

The 3rd Annual Experimental Lecture

Ken Jacobs Transcription

Ken Jacobs

Oh this is on? Ok good. Thank you very much. Thank you Lynne very much. Thank you everyone. Thank you for coming through the snow and the sleet and being in the subway. So, why don't we just start with the film, and then we have something to talk about?

Lynne Sachs

I'd like to say a couple things before we start. Would that be alright?

Ken Jacobs

Not one of those flattering things.

Lynne Sachs

No, no. It won't be flattering.

Audience member

It's terrible, wait 'til you hear it!

Lynne Sachs

You know, this is our third annual experimental lecture, which is put on by the undergraduate film and television department and also cinema studies to celebrate alternative filmmaking, underground filmmaking, experimental filmmaking, found footage filmmaking, home movies, all of those things— "paracinema." So I'm really, really glad to have Ken Jacobs here to be our third lecturer. The first year we had Barbara Hammer, the second year we had Craig Baldwin, who came in from California. This year we had Ken Jacobs, and I wanted to thank a few people, Lamar Sanders, who's the chair of Undergraduate Film and TV and someone who wrote a paper on *Tom, Tom, the Piper Son*. And so that was an easy easy sell. You said, of course we'll have Ken Jacobs. I also wanted to thank Richard Allen, who's the chair of the Cinema Studies department, back there. I want to thank Jeff Richardson, who's helped me organize this evening because he kind of represents the cinema studies part of the evening. And I'm here to represent undergraduate film and media mavericks, the class I teach.

And two other things, I really wanted to thank Flo Jacobs, because we have been talking maybe for about 5 or 6 months with Ken, the three of us pulling together this evening. So I'm really happy to have you here.

We decided, all of us, that it would be a little dull to have a reception in the hallway, and instead we're all going to go, all of you or anybody who wants to come join us at the Apple restaurant and sort of an extension of NYU, which is at 17 Waverly and Green Street for a drink. It's not

hosted by NYU, you have to pay for yourself, but it's a good community thing to do. We're going to eat or drink and just talk about the evening. And so it'll be directly after Ken's presentation. So, welcome to Ken and welcome to all of you.

Ken Jacobs

Um. Max and I went to school on these streets. We sort of with Hans Hoffman, how many years ago? The 50s. Yeah. And, I was interested in film and painting and, more and more the film took up all my time, money and, concentration. At the same time. My mind was mostly on painting. All the time, I was thinking about painting, and I think that in some way my work has absorbed that painting, painting ideas, the painting interests. I know that, the painting ideas that Hoffman had made us aware of, where I needed something to find a way that they could operate in cinema. And, it was mostly a subconscious process. But I would wake up with an idea for this, and an idea for that, and I saw that I'm actually furthering this interest in what Hoffman called plasticity, a depth that pulled from a 2D and more than anything, suggested a powerful 3D, but in the way that you can hardly tell.

You know, the static canvas became alive and it was something that he, I'm sure, picked up from Cubism. And then, it found his way into American abstract expressionism. Any arguing with that? Huh? Okay, so here's a recent piece, again, and a lot of the pieces are silent. Some have sound.

The blinking in the beginning, there's something about it, it's dangerous for some people. Some people can't take this blinking and I try to warn people before. I forgot to warn people before, but it seems everything's okay. Okay. The blinking isn't done to be offensive or regressive. But to create these special effects, these things are not going to happen without it.

Okay, what are some of the things you saw? You know, some things are very hard to put in words. You saw movement and you saw depth. How you saw movement that was unlike any movement ever before, unless you've seen my work, which is something is moving and doesn't move anywhere. It's just moves and plays. Can't do it in life. Can you do it? Can you? No you can't. Any questions first of all?

So, let's see more movies...

Audience member

We got a question.

Ken Jacobs

Oh, sorry.

Audience Member

I'm wondering to what capacity you think about narrative when you're actually, in the formulation stage of something like this? I mean, we kind of impose a narrative on it, if only because it plays within the vocabulary of film shared by the virtue that there are moving pictures on the screen.

Ken Jacobs

This imposing thing is very interesting. Okay, because people impose all kinds of things— they project. And very often I'm sure some of the stuff you'll see tonight, you see things that are not there. And children are completely convinced they're seeing things and they'll speak out loud and public castles and all kinds of things. So there's something about this that elicits Rorschaching.

