

RODNEY GRAHAM

for an unemployed visual artist. I managed to get my foot in the door, writing and producing a clip for a local Vancouver band with a record contract; the video did in fact help break the band in the US (and still gets played on oldies video shows). Emboldened, I tried approaching other groups with some rather slickly drawn storyboards. Jeff Wall actually did the renderings; unlike me, he could draw, and so answered my appeals for help. It would be great to see these sketches now but, alas, they're lost. However, I can still recall a mental image of the Headpins' lead guitarist in a space suit in a vast white eighteenth-century room, facing an ancient figure who lies prone in a great bed; this is Darby Mills, the band's lead singer, and she is gesturing to the guitarist, slowly raising her fist in a heavy-metal salute. . . .

Eventually, I got nowhere and gave up, having learned a few lessons about film production and hauling band equipment. Some of my proposals were probably unrealistic, but I did see my ideas reach fruition in the mid-1990s video masterpiece *November Rain*. (I'm just kidding about *November Rain*.)

Later, I attempted to incorporate elements of this "nascent art form" into my own artworks, largely without success. But I did make one piece, *The Phonokinetoscope*, 2001, which followed from the radical premise that although some juxtapositions of sound and image are better than others, pretty much all of them are aesthetically acceptable. The deliberately *asynchronous* work was a 16-mm film loop that the viewer could activate by engaging the stylus of a turntable, placing it on a vinyl record at any point that he or she wished. I was consciously replicating the earliest attempts at film/sound synchronization by William K. L. Dickson at Thomas Edison's Black Maria film studio in New Jersey. The *Dickson Experimental Sound Film*, as archivists now call it, depicts Dickson himself playing a light operatic barcarole on the violin, while two male Edison employees dance together in accompaniment.

Curiously, the image (forty feet of 35-mm film) and the sound (approximately sixteen seconds on a wax cylinder) of Dickson's proto-music video (as we might call it), although shot and recorded circa 1895, were not actually combined until 2000, the same year I shot my homage to Edison's studio. Indeed, it was nothing more than governmental interdepartmental bureaucracy that kept the image and the sound apart (the film was in the hands of the Library of Congress, whereas the wax cylinder was with the National Park Service, the administrator of the Edison National Historic Site)—but this fact does little to diminish the pleasure this piece of synchronicity gives me. □

RODNEY GRAHAM IS AN ARTIST BASED IN VANCOUVER. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

