

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE LOS ANGELES INDEPENDENT FILM OASIS
PANEL DISCUSSION**

Alternative Projections Symposium, November 14, 2010

Moderator: Terry Cannon

Panel Participants: Grahame Weinbren, Tom Leeser, David Wilson, Amy Halpern, Beverly O'Neill, Morgan Fisher, Pat O'Neill, and Roberta Friedman

MADE POSSIBLE BY SUPPORT FROM PROJECT PARTNERS:



PACIFIC STANDARD TIME:
ART IN L.A. 1945-1980

An initiative of the Getty with arts institutions across Southern California.

Presenting Sponsors



The Getty

Bank of America 

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

About Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis

The Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis was an experimental film screening organization from 1976 to 1981. Founded by a group of filmmakers who were mostly teachers or students at CalArts or the Otis Art Institute, it also functioned as a nurturing meeting place to exchange information and ideas. Oasis -- whose members included Pat and Beverly O'Neill, Morgan Fisher, David & Diana Wilson, Grahame Weinbren and Roberta Friedman -- operated as a collective where each member could suggest programming, and it held approximately one hundred fifty screenings, primarily focused on works of contemporary experimental filmmakers.

OASIS PANEL

08:55:11

TERRY CANNON

I think everybody's here so I'll just briefly introduce everybody from left to right. On the far left with the camera is Grahame Weinbren. So we have Grahame Weinbren on the far left, Tom Leeser next to him, David Wilson, Amy Halpern, Beverly O'Neill, Morgan Fisher, and Pat O'Neill. We'll keep this seat for Roberta when she shows up.

08:55:59

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

It's great to see the films again after many years. I think that for me, one of the really significant things about the formation of Oasis in 1976 really is— [laughter & applause] Oh, here she comes. All right.

08:56:24

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

I'm sorry.

08:56:25

TERRY CANNON

She was never this late at her screenings either. And, Roberta Friedman. [applause]

08:56:33

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

Hi.

08:56:39

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

I think one of the really unique things about Oasis was the organizational structure as a collective. This really stood out to me this week because in one of the first panels yesterday—which was kind of an overview of experimental film exhibition in Los Angeles from the 1950s on—the major policy or model of experimental film exhibition in Los Angeles up to Oasis had always been one person doing the curating.

08:57:15

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

All the way back to Raymond Rohauer's Coronet Theater up through the Theatre Vanguard first run by Bill Moritz and then Doug Edwards, it had always been one person in charge of the programming, which can be problematic of course. Along comes Oasis in 1976 with a whole different concept, so I want to go all the way back to the beginning because I think everybody here was there at the beginning, with maybe the exception of Tom Lesser. Tom you came on...

08:57:49

GRAHAME WEINBREN

We saw people in the audience who were here at the beginning. Can we bring them up? Like, Robin. [laugh]

08:57:53

TERRY CANNON

Well, I know Robin Palanker is here and she was here at the beginning. She's shaking her head no, but feel free to add anything you want.

08:58:05

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

We'll share chairs. [laugh] [all talking at once]

08:58:09

TERRY CANNON

Is there anybody other than Robin here? I know Arlene Zeichner was here yesterday. I don't know is Arlene in the audience? Yeah.

08:58:14

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah, Arlene was a little later.

08:58:17

TERRY CANNON

Robin was at the beginning I know, too. So my question is—let's go back to the beginning. How did Oasis come in to being, and in light of what I just mentioned, to what extent was its creation as a collective with everybody having an equal participation—theoretically—in terms of the programming a reaction to, or perhaps even a repetition of the programming model that already existed in Los Angeles. Who would like to take a crack at that?

08:58:55

AMY HALPERN

It had nothing to do with that at all. It had to do with all of us being filmmakers and out of our individual need to see real work. It wasn't coming...

08:59:04

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Can I contradict that?

08:59:06

AMY HALPERN

Well, certainly. [laughter] Before you contradict me...

08:59:10

GRAHAME WEINBREN

[overlapping] When the history is at state I have something to say. No, we felt that—at least I felt, maybe I shouldn't speak to everybody—I felt that the programming models set up by Doug Edwards, which really took the P. Adams Sitney canon as the basis, was problematic.

08:59:27

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I thought that if filmmakers could get together and look at it in a different way, then we could begin to undercut that book that I despised even in 1974. [laughter] So, yeah, that was certainly I think one of the reasons that we did it.