And from each individual's mind, something will come out and meet the image and join the image. That's very interesting to me. I like the idea of charging people money for the contents of the raw mind. The three dimensional effect is coming from the fact that these are stereo pictures. Meaning, you know, they were twin exposures, the left eye and right eye exposure.

And I'm working the two of them in each case. And sometimes more, more enter into the picture. But I'll show you something, maybe not next, but that's made from the early Edison movies. Okay? Let's just jump to it. Can we see the... street thing?

Flo Jacobs

Push carts?

Ken Jacobs

Push carts up at Trinity Street, push carts at Trinity Street. And, again, something filmed originally only a few blocks away, really. The lower east side. And, one of these amazing paper prints that was at the Library of Congress, until 1912. In order to secure a patent on a film, the ownership of the film, one left a paper print. It couldn't be present, projected, but it marked, you know, the making of the film, and it sat on the shelf and then, and at minimum sat on a shelf until sometime in the 1950s, when there was an effort to put them back on film. Rephotograph them back on film, so they could be projected again. And, I got very caught up in that stuff.

And, this was a 10 minute work, made from that. So is that ready? Yes. Okay, good.

What was the name of the last film?

The last film is. *The day was a scorcher*. The day was a scorcher. Italy. Pizza. Ice cream. Thank you.

So my work, it's just different from movies when you... I think most movies are invisible. Look through movies. I mean, we follow the story. We look at faces, and we read faces. And, I think that a lot of so-called avant garde cinema, like the painting that preceded it, is asking you to look at the work itself, not through it.

You know, contemporary painting since at least since Sezanne, is asking you to look at the painting and not through it. Not at the scene, not at the (inaudible) not at the narrative. And, these films are also asking you to look at the same thing in front of you. Again, questions or?

Audience member

Yeah. And the paper prints? Are they positive prints and are they perforated or how did you register?

Ken Jacobs

I didn't do it. Okay. I, you know, I read in the times that, a number of them—

Audience member

This had been transferred already? and you got the, you know, the projector footage.

Ken Jacobs

And they were very messy then, but they're better now. They've done better. And I think you can see a lot of them online. I think you just, you know, it's going to the...

Flo Jacobs

Library of Congress.

Ken Jacobs

Library of Congress. We can see thousands of stereo images because stereo, is turning up again in the images, was the TV of the 19th century, you know, but everybody had it, had them and they just went out like vaudeville movies came in and the movies came in 2D only because it was difficult to show a large number of people a 3D work, that now is happening, Yes?

Audience member

I was curious to think about the content of the image, I know that you're pushing the idea, the surface and the painting, but it does seem to me that the kind of manipulation of the, the kind of dabs and movement has something to do with the image itself that you are.

Ken Jacobs

I'm very aware of the image. I'm always looking at the image.

Audience member

Okay.

Ken Jacobs

I'm looking and thinking, "gee, I missed that." or "Ah god, I missed that" "ah that guy... I could've done a lot with that" I mean, it's true. At the same time, that would have taken it beyond human tolerance. Which is the problem. Okay?

I do think about it, and I can't think about it too much. I have to go, you know, where I go. I think painters and serious artists have to do that. You have to go, you know. You can't consider what people can actually get onto. If Picasso or somebody has developed a scene that's beyond normal scene he has to go with that. A baseball player, a good one, can't hold a bat in some screwy way because he can really hit that ball. You have to work at the top of your powers. And this can mean, if you stay with something a long time, you're going to develop. You're going to see things that people don't see. And this becomes impossible to explain because you're going to even explain in words and then it's very difficult to explain the actual visceral phenomena. Well, what does it mean to explain it anyway? You have to be able to engage with it. Now, I'm impressed that only one person walked out— really I am. Because, these are not stories. You know, I think that's why we see movies and stories. Our son makes movies, and you seemed like a nice kid growing up, you know?

Audience Member

What's it mean to look through it?

Ken Jacobs

To look through it?

Audience member

You said...

Ken Jacobs

Oh, yes.

Audience member

You look at a painting or you look through it.

