The actual illusion: an interview with Ken Jacobs[1]

Interview by Rodrigo Sombra

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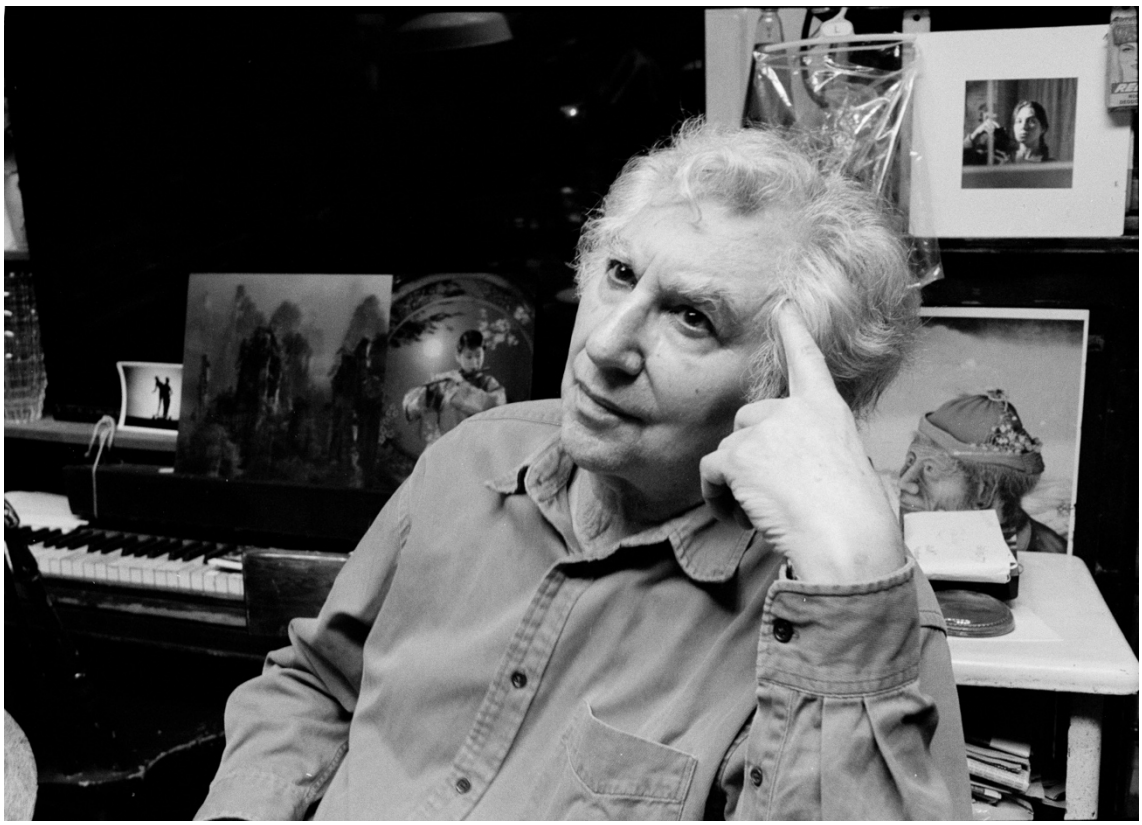