08:59:45

AMY HALPERN

At any rate, it was all from individual needs and that was certainly one of them. We are all reacting to something. The name Oasis came out of the fact that I arrived here from New York City and found a desert in terms of indie films. I had to rent a projector to run silent speed at UCLA, which blew my mind since it was a famous film school. There was one analytical projector behind a locked door somewhere.

09:00:07

AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

I had to RENT a projector in Hollywood to show people in UCLA my film in silent and speed. I couldn't believe that. I mean my understanding has always been that silent films preceded sound films, and if you have a historical concept at all you're able to show them correctly.

09:00:23

BEVERLY O'NEILL

My memory of it is that Grahame and Roberta very much wanted to have a filmmakers' collection here that screened and curated—we call it curation because it was more democratic than something quite a curation.

09:00:43

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Grahame and Roberta pushed at that for a long time and I remember talking with you maybe over several years, let's do it, let's do it, let's do it. Until finally they caved in and, yes okay we'll [do it].

09:01:01

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

I think we had meetings at our house, and we asked everybody in the community who made films or was interested in the history or whatever to please come up and join us and see who would pull together with us, and finally out of that group we kind of self-identified and came together as a collective because we voluntarily wanted to work together.

09:01:23

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Of course, the emphasis has to be on volunteer because that's really the way it was for five years. No one who worked in the organization made any money out of it. Not that any of that has changed over time. Adam Hyman works for free. Davey James has worked for free. Mark Toscano does work on the side for free.

09:01:45

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Being involved in this activity does require that you accept that equation. If you really want to be a serious filmmaker or you want to be a serious artist, you can't give up your day job. So the maxim does have to be switched a little bit. You need to be able to support your habit of making work.

09:02:01 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

But we came together out of an urgency to be together and to have a collective strength here in Los Angeles, because San Francisco had that in Canyon Cinema and was something that I personally envied. I envied their having and took joy in it at the same time.

09:02:30 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

It was run by artists. It had a very long history. It came out of leftists Bay Area politics. Chick Strand and Bruce Baillie put up a curtain in Berkeley to start screening in their back yard. It was just the epitome of old-time leftists Bay Area politics that had a very rich communal socialist structure that had pre-existed Chicky and Bruce's life there.

09:03:02 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Those sort of politics were the general air and the formation of Canyon Cinema, and I think that that was a part of what we had in mind for ourselves. That same similar kind of collectivity, equal sharing, democracy, openness, contention—surviving contentio—and keeping the organization alive, bringing artists to Los Angeles who would not otherwise have been showcased, supported by fellow artists.

09:03:33 **ROBERTA FRIEDMAN**

I'd like to add to that too, Beverly. I thought that was very well said. Our tastes are probably as diverse as our films, and you can see that. One of the things I think that was so important is that we wanted to see everything and provide a place for young filmmakers—filmmakers from all over the world and all over the country—who didn't have a place to show their work. We could bring them to L.A. We weren't—maybe this was so impractical, but wonderfully impractical—

09:04:07 **ROBERTA FRIEDMAN (CONTINUED)**

—Unlike some of the other venues that were mentioned yesterday where, in fact, you had to show known people in order to get an audience. Today at lunch I was talking to Jackie Cane who used to curate at The Kitchen in New York, and she was saying, yeah, if you showed somebody that wasn't known you got four people in the audience. We were more concerned about showing a wide variety of work and supporting artists from all over I think.

09:04:37 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

But we had our four person audiences also. [laughter]

09:04:39 **ROBERTA FRIEDMAN**

That's right, well that's true. But as filmmakers, it was wonderful for us.

09:04:46

BEVERLY O'NEILL

I agree. There's something I do want to say to David James, who's walking back there with a chair in his arms. The first screening that we had at Oasis, which was down at the Haymarket, and we'll probably get into this a bit later. David came down and bought the first ticket and set up in the little foyer waiting for the screening to start. David has been with us through that episode [and] through the chapters of everybody's making work up to the present moment.

09:05:22

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

David has been an incredible force support for all of us. I think that we probably wouldn't be in Pacific Standard Time when we represented there had you not done 35 years plus hard labor going to [laugh] everybody's screening in this city; writing, teaching, staying with us when it wasn't glamorous, when it wasn't THE cutting edge any longer.

09:05:49

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

We owe you a great debt of gratitude, David. You are part of Oasis and you are a part of everything's that has gone on in filmicly in this town on the avant-garde side of it. Thank you. [great applause]

09:06:17

MORGAN FISHER

Can I say something? I just wanted to offer a slight correction. There was a time when there was one person who was a part of Oasis who was paid, and that person was me. [laughter] This came about because in principle, it was exactly as people had been talking about it.