Ken Jacobs

Yes, you look through the actual paint on the canvas to what it's depicting. Okay? It's mother and child, reasons, or whatever, the field, the rainbow. You're looking at the scene and you're missing the painting. And I was saying that the Impressionists— the Impressionists were also very interested in showing, showing the scene the way we actually see it and not the way we think it, okay? But I think they spurred from the early 20th century to go beyond that and to stop feeling they must somehow, bring a world into the painting, that the painting was enough of a world on its own terms.

Audience member

The painting meaning the paint itself?

Ken Jacobs

The paint itself on the canvas—

Audience member

As opposed to the narrative

Ken Jacobs

Rectangular... crazy rectangles—

Audience member

And why did they feel obliged to put in a narrative?

Ken Jacobs

I think something I think most, most interesting, the narrative, the modern narratives became surreal, you know, became strange narratives, dream narratives and, they move away from the logic we expect of stories. We think. Wouldn't you say?

The painters who were exploratory, moved towards the surreal. That was the way that you could deal with story in some fresh, you know, creative way. I mean, you know, people make movies, study the story and studying how people engage with the story. They study the psychological device and how it engages with the mind, the emotions. You know, to me it's very diabolical. You know, like, people giving speeches. They mean to grab hold of you more and, and take you somewhere. So I find a lot of as much as I find, you know, many movies that are brilliant and charming— I am fearful of movies. I tried when I was teaching, you know, to create a lot of fear of movies' ability to charm.

Audience member

What about all those paintings the Met?

Ken Jacobs

That's a question? What about the hotdog stand in front of the Met?

Audience member

They are not engaging with the painting. There's engagement with the narrative.

Ken Jacobs

There is, but you move to the newer paintings and they're less involved with a powerful depiction of story. Some of the pictures in the stories I see. Magnificent. As is, movies, the depiction of story that can be magnificent. Yes? Did I do a nervous system work in your class one time?

Audience member

I remember being nervous but I don't know.

Audience member

We're actually interrupting a comment because I felt... I might get emotional trying to describe it, even though there is the obvious formalist kind of deconstruction. I felt such a powerful narrative tied to the concept, and it may be my sentimental projection, but I rarely want it to be someplace, as much as I wanted to be there. And part of it was that your narrative that you introduced where we are as if we were there, focusing on the boy throwing a box

Ken Jacobs

Can the people here hear him?

Audience

No

Audience member

and I'm kind of choking up, but to open up what I was really happy that as a coda at the end, you ran the film without, you know, as it was. But I had such a different experience of what it might have been to have actually been there, observing the movement of the fruit or the here comes the cops, and here it you know, it opened it up in a way that would I would never have experienced if I simply have been watching the shadow from the L move along the wagon as it goes through. So even though I was fascinated with the technique and the three dimensionality, the way you're pivoting, I think, it made me feel experienced, as if I might have been there, actually engaging them.

Ken Jacobs

Well, I'm very interested in these faces becoming real. Okay, I think I said before, stereo for me, brings a dimension of reality over. Right. What's weird but what we're used to is the world, the world flattened to a two dimensional screen. That is bizarre. But we're used to it, and we knew that not to read this flat thing and feel it and, and then it becomes the unusual thing to actually see the 3 dimensional world. And we know it's a trick. Okay? It's all a trick. It's all in a machine, an allowed trick. Normal movies are, and so is, you know, stereo movies. But they were really addressing the fact that we do have two eyes and usually sending an image one to each eye. This is not doing that. This is depth that can be seen by one eyed person. The problem is that a person with one eye for their entire lives is probably not to recognize this.

Yes?

Audience member

Imagine trying to deconstruct the image so that you don't become charmed by the narrative. You know, I was thinking of doing a lot of art that would presumably include optical printing...

Ken Jacobs

This is being done cheaply, quickly with the computer, you know, I mean, I don't have the patience to do the kind of thing you're talking about.

Audience member

And the one before? Same thing?

Ken Jacobs

Yes. This is all computer work.

Audience member

In talking about engagement or disengagement when you started, especially in the first movie *The day was a scorcher*, you started moving, from and from left to right, you know, an incredibly fluid movement, as if I'm looking at something like, I don't I was back in terms of having me engage in some, there (inaudible) moment, which is about me going somewhere but not so are not engaging in some other narrative, the historic or (inaudible).