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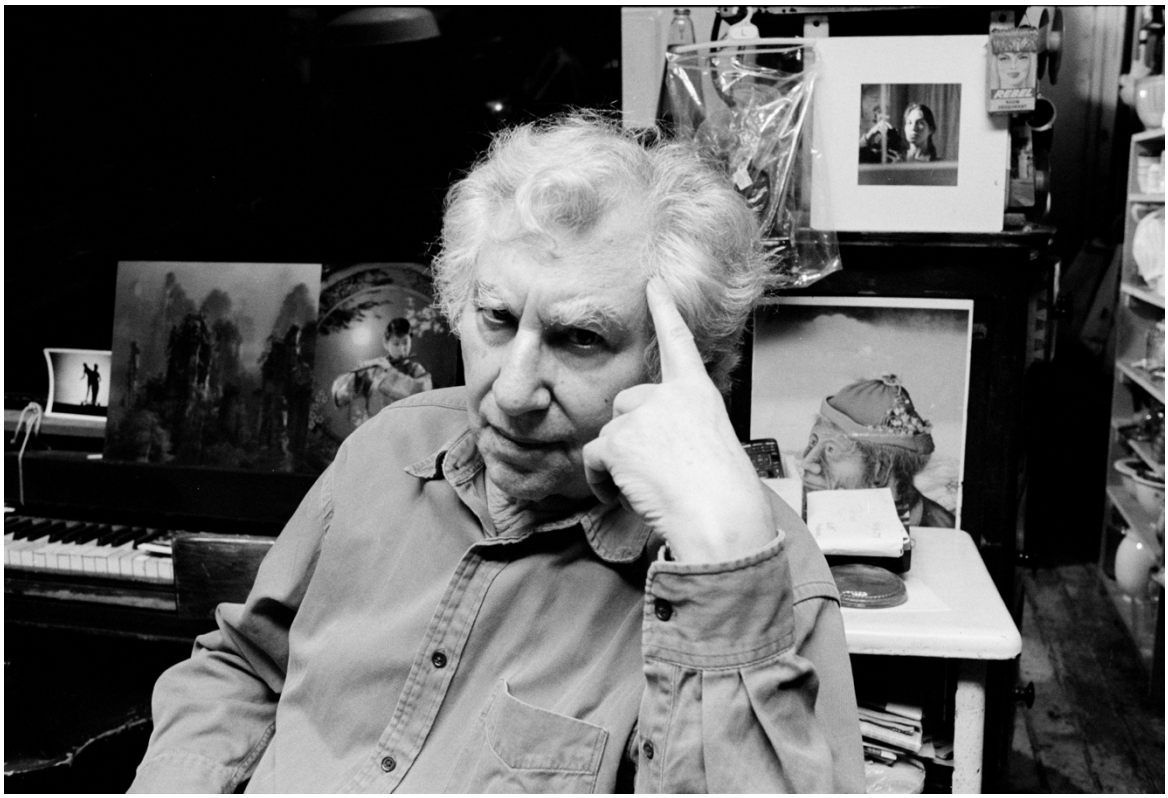
[1] This interview was carried out during the period I was a visiting Ph.D student at NYU Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures with a scholarship sponsored by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nıv́el Superior-Brasil (CAPES).



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“Fourth floor, fourth floor!” Ken Jacobs yells into the intercom. A key figure in the history of American experimental cinema, Jacobs has lived for decades in the same building in Lower Manhattan, the same where he shot *Nissan Ariana Window* (1969) and would welcome me one winter afternoon for an interview. Once the steps are over, he finds me in the doorway then leads me inside. Exploring his apartment is like traversing a maze of shelves crammed with boxes, images, books, toys, and all sorts of gadgets. Merely being there implies an inevitable risk of bumping into something and possibly jeopardizing the existence of one of the manifold items of that cabinet of wonders. In fact, very little there suggests the idea of home. It is as if Jacobs and his wife Flo lived better inside a file cabinet, a chaotic archive with numerous shelves and drawers where, on a whim, someone decided to store a bed.

It is December 2018 and nothing occupies the director's mind more than the impeachment process of Donald Trump: “I am tired, tired of waiting for this president to go to jail. He's a criminal. He only became president to make more money. Lubitsch could have written that story. He had a certain sense of humor.” At the time, Jacobs was not alone in hoping for the frustrated impediment ahead: "A

happy ending would be to see Trump wearing a suit the color of his hair." Orange, like the uniform of prisoners in America.

Three months earlier, Jacobs had presented at the Museum of the Moving Image, in New York City, a performance with eternalisms and the *Nervous Magic Lantern*, both 3D imaging devices manufactured by the filmmaker. The *Magic Lantern*, in particular, in which abstraction reigns, is evocative of his early artistic efforts. A painter as a young man, Jacobs took root in abstract expressionism before discovering cinema. Visits to MoMA and other New York venues dedicated to avant-garde films would lead him to embrace moving images, and also foster personal interactions with directors such as Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage, united in what would later become the heroic generation of American avant-garde cinema. Jacobs was also one of the most important partners of Jack Smith, the gay underground icon with whom he would collaborate in the films *Little Stabs at Happiness* (1960) and *Blonde Cobra* (1963).

The junk aesthetic of the films shot with Smith would be further tempered with research using proto-cinematographic languages, such as shadow play, the magic lantern, and stereoscopy. Such experiments show the radical illusionism at the heart of his art. In them, Jacobs takes as object the operations of the human vision, making apparatuses capable of creating monstrous, aberrant images, apt to "entangle the mind in apparent impossibilities.[2]"

The filmmaker was also notable for his repeated visits to early cinema, as in *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), his most celebrated film. In fact, it would be in found-footage practices that the political bent of his work would reveal itself with maximum force. His forays into the 20th-century visual archive would yield some of the most disturbing reinterpretations of American history, from an apparently elementary gesture, such as presenting discarded takes from a TV news story on the

[2] JACOBS, Ken. *Nervous Magic Lantern: Spiral Nebula* (2005). DVD's booklet.

murder of Malcolm-X, found by chance in the trash, in *Perfect Film* (1986), to films as consequential as *Star Spangled to Death* (1956-60/ 2003-2004), where the personal and the collective amalgamate in a tapestry of more than six hours in length reworked by Jacobs over almost half a century.

