

# Focal Points

## Documentary Shorts from 1969

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

Northwest Film Forum

Co-presented by the Sprocket Society

Seattle, WA

## **All films in this evening's program were released in 1969.**

All films are presented in their original 16mm format. Our projector this evening is a theatrical-grade Eiki EX-6000, with a 1,000 watt lamp.

Due to archival restrictions, we are not permitted to edit and combine all of the films onto larger reels. This necessitates an unusual number of pauses as we rethread for the next movie. We hope you will forgive the somewhat disruptive viewing experience in the spirit of helping to preserve these rare works for future audiences.

## **1969/16mm**

16mm film played an essential role in the evolution of cinematic art. In the pre-VCR late '60s, independent 16mm movies and the cooperatives, loose networks, and freaks that helped distribute them were the YouTube of the time. Many award-winning and extremely influential films and artists were seen exclusively on 16mm, and it was the obvious format of choice for documentarians of every stripe.

## **Some Suggested Reading**

Steven Dwsokin. *Film Is: The International Free Cinema* (Overlook Press, 1975).

Scott MacDonald. *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributer* (Univ. of California Press, 2008).

Erik Barnouw. *Documentary, A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford, 1974)

"Early Newsreel: The Construction of a Political Imaginary for the New Left" in: Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004)

Jack C. Ellis & Betsy A. McLane. *A New History of Documentary Film* (Continuum Books, 2005)

Jack Stevenson. "The Day the Bronx Invaded Earth: The Life and Cinema of the Brothers Kuchar," *Bright Lights Film Journal*, no. 26 (November/December, 1999). Available online at <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/26/kuchar1.html>

Newsreel Films / Roz Payne Archive – <http://www.newsreel.us/>

Tom Palazzolo & Marcia Palazzolo web site – <http://palazzolo-art.com/>

## Leo Beuerman

Directed by Gene Boomer. Written by Margaret Travis. Released by Centron Productions.

13 min. / color

Print source: Private collection

Centron Corporation was one of the top producers of industrial and educational films in the United States. Founded in 1947 in Lawrence, Kansas by Arthur H. Wolf and Russell A. Mosser, Centron made films for McGraw-Hill, General Motors, Sears-Roebuck, Eli Lilly, numerous oil companies, and many other corporate clients. Later Centron also made training films for the US Navy and Air Force. A number of moonlighting Centron employees made the classic cult horror film, *Carnival of Souls* (1962).

During slow periods, Wolf and Mosser would send crews out to shoot footage on miscellaneous topics. One of the subjects that they filmed was Leo Beuerman. They thought the footage was special, and gave the go-ahead to release the completed film.

In addition to an Oscar nomination, the film won 13 top awards in American and international festivals and was translated into several languages, including Spanish, German, French and Japanese, and distributed worldwide.

Following the Oscar nomination, McGraw-Hill, the regular distributor of Centron films, decided not to market the film, so Centron began its own distribution company, Centron Educational Films (CEF).

In 1981, Wolf and Mosser sold Centron to the Coronet division of Esquire, Inc. *Awards:* Academy Award nomination (Best Documentary Short Subject); Best Educational & Best of Festival, National Visual Communications Association.

## Testimony

Brian Patrick

17 min. / b&w

Print source: *The filmmaker*

This film was shot for an undergraduate thesis at the budding Ohio University Film School in Spring, 1969. It is a cinema verité portrait of a Pentecostal religious group in Athens, Ohio.

“Interviews with several of the parishioners and handheld shots of members giving public testimony in downtown Athens counter with shots of dancing, preaching and singing in the church to provide an authentic picture of these people.” – Richard Blumenburg, *Critical Focus*

Brian Patrick has been directing award-winning documentaries for over 30 years. Three films that he has directed, produced, and edited have aired on National Television, including *Testimony*, *The Hideout*, and *On Their Honor*. Patrick has collaborated with directors such as Steven Spielberg, interviewing survivors of the Holocaust. He holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Ohio University School of Film, and has taught film/video production at 5 universities, including the University of Utah, for over 25 years. During this time, he developed and taught courses in film/video production, film history survey (documentary, experimental, animation), and film directing. He has been Co-chair of the Film Studies Division from 1991 to the present. In 2005, Patrick completed a feature length documentary entitled *Burying the Past: Legacy of the Mountain Meadows Massacre*.

*Awards for “Testimony”:* Ohio University Film Festival, Ohio State Film Festival, Esquire Student Film Festival, Baltimore II Film Festival, Monterey Independent Film Festival.

*Exhibition:* Anthropological Film Conference, Temple University, 1970; WNET (PBS), 1971.