Ken Jacobs

Okay narrative to tell a story is very possible on some level. I'm thinking narrative and that I'm not consciously. Okay? That low resizing, you hit something, I think is very important to me. I'm born in 1933, in Brooklyn. And the world was not very different from this at that time. You know, progress was slow. People still dress the same way.

I saw markets that were similar to this. Okay. So my grandmother walking around like one of these, you know, people here and, I'm, I'm it's important to me to revisit that space, you know and these people. And if you were there, you wouldn't have been able to see this kind of thing. This, this, this is artificially slowing it down and allowing you to actually take the measure of things. That would just be a blur, you know, also, you'd be interested in, you be in a situation I don't I don't want to be hit by a, by a wagon...

Audience member

The cops!

Ken Jacobs

Yeah, the cops are coming out to get out of the way. You know, you are busy with all the thoughts we're busy with usually in life.

Audience member

You did introduce a narrative in that there are a succession of foci for our attention that moves from the interaction with the fruit...

Ken Jacobs

You talk so low, you talk so low.

Audience member

You know, well, you're right here. I don't have to tell you, but we do develop the sequence of events in it that has their own narrative kind of progression. Right? Our eye is here, and now we're looking at this event. We're looking at this event.

Ken Jacobs

Right. Okay. This is a movie from Madison Studios is called *Move On*. Okay. *Move on*. And, the cops are coming to tell these guys, you know, get out of here, get out of here. And they are desperately trying to stay in place with, you know, moving the block and come back again. Know when the cops are gone. So there is a life event going on over here. There is a sequence of events that moves to a story.

Yes.

Audience member

I wonder if you would speak on time, I was thinking about John Epstein and what else? And the idea of the close up of time?

Ken Jacobs

Yes, the close up of time. What can I say to this?

Audience member

Yes. It's the last one where we don't have access to different prints. Was it just you going back and forth to the last frame?

Ken Jacobs

Okay. The way I did this originally was to work with two prints, and I think. I think in Tom's class one time I came in with two projectors that were special projectors and allowed one to freeze in a frame and then advance one frame at a time. So I would show all kinds of things, including this piece with two strands of film, 1 or 2, frames out of sync with each other. I think we go back, you know, and you get all these spatial events and time events, and I developed a reputation for being insane.

Audience member

But in a good way!

Audience member

You talked before that, the reaction you get from kids, I'm just curious to know if any of them found black and white and attended.

Ken Jacobs

Well, yeah. I mean, our kids would ask us. Are you going to show us in color? Is there talking? You know, they were nice kids otherwise. But I mean they appreciated Chaplin. But definitely the kids at a certain point want to be normal. This terrible thing happens: they want to fit in. You know before that you can show them anything and they'll work with anything. They'll engage with anything. And I mean, I think that, Nicey who now teaches at NYU, teaches video editing. The little girl, when she saw, she engaged. I think, actually, I think she was no more than six. She's very bright. Maybe six months old, as she saw the Beatles movie...

What's it called?

Flo Jacobs

Yellow Submarine.

Ken Jacobs

Okay, first of all, the kids are all geniuses. Every little kid is a genius. She's in a room, and she sees people in the dark, and she calls out, hi, hi, hi. So she doesn't take the theater for granted. And then there's a spectacle, at this absurd age. Yes.

Audience member

Ken, could you speak about, whether you have any influences on your work, other filmmakers you find an affinity with as opposed to the art influences.

Well, I think, hmmm, good question.

I don't think I... Well, I admire many things I see, and I just saw a couple of films by Ernie Gehr. Wonderful. And Jim Jennings. I mean, great people with their own path. But I think that the, the, the ability to to concentrate and contemplate, we share that, you know, but, I think all of us are, like, crowd adverse very much, if anyone is coming close, I think we react. You know, we want your distinction. Yeah. It's been, I suppose. Yes.

Audience member

When did you realize you can manipulate the persistence of vision?

Ken Jacobs

This is manipulating. You know, I never thought of, you know, I never thought of it that way. And so I was doing something with it. To it. I thought to myself, working with it, I don't think of myself as aggressive. I think of myself as, you know, catching all the things and playing them, seeing the possibilities.