Born in 1933, Jacobs retains some of the virile complexion of youth and the wad of thick white hair combed back lends an intimidating sharpness to his countenance. He's a restless type. While listening to the questions, he shifts around the chair. Whenever it is his turn to speak, a low voice vibrates the surroundings. In the following interview, he comments on his roots in abstract expressionism, the lessons of painter Hans Hofmann, to whom he was a student, without forgetting those of Pollock and Joan Mitchell, and also recalls his interactions with Jack Smith. He also discusses the oscillation between militancy and escapism in his work, finally revealing details of a little-known facet of his career, his more than 30 years as a university professor, when he entangled students in a permanent engagement with Hollywood filmmaking.

The Actual Illusion: An interview with Ken Jacobs

Rodrigo Sombra 1 – Throughout your life you've been very critical of cinema as a device of power. You often mention how manipulative, insidious and ultimately dangerous, cinematic operations can be. And even how tyrannical those operations are when deployed in a cultural system like Hollywood. You seemed to always have kept a certain suspicious attitude towards cinema. I wonder if you could comment on how this suspicious stance first came to be. Did something in your early days as a moviegoer sparked this attitude of suspicion?

Ken Jacobs: When I was 17 I became suspicious of everything. Suspicious of everything. All my political attitudes go back to the age of 17.

What happened back then?

I just became alert and understood that people were getting rewards from deception. That American history wasn't what it was said to be. And also I was

talking to my grandmother and she was getting occasional letters from Europe, from the surviving members of the family. Jews in the East of Europe. It was just shocking. So, in a way this developed and I began to understand left and right and what this was about. And I've only gotten deeper into that attitude, nothing has relieved it.

2- You are one of the pioneers of avant-garde cinema in the US. Could you describe how were the audiences of that rising experimental cinema in the late 50s, early 60s (screenings at Cinema 16, Charles Theater)?

Cinema 16 was a wonderful thing that happened and MoMA showed impossible films. We'd be watching Lulu…what's her name? Louise Brooks in that early Pabst film… And it's amazing. I began to see these films at the age of was 17. My high school in Williamsburg, Brooklyn – a very poor are at that time –, had a ticket for students that wanted to go to the museum. They could go free with this ticket. And at some point, the teacher said: "You just hold on to it until somebody else ask for it. You are the only one who uses it". So, I was going to the museum each week, you know? If I had 13 cents coffered I could get to the museum and back again. So, it was amazing. It was a whole other dimension of reality. People were educated, they sat out in the garden of the museum. Educated people. The films were uncanny. I saw *Greed* (1924) there. Stroheim's *Greed*. I was 17 years old! There were a few good American films, but very very few.

And there was also a theater, a strange theater in Williamsburg, that showed old films, because I think they were cheap. The theater had almost no audience, but it showed Max Reinhardt's *A midsummer night*'s dream (1935). I saw amazing things there. I was always interested in art and this was a turn on to cinema.

And when your films, or the films of Jonas Mekas or Jack Smith, members of the then emerging avant-garde cinema scene, were shown, how did the public react? Did viewers have a reverent attitude towards your films, as it does today when they are screened?

Jack had a very narrow opening into his soul. And he loved the films he saw as a kid in the Mid-West. And these were stupid color spectacles. He never got over it. I think

he could see sometimes the merits of the great films, but his need for film, his love for film, stayed with that stuff [he had watched as a kid], and then in his own work he would lampoon it at the same time he was reverent. He loved it. This is who he was.

You collaborated with Jack Smith in films like *Blonde Cobra* (1963) and *Star Spangled to Death* (1956-60/2003-2004), but it is known that at some point the friendship and the collaboration between you and him fell apart for good. What would be the most enduring effects of Jack Smith in your life and in your work?

None in my life. *Blonde Cobra*, in fact, I didn't shoot. I shot *Star Spangled to Death* and someone who assisted me occasionally was Bob Fleischner. After we stopped shooting *Star Spangled* he secretly began shooting *Blonde Cobra*, but then neither of them [Bob Fleischner and Jack Smith] knew what to do with the footage they shot. They couldn't figure how to put it together. And I looked at it and I said: "there's a film there". And Bob gave it to me and later on I taped Jack's speaking and put them together to make *Blonde Cobra*.

Blonde Cobra (1963)

Little Stabs at Happiness (1960)

Part of his work involves discarded materials: debris, rags, rubbish. Where does this interest in trash come from?

Well, this rubbish you call is history. It's the deeper history, it's the discarded history and that is attractive to me.

