Visions

Animation and Abstraction
Experimental Masterpieces, 1908 – 1994

Wednesday, August 10, 2011

Northwest Film Forum

Co-presented by The Sprocket Society and Third Eye Cinema

Seattle, WA

All films in tonight's program are presented from 16mm prints, except for *When the Organ Played 'Oh Promise Me'* which is being shown from a first-generation professional DigiBeta video capture of a rare 16mm Kodachrome print. In many cases 16mm was the original format; exceptions are indicated in the program notes for individual films.

Due to archival restrictions, we are not permitted to splice tonight's films together into a seamless whole, and we have only one suitable projector. For ease of projection, we have spliced the films together head-to-tail – including all of their leaders and countdowns. Consequently there will be commensurate pauses between each film. We realize this is obviously less than ideal, but we hope you will please accept the resulting imperfections in this presentation as a necessary inconvenience that will help preserve these rare, aging film prints for future viewers. We thank you for your kind indulgence.

Our projector this evening is a theatrical-grade Eiki EX-6000, with a 1,000 watt Xenon lamp and a 43mm lens.

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http://www.nwfilmforum.org/live/page/programs/71

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Print Sources

Canyon Cinema (San Francisco)
http://canyoncinema.com/

The Film-Maker's Cooperative (New York)
http://film-makerscoop.com/

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Oskar Fischinger Film Preservation and Digitization Project, Center for Visual Music
http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/Fischinger/FundingNeeds.htm

National Film Preservation Foundation
http://www.filmpreservation.org/support
http://www.filmpreservation.org/nfpf-grants/avant-garde-masters-grants

UCLA Film and Television Archive
http://www.cinema.ucla.edu/support

Moving Images Archive of the Historical Visual Materials Collection, University of Washington Library
http://guides.lib.washington.edu/content.php?pid=213360&sid=1775313

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
http://www.nea.gov/

This Evening's Program
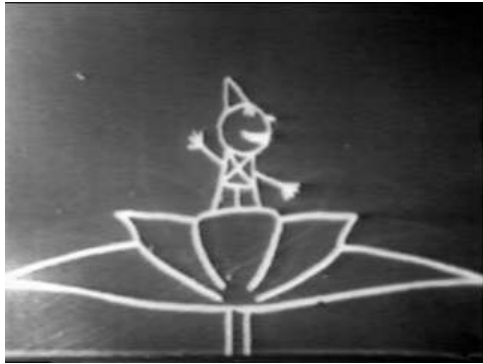
Fantasmagorie
(1908)

Émile Cohl

2 min. / b&w / silent

Produced for Gaumont, Paris, France
Also released as *Metamorphosis* (USA) and *Black and White* (Britain)

Print Source: Private Collection

"Scène tirée de dessins humorestiques et du plus drôle effet."
> – Gaumont film catalog, 1908

"On a black background, tiny grotesque figures in white outline go through a series of movements which cannot fail to win a laugh from all kinds of audiences. An amusing scene shows three figures; one is dancing in a frame representing the proscenium of a theatre, another is seated watching, when the third enters. She is a female with a huge hat, which she refuses to remove, whereupon the man behind pulls out the feathers one by one and at last tears off the hat altogether."
> – *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* (London), 30 July 1908.

Although completed in June 1908 and screened for London buyers in July, it was August 17 before *Fantasmagorie* was released in Paris. By that time Cohl had already completed his second cartoon, *Le Cauchemar du fantoche* (The Puppet's Nightmare), and was working on his third, *Un Drame chez les fantoches*. Gaumont paid Cohl 250 francs each for the films.

Born Émile Eugène Jean Louis Courtet (1857-1938), Cohl first established himself as a caricaturist, cartoonist and writer in the 1880s and '90s. In 1908 he joined the Gaumont film company, originally as a writer. He soon graduated to directing comedy, chase and féerie (magical films in the style of Georges Méliès) films, but then moved to making animation films, a kind of film only just starting to be created, largely through the example in America of J. Stuart Blackton, whose *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906) and *Haunted Hotel* (1907) opened up a whole new world of cinematic possibility.

Cohl worked with line drawings, cut-outs, puppets and other media. He also took the idea of animation one step further by cresting a character, Fantoche. His first animated film, the delightful stick figure *Fantasmagorie* (1908), is held to be the first fully animated film, employing 700 drawings on sheets of paper, each photographed separately. Cohl developed a distinctive personal style of animation, where a figure would metamorphose into some unexpected different image, taunting notions of reality and logical sequence.

Cohl made over 250 films between 1908 and 1923, working for Gaumont, Éclair (including a spell in America), Pathé and others. Thirty-seven (some of uncertain attribution) survive in film archives.

- Luke McKernan, "Emile Cohl," The Bioscope (blog), Feb. 17, 2008
  http://bioscopic.wordpress.com/2008/02/17/emile-cohl/

Émile Cohl Resources

Donald Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film* (Princeton University Press, 1990) – The definitive biography, generously illustrated throughout (including rare pre-film artwork), complete annotated filmography (242 films, 15 scenarios) including corrective notes of misattributions, exhaustive bibliography. Crafton had access to the Cohl family papers. Outstanding.

Émile Cohl, special issue of *1895* (no. 53, 2007), a journal devoted to French film history published by l'Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma (AFRHC). More info at http://1895.revues.org/2163 and http://www.afrhc.fr/

Gaumont Treasures Vol. 2, 1908-1916 (Kino Video, 2011) – Three-DVD set, the first disc of which is devoted entirely to Cohl, with 40 films (190 min.).

Émile Cohl: L'agitateur aux mille images (Gaumont, 2008) – Two-disc PAL DVD set (entirely in French) far more extensive than the Kino edition, with 55 films (most or all of his surviving work) from Gaumont, Pathé, Eclipse, Éclair, and Éclair New York. Also two documentaries. Available for rent from Scarecrow Video, or for purchase while stock remains via http://boutique.gaumont.fr/index.php?page=produit&id=44037

US Down by the Riverside
(1966)

Jud Yalkut

3 min. / color / sound

Soundtrack: "Tomorrow Never Knows" by The Beatles

Print source: Canyon Cinema

"USCO light, Beatles sound. A visionary realization of the USCO Riverside Museum installation exhibition in New York, the show which introduced the word 'Be-In' to the English language." – J.Y.

In 1959, at the age of 20, Yalkut went back home to New York where he remained for 14 years. He worked more odd jobs at the Discophile record store and the 8th Street Book Shop, a beat mecca. Then, in 1961, a friend he had met in Montreal (and who later became his first wife) gave him a new, 8mm camera. Yalkut started making films again. "I hadn't really focused on any particular medium up until that point, but film became the thing," Yalkut says. "I made a lot of films at the time in 8mm. Then in 1964 I got enough money together to get my own 16 mm camera, a Bolex, a great Swiss camera that made the independent film movement possible all over the world."

Soon after, Yalkut began working with a multi-media group called USCO, or the Company of Us. It is the work he did with USCO that won Yalkut his first recognition as a filmmaker. "The work (USCO) did together was anonymous," Yalkut says. "You did not know who did any particular, thing. We had a poet, a painter, an electronics engineer – and I was the filmmaker. We did shows in museums and we did shows with Marshal McLuhan and Timothy Leary. We toured all over; we were the entertainment at the LSD conference at the University of San Francisco; we did a show called "Us Down by the Riverside!" at the Riverside Museum in New York, which was the first time the term 'be in' was ever used." Honing his skills through USCO, by 1966 Yalkut had created 10 films, which he premiered at the New York Filmmakers Cinematheque."

