

GREY CITY JOURNAL

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MOVING PICTURES

Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival

Rules of the Road (Su Friedrich, 1993).

Part of the program *Dykes on the Road* Tues. Nov. 9, 7pm at Chicago Filmmakers.

It's always disappointing to see New Yorkers give in to the automobile; of all people, they should know better. Su Friedrich's narrator, conflicted because of the ecological implications, gives in without much of a struggle, glorying in her ability to drive out to the country at a moment's notice and the luxury of dragging two tons of steel two blocks to the laundry just to wash a few pounds of clothes. The implication is that doing without a car is a sort of asceticism that flesh-and-blood humans can't maintain against the irresistible temptations of an automobile.

Friedrich's car fetishism digs a bit deeper, however. The story is about a lesbian relationship ultimately symbolized by a beige station wagon with fake wood paneling. The narrator's lover buys it; they share it, take trips in it, and argue in it (their reckless driving during the fights says something about the sometimes self-destructive desperation of relationships at the same time that it highlights the danger of letting people operate such lethal machines). The smell of the car is the lover's smell (such is the effect of chain-smoking); their time together is time spent in the car. When they break up, the narrator is haunted by beige station wagons, each one a painful reminder of her ex-lover.

Visually, the film is a series of pans that center on station wagons—dozens of them, sometimes four in one shot, as the filmmaker replicates the obsessive fixation of the narrator. The lack of any identifiable people highlights the use of objects as representations of humans. The technique works surprisingly well, especially as one becomes amazed and disgusted at just how many of these early 80's monstrosities exist. Recommended.—MR