



School of the Art Institute  
of Chicago

ARTISTS' FILM, VIDEO, & NEW MEDIA

# Conversations

AT THE EDGE

## VARIABLE AREA: HEARING AND SEEING SOUND, 1966-78

November 12, 2009

1981, 1966-78, various artists, USA, multiple formats, ca. 65 min.

Experimental Sound Studio's Outer Ear Festival of Sound and CATE team up once again to present a program of films that investigate the visual and aural possibilities of 16mm optical audio, as sounds perform images and images become sonic scores. Sound functions both as a sonic and visual element in these 6 films. Collectively they propose a new model for listening and seeing – a listening that happens with the eyes, and a seeing that happens with the ears. Curated by SAIC faculty member Michelle Puetz. Co-presented by Experimental Sound Studio. The Outer Ear Festival of Sound (November 3-22, 2009) is the only comprehensive interdisciplinary sonic arts festival in the Midwest. Visit [www.exsost.org](http://www.exsost.org).

CHRIS LANGDON, *The Gypsy Cried* (1972, 16mm, 3 minutes, b/w, sound)

"When one likes something very much, or someone, it is hard to do anything but like it. I didn't want to take anything away or add anything to this song because I like it a lot." (Chris Langdon)

PAUL SHARITS, *Ray Gun Virus* (1966, 14 minutes, 16mm, color, synchronous sprocket hole sound)

A series of rapidly and intermittently flickering fields of color that are accompanied by an "open system" soundtrack made possible by double perf 16mm film. Sharits wrote that *Ray Gun Virus* was an attempt to "allow vision to function in ways usually particular to hearing . . . rapidly alternating color frames can generate, in vision, horizontal-temporal chords . . . Just as the film's consciousness becomes infected, so does the viewer's consciousness: the projector is an audio-visual pistol; the screen looks at the audience; and the viewer's normative consciousness. The film's final 'image' is a faint blue; the viewer is left to his own reconstruction of self, left with a screen upon which his retina can project its own patterns."

ROBERT RUSSETT, *Primary Stimulus* (1977, 13 minutes, 16mm, b/w, sound)

In *Primary Stimulus*, the soundtrack printing process was kept completely photographic so that "the sound emitted is the sound the projector interprets from the lines which are the film's image. What comprises the film are sixteen different 'grates' of varying amplitudes (sixteen compositions of black and white horizontal lines): onto each frame of film one of these patterns is printed. The sequence varies. The compositions are similar enough to one another so that the afterimage of one relates compositionally to the next." (Laurence Kardish)

PETER KUBELKA, *Pausal* (1977, 12 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

Peter Kubelka's first and only sync-sound film, *Pausal* captures a rare glimpse of the Austrian artist (and namesake of Kubelka's famous 1960 film) Arnulf Rainer engaged in a full-body performance with a microphone. The vibrations of Rainer's breath and highly gestural movements form a visceral sonic and visual portrait of his body.

BARRY SPINELLO, *Soundtrack* (1969, 10 minutes, 16mm, color, sound)

"During the first half of *Soundtrack*, the "sound painting" – drawn on the soundtrack – is magnified and redrawn, frame by frame, on the image track so that the viewer literally sees what he hears . . . The closing section of *Soundtrack* makes use of acetate self-adhesive screens and tapes. These screens and tapes, cut to fit the soundtrack, yield controlled pitch for any duration in as many different timbres as there are patterns." (Barry Spinello)

### Conversations at the Edge

Presented by the Department of Film, Video, & New Media at SAIC  
in association with the Video Data Bank and the Gene Siskel Film Center

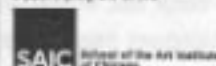
Upcoming Programs

November 19, 6pm – *Variable Area, Hearing and Seeing Sound, 1966-78*

December 3, 6pm – *New Nippon: Contemporary Film & Video from Japan*



a public program of the



**RICHARD LERMAN, *Sections for Screen, Performers and Audience* (1974, 6minutes, 16mm, color, live accompaniment by Art Lange, Guillermo Gregorio, and Brian Labycz)**