You know I think I become part of the thing.

Yes.

Audience member

Do you like Gerhard Richter paintings at all?

Ken Jacobs

Well I do, I'm impressed. Yeah I wish I wasn't but I am. Yeah. Yeah. He's a great painter. How about some more movies, ok?

Yeah. It's kind of warm in here?

Lynne Sachs

Yeah, I opened the door.

Ken Jacobs

Okay. Let's see. Capitalism. Slavery and *Capitalism: Child labor.*

Oh, this is available? I'm. I'm learning that there's somethings not on YouTube. Go for it.

We were in Paris. There is an area which is full of barbershops. Dozens and dozens of barbershops. Maybe 100, wow. That cater mostly to, Black Africans. And one of the things they're selling is the illusion of whiteness. So one place has a red neon sign in front that says "So white!" in English. Another one is called "Fair and White." And I titled the work *Fair and White*, and I went through there in the evening, with a pair of little cameras that actually record HD, the Vado camera, an incredible camera. And got back to New York and got to work. I sent a few friends the copies; it was 30 minutes and I said, (inaudible) five minutes and it became two hours. And in two hours is it, I knew that. That's as far as I can go. So it's intuitive. It's immersing in the work and hearing and seeing where we want to take me. *Strauss Bangladesh*. See that movie. You haven't seen the movie. That's a good movie. I, when I was 25 years old in the mid 50s and I never had the money to finish it as film. Never, never, never could finish it as film. I mean, people ask me how I feel about video. I feel grateful for video because it allowed me to complete that film and exist in the 440 minute work. And if you've seen it, it nearly hangs together, and it's very potent. And, I was at the time, filled with the, the hopping ideas. Shot it a little, you know, how could I make these things happen? And, the best I could do. I felt, sometimes, you know, through working in an archaic way. It wasn't really where my head was in some ways. And I was able to film and put this thing together. And I always wanted to make a big statement about society. And it was an anti-capitalist statement and drove it through. And so there's there's nothing there's nothing in it that you think that, I don't think the labor to do a thing is really very-- I admire it. because I do think I have an objectivity about it. You know, when I see something good. Oh, boring. Uh, that seems potent.

Yes.

Audience member

This might be a silly question, but did you use a camera at all in these last two films?

Ken Jacobs

These are found, I've been very interested in the late 60s with these paper prints. I was interested in found footage before that, so *Star Spangled of Death* is full of found footage. But then I began this other kind of examination of film that happened with *Tom Tom the piper son it's called* and, you know, the 1906, 1905 film and it depicts the old school, it depicts Tom, Tom, piper son, sort of picking me run. Right, right. And the thing was, what was so amazing about it. I couldn't follow it. I look at this film and I just wondered what the hell are these people doing.

They're all running around, I can't make it out. And so they sent me into a scene of actually refilming the film and pulling out all these incidents, so I could see them. Let's take a look. I did another couple movies recently, from the original material, can we look at *Return to the Scene of*

the Crime in a little bit and see that and... Yeah, I think that film was thought to be looking at early film work, very early film, and I felt a kinship with very early film in the film that was made before the 20th century. I felt that no one knew where this was going to go.

The movies were far from people's minds, and they were just excited about, you know, well, we got the leaves on the tree, they're really shaking. We got a wave in the ocean. And it keeps happening. Each time you show it, the wave comes. And when, in time and in history, the things repeat that even with film, you could get some semblance of something that happened in the world and make it repeat.

All right, so all these things got to me.

Let's see a little bit of...

Tech crew

That was one of the ones that wasn't working.

Ken Jacobs

It wasn't working? Is DiGiPlay not available? Oh.

We'll show something else.

Okay. So, Yeah, let's see this film with the sound and, from... whistleblowers. *Let there be whistleblowers!*

Yes and who made the music Flo?

Flo Jacobs

Steve Reich

Ken Jacobs

Steve Reich! Don't tell him I completely forgot.

Because you've heard this before. This, but I think 15 minutes long, something like that. And, there.

How are we doing on time?

Lynne Sachs

I'm sure there's a lot of questions.

Ken Jacobs

Okay. Yes.

Audience member

I know you have talked about painting but (inaudible) in culture?

