

THE BRAKHAGE CENTER SYMPOSIUM 2011

The Brakhage Center Symposium, already a tradition in the not very traditional world of avant-garde filmmaking, will again be hosted this year by the University of Colorado at Boulder. In a weekend dedicated to the exploration of new ideas in cinema art, guest curators Sally Berger, Scott MacDonald, and Bill Nichols will explore expanded notions of documentary and ethnography. Presenters will include James Benning, Nao Bustamante, Alfred Guzzetti, Abraham Ravett, and Lucien Castaing-Taylor.

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

Friday, March 11th

7:00 PM- **Evening Program:** *Sweetgrass* (2010), 100 mins
9:00 PM **Location:** Muenzinger Auditorium at the University of Colorado at Boulder

Saturday, March 12th

10:00 AM- **Morning Program:** *Community and Collaborative Filmmaking*
12:00 PM **Location:** Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus
Curator: Sally Berger

1:30 PM- **Afternoon Program:** *A New Mode in Town*
5:30 PM **Location:** Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus
Curator: Bill Nichols

6:00 PM- **Evening Session:** Nao Bustamante performs *Tierra y Libertad - Kevlar® 2945*
7:00 PM **Location:** Black Box Theater in ATLAS B2 on the UCB Campus
Curator: Sally Berger

Sunday March 13th

10:00 AM- **Location:** Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus
12:00 PM **Guests:** Alfred Guzzetti and James Benning.
Curator: Scott MacDonald

2:00 PM- **Afternoon Program**
4:30 PM **Curator:** Scott MacDonald

5:00 PM- **New Work by James Benning**
7:00 PM

Friday, March 11th

Evening Program: *Sweetgrass* (2010), 100 mins

Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Muenzinger Auditorium at the University of Colorado at Boulder

This year the symposium is to feature the film *Sweetgrass* (2010), by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, presented in 35mm. *Sweetgrass* follows the last modern-day cowboys, who lead their flocks of sheep for the last time up into Montana's breathtaking and often dangerous Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains for summer pasture.

New Yorker, Movies' Pick 2010
New York Times, Critics' Pick 2010
Village Voice, Film Pick 2010
Washington Post, Critics' Pick 2010
Play-Doc International Documentary Film Festival (Spain), Best Feature 2010

This event will be preceded by opening remarks from the 2011 symposium curators. After the feature program, filmmaker Lucien Castaing-Taylor will be available for a question and answer session.

Sponsors of the 2011 Brakhage Center Symposium include: *The William H. Donner Foundation in conjunction with The Brakhage Center (Daniel Boord, Director), The University of Colorado College of Arts and Sciences, the CU Film Studies Program, the CU Anthropology Dept., the Center for the American West, and The Roser Foundation.*

The Brakhage Center
ATLAS 329
c/o Film Studies, Campus Box 316
Univ. of Colorado at Boulder, CO
80309-0316

Saturday, March 12th

Morning Program: *Community and Collaborative Filmmaking*

Time: 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

Location: Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus

Curator: Sally Berger

Community and Collaborative Filmmaking: Directors and Subjects—Chang, Johnson, Lockhart, Simms

Documentarians approach their topics through various means; when it comes to working with their human subjects, their techniques often reflect a specific methodology. In this compilation program, the relationship between the artist and subject is investigated; the filmmakers collaborate with their subjects using various techniques of participation, performance, and observation.

Jeannie Simms explores biography, speech, and historical legacy using stories, texts and biographies from real and fictional people to find the interconnections between subjectivity, language, environment, and representation. Her *Readymaids* series involved performance workshops with migrant Indonesian domestic workers she met in Hong Kong. In *Readymaids: Tri Suyati Speaks Mandarin* (3 min) and *Readymaids: I Want the Kind of Store That Has Pricetags* (6 min), the women explore aspects of their personal experience as migrant laborers in an attempt to regain their sense of identity.