– Keith Pandolfi, "The Beat Among Us: Jud Yalkut," *Impact Weekly*

As an underground filmmaker and video artist, Jud Yalkut participated in seminal moments of early video art. In 1965 Yalkut became a resident filmmaker for USCO, a countercultural collective. Starting in 1966 and continuing into the 1970s, he collaborated with Nam June Paik on a series of video-film pieces in which he used the medium of film not merely to document performances, but, through editing and juxtaposition, to create conversations between film and video.

Yalkut's film and video work has been exhibited at such venues as the Whitney Museum of American Art, MOMA, the Miami University Art Museum in Oxford, Ohio, and Anthology Film Archives; at a one-man film retrospective at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, NY, and in numerous exhibitions and festivals nationally and internationally. He has also organized important exhibitions of video and experimental media art, such as *Computer Art: An Ohio Perspective* at the Dayton Visual Arts Center in 1993 and *Art From Virtual Realities* at DVAC in 1996. The recipient of numerous grants and awards, including a Writing-In-Media grant from the New York State Council on the Arts for his manuscript, *Electronic Zen: The Alternate Video Generation*, Yalkut has also been a writer on the arts and media since 1966, publishing in such journals and newspapers as *Film Quarterly*, *The Dayton Voice*, and *The New York Free Press.*

Yalkut lives in Dayton, Ohio.

– Electronic Arts Intermix artist bio (http://www.eai.org/artistBio.htm?id=257)

Jud Yalkut and USCO Resources

Official artist web site – http://www.hamsadesign.com/vidfilm/JudYalkut.html
Keith Pandolfi, "The Beat Among Us: Jud Yalkut" (*Impact Weekly*, April 13-19, 2000) – Archived at
      http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/people/pview.php3?id=21&page=1
Chrissie Iles, *Dream Reels: VideoFilms and Environments by Jud Yalkut* (Whitney Museum of American
      Art, 2000) – Catalog of a month-long retrospective.
Jud Yalkut, *Electronic Zen: The Alternate Video Generation* (1984) – A history of video art, manuscript
      archived at http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/pdf/Yalkutzen_989.pdf
USCO (Intermedia Foundation web site) http://www.intermediafoundation.org/usco/ - Photographs and
      ephemera, including photographs from the *Us Down by the Riverside* exhibition which appeared
      in *LIFE* magazine.
Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of American Experimental Film*,
      (State University of New York [SUNY] Press, 1997)
Michelle Kuo, "Special effects: Michelle Kuo speaks with Michael Callahan about USCO" (*ArtForum*, May,
      2008) – Archived at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_9_46/ai_n31609052/
Gerd Stern, *From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-
      1978* (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley,
      2001) – An oral history by the co-founder of USCO. Archived online at
      http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt409nb28g
ETC: Experimental Television Center 1969-2009 (Electronic Arts Intermix, 2009) – Five-DVD box set
      anthology (19 hours) plus 132 page book. Includes two video works by Yalkut, and very many
      others. An essential collection.

Duo Concertantes
(1964)

Lawrence Jordan

9 min. / b&w / sound

Awards: First Prizes: Ann Arbor Film Festival, Milwaukee Art Center Festival, Art Institute of Chicago Film Festival, Kent Film Festival; Second Prize: University of Cincinnati Film Festival.

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

"Birds, butterflies, old engravings, – the mind's moving fantasmagoria. A binder on the spell of the white witch." – L.J.

> *Duo Concertantes* has two parts, 'The Centennial Exposition' and 'Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway.' ...Times and a change of culture have given a surrealistic and nostalgic aura to Victorian steel engravings, as Max Ernst and several collagists between him and Jordan have known for five decades. Where Ernst slammed together radically incongruent images from such found material and thereby released the terrors of monstrosities and the sensual depth of inconceivable landscapes, Jordan has chosen to refine their delicacy and to push his images almost to the point of evanescence – a limit represented in several collages by the reductive metaphor of a film within a collage-film flickering with pure imageless light.
> – P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

> "I make films in the surrealist manner, forcing inspiration as often as possible. When I am not inspired, I do not make films. I have always wanted to show the 'impossible' in my films, and to astonish the viewer, rather than to entertain or tell the truth. Animations that try to be clever, or amusing, usually fail for me, and for that reason most cartoons leave me cold for all their amazing transmutations, although as a child of five, cartoons changed my life, and eventually made me an animator. I often operate on freely associated series of images, finding the trail as I go, not plotting it, though some of the films are meticulously scripted. When I astonish myself, I put it in the film. When I don't, I leave it out....
> "My own belief is that the soul yearns for infinity through symbols... I have read extensively in ancient religion, myth and fairy tale; this background, plus my classical education in science, mathematics and language feeds into all my work. Once I have elaborately prepared the material for collage and animation I can synthesize the work fairly quickly without a lot of trial and error."
> – Lawrence Jordan, quotes compiled from his artist statement and an interview.

> The winner of many international film awards including Guggenheim and NEA grants, Jordan has produced more than 65 works, which have been featured at major film centers and festivals around the world, and are among the holdings of the Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley), MOMA, Anthology Film Archives, the Pompidou Center (Paris), and others. He continues to make films and box collages at his home in Petaluma, CA. His most recent film is *Solar Sight* (2011), with music by John Davis.

Lawrence Jordan Resources

Artist's web site (official) – http://lawrencecjordan.com/

Oral history interview with Larry Jordan, 1995 Dec. 19 - 1996 July 30 (conducted by Paul Karlstrom), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Archived online at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-larry-jordan-12216

P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2000; third edition, originally published in 1974)

Jackie Leger, "Larry Jordan," *Animation World Magazine*, vol. 1 no. 6 (Sept. 1996) – Archived online at http://www.awn.com/mag/issue1.6/articles/leger1.6.html

Doniphan Blair, "Jordan's Animated Journeys," *CineSource* magazine (August 2010) – In this interview, Jordan discusses his work and involvement in the Bay Area film community. Archived online at http://cinesourcemagazine.com/index.php?/site/comments/jordans_animated_journeys/

Sean Uyehara, "Lawrence Jordan: to Infinity and Beyond," *SF360*, June 1, 2009 – Another interview, published by the San Francisco Film Society. Online at http://www.sf360.org/?pageid=12174

The Lawrence Jordan Album (Facets Video, 2008) – Four-DVD box set with illustrated booklet, includes 25 short films and features.

Treasures IV: American Avant-Garde Film, 1947-1986 (National Film Preservation Foundation, 2009) – Wide-ranging two-DVD anthology with illustrated book includes Jordan's *Hamfat Asar* (1965), which is not included in *The Lawrence Jordan Album* set above.
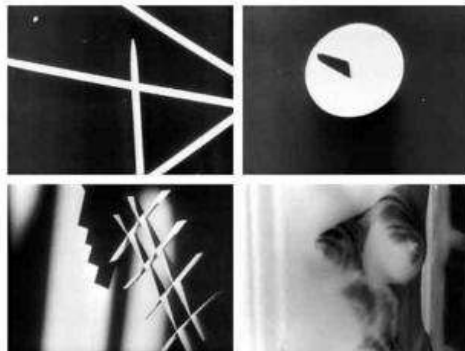
Le Retour à la Raison
(*The Return to Reason*, 1923)

Man Ray

3 min. / b&w / silent
Originally 35mm

Print Source: Private Collection

       Legendary photographer, painter, and maker of objects and films, Man Ray was one of the most versatile and inventive artists of the 20th century. Born in Philadelphia in 1890, he knew the worlds of Greenwich Village in the avant garde era following the 1913 Armory show; Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, where he played a key role in the Dada and Surrealist movements; the Hollywood of the 1940s, where he joined others chased by war from their homes in Europe; and finally, Paris again until his death in 1976.
       – Man Ray Trust web site

