

OPPOSITIONAL AND STIGMATIZED CINEMA

Forbidden and Taboo

Curated by Janis Crystal Lipzin and Caroline Savage

Sunday, February 18th, 2007 at 7:30 pm – Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Since the origins of cinema, this medium has been under attack by censors, government, religious groups, and conformists that fear its potent influence. This series, **Oppositional and Stigmatized Cinema**, presents some notable examples of the aesthetically, sexually and politically subversive films that have emerged from diverse eras and cultural identities. These remarkable works have, at one time or another, been identified as oppositional or stigmatized by the mainstream. Many have been the source of heated controversy or censorship. Some actually have been banned or subjected to efforts at suppression.

The first recorded public protest against the exhibition of an erotic movie occurred in April 1894 in New York. Only two weeks after Thomas Edison's kinetoscope motion picture machine first appeared in New York, angry citizens demonstrated against the exhibition of an erotic Edison film, *Dolorita in the Passion Dance*. Since this early moment in film history, filmmakers have been under pressure to refrain from producing or exhibiting sexually explicit films. Nevertheless, the San Francisco Cinematheque has, since its founding over 45 years ago, demonstrated a courageous exhibition stance in the face of omnipresent censorious efforts of the disapproving.

Blow Job (1963-64) by Andy Warhol; 16mm, b&w, silent, 30 minutes at 18fps, print from The Museum of Modern Art.

“At the end of ‘63 when I decided to shoot *Blow Job*, I called up Charles Rydell and asked him to star in it. I told him that all he'd have to do was lie back and then about five different boys would come in and keep on blowing him until he came, but that we'd just show his face, 'Fine. I'll do it.' We set everything up for next Sunday afternoon, and then we waited and waited and Charles didn't show up. I called his apartment and he wasn't there either, so then I called Jerome Hill's suite in the Algonquin and he answered the phone and I screamed, 'Charles! Where are you?' and he said, 'What do you mean, where am I, you know where I am, you called me,' and I said, 'we've got the cameras ready and five boys are here, everything's set up.' He was shocked; he said, 'Are you crazy? I thought you were kidding. I'd never do that!' We wound up using a good-looking kid who happened to be hanging around the Factory that day, and years later I spotted him in a Clint Eastwood movie.” (Andy Warhol)

Hermes Bird (1979) by James Broughton; 16mm, color, sound, 11 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema Co-op.

“*Hermes Bird* is a celebration and an apotheosis of the masculine miracle; the transformative powers of the phallus, revealed as a phenomenon of glowing beauty and wonder. Because the film occurs in extreme slow motion one has the opportunity to witness for the first time in cinema the delicate pulsations and tremors and changes of the penis as it grows erect, until at last, reaching outward and upward, it takes flight toward its climax. The filmmaker-poet has written a group of lyrical poems for the sound of the film they are spoken by the poet, and they sing praises for the radiant masculine mystery of the ‘sacred firebird,’ the ‘holy acrobat shaped for surprise’ which is every man’s pride and, hopefully, his joy.” (James Broughton)

This film portrays a phenomenon usually occurring in one minute stretched to 10 minutes. It was shot at ten times normal speed (250 fps) with the camera that shot the Atom bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in 1953-54. Hermes (Mercury) is the Greek messenger of the gods. In ancient times, Hermes’ bearded head adorned the top of road markers called herms. Midway up the rectangular stone herms were Hermes’ other head; erect male genitals that were often stroked by passersby for good luck.

More Intimacy (1999) by Chun-Hui (Tony) Wu; Super8mm, b&w, magnetic sound, 5.5 minutes print from filmmaker

More Intimacy uses reproduction, repetition and inter-film gauges to explore film’s essential elements. Regular-8, Super-8 and 16mm was contact printed onto Super-8 in a dark room using Man Ray’s revolutionary technique, the photogram. Films themselves become the object resulting in an intimate touch between different gauge films. Elements of image/no image; sound/no sound present an illusion (pornography) that the filmmaker has created on film (screen). Behind the illusion, these elements allow the viewer to discover the source of film: film itself as material, the mechanical movement projected through light. (Tony Wu)

The Color of Love (1994) by Peggy Ahwesh; 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema Co-op

The Color of Love binds the fetishism of Joseph Cornell’s *Rose Hobart* to the sexual transgressions of Barbara Rubin’s *Christmas on Earth*, to name a couple of classics of American avant-garde film. *The Color of Love* began with a deteriorating, found-footage porn film from the 1970s that was given to the filmmaker. She re-photographed and hand-tinted the imagery, giving the film a stained glass effect. The film deconstructs the original film narrative, and at times abstracts the imagery and the body. In 1964, whenever *Christmas on Earth* was screened, one expected the police to close the theater—and sometimes they did. I doubt the NYPD is going to invade the Whitney, but when I saw *The Color of Love* there at a press screening, I had the old familiar feeling—that I better watch my back. (Amy Taubin in *The Village Voice*, April 18, 1995)

Christmas on Earth (1963) by Barbara Rubin; 16mm, color, sound, 29 minutes, print from Filmmakers Co-op

“*Christmas on Earth* is an ethereal tangle of Dayglo faces and dangling cocks, guys posing as Greek statues and girls painted like archaic fertility goddesses, fingers probing cunts and assholes in bleached black-and-white and mega-close-up. The camera explores bodies with a kind of ecstatic curiosity, neither clinical nor precious so much as bluntly innocent. Rubin’s paint-splattered backdrop and overall harsh lighting gave her mise-en-scène a primitive elegance suggesting a cross between Paleolithic cave painting and Aubrey Beardsley.” (J. Hoberman)

“A woman; a man; the black of the pubic hair; the cunt’s moon mountains and canyons. As the film goes, image after image, the most private territories of the body are laid open for us...a syllogism: Barbara Rubin has no shame; angels have no shame; Barbara Rubin is an angel.” (Jonas Mekas)

“so i shoot & shoot & shriek
up over slow & fast down & often all the way around & rewind many times
the subject, what else could it be, was all about cocks & cunts & fantasies
that freely expressed our sexual needs & dreaming beliefs
painted on their nude bodies
so i spent 3 months chopping the hours of film up
into a basket
and then toss and toss
flip and toss
and one by one
absently enchantedly destined to splice it together
and separate onto two different reels
and then project on reel half the size
inside the other reel full screen size
and then i showed it
and some tell me, ‘my what a good editing job that is indeed!’”
(Barbara Rubin)

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Founded in 1961, San Francisco Cinematheque is dedicated to the advancement of experimental and artist-made cinema that challenges the limits of the art form and offers original aesthetic experiences.

Program notes by Jennifer Blaylock and Janis Crystal Lipzin