Flaubert used to say that there is a "moral density to be found in certain forms of ugliness."

Oh, that's very good.

What kind of morality is involved in your engagement with discarded materials?

Another word for this discarded material is refuse. Sometimes a basket invites you to drop your refuses into it. I think it's a Holocaust reaction. Yes. I think it's the predicament of Jews. And I'm not religious at all. At all. I'm very anti-religion, very anti any fixed Cosmology. The virgin birth is an embarrassment. It's stupidest thing in the world. But there are the historical facts. People experienced these things. My Grandmother was experiencing in Brooklyn what was happening to her relatives in Europe.

Perfect Film (1986)

You once said that "My accomplishment is out-of-the-art market Abstract Expressionism picking up on Marey-Muybridge Lessons of Hans Hofmann." While Hofmann was your teacher, are Marey and Muybridge sort of imaginary mentors to you?

No, they are real teachers. Look at their work, it's awesome. It breaks the continuity of illusion. They are into breaking things down to the frame. Marey especially…My God, it's just a revelation. All these dreams are frames? Wow, what a truth! Kids can learn easily now from the Youtube, but when I was a kid you went to a movie and you entered into a dream.

Could you further comment how you assimilated Muybridge and Marey in your work?

I think in just the importance of the nucleus, the frame, you know? The story is very very far away from the frame. And, really, another teacher was the Atom Bomb. There is something so deeply intrinsic to creation, not the movies now, but just life could be reached and it could be exploded and release all this mysterious energy that would devastate cities. God… So, it turns one inward. I love the movies as much as anybody. I watch a lot of movies - on television now. I mean, they are fantastic

movies. The skill that they are made with is awesome. Our son makes movies – and they are good, but that's not what I wanna do.

Star Spangled to Death (1956-60/2003-2004)

In Stan Brachakge's book *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers*, he says that "Ken Jacobs never came to terms with the 'art crowd' of New York. He rejected it totally." Do you agree with that? Does your relationship with the art world in general is still the same up until this day?

No, I'm kinder.

What has changed?

I'm less of an anti-snob snob. More understanding. People have their pretenses and they need them.

In some ways, your engagement with protocinematic devices (shadow plays, magic lanterns, stereoscopic visuality) has pointed for a long time to the idea of "expanded cinema," to practices of the moving image that would become widely embraced in contemporary art. However, even though your work is presented in screening rooms within museums, very rarely it was installed in the traditional spaces of galleries and museums. Why is it that way? Do you believe that there is some sort of institutional resistance towards your work in the art world?

I feel I was welcomed, but many in the audience didn't know what they were seeing and were impatient and hardly convinced that if you give some time to this, something might happen. So, it was using means that they were familiar with – the movies – but not making movies.

Can I show you something?

[I accept the invitation, we interrupt the interview and Jacobs takes me to the monitor on which he works such that I may watch his latest experiment. Entitled *Details of Pollock's White Light*, it is an eternalism applied to a Jackson Pollock oil painting. "It only has eight minutes," he warns, before pressing PLAY. "And it works best with a single eye," he says, handing me a cardboard rectangle that is just a little bigger than an eyeball. The image on the screen oscillates between the colors and contrasts between the blacks and the whites, dissolving into multiple spatial variations, hinting at previously imperceptible volumes and depths, as if the technique of eternalism invented by Jacobs enhanced the density of the painting's materiality, of each ink trail's thickness. At the end of the projection, I turn to the side and notice Ken and Flo, his wife, both standing, still fixed on the screen. Each of them has their right hand over one eye and lets a smile show on their lips. We finally returned to the circular table in the center of the apartment to resume the conversation, this time accompanied by Flo].

Rodrigo Sombra ©

You've mentioned you met Pollock when you were young. How was you encounter with him?

He was very repulsive…Drunk and vulgar. Violent. He was pretty nuts.

Was it a brief meeting?

No, we didn't meet. I was just seeing him. He was very repulsive. You learned to stay away from him. There was a bar near the Hofmann school where artists would go too and he was not permitted to come [laughing].

What impressed me the most when watching the *Nervous Magic Lantern*, in your last performance at the Museum of the Moving Image, was to find myself during the screening in a state of radical curiosity. But that was an always frustrated curiosity. You attracted me to see the objects, the abstract objects seen in the images you projected. And in the beginning I had only a glimpse of those objects, but soon my vision was called upon to see more, to see their volume, to observe all their corners,

to see them from all angles. However, that was a vision never entirely available. Suddenly everything started all over again, there was always an interruption, the looping was always interrupted, the objects were never fully seen. So, there was always this intense play between curiosity and frustration.