    On Thursday, July 5, 1923, Tristan Tzara informed his neighbor Man Ray that the gala Dada-arts soireé [the *Soireé du Coeur à barbe,* or *Evening of the Barbed Heart*] planned for the following two nights at the Théâtre Michel, on the rue des Mathurins near the Opéra, still lacked the right kind of cinematic ingredient. Already set for the bill were Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*...as well as musical compositions by Stravinsky, Milhaud, Auric, and Satie. Poetry would be provided by Cocteau, Soupault, Tzara, and the book designer Ileas Zdanévitch. Georges Ribermont-Dessaignes would be reading from his text, *Mouchez-vous* (Blow Your Nose), and Tzara's play *Le coeur à gaz* [The Gas Heart] would be performed. Could a Man Ray movie be produced on twenty-four hours' notice?
    – Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist*

Acquiring a roll of a hundred feet of film, I went into my darkroom and cut up the material into short lengths, pinning them down on the work table. On some strips I sprinkled salt and pepper, like a cook preparing a roast, on other strips I threw pins and thumbtacks at random; then turned on the white light for a second or two, as I had with my still Rayographs. Then I carefully lifted the film off the table, shaking off the debris, and developed it in my tanks. The next morning, when dry, I examined my work; the salt, pins and tacks were perfectly reproduced, white on a black ground as in X-ray films, but there was no separation into successive frames as in movie films. I had no idea what this would give on the screen. Also, I knew nothing about film mounting [splicing] with cement, so I simply glued the strips together, adding the few shots first made with my camera to prolong the projection. Anyhow, I thought, it would be over before an audience could react; there would be other numbers on the programme to try the spectators' patience, the principal aim of the Dadaists. I arrived at the theater a few minutes before the curtain went up, brought my film to [Tristan] Tzara and told him that he was to announce it, as there were no titles or captions. I called the film: *The Return to Reason.*

> – Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (1963)

In the end the Ray's improvised splices didn't hold up very well, breaking twice while playing. Worse, Tzara's entire soirée degenerated into a riot. Tensions within the Dada group were fast coming to a head at that time, with an angry André Breton soon to split off and form the Surrealists. He was in the audience when something in Tzara's play outraged him enough that he leapt on stage and began verbally and then physically attacking the cast, even breaking one man's arm with his walking stick. Other artists and poets in the audience jumped into the fray as bedlam erupted. Paul Eluard furiously attacked Tzara, but when audience members overwhelmed him he fell into the footlights and smashed several lamps. Police had to break up the mêlée, which left the previously-respectable theater heavily damaged, and its owner in tears.

Man Ray Resources:

The Man Ray Trust – http://www.manraytrust.com/

Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (Clarkson N. Potter Publishers, 1988; revised edition: Da Capo Press, 2001) – The account of making *Retour* and the events of the soirée are on pp. 121-123, 143.

Deke Dusinberre, "*Le Retour a ala raison*: Hidden Meanings" in Bruce Posner (ed.), *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941* (Black Thistle Press/Anthology Film Archives, 2001) – An essay included the fine companion anthology/catalog for the touring exhibition of films from the seven-DVD box set of the same title (also highly recommended).

David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty-Year Evolution* (Delta/Dell, 1971)

Avant-Garde: Experimental Cinema of the 1920s and '30s [vol. 1] (Kino Video, 2005) – This indispensable two-DVD set includes all four of Man Ray's films.

Scenes from *Everything Turns, Everything Resolves*

(*Alles Drecht Sich, Alles Bewegt Sich*, 1929)

Hans Richter

3.5 min. / b&w / sound
Originally 35mm, approx. 15 min. (?)

Photography by Reimar Kuntze
Music by Walter Gronostay

Print Source: Film-Makers' Cooperative

 "A day at the carnival – sensational tent shows where miracles can be seen for the price of admission, boisterous noise of crowds and barkers, shrill and gaudy circus music, the violence of the street ten-fold. This is the substance of *Everything Turns*, Richter's first sound film. At its premier at Baden-Baden Richter got into a fight with two Nazi officials who disliked the film's 'modernism.' Yet in 1936 it was awarded first prize for artistic merit by the Nazis, with Richter's name suppressed from the credits. He had long since left Germany." – Standish D. Lawder

"I conceive of the film as a modern art form particularly interesting to the sense of sight. Painting has its own peculiar problems and specific sensations, and so has the film. But there are also problems in which the dividing line is obliterated, or where the two infringe upon each other. More especially, the cinema can fullfill certain promises made by the ancient arts, in the realization of which painting and film become close neighbors and work together." – Hans Richter

Hans Richter (1888-1976) was a visionary painter, graphic artist and experimental filmmaker, and one of the original members of the Dada movement. While not the very first as he long claimed, his *Rhythmus 21* (1921) was one of the earliest abstract films made. Other notable films include *Rhythmus 23* (1923), *Filmstudie* (1926), *Vormittagsspuk* (*Ghosts Before Breakfast*, 1927), and the collaborative feature *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947) made with Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Alexander Calder, and Fernand Léger. Perhaps as important as his film work was his tenure at the City College of New York from 1942-1957, where he befriended and encouraged or taught the likes of Maya Deren, Jonas Mekas, Shirley Clarke, Frank Stauffacher and others who helped create the post-war American avant garde film movement.

Hans Richter Resources

Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (Thames and Hudson, 1965, also a 1997 ed; also: Abrams, 1970)
Hans Richter, *The Struggle for the Film* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc. 1971; also: Wildwood House, 1986, and Palgrave Macmillan, 1986.)
Hans Richter, "The Film as an Original Art Form," in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *Film Culture Reader* (Praeger, 1970; reprinted: Cooper Square, 2000) – Article also archived online at http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic235120.files/RichterFilmArt.pdf
Richard Suchenski, "Hans Richter," *Senses of Cinema,* issue 49 (Winter 2008-09) http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/great-directors/hans-richter/
David N. Rodowick, "Hans Richter and pure film," *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Film* (Harvard University web site) – Bibliography and selected articles archived as PDFs, available via http://hvrd.me/mlWlqp

Avant-Garde: Experimental Cinema of the 1920s and '30s [vol. 1] (Kino Video, 2005) – Two-DVD set includes two films by Richter: *Rhythmus 21* (*Film Is Rhythm*, ca. 1921) and *Vormittagsspuk* (*Ghosts Before Breakfast*, 1928)
Dada Cinéma (Re:Voir, 2008) – PAL DVD anthology published to coincide with the Pompidou Centre's major Dada exhibition. Includes three films by Richter: *Fimstudie* (1926), *Rhythmus 21,* and *Vormittagsspuk*. http://revoirvideo.blogspot.com/2008/11/dada_03.html
Hans Richter: Early Works (Re:Voir, 2008) – PAL DVD includes eight of his films, 1921-1929. http://revoirvideo.blogspot.com/2008/11/hans-richter.html
Dreams That Money Can Buy (BFI Video, 2006) – PAL DVD of Richter's anthology feature film made with collaborators Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Alexander Calder. Also includes a booklet and the films *Everyday* (1929), *Rhythmus 21*, and *Vormittagsspuk*. http://filmstore.bfi.org.uk/acatalog/info_131.html

Five Short Films
(1957-1980)

Len Lye

14 min. / b&w and color / sound

Rhythm (1957) b&w 1 min. – optical printing, stock footage, direct animation
Particles in Space (1967-1971, revised 1979) b&w 3:30 min. – direct animation
Tal Farlow (1960, 1980) b&w 2 min. – direct animation (completed posthumously)
Color Cry (1952) color 4 min. – optical printing, direct animation
Free Radicals (1958, revised 1979 w/ assistance by Paul Barnes and Steve Jones) b&w 4 min.– direct animation

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

"All of a sudden it hit me: If there was such a thing as composing music, there could be such a thing as composing motion. After all, there are melodic figures, why can not there be figures of motion?"
- Len Lye

Len Lye is a clear example of that very rare type of artist who is equally at home in different media. As a young man he was one of the first sculptors in the world to work with movement; and the sculpture he made during the 1960s and '70s (in the collection of the Whitney Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the Albright-Knox Gallery and other major museums) is among the best kinetic art of any period. He was also a highly original painter and writer.