Liza Johnson's film, *In the Air* (22 min), combines elements of fiction and documentary to explore the legacy of economic crisis in the filmmaker's hometown of Portsmouth, in southeastern Ohio. Three friends spend their days in dead-end jobs, a final year in school, and in frustration with their parents. The local circus school offers a rare departure from daily tedium. The cast is made up of people acting out scenes from their everyday life in collaboration with the Cirque D'Art circus school.

Patty Chang journeys to central Asia and China to seek the history and culture of the Uyghur people in *Minor* (25 min). She visits a natural history museum and with a hidden camera begins her record of an ancient culture struggling for survival today. Through a series of performance actions and interviews she uncovers the hidden legacy of a maternal culture, explores the Uyghur language, and inhabits the physical terrain.

Sharon Lockhart's *Podwórka* (31 min) is shot in Lodz, Poland's courtyards -- playgrounds for the children that live in the surrounding apartment buildings. These spaces provide a sanctuary from the traffic and the commotion of the city, and in six different courtyards throughout Lodz, parking lots, storage units, and metal armatures become jungle gyms, sandboxes, and soccer fields. A series of fleeting city-life interludes, *Podwórka* is both a study of a specific place and an evocation of the resourcefulness of childhood. **SB**

*****This program will be followed by a 1 hour and 30 minute lunch break*****

Saturday, March 12th

Afternoon Program: *A New Mode in Town*

Time: 1:30 PM-5:30 PM

Location: Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus

Curator: Bill Nichols

Profiles in Performativity: Why a New Mode? Guest: Abraham Ravett

Just as feature films divide into genres, including, perhaps, the European art film and Third Cinema, along with melodrama, sci-fi and westerns, so the documentary divides into different modes. Whereas genres involve thematic as well as stylistic issues, modes involve mainly formal ones. Any one mode can take up a wide variety of thematic concerns. Akin to style, these formal concerns can be considered questions of voice: of how the filmmaker speaks about the world we share, with what techniques and tone, what perspective, what sense of direct or not so direct involvement, and so on. The literal speaking voice of the filmmaker or a narrator is but one part of the question of voice in this sense. It involves camera placement, lighting, music, titles, animation, and, to a significant degree, editing as well. Each of the different modes is a different way of giving voice to a perspective on the world. This program is dedicated to a fresh, distinctive mode: the performative.

Performative documentaries contrast with other modes by de-emphasizing the role of an informative voice-over commentary; from poetic arrangements that draw attention to their own formal beauty to the unobtrusive observational powers of the filmmaker, to his or her interactive participation with social actors--often through interviews--and those documentaries that reflexively draw attention to the act of watching documentaries in the first place. Performative documentaries stress the emotional engagement between the filmmaker and his or her subject. They give expressiveness priority over persuasiveness; they seek to take us into the interior of what a given form of experience feels like to those who live it, including the filmmaker.

(Profiles in Performativity: Why a New Mode? cont'd.)

The filmmaker of a performative documentary may well make significant use of techniques that achieve much the same emotional impact as they do in fiction films such as musical accompaniment, collage, imaginative and vivid reenactments, or evocative (perhaps transformative) editing.

Because lived experience that takes on larger social significance has been so central to many political movements grounded in trauma such as genocide, oppression and discrimination it is perhaps not surprising that a sizeable number of performative documentaries stem from the struggles of the gay and lesbian community and the challenge of giving representational form to the Holocaust. The works in this program demonstrate this facet of trauma associated with performative documentaries and simultaneously give a sense of the development of the performative mode of the last fifty to sixty years. **BN**

**Part One:
Precursors and the
Dialectic of Desire**
Fireworks, Kenneth
Anger (1947), 20
mins, *Un Chant
d'Amour*, Jean
Genet (1950), 26
mins

