

THE SHOW ROOM

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Reproductive Labour: An exhibition exploring the work of Cinenova

9 February – 26 March 2011

In the exhibition *Reproductive Labour*, Cinenova's films, videos and paper materials were worked on and displayed in a number of ways. Invited selectors nominated a work from the collection that was featured daily. Bringing these together with a series of screenings and events, this formed a rare opportunity to watch and research pivotal works from the history of feminist, black, queer and experimental film and video, and together consider how they activate the present.

WEEK FOUR: FILMS

Each selected film was shown throughout the day. They were not looped, but were played when there were visitors in the space.

WEDNESDAY 2ND MARCH

Shinjuku Boys, Kim Longinotto, Japan/UK, 1995, 54min
Selected by Anna Colin

Anna Colin: *I have chosen 'Shinjuku Boys' by Kim Longinotto, a film is set in 1995 at the New Marilyn club in Tokyo, where 'onnabe' - women turned men - entertain female customers. Having not seen the film, my choice was first motivated by a curiosity to learn something about Japanese queer politics.*

In the trailer, the 'onnabe' are described as 'ideal men' to the women who frequent the New Marilyn. What does this ideal reveal about gender relations in Japan, and what does it represent in a society in which the institution of marriage holds a strong place? These are the questions I am hoping to find answers for in this film.

Semiotics of the Kitchen, Martha Rosler, USA, 1975, 8min
Selected by Cathy Lane and Martina Mullaney

Cathy Lane: *Twenty years after 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' was first made I was making sound works that were concerned with food, cooking and women's domestic lives past and present. When I first came across this film of Martha Rosler performing her alphabetic litany of kitchen objects deadpan straight to the camera, I was struck by the elegance of the metaphor with its powerful simplicity and underlying humour. Since then I have become more familiar with her long and committed body of work and some of the ways in which, over the last forty years, she has applied to same characteristics to making work around many issues including war, social control and social justice. A true inspiration.*

Martina Mullaney: *I first saw 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' in 2002 on a research trip to Paris. At the time I was studying for an MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art. I was full of ambition, and as such the subject of the domestic was not a threat to my creativity. I have always been a fan of Martha Rosler and while the work interested me in the way the domestic can play on ones fears as a woman – particularly for those of us who were brought up by women who worked in the home – it left me wondering naively if young women continued to fear ending up like their mothers. How foolish I feel now. After the birth of my daughter, an artist friend of mine – herself a mother and someone I*

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admire and respect greatly – on her first visit to see my new infant told me that I was “a homemaker now”. I was horrified – not because I was insulted by her words – but because I knew that the kitchen could indeed become the centre of my world. In my twenties it was the bedroom.

THURSDAY 3RD MARCH

The Death of The Father, Jane Harris, UK, 1986, 29min

The Father is Nothing, Leone Knight, Australia, 1991, 10min

Selected by Howard Slater

Howard Slater: *These two films remind me of my earliest cinema experiences in a small Lancashire town that had a ‘picture palace’ that my grandparents had visited to watch ‘philems’ to the accompaniment of an organ. In the early 70s I wonder about the formative experiences of seeing ‘Diamonds are Forever’, ‘The Towering Inferno’ and ‘Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid’. These films were obviously laid on, chosen for us but, at 10 years old, they appeared as if by chance in the back pages of the local newspaper which I scoured every Thursday to see what was on next week.*

The invite from Cinenova to select a film also has an element of chance to it. I scour the list wanting to see many of the film: hardly any of which I have seen. I have a faith in this archive that I didn’t have in the listings of the local newspapers. I have idealised hopes that many of the films here can change things; can dissolve a little the machismo of knowledge and the perennial and stunting divisions between the intimate and the political.

The films I choose may speak for me and I like the haphazardness, the objective chance, of choosing films I haven’t seen, letting them speak for me and my having to keep an improvisatory pace, to become something other by an immersion in the films and what they could provoke in me. Instead of the father-who-knows, instead of adopting the position of expert-lecturer with a fine tuned discourse I like the idea (more of a ‘co-intentional’ practice) of watching the films with others for the first time.

Being a father of two perhaps goes some way to suggesting that there is a deliberate conscious element to my ‘objective chance’ pitch. Having chosen two films with ‘father’ in the title perhaps permits me to bring an experience into collision with the films and have that increase their affective impact. So too other elements guide my choice. The silence-inducing belittlement of much discursive language has often troubled me, as has the occlusion of the unconscious dimension of social relations. I feel these films will let us play with too tight categories and bring some ‘unconsciousness raising’ into the ‘picture palace’.

FRIDAY 4TH MARCH

Homes for the People, Kay Mander, UK, 1945, 30min

There? Where?, Babette Mangolte, USA, 1979, 9min (currently unavailable)

Selected by Malin Stahl

Malin Stahl:

To Cinenova,

A choice and some notes on why ...

