

## Notice What You Notice

The Poetry and Cinema Conference, held in Boulder, Colorado June 24th through 26<sup>th</sup>, was a first-of-its-kind event, as much about the differences as about the similarities of those two mediums. Tom Gunning of the University of Chicago, whose Mellon Grant provided the funding for the conference, stated in his opening remarks: “We want to articulate the abyss or the gap between these two forms.”

The week-end was a collaboration between Naropa University’s Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics and the University of Colorado’s Film Studies and Creative Writing Departments, as well as that institution’s Brakhage Center. Daniel Boord, who heads the Brakhage Center, initially put Gunning in touch with the Kerouac School two years ago, and the various fusions were forged from there.

Although working in different mediums, there has always been an aesthetic fit between Stan Brakhage, a leading figure in the avant-garde film movement, and Allen Ginsberg, who founded the Kerouac School along with fellow poet Anne Waldman. Waldman still heads Naropa’s Summer Writing Program.

Gunning’s presentation included a screening of El Atlantis, one of the few films of New York poet Frank Kuenstler, which depicts the Third Avenue El cutting through the city. As Gunning pointed out: “The footage was shot before the El was closed in May of 1955, but the film’s date is given as 1973.... Cinema, according to some theorists, exists in the present tense.... Yet one could also claim the opposite: every film has already happened; it is by nature historical, a record of the past.... Cinematic time is inherently a two way street, past and present simultaneously.”

One of the major impetuses for the conference was the publication in 2009 of We Saw the Light: Conversations Between the New American Cinema and Poetry by Daniel Kane. Kane, a Senior Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, also presented a film that has rarely been screened, Rudy Burckhardt’s interpretation of Kenneth Koch’s children’s poem The Apple. Kane characterized Koch’s piece as “the poetics of whimsy” and the film as a “mock epic” created at a time (1967) during which “narrative was becoming politically suspect.” In an earlier presentation, Sarah Keller of Colby College had supported that view by saying: “This kind of cinema is disinclined to engage in narrative modes.”

Despite the premise of differentiation, there were some connections made. Michelle Menzies (University of Chicago) offered a direct link between poetry and cinema, citing Frank O’Hara’s The Threepenny Opera (1950): “But Polly, are you a shadow? Is Mackie projected to me by light through film?” Robert Bird (also University of Chicago) stated that: “Cinematic poetry can frequently be seen... in the fluidity of scale and perspective, of epic and lyric, that captures the vulnerability of the conscious world.” James Rosenow (the Clark Art Institute) pointed out that ee cummings had three unproduced screenplays in his archives, scripts he referred to as “film arrangements.” And in her presentation, CU’s Jennifer Peterson referenced Rimbaud’s visual poetics as “motion painting.”

Phil Solomon (University of Colorado) provided a stop-action presentation of Brakhage's Murder Psalm. As the images unfolded, he used the term "visual rhyme" which would now more flatly be referred to as a "match cut." Different than a linguistic rhyme, he characterized this as "coincidence of shape."

Throughout the week-end, a number of works were screened, including premiers such as New York filmmaker Ed Bowes's The Value of Small Skeletons. Other new work such as Film for Invisible Ink, Case No. 323: Once Upon a Time in the West by David Gatten, and To Reveal the Fourteen Windows, image by Christina Battle, text by Julie Carr, closed out the conference on Sunday.

Junior Burke  
June 27, 2011