

SAN FRANCISCO
CINEMATHEQUE

Oppositional and Stigmatized
program three
Cinema Obsessed

Curated by Janis Crystal Lipzin and Caroline Savage

Sunday, April 8, 2007 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.

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 kinoscope 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 controversial films. Nevertheless, San Francisco Cinematheque has, since its founding over forty-five years ago, demonstrated a courageous exhibition stance in the face of omnipresent censorious efforts of the disapproving.

Amos Vogel asserts in *Film as a Subversive Art*, "We are inundated by ambiguity, allegory, and complexity, by an existential humanism devoid of certainty or illusion. The committed artists of our day, [have] the most nakedly sensitized antenna extended toward our collective secrets." The artists included in this four-part series illuminate these secrets with works providing radical challenges to typical cinematic modes of presentation, production and representation, cinema that is forbidden, shocking, blasphemous, extremist, defiant.

Tonight's films, broke new filmic ground in the 1960's and 1970's and broadly combine analysis of the structuring of perception with an exploration of film's material components: time, light, space and celluloid. They all take a radical stance against the psychological identification that one expects from mainstream cinema. Some of the films dispense with photographic image altogether. Other films re-use footage that would be otherwise discarded or was shot by anonymous others.

The program begins with Peter Gidal's *Clouds*, which uses obsessive repetition as materialist practice not psychoanalytical indulgence, followed by the intellectually paradoxical *Hapax Legomena II: Poetic Justice* by Hollis Frampton, where the themes of sexuality and infidelity are "projected" in narrative sequence as a script with the voice revealing the story; *Straight and Narrow* by Beverly Grant Conrad and Tony Conrad, which expands and extends the flicker phenomena to attack our visual sensibilities and optic nerves; *Rate of Change* by Bill Brand, a film with no original, no frames, only slow continuously shifting colors created in the film lab; Annabel Nicolson's *Frames*, created in a contact printer with 8mm color film that had deteriorated in a projection event; *24 Frames Per Second* by Takahiko Iimura, which reduces the examination of time and space to the alternation of black and clear leader with a series of fractions; *1933* by Joyce Wieland, which reworks found footage, camera outtakes and film ends shot in NY.

Clouds (1969) by Peter Gidal; 16mm, b&w, silent, 10 minutes, print from LUX

Frantic frame edge defining nothingness. The anti-illusionist project engaged by *Clouds* is that of dialectic materialism. There is virtually nothing ON screen, in the sense of IN screen. Obsessive repetition as materialist practice not psychoanalytical indulgence. (Peter Gidal, November 1975, quoted from www.lux.org.uk)

“Gidal’s film *Clouds* establishes an awareness of position, a confrontation, and it takes you back to you from the far reaches of eternal space the confrontation as with you.” (Steve Dwoskin, *Independent Cinema*)

Hapax Legomena II: Poetic Justice (1972) by Hollis Frampton; 16mm, b&w, silent, 32 minutes, print from the Film-makers’ Cooperative

Hapax Legomena [from the Greek, “things said once”] was series of works of which this is number two.

“Frampton presents us with a ‘scenario’ of extreme complexity in which themes of sexuality, infidelity, voyeurism are ‘projected’ in a narrative sequence entirely through the voice telling the tale—again it is the first person singular speaking, however, in the present tense and addressing the characters as ‘you,’ ‘your lover,’ and referring to an ‘I.’ We see, on screen, only the physical aspect of a script, papers resting on a table... and the projection is that of a film as consonant with the projection of the mind.” (Annette Michelson)

“At various moments I have found each [section of *Hapax Legomena*] uncomfortable, abrasive, trying to my capacity to sustain attention; but while that is true, I have to remind myself that I am simply getting my just desserts: there’s nothing in any of the films, after all, that I didn’t put there, and I did include those difficulties, those abrasions, those vexations to the power to attend, so that I have nothing to complain of. (Hollis Frampton, interviewed in *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* by Scott MacDonald.)

Straight and Narrow (1970) by Beverly Grant Conrad and Tony Conrad; 16mm, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

(This film is not recommended for viewers who are sensitive to stroboscopic light flashes.)

Soundtrack by Terry Riley and John Cale.

Straight and Narrow an outgrowth of Tony Conrad’s education in mathematics and music and is a study in subjective color and visual rhythm.