# Mayday!

California Newsreel

15 min. / b&w

Print source: *Canyon Cinema*

“A historic rally by the then-revolutionary Black Panther Party to free their leader, Huey P. Newton. Held on May 1st. Panther leaders promote Mao's “Red Book”; Bob Avakian, who also spoke that day, expresses some foretelling views on internationalism. There is a flashback to a police raid on Panther headquarters. The crowd on the Federal Building steps indicates that the revolutionary views of the Panthers were drawing forward many people.” – *Canyon Cinema catalog*

“February: First screening of newsreels produced by the Newsreel group (organized late in December 1967) – the most important new development in the American cinema.” – Jonas Mekas, Dec. 26, 1968

“Many times the films of Newsreel, the movement's only organized film producers...give us a sense of action taking place, involving us rather than forcing us to involve ourselves; these films make viable situations out of last-ditch, too-late efforts.” – John Hunt, in *Leviathan*, Sept. 1969

Excerpts from “Early Newsreel Life” (2002) by Roz Payne:

“In 1967 a group of independent filmmakers, photographers, and media workers formed a collective to make politically relevant films sharing our resources, skills, and equipment...

“The only news we saw was on TV and we knew who owned the stations. We decided to make films that would show another side to the news. It was clear to us that the established forms of media were not going to approach those subjects which threaten their very existence...

“[W]e came from various political backgrounds and had different interests. We never all agreed on a political line. We broke down into smaller groups to work on the films. The working groups included anti-Vietnam-war, anti-imperialist, high school, students, women, workers, Yuppies, Third World, and the infamous sex, drugs and party committee.

“We wanted to make two films a month and get 12 prints of each film out to groups across the country. We wanted to spark the creation of similar news-film groups in other major cities of the United States so that they would distribute our films and would cover and shoot the events in their area...

“Newsreel worked to expand the awareness of events and situations relevant to shaping the movement. Our films tried to analyze, not just cover; they explored the realities that the media, as part of the system, always ignores.

“Newsreel not only made films but we were among the first to distribute films made in Cuba, Vietnam, Africa, and the Middle East.

“As Newsreel grew we spread out, opened offices and distribution centers across the country. We had offices in San Francisco, Detroit, Boston, Kansas, Los Angeles, Vermont, and Atlanta. We made films and distributed our films in the hope that the audiences who saw them would respond to the issues they raised. We wanted people to work with our films as catalysis for political discussions about social change in America and to relate the questions in the films to issues in their own communities.

“We had many struggles in Newsreel around class, women, political education, cultural and worker politics, the haves and have nots. It was hard to hold to the correct political line. Little by little the groups changed from film-maker control to worker control, to women control, to third world control. Today, Third World Newsreel is in New York, California Newsreel is in San Francisco, and there is a Vermont Newsreel Archives.”

# Campaign

Tom Palazzolo

12 min. / color

Print source: *Canyon Cinema*

Filmed in the streets of Chicago during the 1968 Democratic Convention “under actual combat conditions.”

“The film is framed like a one-day experience: It goes from daytime to nighttime. I borrowed that from the Greek playwrights.

“I also wanted to do a reverse-style of film, because the actual event was very exciting at the beginning, but then people drifted away after they got beat up. So it ends with Hubert Humphrey arriving, and then disappearing in a puff of tear gas. I had mixed feelings about a lot of the events of that era, but it was fun to be part of it and running around, being chased by the police, though it wasn't fun sniffing tear gas.

“It's the only film of mine that has a few celebrities of the time: Jean Genet, Allen Ginsburg, William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Phil Ochs. ...Abbie Hoffman is on early in the film, dancing around. They had an un-birthday party for President Johnson, where a lot of these people spoke.”

*Excerpted from:* Al Hoff, “1960s Protest Films: Chicago-based filmmaker Tom Palazzolo presents an evening of shorts,” *Pittsburgh City Paper* (Sept. 17, 2009).

Palazzolo was born in St. Louis in 1937. After studying at the John and Mable Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida (1958-60), he attended the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) where he studied photography and painting and exhibited with the Hairy Who. Palazzolo received his MFA from SAIC in 1965, and began to make films that same year. He was involved with some of the small collectives presenting experimental film at this time in Chicago, such as the Floating Cinematheque and the Center Cinema Co-op. During the late 1960s, Palazzolo became well known in what was then called “underground” film; in 1969 he traveled in the Middle East with a program of American experimental films under the auspices of the United States Information Agency, and in 1970 he received a grant from the American Film Institute.

Palazzolo's films of the late 1960s are alternately political and comedic. ...In the early 1970s, Palazzolo began to experiment with forms of cinema-verité documentary, and for the next ten years his films focused on the rituals surrounding marriage: prom night, showers, bachelor parties, weddings, receptions, and anniversaries.

During the 1980s Palazzolo shifted his style and focus once again, using local performance artists as actors in the bizarre and semi-autobiographical narrative films, *Caligari's Cure* (1982), featured in 1983 as part of the Whitney Museum's New American Filmmakers series – and *Added Lessons* (1990). More recent films have marked a return of sorts to his work of the late 1960s – bringing quirky personal views to documentary filmmaking. *I Married a Munchkin* (1994), about Mary Ellen St. Aubin who ran a midget bar on Chicago's South Side, takes its place besides his unusual films from the 1960s and 1970s of a tattooed lady, a wet T-shirt contest, and other offbeat people and events.

Palazzolo is represented in the film collection of MOMA. In addition to filmmaking, Palazzolo has continued to work in photography and painting. He has taught film at SAIC and is an associate professor in the Department of Human and Public Services at Richard J. Daley College where he teaches art history and photography. Palazzolo currently lives and works in Oak Park, Illinois.