"I was always fascinated by music scores and often imagined how concerts might be changed if performers were not hidden behind music on stands. In the 1960's, I made several films that used oscilloscope imagery and, in doing so, learned to 'play' various synthesizers to generate images. For this film, I used colored gels while filming and chose to optically print a few visual phrases, allowing for repeated sections. I also super-imposed hi-contrast notation over the film. So, *Sections* became a kind of feedback piece: sound generated the images for the score and performers created new sounds and a new piece from these images." (Richard Lerman)

**Guillermo Gregorio** is a composer, improviser, and visual artist in Chicago. Trained in architecture and music, he was associated with the Madí movement in Argentina in the 1960's, and the spirit of experimentation across forms continues. He is especially noted for his compositions that combine improvisation and composed elements through graphic notation.

**Peter Kubelka** was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1934 and is an "artist and theoretician who has worked in the art forms of film, cuisine, music, architecture, speaking and writing. In 1964, Kubelka co-founded the Austrian Film Museum and has been its curator ever since. In 1978, he became professor in film at the Art Academy in Frankfurt, where he also served as Rector in the period of 1985-88. Kubelka's theoretical work in cooking began in 1967, and in 1980 his teaching position was expanded to include 'Film and Cooking as Art.' He is a co-founder of the Anthology Film Archives in New York." (Hong Kong Int'l Film Festival)

**Brian Labycz** is a Chicago improviser primarily performing with electronics. He draws from a variety of sources including analog synthesizers, acoustic instruments, digital manipulations, field recordings, and self-made devices to produce and explore various expressive forms.

**Chris Langdon** is from the middle of the country somewhere. He studied art (and a little film) at the California Institute of the Arts roughly between 1972 and 1976, during which time he made somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 films. He collaborated with Fred Worden and worked with Jack Goldstein and John Baldessari on several of their early films.

**Art Lange** has produced more than two dozen recordings for artists like Matthew Shipp, Ellery Eskelin, Ran Blake, and Guillermo Gregorio, and he has directed ensembles in the music of Cornelius Cardew and Anthony Braxton. His writings on music have been published across the U.S., England, and Europe. He teaches at Columbia College, Chicago.

**Richard Lerman** has been creating electronic music and interdisciplinary art since the 1960's and has performed and exhibited his artwork and film in North and South America, Asia, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. For the last 30 years, he has been designing and building microphones using piezo disks. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the NEA, the Asian Cultural Council, among many others. A 2-CD set of his early audio work, including "Travelon Gamelon" and a performance of "Sections for Screen, Performers and Audience," is available on EM Records. Visit <http://www.sonicjourneys.com>

**Robert Russett** holds degrees from the Rhode Island School of Design and Cranbrook Academy of Art. His work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the New York Film Festival, the Centre Georges Pompidou, SIGGRAPH, the American Museum of the Moving Image, and the International Symposium on Electronic Art in the Netherlands, and widely on international television. Awards include 3 MacDowell Colony fellowships, a Media Fellowship from the Louisiana Division of the Arts and a production grant from the American Film Institute. John Libbey and Co. has published his new book, *HYPERANIMATION: Digital Images and Virtual Worlds* (2009), in association with the University of Indiana Press. Russett is Professor Emeritus of Visual Arts at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**Paul Sharits** is widely considered to be the first American filmmaker to make "pure-color" flicker films. He was involved with Fluxus in the 1960's and worked in a variety of different mediums including film, sound, sculpture, drawing, performance art, typography, and printmaking. His film work investigated visual and aural modes of perception by examining the intersections between shifting fields of color and sound, the mechanics of film projection and optical sound reproduction, and what he referred to as "the operational analogues constructed between ways of seeing and ways of hearing."

**Barry Spinello** came to animation from painting, and completed a number of films in the late 1960's and early 1970's (*Soundtrack*, *Sonata for Pen, Brush and Ruler*, and *Six Loop-Paintings*) that explored various techniques of painting and drawing images and soundtracks directly onto 16mm film. His films have been shown at the Whitney Museum and at various international film festivals, and he taught animation at the University of California at Berkeley.