

a program of film and video art



## The Sydney Observatory

23 - 25 November 1990

### *Program*

#### **OPEN THE KINGDOM**

Andrew Frost

6 mins. 1988. Produced on Super 8. Screening on VHS.

The inspiration for *Open the Kingdom* came from seeing a number of classic Minimalist paintings by Barnett Newman and a series of I.K.B. monochromes by Yves Klein. I began to contemplate the idea of making a film that gestured towards the absolute reduction of image, towards a very basic pictorial space, whilst retaining the tension and purity of Minimalist painting.

#### **EC/STATIC**

Toula Anastas. Music and sound design by Simon Hunt; Production assistance by Anne Rutherford and Greg Fitzgerald.

8 mins. 1988. Produced on Super 8. Screening on Umatic.

"In a certain sense each medium (Photography and Cinema) is seen as empowered to disclose a secret of the other: Cinema, that the photograph, however mutable and unstable its frame of reference, is always (at least latently) discursive; Photography, that the temporal flow of a film is founded on a series of sequential pauses, is constructed from images wrested from a time other than the time of the text. If the "truth" of the image is guaranteed by neither form over against the other, truth of a kind is illuminated, and a critical lever forged, at the point of the friction where photography checks cinema and cinema traverses photography."

Charles Wolfe *Wide Angle* Vol 9 No 1

#### **SAVING DAYLIGHT**

Virginia Hilyard. Sound assistance by Gary Warner.

6 mins. 1984. Produced on Super 8.

A transformation, slow like the phases of the moon, painful like the sting of a wasp, *Saving Daylight* is in three parts: the first, of circular dizziness, heightening vertigo, moving mountains; the second occupying real time and the third walking tall, surfacing for air.

#### **THE JAR**

Colleen Cruise

10 mins. 1987. Produced on Video 8 and Betacam. Screening on Umatic.

An old man and his net begin the journey in the life of a lepidopterist. *The Jar* explores the notions of science and nature. The video is based on patriarchy and authority, beauty, the divine spirit, the feminine and death. Wrinkled hands are caught in a mystical haze created by the slowly transforming black and white imagery.

#### **OPTIC YOUTH**

Nick Ostrovskis

7 mins. 1990. Produced on Super 8. Silent.

*Optic Youth* is a mixture of several techniques I have used over the years - animation and rephotography of photographs, slides and negatives, dissolves, rapid editing, timelapse etc.

#### **BANNER**

Barbara Campbell

4 mins. 1990. Produced on Super 8.

Working backwards, the distinctive red stripes of Sydney's Coca Cola sign and Reagan's Star Wars policy must have inspired that original star-spangled banner worked out by Betsy Ross and George Washington on a clear Philadelphia night in 1776.

#### **TRANSLATION... (of a ghost story, told me by Wassily shortly before his demise)**

Richard de Souza and Gary Warner

7 mins. 1985. Produced on Super 8.

"Abstract art, abstract art"

Lucy Lippard, 1981.

#### **URANUS**

M. T. Hill

11 mins. 1990. Produced on Super VHS. Screening on Umatic.

Among other things, Uranus rules anything in wave formation. Hence radio, television, X-rays, permed hair, the spectrum of light, crinkle-cut chips, the tides, ribbed condoms, oscilloscopes, radium, plutonium, gravity waves, waterbeds, Mexican waves, the movement of reptiles, information from satellites, corrugated iron and the Queen's right hand.

### *Acknowledgements*

Curated and co-ordinated by Barbara Campbell.

Presented by Sydney Intermedia Network in association with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.

Thanks to Geoffrey Batchen for the program essay and staff at the Sydney Observatory for their assistance.

Projectionist: Virginia Hilyard. • Artwork: Sensible Art Services.

Sydney Intermedia Network is assisted by the Australian Film Commission.