Lye was the pioneer of many filmmaking techniques, including "direct animation," the process of drawing and scratching designs directly onto film. He made his first animated film in 1929 and continued experimenting with new film-making techniques to the end of his life in 1980.

Lye was born in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1901. When he heard about the Futurists in overseas art magazines he was excited to learn that other artists were engaged in experiments similar to his. In his early years Lye made a close study of the art of the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. In the early 1920s he spent several years in Australia and the islands of the South Pacific such as Samoa. He studied the dance rituals of Polynesia and the Australian Aborigines. In Australia he became involved with filmmaking which he saw as an ideal medium for his "art of motion." His first film, *Tusalava*, which he completed in London in 1929, was unique in style – a semi-abstract animated film influenced not only by modernism but also by Maori, Aboriginal and Samoan art. The film was partly funded by his friends, Robert Graves and Laura Riding.

His breakthrough came in 1934-35 when he discovered that he could make films by drawing directly onto celluloid. This was an inspired solution to the problem that he could not afford to hire a film camera. He found he could create "pure figures of motion" by painting, stenciling or scratching.

Lye found an enthusiastic sponsor in John Grierson who screened Lye's films to add a splash of color and humor to the program of black and white documentaries produced by his G.P.O. Film Unit. In *Rainbow Dance* (1936) and *Trade Tattoo* (1937) Lye experimented with the new colour separation processes such as Technicolor, taking black and white footage and re-coloring it in a dazzling way so that it looked like a cubist painting or a collage by Matisse.

In 1944 he moved to New York and contributed to an upsurge in experimental film-making in the USA. In the 1940s and '50s he came to know many of the abstract expressionist artists, screened his films at their parties, and felt an affinity between their paintings and his films. Despite his failure to find sponsorship he continued to make films. In *Color Cry* he extended the "rayogram" method in new directions, using everything from strips of film to patterned fabric to accompany a spine-tingling blues song by Sonny Terry. In *Free Radicals* and *Particles in Space* he gave up colour to concentrate on the most basic elements of the film medium – light and movement. He developed new symbols of "energy" scratched onto black film with a variety of tools ranging from ancient Indian arrowheads to modern dental tools.

Many animators have picked up the idea of direct film-making and used it in their own way. Norman McLaren, a fellow member of the G.P.O. Film Unit was deeply impressed by *Colour Box* (1935). After Grierson gave him a job at the Canadian Film Unit, McLaren had a long and notable career as a direct film animator, and to this day many viewers confuse Lye's films with McLaren's. The two film makers were friends and always spoke generously about each other's work.

Although Lye continued to make films he was mainly involved in his later years in making motorized metal sculptures. His work and ideas continue to influence those involved in kinetic sculpture and experimental animation.

– Adapted from official artist's bio courtesy of The Len Lye Foundation

Len Lye Resources

Official Len Lye web site, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, NZ
http://www.govettbrewster.com/LenLye/LenLye.aspx
Brett Kashmere, "Len Lye," *Senses of Cinema* issue 43 (April-June, 2007).
http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2007/great-directors/lye/
Guy Brett, "Force Field and Sonic Wave" – Essay excerpted from Cann & Curnow's book, *Len Lye* (below).
http://www.kunstsenter.no/en/kraftfelt-og-lydb-lge-av-guy-brett/
Roger Harrocks, program notes for *Free Radical: The Films of Len Lye*, Nov, 26, 2007, Harvard Film Archive. http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2007novedec/lye.html
Rhythms (Re:Voir Videos, 2009) PAL DVD-R – 12 films, plus 28 page booklet. Originally released on VHS circa 2001.

Tyler Cann and Wystan Curnow, eds. *Len Lye* (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery & The Len Lye Foundation, 2009) – Lavishly illustrated large-format book, with essays, chronology, and extensive bibliography.

Roger Harrocks, *Art That Moves: The Work of Len Lye* (Aukland Univ. Press, 2009) – Generously illustrated book details primarily Lye's work in film and kinetic sculpture, as well as his work in other media relating to movement. Included DVD features four of Lye's films, video documents of five of his sculptures, and a short film about him.

Roger Harrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Aukland Univ. Press, 2002) – The definitive biography, now out of print and fetching high prices on the collector market. Illustrated.
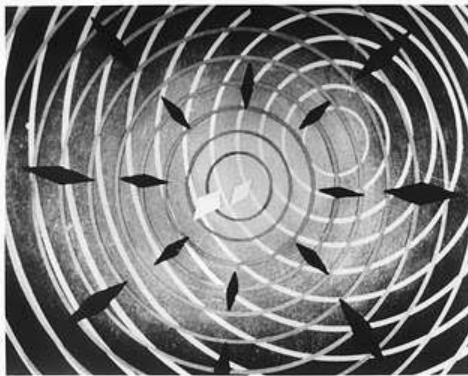
Allegretto
(1936-1943, late version)

Oskar Fischinger

4 min. / color / sound
Originally 35mm

Music: "Radio Dynamics" by Ralph Rainger

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

 "Visually, *Allegretto* is very rich indeed. Fischinger's fascination with the new (to him) technique of cell animation led him to experiment with multi-layered see-through constructions which are more diverse and complex on the surface than those in most of his other films. At the same moment, one sees a background pattern of two overlapping concentric radiating circles, comet-like figures, sparkling and stretching diamonds, a row of teeth-like triangles gliding down one side of the frame like a liberated soundtrack, and other sensuous or mechanized motifs, each moving independently. …The figures work themselves up into a brilliant and vigorous conclusion, bursting with skyscrapers and kaleidoscopes of stars/diamonds, and every facet of the chic Hollywood design of the thirties. It is a celebration, plain and simple, of the American lifestyle, seen fresh and clean through the exuberant eyes of an immigrant."

– Dr. William Moritz, *Film Culture* magazine

Oskar Fischinger was born on the summer solstice in 1900 in Gelnhausen, Germany. Around 1920 in Frankfurt, he met Dr. Bernhard Diebold at a literary club; seeing Fischinger's abstract scroll sketches, Diebold urged him to take up abstract filmmaking. Oskar was greatly impressed by Walther Ruttmann's *Opus I* in 1921, at the first public screening of an abstract film. Fischinger soon resigned his engineer's job and moved to Munich to become a full-time filmmaker. By June, 1927 financial difficulties forced Fischinger to leave Munich, so he walked to Berlin where he re-established himself. In 1928, he worked doing rockets and other special effects for Fritz Lang's *Frau Im Mond*. In 1929 he broke his ankle at the UFA studios and while hospitalized, decided that he must devote himself full-time to abstract filmmaking. He then produced the remarkable series of black-and-white studies tightly synchronized to music. These Studies screened widely in Europe, Japan and America, and came to be in such demand that by 1932 Fischinger had his brother Hans, his wife Elfriede, and three other girls working at Fischinger Studio. Oskar pursued experiments with drawn synthetic sound and collaborated with Bela Gaspar on a three-color film process, GasparColor, which allowed him in 1933 to complete his first color film *Kreise*. Fischinger's subsequent color films *Muratti Marches On* (1934) and *Composition in Blue*

(1935) gained so much critical and popular acclaim that Paramount offered him a contract, and in February 1936 he set sail for Hollywood never to return to Germany.

Fischinger found it extremely difficult to work in studio situations, enduring episodes at Paramount (1936), MGM (1937), and Disney (1938-9). His frustration at not being able to produce independent film led him to take up oil painting, and he came under the patronage of Hilla Rebay, curator of the Solomon Guggenheim Foundation, who extended several grants to him during the difficult war years. Unfortunately, they quarreled over the artistic merits of his film *Motion Painting No.1* (1947) and he never again received adequate financial support to complete another film. For the last twenty years of his life, Fischinger had to content himself with unfinished projects, with his paintings and with a home light-show instrument, the Lumigraph. After some years of relative ill health, he died on January 31, 1967.