09:06:36

MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)

But at the end of 70's thanks to CETA—Comprehensive Education and Training Act enacted under the Carter administration—there was money. It was basically a jobs program. At the time, Oasis had LAICA—the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, an alternative space that has since disappeared—it was arranged that I got a CETA job.

09:07:06

MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)

So I was on staff at LAICA, and I devoted a lot of my time to dealing with Oasis matters. Not entirely, but a significant part of my time as devoted to secretarial details having to do with Oasis. I think maybe writing press releases or sending out membership cards. I can't remember. It was all done by mail, of course. It's hard to imagine.

09:07:37 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

I just wanted to say a couple of other things. My memory is that the habitual audience—the audience we could count on showing up—was actually quite small. In my memory, we had to work to publicize every single show because even if there was in the mailer that listed the calendar and gave descriptions of the films, we couldn't count on people just showing up on faith, so to speak.

09:08:12 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

So we depended a lot on the reviews and in the LOS ANGELES TIMES. My memory is that the screenings where the reviewers would take place at David and Diana's house on Sixth Street, and the reviewer was either Kevin Thomas or Linda Gross.

09:08:31 **DAVID WILSON**

[overlapping] Primarily Kevin in those early years.

09:08:36 **MORGAN FISHER**

Yeah, I mean my memory is that the technique for managing Kevin, who was this somewhat irascible guy, was to feed him cookies. [laughter]

09:08:44 **DAVID WILSON**

Diana knew exactly which cookies Kevin liked best, and the reviews directly reflected the quality of cookies.

09:08:52 **MORGAN FISHER**

Then there would be a review in the LOS ANGELES TIMES. Then people might or might not come. But to me it was very much a matter of making the same efforts over and over and over again, which we were glad to do but it was a little tiring.

09:09:12 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

I wanted to say just one more thing, and that is I'll offer this as a hypothesis for where the co-op or the collective model came from, and that's from the film co-ops—the one in New York and the one in San Francisco, Canyon. This is probably hard for younger people to imagine, but there was a time when avant-garde or independent or underground cinema, the members of that world saw themselves as members of a kind of confraternity.

09:09:47 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

We were all workers in the cause of independent film, which meant there was a relation of equals in this world to the extent that— when you offered your film for rent, the rental had to do with how long it was.

09:10:12 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

That was, to say, how much per minute. People were under pressure to all rent their films for the same amount per minute, as if all films were equally good. [slight laughter] I just mentioned this to show how very, very powerful this model of equality was, and that perhaps was in the background from which Oasis emerged. Maybe.

09:10:49 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

There was an unwillingness to make a judgment among the Canyon Cinema people about which work would get into the co-op, which work would be screened and so on, that ethos stayed with Edith Kramer who ran Canyon Cinema for a period of time in the late 60's before she became the director of the Pacific Film Archive. She maintained that position as a curator at the PFA.

09:11:18 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So any independent filmmaker sending work, she screened it. She didn't care whether she liked it or she didn't like it, or it was important or not important. It always made it to screening at a show. I marveled at that model that she was able to keep the commitment until the time she retired.

09:11:40 **TERRY CANNON**

Now following through on that, I'm looking at this large group here and I'm trying to think what it was like when you had a programming meeting. How did this happen? Did you all bring in a list of filmmakers who you wanted to show, and then you would discuss them and do a vote on them? How did it happen? I'm just imagining that there might have been a lot of contention, a lot of heated arguments.

09:12:13 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

What was a typical programming meeting where you were going to decide what you were going to screen for the next quarter? Be as honest as you want to be, now.

09:12:26 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

I don't think we voted. As we know, voting doesn't work very well, right? So, I think we looked for a consensus.

09:12:32 **MORGAN FISHER**

No, we voted.

09:12:33 **DAVID WILSON**

We did vote, but I agree with Grahame. Sometimes it was a consensus driven.

09:12:37 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, there were lists.

09:12:41

MORGAN FISHER

People would propose a program. You know, I propose a program of whatever - LA RÉGION CENTRALE - and someone else proposes another program and so forth. Then we voted, and the ones that got voted in were the ones that we presented. As a member of this collective, you were obligated to do your share of the work even in support of programs that you didn't vote for or perhaps you even despised. [laughter] You earned your right to vote by committing yourself to perform your share of the work.

09:13:22

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

It changed over the years because I remember at the beginning we didn't vote. It was a consensus at the beginning, and we could be five programs in advance, for example. Maybe later we had started voting, but I don't remember voting.