Frustration Machine. I think I will call my next work "Frustration machine" [laughing]. Did I show you these [he hands me a set of plates with abstract images, the sort of plate projected in the Nervous Magid Lantern apparatus]at the museum?

Yes, I think you projected them that day.

I am tapping the subconscious. Optical things happen, lights are going on and off. It is a certain kind of hypnotism.

It's like a possession. It felt haunting.

And dangerous, crazy-making. But I mean it to be beautiful. I encouraged someone recently to bring their little children over because I learned from experience that kids who watch these stuffs talk out loud. They talk about what they see. It's so interesting. Very often, in sophisticated abstract art, they tell you: "You mustn't rorschach, you mustn't see things that aren't there, just see the paint". But I discovered I really like having these kids, little kids, talking about what they see [laughing]. So I invited someone over with their little kids (and I also showed them as I was working what I was doing, so I didn't want to scare them) and then I realize that this little kid was sitting in a chair and drawing underneath me.

It is curious that you are saying that, because Pollock used to say that although his work was abstract, there was always a degree of figuration in it.

Ken Jacobs: That's why I consider Joan Mitchell a greater artist. When Pollock gave up the drips, near the end of his career, he really became very figurative, and began doing faces, and that was terrible. Joan Mitchell always spoke about being inspired by nature, but she never copied nature. When you look at her work you see paint.

Flo Jacobs: But you can't say any different about Pollock.

Ken Jacobs: At the end, Pollock was making faces.

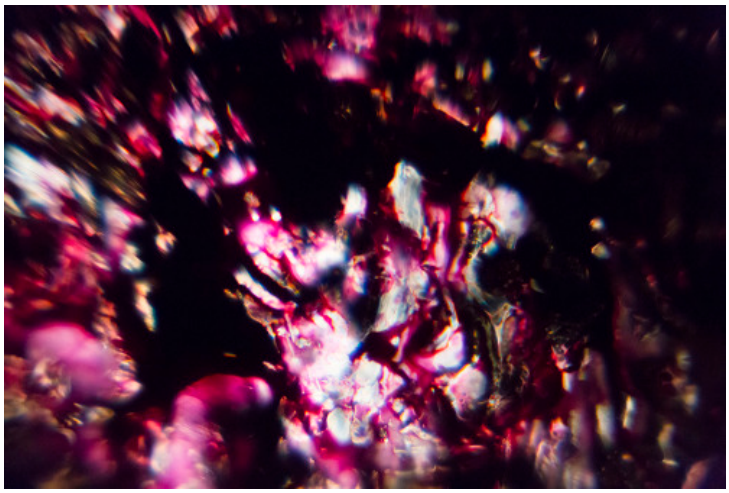
Flo Jacobs: But that's different, that's another phase.

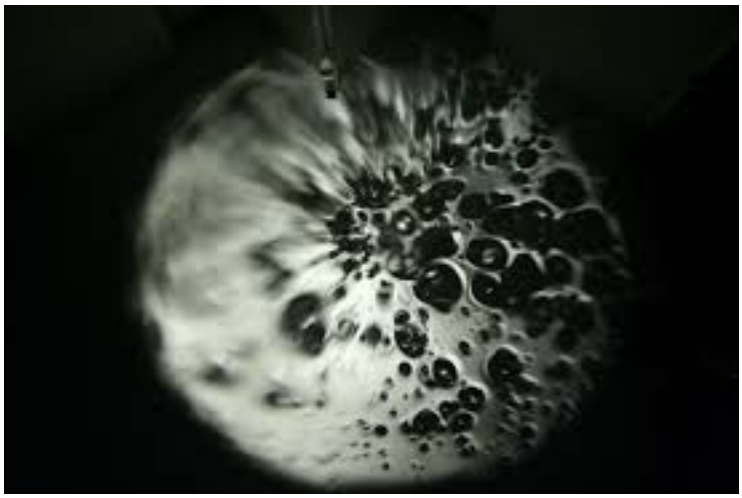
Ken Jacobs: But the tendency was always there. He resisted it, but he also gave in to it. These guys were very impressed by Picasso. Picasso never left figuration. Never for a moment he stopped painting things, and that's fine. But the big discovery I feel in what they were doing was getting to see what just paint would do. Let paint be paint. Let it not evoke or resemble things from the world. Let it do what it can do.

Also, Hofmann, especially, made one very very depth-conscious. I value his paintings because I see them in their strong suggestions of depth. I work in illusion. Actual illusion, which strangely enough is more effective for one eye than two eyes. Two eyes you normally need to see depth, so this [he shows a plate used in the *Nervous Magic Lantern*] is for one eye. But I deviated. I moved away from paint…Actually, this is paint [he holds the plate again]. I'm still painting, to me surprise. Except that you don't see it directly, you see its shadow.