# ZOOM CULTURE

*For ADORATION, in the skies,  
The Lord's philosopher espies  
The Dog, the Ram, and Rose;  
The planet's ring, Orion's sword;  
Nor is his greatness less ador'd  
In the vile worm that glows.*

This extract from an eighteenth-century poem, *A Song to David* written in 1763 by Christopher Smart, contains a number of assumptions that are typical of Enlightenment thinking. It assumes, for example, that the whole of nature, from the heavens to the underworld, is orchestrated according to a single, divinely-inspired system of order. And it also assumes that the microscope and the telescope are as one with the naked eye in their obedient confirmation of this order's ubiquity. All three are regarded as variations of the one instrument, or at least of the one privileged instrumentality - sight itself. As a consequence, according to Foucault, "the microscope was called upon not to go beyond the frontiers of the fundamental domain of visibility, but to resolve one of the problems it posed: the maintenance of specific visible forms from generation to generation." This utopic Enlightenment resolution has recently been revived under the aegis of Chaos Theory. Using progressive, computer-induced magnifications, proponents of this theory represent the world as an infinite repetition of the same. Rushing up towards us through the computer screen comes an endless unfolding of fractal geometry, a geometry that claims to mirror the unruly processes of nature herself. Apparently this test-tube zoom culture will allow even chaos to be brought to order, if not by the hand of God then by its modern equivalent, the theology of mathematical science.

But can we accept that magnification makes no difference? Is the zoom-effect no more than an exponential extension of the Enlightenment's all-seeing eye? Some historians have argued that the microscope and telescope were invented by the same person, a Dutch spectacle-maker working in about 1600. What's interesting about this claim, apart from the way it continues to refer these inventions to a history of the eye, is the inherent uncertainty on which it is based. For at least six different pioneers, including the famous Galileo, appear to have been independently experimenting with aids to magnification around this date. What is it about magnification that would suddenly induce so many to seek its mechanical disclosure and calibration at this particular time (rather than during some other moment in history)? Although there isn't sufficient space to fully examine this undoubtedly fertile question here, it is at least worth briefly noting Paul Feyerabend's commentary on Galileo's telescopic vision. In *Against Method*, Feyerabend points out the inexplicable discrepancies between Galileo's drawings based on his telescopic observations of the moon, and the evidence of his own eyes. Faced with obvious contradictions between the two, why did Galileo choose to trust in telescopic vision (which he called a 'superior and better sense') over centuries of clear but unenhanced representations of the moon's surface? In the context of contemporary shifts in epistemology, Feyerabend speculates that "the new telescopic reports changed not only what was seen through the telescope, *but also what was seen with the naked eye*". Magnification was, in other words, a discourse with the power to reconstitute both its object *and* its operating subject.

This is a claim that has often been made about photography and cinema as well. The identification of spectator with camera allows for all the pleasures of bionic vision. We become a prosthesis to the peculiar delights of zoom culture, its seamless movement, its speed of focus, its relentless penetration of space and time, its capacity for uninhibited voyeurism. It's not so much that the camera has become an extension of us, as that we have also become a collective extension of the camera. Indeed this machinic assemblage insists that we momentarily suspend our very rationality (that which supposedly makes us human) in order to with equal conviction share the sweat on a distant footballer's brow, or, as in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, join a swarm of ants within the macabre confines of a severed ear. For these are both impossible sights, as impossible as Galileo's mechanically assisted images of the moon. The point is that zoom culture lends the same credence to the fictional as it does to the empirical, and this is what gives it a potentially critical edge. By foregrounding the act of representation over the thing being represented, magnification can allow the boundary between the two to be called into question. This doesn't mean that mechanically enhanced observations are necessarily false. It is the nature of truth and falsity itself that has to be examined, as well as the lived effects of favouring one form of seeing over another, or, for that matter, of privileging sight in general. Where Galileo enjoyed a choice between eye and (magnified) image, our dilemma is that we must negotiate a world where such distinctions have become undecidable.

**Geoffrey Batches**