09:13:39

PAT O'NEILL

Remember Grahame, we had the Carnegie Institute's list of traveling filmmakers published every two months, and anybody who wanted to be on that list and present their films would say where they were going to be and when. So it was often a matter of combining travel money—as it is today—or seeing what other institutions within 500 miles was going to do something and see if we agreed that we'd like to do it as well. So that was some of it.

09:14:10

DAVID WILSON

Which we did a lot of with Terry's organization. They were wonderful sister organizations in those ways. The audiences were different enough because of the locations within the city. I don't think we cooperated with anyone the way we did with Filmforum that I can remember.

09:14:31

PAT O'NEILL

Well, Vanguard as well, as I recall.

09:14:32

DAVID WILSON

Vanguard some, but that... When did the Vanguard close?

09:14:38

TERRY CANNON

That would have been '77. But then you had Encounter Cinema following in its footsteps.

09:14:51

BEVERLY O'NEILL

The other thing too along with the idea of the traveling circuit, there were spots where people coming from the East coast were guaranteed to get a gig. So maybe we would get something at Pacific Film Archive, which would pay for the plane ticket. You would get something at San Francisco Art Institute, which would pay for the hotel, and then something over at the San Francisco State, which would take care of the per diem.

09:15:19 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

You wanted to come down to Los Angeles, you could get Gene Youngblood's class there, and then you could pick us up and you could pick up Terry and then you go on down to San Diego to UC San Diego where Standish Lawder was teaching and pick up a gig there.

09:15:35 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

That way you could have a West coast tour. I remember James Benning came to Los Angeles, came to Oasis that way on that 800-mile circuit. That was the way we were able to pay for him. We brought some of the Warhol—when we brought Pope Ondine and...

09:15:58 **MORGAN FISHER**

CHELSEA GIRSL.

09:15:59 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

CHELSEA GIRLS. I think we were on a circuit with them and you wanted to do that. It was hard for us to originate really major program, because we didn't have the kind of funds to put someone up to pay them. Everybody slept on the floor of my office, that seems my memory for the most part. Amazing people—Babette Mangold slept on the floor of my office, and Ken Jacobs slept on the floor of my office. At home.

09:16:30 **MORGAN FISHER**

I remember that.

09:16:30 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

[I remember] tripping over him on the way to my job. So they had that sort of small-scale economy to it, and that's how we could do things.

09:16:44 **TERRY CANNON**

I'd like to have you discuss briefly the venues that Oasis screened at, because I think it was very interesting the transition that was going on there in terms of the places you were at. In a sense, each of those venues represented a certain kind of tendency at that time in experimental film.

09:17:12 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

You started off at The Haymarket, a little funky socialist book store near MacArthur Park, which probably represents a little bit of what you were talking about, Beverly, was those funky San Francisco origins. Here was a place that existed for political purposes, grassroots organization.

09:17:31 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

Then you moved to the campus here at USC for Founder's Hall, so you had that academic connection. Then you moved to LAICA, as Morgan mentioned, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art on Robertson, which was a white walled gallery/museum. So you're looking at three completely different kinds of venues. So, can you talk about...

09:17:59 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Four.

09:17:59 **TERRY CANNON**

Well, and then there was downtown, Attraction too. [all talking at once] Yeah, that's right, your fourth venue. But you were at all of these different kinds of places. So how did it come to be that you started at Haymarket and then you went to these different places? Was there a programming philosophy or reason why you went to each of these succeeding venues? [all talking at once]

09:18:34 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Whoever would take us. But, yeah, but didn't Roberta find The Haymarket somehow? When did you find The Haymarket?

09:18:43 **ROBERTA FRIEDMAN**

I don't remember. [laughter]

09:18:48 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

But, it wasn't a book store. I thought it was the headquarters of Los Angeles Communist party, wasn't it?

09:18:54 **MORGAN FISHER**

It was a little stage.

09:18:57 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

It had been at one point.

09:18:58 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, so somehow we convinced them at our interests and their interests were related.

09:19:05 **PAT O'NEILL**

They had just been fire bombed by some Cuban dissidents, and I think we were the first to come in after that.