Although it is printed on black and white film, the hypnotic pacing of the images will cause viewers to experience a programmed gamut of hallucinatory color effects. *Straight And Narrow* uses the flicker phenomenon not as an end in itself, but as an effectuator of other related phenomena. In this film the colors which are so illusory in [Tony Conrad’s] *The Flicker* are visible and under the programmed control of the filmmaker. Also, by using images which alternate in a vibrating flickering schedule, a new impression of motion and texture is created. (Tony Conrad)

Rate of Change (1972) by Bill Brand; 16mm, color, sound, 18 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Rate of Change is a collaborative work between the filmmaker and the film lab, in which the filmmaker gave the laboratory specific printing instructions to create a film which consists of gradually changing color. [*Acts of Light*] is a trilogy consisting of *Rate of Change*, *Angular Momentum* and *Circles of Confusion*. Together they develop a study of pure color based on the notion that film is essentially change and not motion. The films build one on the other as first pure change, then relational change, and finally, irrational change. They can be seen together or as separate works and demonstrate Brand’s concerns with systemic structures.

Therefore, this section [*Rate of Change*] has no original, no frames, only slow continuously shifting colors, cycling around the perimeter of the spectrum. The changes are so slow as to be unseen, yet they alter perception of the color. (Bill Brand)

Frames (1973) by Annabel Nicolson; 16mm, color, silent, 8 minutes, print from LUX

“The original image was from something I’d shot myself, standard 8mm material that I’d shot in a village in Italy. The material had gone through a process of deterioration. I’d used it in performing and taken it through a slide projector, I had an old Russian slide projector, very cheap, that didn’t have a fan, so it was completely silent, which was why I liked it. I took the lens out of this projector so it created a gap where I could pull the film strip through and because the lens was out of the projector it meant the image could be focused on different surfaces. Instead of the image falling onto a screen as normally it would do I could direct it around the room with the lens in my hand. It made the focusing quite critical. The image could go in and out of focus quite easily.

“I was using this material, trying to focus on individual images, rather than having a sequence and duration. I suppose I was treating it like a series of still images, because it was going through a slide projector, not a movie projector. In the process of this it got very torn and scratched and it was that material I eventually put in

the contact printer and made into a 16mm film, *Frames*.” (Annabel Nicolson, from interview with Felicity Sparrow 2003, quoted from luxonline.com)

24 Frames Per Second (1975, revised 1978) by Takahiko Imura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 12 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Like Jonas Mekas in New York, Imura in Tokyo was instrumental in bringing together and organizing Japanese independent and avant-garde filmmakers and events in the early 1960's. *24 Frames Per Second* manifests film as a device of time. The film deals with the problems of durational experience and its relationship to counting and numbers. Following the tradition of constructivism and rational and structural assemblies, this work reduces film to a serial process. Mathematics provides a structure in which to define time.

“Anti-illusionism is an occasion for a denial of imagism – working without the photographic image.” Daryl Chin

“Imura is one of the most important conceptual artists working in any medium.” Malcolm LeGrice

“This film and in particular the function of sound within it will vary freely from moment to moment, viewer to viewer. Totally different in its physical surface from most of the sound films of the 1970s, the film's openness of articulation of sound stands as an emblem for the new investigations of sound-image relationship during this period. Allowing the full force of its meaningful symbolic oppositions between black and white, silence and sound, to resonate, the film brings these issues forth within [the] larger context of its (and the viewer's) probing of the nature, the limits and the possibilities of human consciousness.” (Larry Gottheim, note published in *10 Years of Living Cinema*, 1982)

1933 (1967/68) by Joyce Wieland; 16mm, color, sound, 4 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

“That film was totally by accident. I'd been out with Shirley Clarke, working on another film. On that day, I came back with a little bit of color negative and then shot that out the window, out of the loft on Chambers Street. It was only after seeing it that I said ‘that looks like it should be 1933 and so I put that on the film and made into segments.’ It maybe sounds totally insane – but when I was a child, I wanted to be part of what my mother was doing and she'd be making a pie and you know how she cut the edges? And I could have the edges. That was my little part and I could make something out of those. It relates a lot to that being at the fringes...It's taking something that no one would believe is worth anything and what can I make out of it. You know, in the sixties, when people were making everything out of shot, like Rauschenberg. You can get something that no one wants and you transform it, it's a transformation of garbage into something that really works.” Joyce Wieland from catalog, *In Search of the Far Shore: The Films of Joyce Wieland*, Canada House, 1988.

Program notes by Steve Polta and Janis Crystal Lipzin

San Francisco Cinematheque's series, Oppositional and Stigmatized, concludes Sunday, April 29, 2007.

The fourth and final screening will include L'Age D'Or by Luis Buñuel and The Seashell and the Clergyman by Germaine Dulac.

Please see www.sfcinematheque.org for complete details.