Films from the postwar period such as *Fireworks* and *Un Chant d'Amour* clearly share a common expressive trait with more recent work. Traditionally classified as avant-garde, their inclusion here also demonstrates the porous boundary between not only documentary and fiction but also between documentary and the avant-garde. Made well before *Stonewall*, these two films give vivid expression to the urge to find a form of visual representation for forbidden desire. That the hero of *Fireworks* becomes the victim of a sado-masochistic ritual could be read as testimony to the conventional idea of homosexual self-loathing, but it can also easily be read as a symptomatic expression of the persecution of the gay male and of the social ostracism and punishment that gay desire provokes--along with the undercurrent of ecstasy that cannot be denied its moment of exposure. This idea takes even more vivid form in Jean Genet's film, *Un Chant d'Amour*, in which the gay characters are held within a prison, but it is a prison in which the guards as well as inmates share a longing for connection, intimacy and sexual release. These films give performative expression to the filmmakers' own deep investment in the arduous and incomplete search for a form and a social context in which their desires might achieve legitimacy.

**Part Two: Trauma,
Memory and
Recovery of Lost
Histories**
The March,
Abraham Ravett
(1999), 25 mins
The Maelstrom,
Peter Forgacs 1997,
60 mins

The second pair of films is more recent and explores the question of trauma. Events that cannot be grasped coherently, that escape comprehension, that ravage the emotions and the very sense of self are at the core of *The March* and *The Maelstrom*. Abraham Ravett's film explores, *The March*, over time: the tension between his desire to learn more about how his mother survived the Holocaust and a brutal death march and her desire to both speak of it and put it behind her. Fragmentary, and expressive of the pain that resides within and cannot be fully shared, *The March* haunts the viewer with its effort to cross a gulf that resists all efforts to do so. Peter Forgacs takes a different tack in *The Maelstrom*. Here he generates an interpretative frame for what began as home movies shot principally by the Peereboom family in The Netherlands in the years leading up to and including World War II, and the Nazi occupation of their county. As prosperous Dutch Jews, the Peerebooms led a joyful, privileged life and were, like many, unheeding of the warning signs around them; signs Forgacs offers to us with just enough clarity to generate a rising sense of impending doom. Marriages and births slowly yield to deportations and death. Forgacs is far less concerned with sketching out the history of the 1930s and 40s as the years pertained to the Netherlands than to convey a performative sense of what it might have felt like to live that experience directly. Adding to the ominous tone that Forgacs's editing and music set for the Peereboom footage, is additional footage taken at the home of the Reich's Commissioner for the Netherlands, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. The two forms of footage appear to be on the collision course that cross-editing traditionally implies, and that is certainly true here.

**Part Three: Family
Matters**
His Mother's Voice
Dennis Tupicoff
(1997), 14 mins,
Tarnation, Jonathan
Caouette (2004),
clip

The final pair of films turns to explicitly personal and family trauma. Dennis Tupicoff chooses a radio interview with the mother of a young man who was shot as the documentary basis for his film, *His Mother's Voice*, but he then opts to give expressive power to her experience by illustrating her response to the news of the shooting with animation. The film actually completes her account mid-way through but then continues as the same audio tape plays for a second time, but to an entirely different animated accompaniment. The anxiety, fear, and grief experienced by the mother take precedence over any more informative or interactive impulse: we are left to contemplate the emotional depths of her experience for what it was, rather than place it within a larger interpretative frame. Jonathan Caouette, in his famous \$218 film, *Tarnation*, explores trauma from the point of view of a son whose mother experiences a life of abuse: some at the hands of her own parents and relatives, some at the hands of the medical establishment. In addition, Caouette gives powerful expression to his own experience of being gay in a small town Texas world and his extensive journey of self-discovery, as he simultaneously returns to the past to discover the origins of his mother's insanity and to reaffirm the love that binds them. Like the other films in this program, these two works touch on weighty social issues but strive to present them from the personal, expressive perspective that is the hallmark of the performative documentary.

