

ISSUE 44

# BARTLEBY REVIEW

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The stand out work on a personal level was *Balmoral Hotel*, a film of a dancer moving from Pigeon Park along East Hastings Street, finally entering the bar of the titular location, and in an unfortunate moment of camp, ordering a beer. While the description of the film suggested it to be the story of a First Nations female sex worker, the true beauty of the work comes from the fact that this dance occurred in a real setting that was perhaps more important than the dance. This stretch of Vancouver is a well worn place where residents may or may not react to the presence of a camera, whether from their inability to notice it or the fact that the environment is so active already that it may seem irrelevant. The dancer is an aestheticized centre point that keeps this film from being a voyeuristic exploitation of the abject, while maintaining a freedom to document this space and these people.

A few weeks prior to the screening of these films, *Tokyo-Ga*, a Wim Wenders documentary played at the same theatre. In this film Wenders spoke to fellow German director Werner Herzog about his goals as a filmmaker. While Herzog's ambitions were presented with a near religious zeal, Wenders described his aims as an attempt to "just look without trying to prove anything." This can run the danger of boredom, but also the potential of true importance.

—Zeb Zang

## If you look long enough

written  
by

### Zeb Zang

about  
the  
festival

*Canada's Top Ten Film Festival*  
The Cinematheque  
1131 Howe Street, Vancouver, BC  
January 8–17, 2016



"FOR SALE: BABY SHOES, NEVER WORN."  
Allegedly, this was Hemingway's  
answer to the challenge of writing a  
six word story.



Its brevity prompts the reader to produce a context and extend a web of implications to give this simple statement meaning. The constant challenge to do more with less is not simply about economy, but an attempt to make a story feel effortless, and natural. However what Hemingway wrote was not a story but an advertisement. In deviating from the expected structure he made six words a meaningful narrative.

In this year's showcase of the Top Ten Canadian short films, the best works also deviated from the norm, while others were stunted by a faithfulness to filmic conventions and a fear of simplicity. In the mix of fiction, documentary, and experimental works, it was most often the fictional films that felt overstuffed with content in a vain attempt to hold the attention of their viewers. In the film *Never Steady Never Still* a young man returns home from working on an oil rig after accidentally killing a man. Though beautifully shot, this work exemplifies the tendency to rely on continuous twists, making the film jump too quickly through problems and plot points.

Principally the fictional works in the festival suffered most from their unwillingness to recognize that the short film is not a compressed feature length, but an entirely unique medium. In this unwillingness to submit to the form, stories are instead told through overly didactic dialogue, simultaneously providing patronizing exposition and unsatisfying resolution. They feel unreal and almost insulting in the brash way they try to communicate character and story, such as the dialogue between teenagers in *Overpass*, where nearly every other redundant word is "fuck" or "bitch".

Perhaps reality gives confidence. Both the documentary and the experimental work (categories that overlapped in such films as *Bacon and God's Wrath* or *Bring Me the Head of Tim Horton*) were the most willing to disregard convention in order to produce something of note. The best films were less impatient in their delivery, and willing to stray from stilted, stern faced subjects, towards levity and, at times, genuine comedy.



Image: Balmoral Hotel on 159 East Hastings Street.  
Courtesy of the author.