Ken Jacobs

Yes, absolutely. But, you know, like, I can think of some theories that I thought over. And I'm very sensitive to what's happening in space. What happens when stuff returns? You know, in history I guess that means something to me. Some reason I'm being reminded now of the piece, a film like downtown. You know, where we live, right?

Flo Jacobs

Richard Serra

Ken Jacobs

Richard Serra and his piece, that was, it was like, office buildings tending to make space there, and he made a piece for it. That was very well, (inaudible). Okay. But, the people working in the place saw a big, you know, dirty metal thing in their way. Okay. You can use it.

You know, if I came there, it would move from the thing freely. And they wanted it removed and eventually, he was very angry. Richard Serra was very angry. And he spoke about, fascism. The fact was that the piece fit the space very, very well. If you're looking down at the space like this, you know, you should have some abstraction, but in the actual world through all these ugly buildings behind it. And you couldn't help us see the edge of the edge of the sculpture and these buildings. It was a mess. Also it was in the way of people moving. There had been a, during the summers have been, and they went through there. They've been, have found and the people in Chinatown for the kids over there, you know, there was a life going on.

So it was one of the things where he had an idea. It was the idea. I mean, it really didn't belong there with, you know, it interfered with patterns of life. It was good for a piece.

Yes.

Is that sort of an answer?

Audience member

Okay, you can shoot me down if this is nonsense.

Ken Jacobs

Yes.

Audience member

I wonder if you saw your films or see your films as a kind of pedagogy about vision. We normally when we watch a film, we just look, but in your films, we glimpse, we peer, we glare. And there's that whole thing about turning— as if we're having to turn around while staying in the same place. They're obsessed with turning.

Ken Jacobs

I like your question. I met with some students here yesterday, and towards the end I began to say, well, how do I justify what I do, when I think of what I should be doing? Okay. Haiti just to begin with. All kinds of all kinds of things in the world I feel I should respond to, instead of make movies. Okay, this may be really baloney. Okay? I think I'm answering in a way that I have a gift. Okay? I have a gift. I'm using my gift to answer to a higher motive. Because the thing is, as if there's something higher than helping a kid who has been born. Okay? Nothing harder than that. I don't know. I feel for... We are... We are doomed. No, not just the doom is coming up so fast. Even if we had, our normal lifespan from the human race, which could be thousands of years before the planet is knocked off its cycle. Okay? We're here in a world even without Bush/Cheney and the rest of them and Obama, a limited time. I would love to see what we would do with all the scientific knowledge we had. We actually had a thousand to 2000 to 50,000 years to go. How things can happen. Okay. And if we have ten years, it's probably pretty good. So I feel, everything is sort of in vain. The only thing that we can get out of this is consciousness. We can become, I think, compassionate and conscious of this phenomena going on and on our stay in the world. And I think that what art does is build the mind— it actually is part of the creation of the mind. And I think that I am not directly trying to be a teacher in the work, but I am creating mindfulness. I am creating the mind. I'm doing my part in that.

Yeah. Yes.

Lynne Sachs

I wanted to say something and I had a question. I remember yesterday I was with my students, and one of them said, are you making green films? And are you making films that deal with social issues? And at almost every turn in each of these films, I felt like you were asking us to analyze. You weren't giving us answers. You were asking us to think about what's going on around us. And I was thinking even about the traditions of somebody like Dickens. When people turn to Dickens and when you read a chapter and then what happens is you're expecting something to change in the next chapter. With your work, especially the piece about child labor and slavery. It's not that we expect change. We are having to recognize stasis and that kind of confrontation with what exists in the world is...was... You know, the idea brought me to tears. I

was thinking, there's Dickens, there's Howard Zinn, there's all these different ways that we can look at—

Ken Jacobs

Howard Zinn

Lynne Sachs

One of my favorite historians and I'm thinking of him these days. So, I just thought that this was another way to lead us to thinking about how we... not necessarily how we can change, but that these things exist and we have to recognize them and we have to face them, even with the loud noise and, and the harshness of that.

Ken Jacobs

Yes. You know with *Capitalism*, *Child Labor*. It is a pleasure. I, you know, I am providing pleasure. You know? It's a twisted pleasure and it's a mispleasure and it troubles me.