09:19:13

DAVID WILSON

In a nice side note to The Haymarket was that our very first screening was Jonas Mekas' REMINISCENCES OF A JOURNEY TO LITHUANIA. We had an absolutely packed house, and The Haymarket was a big place and we didn't know if anybody would come. But it was entirely packed, and it was all packed with Lithuanians, [and] our mailing list at the time was of course Xerox sheets, and we had literally hundreds of Lithuanian names on our mailing list forever. [laughter]

09:19:46

AMY HALPERN

We had a similar experience after when we showed Italian filmmakers Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian showed their movie about Armenia, and suddenly we had a full audience of Armenians looking at the passage over the mountains.

09:20:02

TOM LEESER

Then one of our last shows was [sounds like] Paul Disaria at LAICA.

09:20:07

BEVERLY O'NEILL

The funny thing about the Lithuanian screening was that these were a number of people who were immigrants to California, just as Jonas was an immigrant to New York just after the war. They were a very middle class group of people, and Jonas had this very erratic three-frame cut and the jiggling camera and they went mad because of him.

09:20:38

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Please, the projection, the projection, stop the projection! They just could not bear the erratic nature of the camera. They were sure it was our fault. They did stay to the bitter end, but they were just really very annoyed with us at being unable to project anything. I think David James was the only native English speaker among the audience that particular night [laugh]. But we started The Haymarket, then we moved to LAICA. I think the interesting thing about being at...

09:21:11

TERRY CANNON

USC then I think was your second venue. Yeah, Founder's Hall.

09:21:19

MORGAN FISHER

Yeah, that was owed to a man named Gene—who's the last name I have forgotten—who taught in the animation department here. He was a nice guy. He was nice enough to arrange for us to have a home here at SC.

09:21:37 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

He made it very clear that he was totally unsympathetic to the kind of films that we showed, but I think what he responded to was the fact that here was a bunch of people who were committed to this kind of filmmaking and I think that might have been what moved him to arrange it.

09:21:59 **DAVID WILSON**

I remember those as our dark ages, that period of time. I think it was harder for us to get an audience. I think there's a barrier around academic institutions sometimes that makes it harder.

09:22:17 **PAT O'NEILL**

I think it was always hard.

09:22:20 **DAVID WILSON**

Yeah, it was.

09:22:21 **PAT O'NEILL**

Just carting all those chairs around and David built a box to just muffle some of the projector sounds because we never had a projection room. Just a huge amount of work. Yeah, whatever happened to it?

09:22:41 **TOM LEESER**

We thought you had it, Amy, because you have the projector.

09:22:43 **AMY HALPERN**

I'd love it now. It disappeared. They built a beautiful, beautiful box. It was soundproof and it had glass doors so the projector could be in the room and you wouldn't hear it as much. It wasn't perfectly sealed, but it made a big difference.

09:22:56 **DAVID WILSON**

It really worked.

09:22:57 **MORGAN FISHER**

A friend at the UCLA Art Gallery gave us a screen that was 12 feet wide. It was a good screen that replaced it. So we carted that around for a while. It was like a bunch of gypsies moving. [laughter]

09:23:11 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Every Sunday night we had to show up with the furniture, the projector, the box, the coffee maker and all. We did this for five years, and I remember Diana Wilson and I setting up chairs and she said, do you know I feel like church on Sunday, waiting for parishioners to come in so we could have a decent prayer meeting.

09:23:35

PAT O'NEILL

Well, we always had the imagination that it was going to grow. That was the idea—it was going to get bigger, it was going to get its own place.

09:23:43

BEVERLY O'NEILL

We needed a screening room, a regular screening room.

09:23:45

PAT O'NEILL

It became obvious it wasn't going to happen.

09:23:47

BEVERLY O'NEILL

But Terry, you had the question about the change in aesthetics in terms of filmmaking and the venues that we went to. So I'm interested in what you were thinking of.

09:23:56

TERRY CANNON

Well, I'm thinking of this transition. Now then going to LAICA, which was quite a tremendously different kind of venue, now all of a sudden you were part and parcel of the quote unquote art world, and yet obviously that world wasn't quite ready to embrace you judging from the letter that's on a view in the display case talking about—in fact, I think it was pointed at you Beverly for moving a painting out of the way to set up the screen or something like that and spackling a wall.

09:24:34

AMY HALPERN

She was blameless.

09:24:34

TERRY CANNON

So what was that transition like to LAICA, and also what was the reaction at that time of the non-filmic art world in terms of their involvement in a relationship with Oasis? Were you getting painters, sculptors, photographers to come to the screenings? Was there any kind of interrelationship going on there?