– Dr. William Moritz, courtesy of the Fischinger Trust web site

Oskar Fischinger Resources

The Fischinger Trust – http://www.oskarfischinger.org/

Robert Russett & Cecile Starr, eds., *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art* (Da Capo Press, 1988. Originally published as *Experimental Animation*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976)

Lenny Burdette, *Oskar Fischinger*, web-based "research report" slideshow presentation, prepared for Dynamic Typography, Winter 2007, at the UCLA School of Design & Media Arts. Online at http://classes.dma.ucla.edu/Winter07/155/projects/lenny/research/

Oskar Fischinger Research Pages (Center for Visual Music) – Bibliography, texts, visual materials and much more. Online at http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/Fischinger/

William Moritz, *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger* (Indiana University Press, 2004) – Excellent bio and survey of works in all media, by the preeminent Fischinger scholar. A detailed discussion of this film can be found at pp. 227-229. Illustrated throughout, including color plates and rare photos. Includes annotated filmography, an appendix of various Fischinger statements/writings about his own work, and extensive bibliography. Essential.
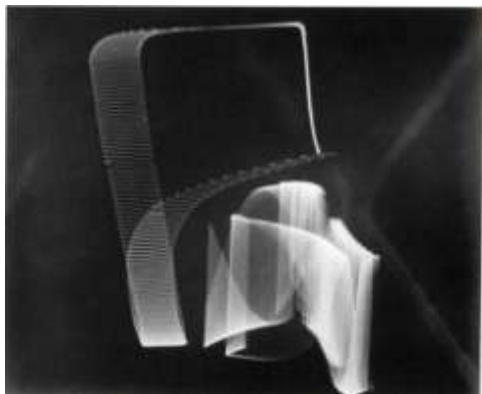
Mood Contrasts
(1953)

Mary Ellen Bute

7 min. / color / sound

Music: "Hymn to the Sun" from *The Golden Cockerel* and "Dance of the Tumblers" from *The Snow Maiden* by Rimsky-Korsakov
Premiered: Radio City Music Hall, with *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*
Award: Best Short Film, 1958 Brussels International Experimental Film Festival

Print Source: Private Collection

The fourth and last phase of Bute's "absolute cinema" in 1952 and 1953 is marked by her shift from animation techniques to electronically generated images through the use of an oscilloscope. While Bute was making *Pastorale*, a scientist at Bell Laboratories came to her studio to see her films. Bute told him she "was tired of the laborious animation technique, and that [she] should rather use light to draw with instead of making thousands of drawings." The Bell scientist discussed with her the possible use of

an oscilloscope for electronic image generation, and he designed a circuit for her. Bute then had it built by an engineer. The oscilloscope allowed her to pattern composition right on the oscilloscope through the kind of mathematical models she had earlier employed. She was so happy with the results that she adopted the oscilloscope as her "true pencil of light":

> We got the pattern so that we could make it come forward or backward on the screen and move around and come in any side of the screen so that you also have horizontal and vertical control... You can also channel music through the Oscilloscope and work (draw) right on the Oscilloscope with the music on the soundtrack going through the machine, thus coordinating the two. You can also alter and distort the forms taking the fundamental direction from the music as it goes through the Oscilloscope. [23]

Bute's appropriation of the oscilloscope, at least ten years before Nam June Paik began working with similar tools, provided the most direct method for "drawing" abstract cinema images.

Bute first used the oscilloscope in *Abstronic* (1952), an absolute film structurally and thematically similar to her work of the previous decade. Although the oscilloscope apparatus may have allowed for more exact rhythmic matches to music pitch, it also seems to have limited her visual range to spiraling lines looping and jumping around the foreground...

Bute overcame whatever limitations the technology posed for her personal style in *Mood Contrasts* (1953), her last absolute film and one of her best. *Mood Contrasts* employs oscilloscope-generated images layered over animated backgrounds to music by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Dmitri Shostakovich. By combining oscilloscope and animation techniques, Bute recaptured the sense of dynamic, seep space so intrinsically a part of her earlier films. After the initial voiceover and credits announcing the edifying nature of this film, *Mood Contrasts* is a series of swirling colors and concentric circles periodically set against a flat checkerboard that gives the illusion of a background plane. In this film, color changes and harmonies of highly saturated monochromes and complementaries offer rich visual excitement.

...*Mood Contrasts* was named "Best Short Film" at the 1958 Brussels International Experimental Film Festival. It is interesting that the postwar community of avant-garde filmmakers, who so heavily publicized their members' awards, ignored and even snubbed Bute's award-winning abstract films. Although her films captured some of the graphic qualities of Abstract Expressionism and were reproduced by a seemingly perfect or balanced combination of scientific, modern technique and psychological expressionism, Bute's critical discourse of cinema contradicted the prevailing ideological goals of the New York avant-garde. Her publicity statements especially opposed the modernist distanciation from mass tastes: "The nice thing about 'seeing sound' is that the people don't take the films seriously, as something pretty advanced, find them amusing. Even gallery types can tolerate the idea of dancing rhomboids and moving prisms and geometric forms because the films don't last very long anyway."

> – Lauren Rabinovitz, "Mary Ellen Bute," in Jan-Christopher Horak (ed.), *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Avant-Garde, 1919-1945* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1995)

I was born a painter in Texas [in 1906, and] lived on a ranch [until my Houston art teacher] arranged for a scholarship for me at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. That was a whole new world for me. Practically all of the articles and journals that had reached my part of Texas were very against modern art.

[So] when I went to Philadelphia I was...deeply impressed by the wonderful Picassos, the African art, the Klees, the Braques, the Kandinskys... He [Kandinsky] used abstract, nonobjective elements so you could experience a canvas the way you experience a musical composition... Well, I thought it was

terrific…[but] these things should be unwound in time continuity. It was a dance. That became my [objective]…

I came to New York and tried to find the technical means. The most developed thing at that time was stage lighting. I went to an art school where we did many things with lighting, but it wasn't adequate, and art medium *per se*. Then, by a fluke, I got into Yale, and they had a fabulous switchboard [light board] – and of course I became one of its runners, reaching for my kinetic art form.

From Yale I got the job of taking dramas around the world…and I got to see, oh, the Noh drama of Japan, and the Taj Mahal in India [where gems surrounded the building]. I looked into the gems and saw reflected the Taj Mahal, and the lake, and the whole thing appealed to me enormously…because it was romantic and because it was a kinetic, visual thing. I started entertaining myself by imagining these designs and patterns all in movement.

Back in New York I related all of this to Thomas Wilfred, who by that time had developed a color organ. This was in 1929… Then I heard about Leon Theremin…and apprenticed myself to his [sound] studio to learn more about composition. He became interested in my determination to develop a kinetic visual art form [and helped me with experiments].

We submerged tiny mirrors in tubes of oil, connected [them] to an oscillator, and drew where these points of light were flying. The effect was thrilling for us – it was so pure.

But it wasn't enough. Finally we got a Bolex camera, and started…to make my first film, *Rhythm in Light*. It was mostly three-dimensional animation. Pyramids, and ping pong balls, and all interrelated by light patterns – and I wasn't happy unless it all entered and exited exactly as I had planned.

– "Mary Ellen Bute: Reaching for Kinetic Art," *Field of Vision* no. 13 (Spring 1985). Condensed from an audio recording of a talk Bute gave at the Art Institute of Chicago on May 7, 1976.