Another aspect that impressed me a lot in the Nervous Magic Lantern is that while watching it one experiences long durations, but these are continually interrupted. There is the extended time, the duration, and also, through the flickering effect, the repeated breaks. It is as if you were throwing us into a paradox: we experience duration and interruption at the same time.

Oh, I love that. You are really making me happy to hear that! I like that very much. You are getting the atomic structure of time, you know? You get this piece of time, that piece of time, and this piece of time, and they are combusting in front of you.





Nervous Magic Lantern

Tom, Tom, the piper's son (1969-71) is your best-known work. The film received considerable critical attention, and much of what was published about it tends to

emphasize the analytical movements deployed in it, associating the film with a sort of archaeological impulse. I've re-watched it recently, and for the first time in the movie theater, and what caught my attention was less the visual analysis procedures which are usually highlighted, but, in the absence of a better word, a deep love, a deep devotion for those images. I wonder if you could talk about what, specifically, in that 1905 film shot by Billy Bitzer attracted you. What made you appropriate Bitzer's film to create *Tom, Tom, the piper's son?*

That was it. I love the women in the movie. I love their necks. I love it and I couldn't let go afterwards. We kept working with that in our live performances for years afterwards. We spent 25 years traveling with very heavy analytic projectors and later on I was able to find some other ways of showing it a frame at a time. Two projectors side by side and two prints of the same film. Showing a frame or two – sometimes more – out of sync with each other. And so the similarities and differences made for all kind of strange spaces. Aberrations. Uncanny, crazy – "crazy" is the world, right? Crazy spaces. And they were beautiful to explore, wonderful to explore.

Tom, Tom, the piper's son is often credited for having helped to trigger a whole new appreciation of early cinema. In fact, with this film you are nodding to the plastic richness of the beginnings of cinema, to the origins of cinema as an artform. On the other hand, *Tom, Tom, the piper's son* strikes me as an experience of futurity. It's a 1969 film that, in a sense, foresees our current relations with images, that anticipates our commons habits as spectators in the digital era. Freezing, reframing, zooming in and out, speeding up and slowing down, going back and forth, messing up with an image to the point of disfiguring it, turning it into a mass of grain and abstraction: it's all already there in your film.

I think so. Yes. But it's an actual experience of investigation into film. The image of the film and the things that make up the image. These little dots and spaces that make up the image. The subatomic particles of a visual image. First of all, I watched it a few times when I first got it. It had been rescued from the Library of Congress. In order to hold on to a possession of a film, you'd leave a paper print with the

Library of Congress. And then someone came along in the sixties, fifties maybe, and he re-photographed the paper back onto film and then these things became available. And I had begun teaching at Saint Jon's University. Big catholic school, with I think 300 students. The women with lowering stockings. They were so oppressed… They were so proper and I began showing them all these improper things [laughing]. And I liked it. So these films became available and with the school budget I could rent them and see them. Most of them worth anything, but that one was amazing. It was just an explosion. I couldn't follow the story! I could not tell the mass of people. I could not break them up into individuals. I never saw the pig that was stolen! That was fascinating.

There is also a pedagogy of vision at play in *Tom, Tom, the piper's son*. At first, you show the entire Bitzer's film, then you break it down and analyze it, you do your experiment with it, and at the end you show us the original film again, from beginning to end.

Yes, that's right. But you see it differently.

Tom Tom the piper's son (1969-1971)

Also, in the experiment with Pollock you've just screened to me, you show the "frames" you are using. Why is this demonstration of the materials, of the procedures, important to you?

Ken Jacobs: I'm taking Pollock for a ride. The painting is fantastic. He is not making faces here. He is laying tubes of paint. It's an incredible painting. So, I've got to mock this point of departure, you know? And then I'm doing a riff, a cinematic riff on Pollock. He would not like it. I don't believe he would have liked it. I don't believe that Joan Mitchell would like what I do with her work. But it's a very respectful indignity. I'm laying on them.

Flo Jacobs: I'd like to say how much of this has come from Hofmann. The idea of showing the source, making a version of your work and then having the source looked at again.

Ken Jacobs: Good question… I can't answer that…One of the extraordinary things about studying with Hofmann was people were painting very abstract works, or drawing very abstract works, but there was always a model. There was a model holding a pose for sometimes a week or two weeks at a time. None the models were picked for their beauty. Not holding graceful poses sitting. They were usually heavy models. And there would be just a sense of weight, gravity, and the works would be departures from this. No one was drawing to make resemblances. I don't think you could tell, when the work was done, that this was from a model. But it was from a model. And Hofmann would be very critical if the model hadn't been absorbed enough, if, whatever departures one did in one's own work, they weren't based on the reality of the model sitting in space. It was very confusing. I wrote something about it.[3] So, it had to do with the model sitting there, but you are after something else. You were making a drawing, that is going to be the model, this truth you discovered about the model sitting on a chair, sitting in space, and yet, at the same time, not a likeness. It was something you were taking off from it, you were expanding on it.