Instead of choosing one film I have decided to select two that I think make for an interesting dialogue. ‘Homes for the People’, Kay Mander, 1945 and ‘There? Where?’, Babette Mangolte, 1979.

Without having seen the films, I would suggest that they both explore different ideas of home. What is a home? The Wikipedia definition is:

‘A home is a place of residence or refuge. When it refers to a building, it is usually a place in which

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an individual or a family can rest and store personal property. Most modern-day households contain sanitary facilities and a means of preparing food. Animals have their own homes as well, either living in the wild or in a domesticated environment. As an alternative to the definition of "home" as a physical locale, home may be perceived to have no physical definition—instead, home may relate to a mental or emotional state of refuge or comfort' (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home>)

For her film 'Homes for the People' Kay Mander interviews five women that all express dismay at the poor housing conditions of the time. Mander has a way of making these women feel at ease with her – during the interview they go about with their daily routine, washing clothes, cleaning the dishes and so on. It is clearly the housewife's opinion we are given. It is explained that the average household in 1945 has no hot water and is not properly heated. The film concludes with an urge to fight for better homes by getting organized into women groups, trade unions and to vote for the local council that has the working class people's interests at heart. In England, women achieved the right to vote in 1928, making these women part of the first generation of female voters.

Babette Mangolte made 'There? Where?' when she first moved to California. She calls it 'a film about dislocation' (<http://www.babette-mangolte.com>). It is alluring to imagine that the making of the film was a way for Babette to get to know this new place and to make it her home. But I think the film is more about learning about a place - less a conquering of the foreign through knowledge and more about allowing difference.

Can dislocation be thought of as the opposite of home? To dislocate implies to pull something apart, away from its belonging. If home is a refuge, is dislocation the state of a refugee? Is home harmony and dislocation dis-harmony?

Writing on democracy, Chantalle Mouffe argues that the moment we overcome a disagreement/disharmony with harmony, a new disharmony is formed. She suggests that consensus is impossible, because as soon as one inclusion is made another exclusion takes place. Instead, Mouffe prefers a state of 'undecidability' or 'antagonism' – suggesting a society that does not rest in consensus but is instead kept in motion through friction.

The selected films represent two different examples of what 'political' might mean. Mander's film holds up the issue of bad housing conditions and points to concrete and practical ways to resist and to fight. Today this is still or again a very relevant issue as the current government has implemented cuts to Housing Benefits whilst London rents are continuously increasing. Soon, I read in The Guardian, hundreds of people will be forced to move out of their homes. The demographics of London will change drastically, as poor people will have to find new homes, further out in the suburbs. For many, the meaning of home is about to change. Babette's film contains no political message, but the structure she applies can be said to have political connotations. Babette has pulled the voiceover from the image - the voices are dislocated - we are not sure if they are near or far, here or there. Mouffe's term 'undecidability' can be used to describe the position of the film – it is kept in motion by 'disagreement'. An act of dislocation has the potential to de-stabilise conventions and regulations of standard usage and thereby to make room for other possibilities. (This is not to say that destabilisation is always a good thing!)

Malin

Stranger Baby, Lana Lin, USA, 1995, 14min
Selected by Cynthia Chris

Cynthia Chris: *In a tangle of parallel narratives and meta-narratives, Lana Lin's 'Stranger Baby' allegorises the liminal status of immigrant populations — and the particularised experience of*

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individual alienation — in the body of a mysterious alien figure. The alien, who arrives in a delightfully classic flying saucer, wanders wordlessly, observed, tracked, and examined. She is an object of anxiety and subject of speculation, which is compiled in voiceovers that respond to Lin's footage, imprinting possible stories onto enigmatic imagery. Finished on film and largely composed of scenes that focus on TV screens, 'Stranger Baby' is a gorgeous integration of original and found footage that eerily exploits video's distinctive flicker, static, and vertical roll. Some of its tension derives from the jittery, imperfect attempts to sync the frame rates of film and video, while additional waves of displacement enter via the commentary of women interviewed on their own experiences of occupying the status of immigrant or racialised aliens. "I'm always being asked," one laments. "What are you? I thought I was some kind of science experiment." Another imagines, "If I was in the right kind of atmosphere I could have all these incredible powers. I could leap fifty feet high... I just wasn't in the right kind of atmosphere." In these playful layers, Lin captures a sense of what it means to recognise the 'I' as an 'Other', to face the self, as one participant puts it, as if ever at "the beginning of the world, the beginning of time."

SATURDAY 5TH MARCH

Eerie, Sandra Lahire, UK, 1992, 1min
Selected by Lis Rhodes

You Be Mother, Sarah Pucill, UK, 1991, 8min
Selected by Grace Schwindt