Mary Ellen Bute Resources

Mary Ellen Bute Research Pages (Center for Visual Music) – Bibliography, film notes, selected texts, more. Online at http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/Bute.htm
Jan-Christopher Horak (ed.), *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Avant-Garde, 1919-1945* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) – This excellent anthology about an oft-neglected aspect of US film history includes an entire chapter on Bute.
Light Rhythms: Music and Abstraction, vol. 3 in *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894-1941* (Image Entertainment, 2005) – This truly essential seven-DVD box set includes two films by Bute: *Rhythm in Light* (1934) and *Synchromy No. 2* (1936).

Black Ice
(1994)

Stan Brakhage

3 min. / color / silent

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

 "I lost sight due a blow on the head from slipping on black ice (leading to eye surgery, eventually); and now (because of artificially thinned blood) most steps I take outdoors all winter are made in frightful awareness of black ice. These 'meditations' have finally produced this hand-painted, step-printed film."

Here, Brakhage juxtaposes, with both intercutting and superimposition, two kinds of painted-on-film abstract imagery: fragments of color reference an abstract version of stained-glass windows, while other fragments seem to be rushing toward the viewer, creating a sensation of falling into the image, collapsing into oblivion, a sense heightened by the fact that the color fragments are surrounded by black. The rushing sensation results from zooms made on an optical printer, a device used for 'special effects' that can rephotograph the filmstrip a frame at a time, with a variety of changes. Like many Brakhage films of the period, this one was created in collaboration with Sam Bush of Western Cine.

– Fred Camper, companion booklet for *by Brakhage: An Anthology* (Criterion Collection)

Stan Brakhage Resources

Fred Camper, *Stan Brakhage on the Web* – An enormous collection of links and articles curated by one of the top Brakhage scholars at http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/BrakhageL.html
Spencer Sundell (ed.), Program notes for *Dog Star Man* (The Sprocket Society, 2010) – Includes bibliography and resources listing. Archived online as a downloadable PDF at http://sprocketsociety.org/library/
By Brakhage: An Anthology, Volumes 1 and *2* (Criterion Collection, 2003-2005) – More than seven and a half hours of new high definition transfers spanning Brakhage's entire career, plus extras. Available on DVD or Blu-Ray.

Film Number 11
aka *Mirror Animations*
(1979 version, originally shot 1956-57)

Harry Smith

11 min. / color / sound

Music: "Misterioso" by Thelonious Monk

Print Source: Film-Makers' Cooperative (new print)

"…I only number my films. I don't use my name, titles, nothing on the film, although I used to put end titles on them. …I discovered that the audience didn't know when the goddamned thing was over."

"If, (as many suppose), the unseen world is the real world and the world of our senses but the transient symbols of the eternal unseen, ad limiting ourselves to the aesthetic experience's well-known predilection for the eyes and ears, we could logically propose that any one projection of a film is variant from any other. This is particularly true of *Mirror Animations*. Although studies for this film were made in the early 1960s [sic?], the non-existence of suitable printing equipment until recently, my inability to locate the original camera footage until 1979, and particularity, the lack of an audience ready to evaluate L. Wittgenstein's *Ethics and Aesthetics Are One and the Same*, in the light of H.C. Agrippa's earlier, 'there is no form of madness more dangerous than that arrived at by rational means' have all contributed to delaying until now the availability of a print in the full mirror-reverse from originally envisioned. I hope you like it."

– H.S.

Harry Smith (1923-1991) was an artist whose activities and interests put him at the center of the mid twentieth-century American avant-garde. Although best known as a filmmaker and musicologist, he

frequently described himself as a painter, and his varied projects called on his skills as an anthropologist, linguist, and translator. He had a lifelong interest in the occult and esoteric fields of knowledge, leading him to speak of his art in alchemical and cosmological terms.

Through his experimental films, visual artistry, and recordings, Smith became a central, if largely unheralded, figure in the 20th-century American avant-garde. Along with contemporaries Kenneth Anger, Jordan Belson, and Oskar Fischinger, Smith was considered one of America's leading experimental filmmakers. But his best-known work is the seminal compilation recording of 1952, *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which helped spur the folk revival of the 1960s.

Harry Smith Resources

Harry Smith interviewed by P. Adams Sitney (Anthology Film Archives, 1965) – Two hour audio
    recording, downloadable as two MP3s. http://www.ubu.com/sound/smith_h.html
Jamie Sexton, "Alchemical Transformations: The Abstract Films of Harry Smith," *Senses of Cinema*,
    issue 36 (July-Sept. 2005) – Online at http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/36/harry_smith/
Andrew Perchuk & Rani Singh (eds.), *Harry Smith: The Avant-Garde in the American Vernacular*
    (Getty Research Institute, 2010) – Essays that emerged from the eponymous two-day symposium
    in 2001 and another, "Investigating *Mahagonny*" in 2002. Illustrated, including color plates.
Rani Singh (ed.), *Think of the Self Speaking: Harry Smith – Selected Interviews* (Elbow/Cityful Press,
    1999) – A collection of published and unpublished interviews. Now rare, but recommended.
Paola Igliori (ed.), *American Magus: Harry Smith, A Modern Alchemist* (Inanout Press, 1996) – As
    broad as Smith himself, an excellent collection of interviews, reminiscences, liner notes, articles, a
    partial guide to his collections, and more. Rare, but outstanding. Heavily illustrated.
The Harry Smith Archives (NYC) – http://www.harrysmitharchives.com/
Treasures IV: American Avant-Garde Film, 1947-1986 (National Film Preservation Foundation, 2009) –
    Wide-ranging two-DVD anthology with illustrated book includes Smith's very short *Film No. 3*
    (aka *Interwoven*) (1947-49)

Symmetricks
(1972)

Stan VanDerBeek
with Wade Shaw

7 min. / b&w / sound / computer animation

With assistance from Project MAC, Massachusetts
    Institute of Technology
Edited by S.I. Fried
Music: Unknown (not credited)

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

"Electronic-optical computer finger paintings. Laws of reflective mirror images an interplay between drawing by hand and computer. Art from the future, electronic calligraphy." – SVDB

"Computer-animated drawing that works at the speed of light. Developed as an experiment at MIT while at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, this film explores the rapid tracking of drawn line images compounded by the symmetry of multiple images; one result of the experiment is the phenomenon of color that comes from the black and white images, a blend of music and images that mystifies and delights the eye." – Canyon Cinema catalog

Shown by invitation at the 1974 Cannes Film Festival's survey of recent American underground film.

Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984) attended the experimental Black Mountain College (where such diverse people as Aldous Huxley, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and Buckminster Fuller taught and performed), and certainly learned there an adventurous attitude towards art and the expansion of art into new areas and technologies. His early films, from 1955 to 1965, mostly involved animating combinations of painting and collage work. He would cut pictures out of magazines and art books, often combining parts of one person with parts of another and grafting classic paintings onto latest news items, as in the famous image from the 1958 *Science Friction* in which a renaissance Madonna's altarpiece blasts off like a rocketship from the New York skyline. …In some films, such as *Mankinda* (1957), he painted, making single frames as he added brush strokes, including calligraphy of a poem. The masterpiece of this early period is the 15-minute *Breathdeath* (1964), a hectic anti-war collage, which contains animation superimposed over live-action footage, time-painting over the collage work, and footage filmed from television…

VanDerBeek had made documentations of many happenings and performance pieces by Claes Oldenburg and Allen Kaprow in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1965 he began collaborating with various modern dancers, including Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer, making filmed backgrounds and devising small portable screens to be carried by dancers. He also created multiple-projector shows for the Movie-Drome dome theater he constructed at his home in Stony Point, New York. He also performed these "Movie-Murals" and "Newsreels of Dreams" in conventional theaters, using two projectors on the normal screen, and five additional projectors carried around the room by hand… He hoped these "Cultural Intercom" performances would communicate universal concepts that could speak to average people in all countries of the world, and believed that satellite television would make simultaneous world-wide linkage possible…

His utopian yearning in 1966 led him to work with Ken Knowlton at Bell Telephone Laboratories, creating a dozen computer animation films [including the *Poemfield* series], and experiments with holograms, always hoping to come closer to the working of the human nervous system through more complex technology…

VanDerBeek's films are never polished, but their intentional roughness assures the viewer that this is not the work of an "artist-priest" with all the answers, but rather a common human speaking to other common humans. While many of the particular references in the collaged imagery may now seem obscure, VanDerBeek's exuberant montage convinces.