Flo Jacobs: I have a suggestion. Maybe it's evidence what Hofmann was having you see. The evidence and then what comes from it and what one makes from the evidence.

Ken Jacobs: See, I think what was important to him was gravity. We are always in a world of gravity and never leave it for a moment. It plays a huge part in our lives, which from infancy we adapt to. We don't realize that gravity is at work [he lifts a spoon and lets it fall on the table]. Everything is being pulled to the center of the globe. There's no real down, but there's the center of the globe. This is the reality. I think about the image of the crucifix, a man suspended over this thing. The suspension is a torture because he's not been allowed to succumb to gravity. He can't go in the way that gravity is pulling him.

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[3] Jacobs refers to the essay "Huge churning vistas," available here: https://www.kenjacobsgallery.com/talks-interviews

That's a very interesting formal principle for artmaking: gravity

Oh my god, it's *the* principle. So you had to think of those things. Even when you didn't say them you put them in a place in your mind where you had to confront those realities.

You often refer to cinema as a way of thinking. In what sense does cinema "think"?

Well, language allows us to formulate ideas that we can pass from one to the other. But the mind is capable of all kinds of thinking. Musicians think with sound, it's far more abstract where they go. They are thinking in sound. I heard some Beethoven the other, I was just knocked out. The thinking that was taking place a couple centuries ago. Who could operate better in this realm? Yes, it's a form of thinking.

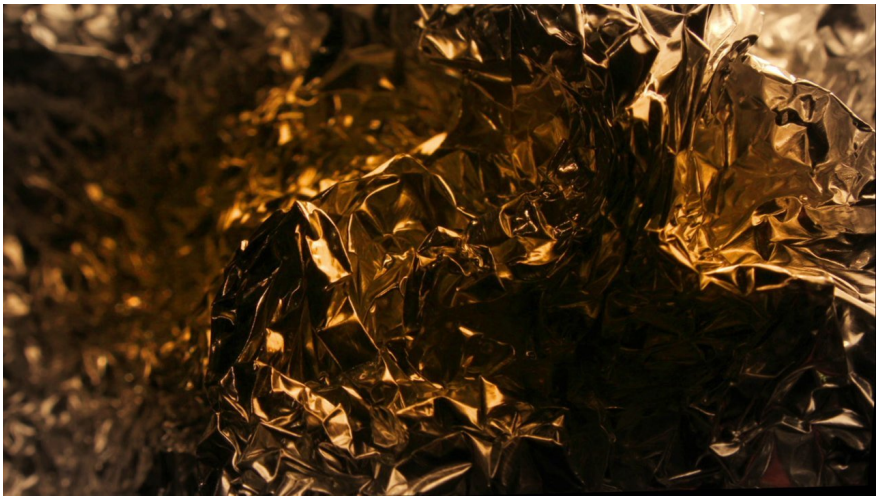
In an interview in the early 1990s, you said when commenting on Nissan Ariana Window (1969): "One of the things that was important to me in making this film, and other films at that time, was to make pockets of sanity, not to make anti-war films that were going to be as feverish as war itself, but to make pockets of calm, serenity, and, to me, sanity." Do you hold a similar feeling today? What kind of response does the current moment provoke in you as an artist?

Well, we are in a crazy moment. Republicans have lost their senses. They work for the very rich. Many democrats work for the very rich. We live in a plutocracy. You [Brazilians] live in a fascist state now. So, they are no longer following the rules. The rules have been discarded. This is about war, power, possession.

America, which has always been grotesquely brutal, now is in danger of losing even the congeniality that made life pleasant over here for many people. People in exceptional circumstances, people who are not brutally poor, not sick. You walk through the streets now and you see so many beggars, they're begging for money. That wasn't true I think even 10, 15 years ago. And then America is at war, America is always at war…

What was I saying? Oh, the islands of sanity! The islands of sanity are very necessary. I think Matisse had this idea too, that you could see his painting and forget the world around. Picasso didn't let you forget the world around. And I think it was to his merit that he couldn't forget. Picasso could attend to the brutality of the world and Matisse escaped it. But I think that I'm escaping too. In most of my works I also escaped. But I do a lot of works, so some things like *Capitalism Child Labor* (2006) do make an acknowledgment of what's going on. Did you see *Seeking the Monkey King* (2011)? That's on my website, it's free. Those works allow me to do my Matisse works. But, see, these isles of sanity, they are criminal. Who should really neglect what is going? It's horrendous.

