass the door's mechanical etching becomes entwined with the percussive beat. These sounds become one. A series of vignettes begin to slowly brew. Three performers, with painted nails and matching striped costumes, emerge in the following scene. They wade through the hallways and rooms of the building and the frame. The image begins to break apart and diffuse into oscillating splits. The sound stretches. Their bodies seem to occupy the interstitial space between these parts. Their fragmented bodies nearly converge. The performers are mirrors to one another while simultaneously occupying the space of their pure seclusion. The visual ripple progresses as another performer stretches their arm then turns their hand toward a space existing beyond the expanse of the video's frame. As they dance they sway and bend down toward some forceful energy that is entirely invisible to those of us viewers who are still lingering. Yet, in this impossible grasping this aura is vivid. Their voices wheeze, grunt and groan while they slowly meditate on the contours of the space they are ultimately trying to comprehend. They intuitively feel out the edges. They are strangely distraught while they perform these actions. Their whirling movement mirrors the cascading light caressing the walls near the entrance/exit on Husain's installation. The viewers vibrate to this movement. We are moved movers. Their ceaseless repetition builds and builds throughout the video until the revolving is dizzying, dispersed and eventually disintegrates.



French Exit sets up a series of moments, interactions or possible modalities of witnessing that seem to recall filmic montage techniques. To witness these choreographic intimacies on screen brings new meaning to the generative power of breaks in our own independent strides. To pause, delay, and tread gently. We feel we may stretch out our gaze. There is a generosity in this presentation as your eyes are drawn back towards the structures we have long passed and you see the surfaces of these objects differently.