In 2011, the retrospective exhibition *Stan VanDerBeek – The Culture Intercom* surveyed his "remarkable body of work in collage, experimental film, performance, participatory and computer-generated art over several decades."

– Condensed from: William Moritz, "Stan Vanderbeek" in Jean-Michel Bouhours (ed.), *L'art du Mouvement 1919-1996*, Cinéma du Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1996, p. 443.

Wade Shaw describes himself today as having "a long career as a computer engineer struggling to be an artist." He began his computer studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and went on to do post-graduate work at the MIT Media Lab. There, in 1972, he invented the first pressure-sensitive electronic stylus and stroke design tool (aka a light pen) with Professor Nick Negroponte for his Master's thesis. With that tool and software he developed for it, he and VanDerBeek made *Symmetricks*.

After leaving MIT, Shaw went to work at the Atlas Computer Laboratory in Chilton, Oxfordshire in England, then one of the foremost computer and digital imaging labs in the world. He developed a system for the PDP15 computer called PIGS, or PDP15 Interactive Graphics System. Today it would be called a User Interface Management System, but the term had not been invented yet. A short demonstration film shot at the lab shows Shaw demonstrating the animation system.

After some years in the computer industry, Shaw later studied graphic design, life drawing and painting at the Austin Musem of Art with noted artists Philip Wade, Eve Larson, and Sydney Yeager. After studying digital photography with Robert Shults, he devoted himself to that art form and in recent years has shown digital art work at the Edinburgh Arts Festival, the Victory & Albert Museum in London, and elsewhere.

Stan VanDerBeek Resources

Stan VanDerBeek CV – http://stanvanderbeek.com/_PDF/VanDerBeekBio.pdf

ProjectStanVanDerBeek: http://www.projectstanvanderbeek.com/ – A long-term research project investigating the legacy of Stan VanDerBeek, loosely affiliated with the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), where he taught. Features streaming video and downloadable PDFs of journal articles, archival clippings, photos, etc.

Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston/MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2011) – Catalog for the 2011 retrospective exhibition at CAM in Houston (http://www.camh.org/exhibitions/stan-vanderbeek-brthe-culture-intercom) and at MIT (http://arts.mit.edu/fast/vanderbeek/). Available directly via Distributed Art Publishers at http://www.artbook.com/9781933619330.html

Informational brochure about Project MAC at MIT: http://people.csail.mit.edu/psz/LCS-75/Brochure.html

Visibles (Re:Voir Video, 2008) PAL DVD-R – Nine films from 1959-1972, including cut-out/collage, video, and computer animations. Originally released on VHS. Available directly via http://revoirvideo.blogspot.com/2008/11/stan-vanderbeek.html or in the US from http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/store/

70
(1970)

Robert Breer

5 min. / color / silent

Print Source: Canyon Cinema

 "Made with spray paint and hand-cut stencils, this film was an attempt at maximum plastic intensity… Places Breer for the first time among the major colorists of the avant-garde." – P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

Robert Breer's creative explorations in painting, sculpture, animation, and film, have made him an international figure. Using an old Bolex 16mm camera, his first films, such as *Form Phases*, were simple stop motion studies based on his abstract paintings. After studying engineering at Stanford University, his interests shifted to the mechanics of film and motion. He experimented with flipbooks and was influenced by European avant-garde movements, especially Dada and Cubism. He is well known for drawing by hand on 4 x 6 inch index cards and animating those drawings in the camera. In 1970s Breer worked for the Children's Television Workshop doing animation for the show The Electric Company. His

films have been screened at the Museum of Modern Art, the American Museum of the Moving Image, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Osaka Expo, and numerous other exhibition venues. He was recently featured in the 2004-5 Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, PA.

> – MIT List Visual Arts Center

Robert Breer Resources

Jackie Leger, "Robert Breer: Animator," *Animation World Magazine*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (July 1996)
http://www.awn.com/mag/issue1.4/articles/breer1.4.html
"Interview with Robert Breer Conducted by Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney on May 13, 1971 in New York City," *Film Culture*, No. 56-57 (Spring 1973) – Transcribed online at
http://making-light-of-it.blogspot.com/2010/04/one-breer-please.html
Fred Camper, "On Visible Strings: Films by Robert Breer," *Chicago Reader*, June 5, 1997 – An article previewing a local screening.
http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/on-visible-strings/Content?oid=893567
Hans Ulrich Obrist , "Interview with Robert Breer," *Guide to the Contemporary Art in Italy*, Dec. 18, 2001 – http://www.undo.net/cgi-bin/openframe.pl?x=/cgi-bin/undo/features/features.pl?a=i&cod=35
Program notes for *Robert Breer, Kinetic Poet of the Avant-Garde*, Harvard Film Archive, April 25, 2008 – Online at http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2008marchapril/breer.html
Robert Breer - 30 Years – PDF of tri-fold pamphlet prepared for a 2005 exhibition by the MIT List Visual Arts Center of select films shown 24 hours a day at their Media Test Wall.
http://www.mit.edu/~lvac/pdf/breer.pdf
Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (University of California Press, 1992) – Publisher's info at
http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520079182
Robert Russett & Cecile Starr, eds., *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art* (Da Capo Press, 1988. Originally published as *Experimental* Animation, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), pp. 131-136.
Lois Mendelson, *Robert Breer: A Study of His Work in the Context of a Modernist Tradition* (UMI Research Press, 1982)
Screening Room with Robert Breer (WCVB channel 5, Boston, MA, 1976) – Episode of Robert Gardner's legendary TV series. Interview plus several films and excerpts.
http://studio7arts.org/index.php?/projects/screening-room-with-robert-breer/

Thanatopsis
(1962)

Ed Emshwiller

5 min. / b&w / sound

With: Becky Arnold and Mac Emshwiller
Soundtrack: Ed Emshwiller
Award: Special Award, Brussels Experimental Film Festival

Print source: Canyon Cinema

"An expression of internal anguish. The confrontation of a man and his torment. Juxtaposed against his external composure are images of a woman and lights in distortion, with tension heightened by the sounds of power saws and a heartbeat." – E.E.

Ed Emshwiller (1925-1990) studied painting both in the US and Paris. In the 1950s, his abstract expressionist canvases received praise at art galleries, while his hyper-realistic cover illustrations for science-fiction magazines such as *Galaxy* (signed merely EMSH) delineated the surrealistic landscapes of imaginary planets and exotic creatures in fine detail.

He began filmmaking in order to document his paintings, but in 1959 produced *Dance Chromatic*, in which animation of his abstract painting is superimposed on a dancer. His own skills as a cameraman – which included a dancer-like ability to move gracefully while carrying a camera, thus allowing him to execute steady, complex pans and "zooms" in limited space – made him much in demand for films documenting dance performances. In the 1963 *Totem*, he wholly re-conceptualizes the Alwin Nikolais dance in cinematic terms, superimposing different viewpoints of the dancers, as well as such symbolic counterpoint as rings and fire. The 1962 *Thanatopsis*, more remarkably, created the dance choreography itself in camera, by superimposing multiple single exposures of the same gesture, causing an eerie blur of the figure representing the angel of Death, whose thrashing wings make a chilling buzz-saw-like noise as she hovers about the dying man. These filmic experiments reached their climax in the 1966 *Relativity*, which, in 40 minutes, meditates on the place of man in the cosmos, using clever photographic effects to suggest vast interstellar distances in parallel to restlessly-moving closeups of a human body. [After seeing *Relativity*, Stanley Kubrick approached Emshwiller and asked if he would help to make *2001*. Emshwiller declined, because he was making a Project Apollo film for NASA, and *Image, Flesh, and Voice* for himself.]