– *Art in Chicago, 1945-1995* (New York/Chicago: Thames and Hudson ; Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996)

Eight short films by Palazzolo, made 1967-1984, were recently preserved by Chicago Filmmakers through National Film Preservation Fund support.

# The Kuchar Brothers (Legendary Epic Yarns and Fables, Part 4)

Stephen E. Gebhardt

13 min. / color

Print source: *The Film-Makers' Cooperative*

“George and Mike Kuchar also known collectively as The Kuchar Brothers, discuss in elaborate detail, every aspect of their lives. No stone is left unturned. Without regard for their privates and seamier entrails, a glowing and super-duper account of the trials and tribulations of film-making at its lurid and titillating best is weaved right before your very eyes and ears. A stirring testament to the Bronx.” – S.G.

The monarchs of homemade movies, the Kuchars impressed art world film kings like Stan Brakhage, Bruce Conner and Jonas Mekas, and influenced future film legends like Buck Henry and John Waters. Born in the 1940s, the brothers swooned over classic 1950s Hollywood. Borrowing their Aunt's 8mm camera, George and Mike reinterpreted their neighborhood friends as Rock Hudson and Lana Turner types, wrote fantastic melodramas and genre stories, cobbled together props and costumes and set out into remarkably diverse locations around the Bronx. Their classic films include *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (1966), *Sins of the Fleshapoids* (1965) and *Summer of No Return* (1988). Now in their 60s, both have continued working with video, their projects numbering in the hundreds.

Other films in the Legendary Epic Yarns and Fables series (all 1969):

- Part 1: Robert Nelson
- Part 2: Stan Brakhage
- Part 3: Peter Kubelka

Born and raised in Cincinnati, OH, Stephen Gebhardt was an architecture student with an interest in urban planning who became a filmmaker while in college. He founded the U.C. Film Society in 1961, which later developed the legendary Spring Arts Festival. He taught film in the U.C. Graduate School and Antioch College and made films commercially until he moved to New York City to manage the newly created Anthology Film Archives at The Public Theater and to pursue a career in filmmaking.

In 1969, he made *Legendary Epic Yarns and Fables*, a series of short interview films with prominent avant garde and underground cinema artists. (We will screen his film about the Kuchar Brothers here on Oct. 14, 2009.) He also filmed recording sessions for a jazz opera, *Escalator Over the Hill* by composer Carla Bley and poet Paul Haines, with Don Cherry, John McLaughlin, Sheila Jordan, Gato Barbieri, and others.

In 1970, he began a 3-year relationship with John Lennon and Yoko Ono where he made their films and ran their attendant company, Joko Films. Among the films he shot and directed was what proved to be Lennon's final live concert appearance.

He directed the concert film *Ladies & Gentlemen, The Rolling Stones*, made during their 1972 US tour supporting *Exile On Main Street*, which was released theatrically in 1974 to specially prepared theaters in quadrasonic concert volume sound.

Beginning in 1974, he developed a friendship and what he describes as “a student/mentor relationship” with Harry Smith, assisting him in the making of the epic multi-projector film, *Mahogony*.

Gebhardt later returned to Cincinnati to teach. His later films have included the documentaries *Twenty to Life: The Life and Times of John Sinclair* (2004), and *Bill Monroe: The Father of Bluegrass Music* (1993). He is a member of the artist collective, Musicus Media.

# Fallout Shelter Analysis by Computer Graphics

University of Utah Computer Center. Produced for the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), US Dept. of Defense

17 min. / color

*Print source: Private collection*

Using a UNIVAC 1108 computer with a “magic stylus” and sensor pad to design a fallout shelter.

The Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) has been called “the single most influential agency in the history of computer development in the United States.” Established in February 1958 by President Eisenhower in direct response to the launching of Sputnik by the former Soviet Union, ARPA is the central research and development organization for the US Department of Defense. In 1972, ARPA was renamed to DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency). In April 1993, it was changed back to ARPA, dropping the word “defense” from its official title.

ARPA shepherded the creation of the first packet-switching computer network, the direct ancestor of today’s Internet. The first message ever sent over the ARPANET occurred at 10:30 PM on October 29, 1969. It was “lo” – an attempt to “login,” which failed when the computer crashed. (They succeeded in logging in an hour later.)

The University of Utah’s computing center was on the cutting edge in the development of computer graphics, animation, and graphical interfaces. Among their pioneering developments:

- First interactive graphics program, Sketchpad.
- First method for representing surface textures in graphical images.
- Gouraud smooth shading model for computer graphics.
- Invention of magnetic ink printing technology.

Among the key figures who have passed through the center are founders of Adobe Systems, Pixar, Silicon Graphics, Netscape Communications.

Sperry Rand's UNIVAC 1108 systems were first introduced in 1964, then upgraded in 1965. The computer had support for multiprocessing: up to three CPUs, four memory banks totaling 262,144 words, and two independent programmable input/output controllers (IOCs). With everything busy, five activities could be going on at the same moment: three programs running in the CPUs and two input/output processes in the IOCs.