Lynne Sachs

But fiction does the same thing.

Ken Jacobs

Yes.

Lynne Sachs

And it's also trying to haunt us.

Ken Jacobs

You know I'd like to do more capitalism pieces. I'd like to work with more except I can't work with more because it will be exciting. I don't want to make something exciting. I want to make something boring. (inaudible) The reason I want to show some of the razzle dazzle of the lost world before, which was done in the midst of the, Bush Cheney, you know, suicide plunge. It is because it deals with, it really develops and deals with power. So I did actually do it, but it's heavy, really heavy, and it's very mixed pleasure. I can't show it because it's in a format that we can't show.

Lynne Sachs

I just want to mention...

Ken Jacobs

Yeah.

Lynne Sachs

Your talk is called Cucaracha—

Ken Jacobs

Cucaracha, yes!

Lynne Sachs

Cucaracha cinema. So I was wondering if you could tell us where that came from.

Ken Jacobs

Right. When Lynne asked me to do this I was thinking, well, maybe go long enough for me to do this night, and you know, the cockroaches are going to take over. Take over the lower east side, the world. And I was thinking, well, how do you cockroaches see? So maybe I can start making movies for cockroaches. There's an audience there.

Audience member

So, I was wondering—

Ken Jacobs

Well, just one minute. I don't want to lose this. Okay?

Audience member

Okay.

Ken Jacobs

You mentioned Howard Zinn. I revere Amy Goodman in *Democracy Now!* The other thing I wanted to say was, the end of *Star Spangled to Death*. It says there's, you know, there's lots of reasons for despair. We can't despair. Despair is collaboration with the enemy. You cannot despair. And you never know what might happen. You never know what kind of crazy role of your (inaudible) might take place. You cannot despair.

Audience member

Um, you say you're not a teacher, but I certainly remember taking the summer series of lectures back to the days of René Intaglio at anthology film archives. Yeah, and if anyone embodies the notion of learning how to see what they're looking at, it was, you, and I always felt, one of the reasons why I always think (inaudible) But over time, I'm wondering, is the notion of trying to see what we're looking at, and your discourse, trying to wake us up, whether or not it does, you somehow use this vision also to, in some sort of Talmudic sense. In my thinking, you call it mindfulness, but I'm wondering—

Ken Jacobs

Well, Talmud to me is the idea received truth. And the idea of, some bobbing ceremony, you know, all these things. This is all about sleeping. You know, thinking it might have been live truth when time and bombing them. You know, I much prefer the streets and the moving feeling, And, not having any kind of strict idea should regard reality or anything else. Am I making myself clear? We should be of loose ends. We can do something then.

Audience member

I'm also wondering about Kabbalistic ideas to throw yourself into one's mindset to stay here and stay present.

Ken Jacobs

All these things, Kabbalah and all these things, they're codified. You get into some kind of, I think a kind of sleeping state, in a kind of wakeful sleeping state. So they're, they're honoring— I mean, the idea of God is so horrible to me. You know, I'm an old guy. Last night, I was thinking, Flo has two cousins who are both doctors, they're both dying horribly horrible deaths.

And I'm thinking, oh, God, this is ahead for me? Oh, Flo, how can we do this? This is really awful. And all I can think is, “good god.” This is a cleverer universe. Living things eat living things. This is horrendous. Okay. And only people who are conditioned to being the servants of tyrants, we say, please be good to me. Please do this nice thing for me. Let me not die today. Let so-and-so die today. All these things. What a horrible idea. You know, God. And I go by the churches...

Yes.

Audience member

Could you talk about how Steve Reich was involved in the project? Did he see the film and respond to it?

Ken Jacobs

Yeah. Somebody brought us together to do a live performance. Okay? And the live performances—

Flo

The Co-op benefit.

Ken Jacobs

Oh, the Co-op benefit. My work was obliterated because when the actual performance took place, they lit up the musicians on the stage and lit up the screen. You know, it needs darkness to

cooperate. So afterwards, I had all these things I worked out for a live performance, and, in front of me, you know, let me continue and make it as a discreet work. Steve thought that it should start right away, you know, and I did the thing with this, this long delay, making it heavy, by making the audience wait. And he didn't appreciate that. I don't know if he appreciates anything at all.