In the 1970s, Emshwiller began to experiment with videotape and computer graphics – although, since the initial results were less than perfect, he also shot a few more dance films... Despite a lack of subtlety in video and computer technology, Emshwiller managed to make several highly-praised productions, including the hour-long *Pilobolus and Joan*, and a multiple-monitor installation *Slivers* at the New York gallery The Kitchen (1977). His 1979 pioneer 3-D computer animation *Sunstone* proved a genuine artistic breakthrough, with a technological subtlety of color and shape that gave the 3-minute metamorphosis of a face and a cube real charm, quite aside from its novelty.

In the 1980s, he concentrated more on multi-technology interface and live electronic performances, including the 1984 *Skin Matrix* which consisted of computer modifications of live-action images, and the 1987 interactive opera (composed with Morton Subotnik) *Hungers*, in which 16 video monitors as well as live singers, musicians and dancers are fed through a computer sensitive to the audience movement and responses, which then alters the images accordingly. Performances of this

massive, technologically intricate *Hungers* at the Los Angeles Arts Festival and Ars Electronica [in Linz, Austria] resembled nothing more than Emsh's early science fiction illustrations of fantastic futures.

> – William Moritz, excerpted from *L'art du Mouvement 1919-1996*, Jean-Michel Bouhours (ed.), Cinéma du Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1996.

Ed Emwhwiller Resources

"Ed Emshwiller: Computer Animation Lab Founder" (California Institute of the Arts)
http://emsh.calarts.edu/facility/emsh.htm
Robert A. Haller, *Intersecting Images: The Cinema of Ed Emshwiller* (Anthology Film Archives, 1997)
Myrna Oliver, "Ed Emshwiller, 65; Artist, CalArts Dean" (obituary), *Los Angeles Times* (July 28, 1990).
Luis Ortiz, *Infinity x Two: The Art & Life of Ed & Carol Emshwiller* (Nonstop Press, 2007) – Biography of the couple and their dual-careers in the science fiction and avant garde film scenes. With introductions by Carol Emshwiller and Alex Eisenstein and a filmography. Illustrated throughout with photos, original art, etc. Publisher's catalog page at http://nonstop-press.com/?p=285
Screening Room with Ed Emshwiller (WCVB channel 5, Boston, MA, July 1975) – Episode of Robert Gardner's legendary TV series. Interview plus five complete films and excerpts from two others.
http://studio7arts.org/index.php?/projects/screening-room-with-ed-emshwiller/
Electronic Arts Intermix offers 11 Emshwiller video works for screening rental and institutional purchase. Details at http://www.eai.org/artistTitles.htm?id=471

Délicieuse Catastrophe
(1970)

Piotr Kamler

14 min. / color / sound
Originally 35mm

Print Source: Private Collection

Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1936, Piotr Kamler studied graphic arts at the Warsaw Fine Arts Academy. In 1960 he won a scholarship to study at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris. There he met Pierre Schaeffer and began what proved to be a life-long career as an experimental animator.

Between 1960 and 1975, Pierre Schaeffer, the famous inventor of *musique concrète*, presided over the Research Service of French TV & Radio (ORTF). Under his direction, this Service de la recherché produced countless experimental films and videos; largely animations and abstract works, but also documentaries and live-action films. How many exactly is difficult to say – the scholarship is threadbare, even in French.

Schaeffer had already led the GRM (Group de Recherché Musical) to preeminence as a centre for creative electronic music; it was the composers working in those studios who were to score all the works produced by the Research Service of the ORTF….

Kamler's cinema is among the most unlikely bodies of work in contemporary film. …[He] produced a dazzling series of 15 abstract films and animations, all of which were paired to electronic

soundtracks by the premier composers of the GRM: Francois Bayle, Ivo Malec, Robert Cohen-Solal and Bernard Parmegiani....

> – Jim Knox, program notes for "Concrete Cinema: GRM Films," *Liquid Architecture 4* festival of sound art (Melbourne, Australia), July 13, 2003

Piotr Kamler Resources

Jim Knox, program notes for "Concrete Cinema: GRM (Le Groupe de Recherches Musicales) Films," July 13, 2003, Liquid Architecture 4 festival of sound art (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.liquidarchitecture.org.au/la4/concrete_essay.html
http://www.liquidarchitecture.org.au/la4/concrete.html
Piotr Kamler, à la recherche du temps (aaa Studios, 2007) PAL DVD – Nine short films, the feature *Chronopolis*, a 30 min. documentary, and other extras.
http://www.aaaproduction.fr/aaa_dvd.php

When the Organ Played 'Oh Promise Me'
(1943)

Cecil Stokes

3 min. / color / sound
Originally 35mm?

Sung by Bing Crosby
Organ by Lt. Col. Eddie Dunstedter (Ret.)

Print Source: Robert W. Martens
Original 16mm Kodachrome print transferred to DigiBeta

In this extremely rare surviving example of "Auroratone" films, abstract visuals are created by filming crystalline growth using polarized light and time-lapse photography. Melancholic sentimental music plays, crooned by Bing Crosby.

All but forgotten today, the Auroratone films were produced in the early 1940s by an obscure British inventor and mystic named Cecil Stokes (1910-1956). He intended for them to be used as a therapeutic aid in the treatment of post traumatic stress, manic depression, anxiety disorders, and similar conditions. They were much like this one – slow, mildly sad and melancholic music combined with imagery, usually abstract, but some used semi-animated drawings instead, according to contemporary descriptions.

Stokes was awarded a patent for his film process in 1942, and he formed the Auroratone Foundation of America to make and distribute his films. One of his partners in the effort was Bing Crosby, who also contributed new song recordings to a number of them.

Auroratone films were donated to a number of hospitals in the US and England, where records indicate they were indeed used as part of therapy with vets. One of them was a VA hospital in Ohio, where the trial program led to a series of articles in major medical journals, written by Capt. Herbert E. Rubin and 2nd Lt. Elias Katz of the Crile General Hospital in Parma, Ohio. They consistently reported positive benefits. "Most patients became more accessible" after watching the films. They "spoke more freely," making it "possible for the psychiatrist to establish rapport." Curiously, an article about Stokes and his Auroratone films also appeared in a 1944 issue of *Rosicrucian Digest*.

According to reports published in *Billboard* magazine, Stokes later hoped to make the films available to the general public in "film jukeboxes," commonly known as Scopitone machines, which were popular in bars and lounges during the 1940s and '50s. In the summer of 1945, he made a presentation to a number of such distributers in Chicago, but the businessmen demurred, reportedly saying "the haziness of the color pattern – or lack of pattern – made the process unsuitable for adaption to jukes." In a word, it was just too weird. The record fades after that, except to note that Stokes died less than 10 years later.

Auroratone/Cecil Stokes Resources

Herbert E. Rubin and Elias Katz, "Auroratone Films for the Treatment of Psychotic Depressions in an Army General Hospital," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. Vol. II, No. 4. (Oct. 1946), pp. 330-340.

Cecil Stokes, "Process and Apparatus for Producing Musical Rhythm in Color," US Patent no. 2,292,172, awarded Aug. 4, 1942 (application submitted May 24, 1940).

Laura DeWitt James, "The Color Trail," *Rosicrucian Digest*, April 1944, pp. 86-87, 105. Archived online at Google Books, via http://bit.ly/n6feWv