*****This program will be followed by a 1 hour and 30 minute dinner break*****

Saturday, March 12th

Evening Session: Nao Bustamante performs *Tierra y Libertad - Kevlar® 2945*

Time: 6:00 PM-7:00 PM

Location: Black Box Theater in ATLAS B2 on the UCB Campus

Curator: Sally Berger

Bustamante's performance lecture tracks some of her performance and video works ranging from vulnerable anti-heroines to the dominant and sturdy protectors. Her appearance on Bravo's recent reality television show, "Work of Art: the Next Great Artist" (summer 2010), led to her current work-in-progress, *Tierra y Libertad - Kevlar® 2945* (2011), which she created around the typical Edwardian dress worn by the women that fought in the early part of the Mexican Revolution, from 1910 to 1920. Reproduced in Kevlar®, a space-age fabric typically used for bullet proof vests, Bustamante subjects the re-envisioned garment to ballistic testing to explore its durability and the role of women in combat.

Bustamante is an internationally known, New York based artist, originally from California. She is an alumna of the San Francisco Art Institute, New Genres program and developed her sense of performance as part of the West Coast art scene in the 1980s. Her vulnerable, spontaneous, humorous work encompasses performance art, video installation, visual art, filmmaking, and writing. **SB**

Sunday March 13th

Time: 10:00 AM-7:00 PM

Location: Visual Arts Complex Room 1B20 (Auditorium) on the UCB Campus

Guests: Alfred Guzzetti and James Benning.

Curator: Scott MacDonald

We live in a culture of distraction, and most of our experiences with media involve one or another kind of overload. During the past twenty years, a number of independent filmmakers and videomakers have decided to challenge this pattern by using the film experience to re-train and reinvigorate viewer perceptions of cinematic space and time, and in particular, the representation of place. The films and videos of Peter Hutton, James Benning, Ernie Gehr, Nathaniel Dorsky, Warren Sonbert, Alfred Guzzetti, Sharon Lockhart, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, and the other filmmakers and videomakers who have made contributions to this tendency have often taken one of two rather different forms. Benning and Lockhart have grown increasingly committed to the long single shot, designing films that ask viewers for a form of attention akin to meditation. Benning's *13 Lakes and Ten Skies* present viewers with a succession of ten-minute shots, and the recent digital work *Ruhr* includes a sixty-minute shot; and Lockhart's *Double Tide* challenges her viewers' patience and attention with two forty-five minute shots. The resulting experiences are both beautiful and, for those willing to explore a new form of cinematic attention, liberating. Other moving-image artists, including Dorsky and Guzzetti, have chosen to construct montages of considerable subtlety and complexity, creating film and video experiences akin to musical compositions or to modern poetry (John Ashbery's work, for instance), where the gradual revelation of particulars builds toward an acknowledgment of both the mortality and transience of our experience and its wonder and mystery—and demonstrates the moving-image artist's ability to transform angst into song. **SM**

10:00 AM: Introduction by Scott MacDonald

10:30 AM-12:00 PM: *Double Tide*, Sharon Lockhart (2009), 90 mins

12:00 AM-2:00 PM: ****Lunch Break****

2:00 PM-4:30 PM:

Summerwind (1965) by Nathaniel Dorsky (14 minutes)

Air (1971) by Alfred Guzzetti (18 minutes)

I...Dreaming (1988) by Stan Brakhage (6 minutes)

Triste (1996) by Nathaniel Dorsky (19 minutes)

The Tower of Industrial Life (2000) by Alfred Guzzetti (15minutes)

Aubade (2010) by Nathaniel Dorsky (12 minutes)

Still Point (2009) by Alfred Guzzetti (15 minutes)

4:30-5:00 PM: ****Coffee Break****

5:00 PM-7:00 PM: New Work by James Benning and Closing Remarks

For more information regarding the 2011 Brakhage Symposium contact Don Yannacito at Donald.Yannacito@colorado.edu or by telephone at 303/492-1532.

The Brakhage Center

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