Oh, yes?

Audience member

So I was actually going to ask you after the Capitalism Child Slavery Piece, how much do you think about the design of the space in which your films are shown? I mean, obviously they're shown here on a screen as a traditional film would be, but I remember the Nervous Light show that you did with John Zorn a while back, and that was just a massive activation of space. I'm wondering if we weren't in this little amphitheater right now, how would you prefer to be showing this?

Ken Jacobs

Well, I like this very much. Yeah, I think it's very tense and very powerful. The nervous magic lantern. John Zorn and I made a piece which is called, the nervous magic lantern. And it really is basically a magic lantern with a propeller with something to impart movement, and I don't use it with film or video, but with things. And often things are painted, it will operate and, and reason depth events take place. Depth events. You said that that's an often expression, a depth event.

I videotaped a number of those pieces, you know, off the screen, you know, two more and we just did a presentation at the Paris Cinematheque and you think people, actually, young people left the center of Paris, which they never do. They came out to the American, see what used to be the American center and saw the work and engaged with it. It was really great. I'm taken for granted over here. Once and a while, some say will employ to see me and invite me to perform. Well, you know, I would rather just. Well, do you do all these things on tape, and we're taping less and the performance is ephemeral and I've been making ephemeral performances for, I don't know, for 30 years. And, I'd rather things be very, very precise and right than last.

You got all your answers.

Yes.

Audience member

It's just a comment. You know, we've been talking, me and her, about how emotional your pieces are. There's some pieces, like the first one I felt that that image of the pram with a boy. I felt the movement was all rocky and that there was a kind of cradling going on there. So I do feel that

there's such an incredible uniqueness about how you react to each of those images, you know, and it's really incredibly moving. And at some points, for instance, in the last piece, I felt there were these emotional moments and then there were more analytical moments, more like, I'm going to show you, you know, moments of this film, areas of this film, personages that are important. And it seemed a little bit like a catalog of all the possibilities in the film ending with, with a don't know what the circle. But, I guess the emotional thing is, is this affect. I wouldn't call it narrative exactly, because there's no development. But there is a hint.

Ken Jacobs

Yeah

Audience member

A hint. It's very strong.

Ken Jacobs

The world can be emotional. Daily events and too much, too much, you know, and I have to, we see all this life that took place in front of the camera, emotionally. It means a lot to me. All these things are real. Working with the MoMA pieces. And then you don't do something called New York ghetto fish market 1933, lower east side in the ghetto, the Jewish ghetto. And it's familiar. Right. I'm somebody whose first language was Yiddish, and my grandparents who raised me, they didn't know any English. So, it is touching upon a world that means a lot to me.

Yes?

Audience member

Related to that question, are there always human beings and human figures and gestures in your films.

Ken Jacobs

No because, sculpture was born before architecture. These things are powerful. This open door is very, very powerful to me. This thing— it pulls away from the wall. Ugh! I can work with this.

Yes.

Audience member

Obviously, it's easier for you to have it in digital today.

Ken Jacobs

Yeah.

Audience member

Do you miss film?

Ken Jacobs

Yeah. I love film, but I don't miss it.

Audience member

I mean, do you miss some of the...

Ken Jacobs

No, no no no, I'm dyslexic, which didn't help, okay? And having everything contained is so wonderful. Our house and food junk, you know, you know, when I was doing these physical things, I needed everything available to me. Always had a wonderful collection of broken umbrellas, you know, bought from New York City after the rain. She didn't get rid of it. This is better.

Do we have time for one last work?

Lynne Sachs

How long? One more film?

Ken Jacobs

It's a short film.

Audience member

What is the title of this?

Ken Jacobs

We are about to see *Amorous Interludes*. *Amorous Interludes*!

Thank you wonderful audience. Thank you very, very much.

Lynne Sachs

I want to thank Ken for spending yesterday with our students and today with all of us, it was really wonderful.

So this is in case some of you were late. We will be gathering in just a few minutes at the Apple Restaurant at 17 Waverly, which is just around the corner. If you get there before I do to say that we have a reservation, it's under my name there for 20 people. So we have plenty of room. And I hope you'll join us.

Ken Jacobs

So you're paying for the wedding?