Nissan Ariana Window (1969)



Seeking the Monkey King (2011)

Capitalism Child Labor (2006)

In your last performance at the Museum of the Moving Image, you presented a new eternalism inspired by the activist Patricia Okoumou, who a month earlier had climbed the feet of the Statue of Liberty to protest against the Trump administration's detention of immigrant children. What in Okoumou's gesture drove you to make this homage in your work?

I can only tell you: absolute need. While I was making the film, she did the climbing. So, it happened here, at this moment. I show you the statue of liberty, the symbol standing out there, and someone put that symbol back to life. She went for what it was supposed to mean. I respected that.

Yes, because the Statue of Liberty is a symbol that supposedly welcomes the immigrants.

That's not supposed to be a tourist spot. It's tragic. This is the light

Do you appreciate the monument?

Ken Jacobs: I like it because a little girl we know likes it.

Flo Jacobs: It's wonderful.

Ken Jacobs: I like it. Not the sculpture.

Flo Jacobs: The inside.

Ken Jacobs: The inside is wonderful engineering, but the outside is… there's a word… There's a German word…

Flo Jacobs: Kitsch.

Ken Jacobs: Kitsch!

I would like to hear a little bit about your experience as a university professor. You taught for many years.

I'm told that I couldn't teach today. I would be offending too many people.

Why? What would happen in your classes that would not be acceptable today?

Ken Jacobs: I'd discuss everything. Nothing was forbidden. There was nothing I could not deal with.

Flo Jacobs: You should say your statement about being touchy.

Ken Jacobs: Oh, yes: "If it's touchy we touch it!" [laughing]

Did the students feel intimidated in your presence?

Some were, but others adapted and I think enjoyed the dialogue.

Your work continuously challenges our usual perceptual experience. Was this drive to challenge the spectator's habits in your films translated to your pedagogy in the classroom?

In the classroom we were considering everything and I really wanted them considered. What are we doing? What are we looking at? What is this dealing with? Things are deep if you allow them. If you go with them, they take you into all kinds of forbidden territories, and we went.

I've been reading about your classes in Binghamton University. I love your course's titles: "Movies are not made in heaven," "Ronald Reagan," "Beginning Stupidity," "Intermediate Stupidity," "Terminal Stupidity." I'd love to see their syllabuses.

We are immersed in stupidity, right? A big soup of stupidity! [laughing] These courses would deal with, you might say, the extravagance of the madness of many movies.

According to your former students, in your classes you would discuss experimental and documentary films, but also Hollywood blockbusters such as *Independence Day* (1996) and *Gremlins* 2 (1990). Academia tends to ignore this sort of film. They are rarely taken in consideration in the university space. How did you approach these films in your classes? What discussions were sparked by those films?

They make up people's minds. If you are talking to somebody, you are talking to that fucking movie. You should really see the movie and analyze it to understand this person. That is their mind. The movies are making up minds. People absorb the movies, they don't think about them, they just represent the movies.

So your classes always had this commitment to discuss mainstream cinema.

Ken Jacobs: Absolutely, yes.

Flo Jacobs: He felt obligated to see these movies up until the time that he retired, then he said he could be free of them.

Ken Jacobs: I haven't watched a single "muscle film" in a while**.** I'm retired. I'm through.

Flo Jacobs: But we've seen some 3D movies.

Ken Jacobs: Yes, we watched something very impressive the last time. A futuristic film, of course. I don't remember the name…

Flo Jacobs: *Inside out* (2015)?

Ken Jacobs: Wow! *Inside out* (2015) was very brilliant. It was very impressive. But now what could be better than lying in bed and watching a movie? I mean, a large enough TV screen. It's wonderfully clear and sharp and there it is! If one of us has to go to the bathroom, we stop the movie, go, come back, pick up the movie again. It's super convenient. Who can now go to the theaters? I mean, it's wonderful to see the big screen, but I never shared the feeling of the herd. I never was part of the theater community watching a movie. Whatever the response was, it was not contagious to me. I was apart. So, this is nice, I'm with my best friend and we watch incredible things.

What are your viewing habits today?

Flo says to me each night: 'What do you have in Black and White?"

What did you watch yesterday?

Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1929). Amazing. I mean, what a skill, what expressive skill.

One last question: what is your most remote memory? The earliest memory you retain from your childhood?

I remember lying next to my mother – this big, warm, solid area: my mother – and listening to the street below in Brooklyn. Cobblestones, horses, wooden wheels, and they made wonderful sounds. Clop, clop, clop. That was beautiful. And now I'm in the age of the computer! How did this happen?