

# Sheepframes

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## Sheepman and the Sheared Millennium Film Workshop

Much of the independent film activity in England seems to be in the area of "the structural film": the possession of an optical printer by the London Film-makers Co-op has allowed the filmmakers to involve themselves in the conditions of the filmmaking process. It's in this context that Mike Leggett's *Sheepman & the Sheared* presents itself as a particularly ambitious example.

*Sheepman & the Sheared* is a film in seven parts, lasting two hours and a quarter. The first part, "Sheep," is an example of utilizing found footage: the inclusion of "mistakes," in this case, flash frames, marks, splices, marker boards, refers the viewer to the materiality of the image. The found footage consists of out-takes from what was, apparently, a documentary on sheep. The footage displays how the seamless order of most conventional films, either fictional or documentary, is actually a *construct*, created by the elimination of such mistakes. The second part, "Sheepman," has the same found footage augmented by other footage, and reworked so that there is a dense overlay which serves to foreground the image, emphasizing the flatness of the image.

"Window," the third and longest part, is the most visually complex section. Its concerns include the relation of the image to the frame, an investigation in the temporal changes of light, and the nature of the zoom and camera movement to the illusion of cinematic space. The film is the record of a country landscape as seen through a window: the film was shot over progressive weeks for a whole year, forty seconds of film a week. "Window," creates an illusion of passing time while reminding the viewer of the condition of film-as-film. Such devices as the zoom and the use of the windowsill as a frame serve to emphasize the *filmic* enterprise, its

position as illusion.

"Film Lane," the fourth part, juxtaposes two illusory movements, forward and backward, such that the space captured by the moving camera begins to create a pulse which eventually flattens the image. "Farm," the fifth part, uses a number of cinematic elements, such as dissolves, cuts, camera movements and movements within the frame, to suggest spatial correlatives. The optical printer is used extensively in this part: the image is reduced, and moves around the size of the "normal" frame. This provides a reflection on the limits of the frame, and of the screen, as a decidedly flat surface.

"Blue Plus Green Plus Red," the sixth part, deals with the issue of color. Colors are here abstracted, then presented in an animated series of circles. The abstractions come from the colors needed in the film emulsion to print the sky, the grass, and berries. As with the rest of the film, the reference, even in this most abstract section, is to landscape. "Sheepwoman," the final part of the film, returns to the found footage which began the film. In addition, there is a filmed sequence involving a woman reading a text on sheep. The reading alternates between synchronous and nonsynchronous sound. Titles appear on the image: an additional statement of the text. The permutations of sound, image, and word are systematically examined.

*Sheepman & the Sheared* has a double focus: it is about the rural landscape, and about the processes of film. Either way, it's an examination of a palpable reality. The title of the film is indicative. Sheepmen guard the sheep; the sheared refers to a stripping of the sheep. In *Sheepman & the Sheared*, Leggett delicately negotiates a dialectic between the creation of images, and stripping the images of their illusionism. The comprehensiveness of his task provides the film with its interest: the evident intelligence and diligence make the film an imposing work in the canon of the British structural film.