09:25:04

TOM LEESER

At the very end at LAICA, the time frame was basically '78, '79, '80 I think was when we wrapped it up in 1980. But you just track the trends and the movements within the creative work at the time and the work that we showed reflected that. I think we ended with Michael Olowitz's films. We ended with other punk films from the late 70's and it certainly it wasn't something that we started when Oasis started. That was a downtown scene across the street from Al's Bar.

09:25:36 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

But I think in general, the one thing that I wanted to sort of make note of—which is maybe rather than looking backwards maybe we could look a little bit forward—the notion and the basis by which Oasis started and grew actually was very influential in what seems to be happening now to a lot of younger generation artists working around.

09:26:01 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

If you look at the collectives that are centered around Machine Project, and if you look at public school and if you look at other ways of working that a lot of younger artists are doing, if you trace back that tradition I think you could see that tradition or the seeds of that tradition here with the notions of collectivity and the notions of DIY.

09:26:25 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

You know, projecting basically wherever we can and however we can. So I think in a lot of ways, what's also interesting in looking at the work today is how up-to-date the work feels, which is very interesting in regards to the kind of work that's being done now by a lot of younger artists. So the convention between what's happened back then and what's happening now I think is very, very relevant to discuss.

09:26:50 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

You probably wouldn't be aware of small organizations across the country. A small amount of money to one program...

09:26:58 **DAVID WILSON**

How much would we get? Do you remember?

09:26:59 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

I think we got \$5,000 or \$8,000 bucks per the year, and there were a number of organizations that sprang up across the United States. There were screening groups, there were groups for performance art, there were groups strictly for music. A lot of the ephemeral activities had a chance to build an audience and have a venue to operate out of. LAICA was— well, Pat, you helped get us into LAICA through Bob Smith, if you want to say something about that.

09:27:33 **PAT O'NEILL**

No I don't have recollection. I mean I know Bob Smith...

09:27:35 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

LAICA had upscale ambitions, and Bob Smith was— Pat and I had gone to graduate school with him and so we were able to use that as an advantage to have an access to the space on Sunday evening.

09:27:52 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

That was the only interest that Bob Smith had in us. It was just out of friendship that we could be there. They didn't give a damn about the work. They didn't come to the screenings—the board or the audience that normally came to LAICA to see the static work that was presented there. I don't think we drew any people from that.

09:28:10 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

We had built our own audience, I think very largely of students from CalArts, from Otis, from the art schools around and from UCLA and so on. We had a pretty young audience then. We were just very separate from everything else that went on inside LAICA during the rest of the week or the rest of its monthly calendar or whatever, but we all had money—LAICA had money and we had some money—and that allowed us to exist for a certain period of time.

09:28:45 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

What was interesting I think is that the National Endowment sponsored a lot of artist-run organizations for a period of time—like The Kitchen in New York, for example, and maybe even the Collective for Living Cinema and so on.

09:29:03 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Then something turned around the 80's where these artist-run organizations began to feel that they should be operated by people who were more professionally involved with the arts. That they should have a board of directors, and the board of directors should be sort of key figures in the local art scene in San Francisco, New York or whatever and have some authority, some power.

09:29:28 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Slowly these grassroots organizations began to turn into something very different from what any of us would have wanted to have happen then or even now. Though our guys I think are pretty much still in sync with where we started when we began Oasis.

09:29:53 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Then when the Endowments began to get nervous and they could play the culture wars game and they, you know piss, Christ, and all the rest of it, then suddenly the money was withdrawn, the organizations began to fold because they didn't have the kind of legs to stand on because they couldn't pay the functionaries that operated those spaces.

09:30:13 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

They couldn't pay the directors and the superstructure that they had created that keep the doors open and have shows that were on their way to be in the Whitney Biennial or on their way to be at the Guggenheim or whatever. The spaces just folded rather rapidly.

09:30:32 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

The sad part of it was that I think it locked out a whole generation of younger artists. It took away the opportunity for younger artists, certainly students of mine—of ours—to really have their own chance to be their own curators, to form their own scenes and to create their own visibility within their individual communities.

09:30:56 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

I think that's the biggest loss. But on the content side of it, I don't think it's a loss at all. I think it's actually a godsend that the NEA backed away from the arts. That is something. I think we back away from NPR, I would be very happy to get a real radio station. But that's a personal opinion to me.

09:31:15 **DAVID WILSON**

Could I really quickly go back to Terry's question, because it's been mulling over in my mind and I think it was actually a great question, that how did the venues where we screened reflect what relation did that really have to us? I think in a certain way, it actually had to do with underground experimental independent film.

09:31:40 **DAVID WILSON (CONTINUED)**

That form of filmmaking didn't ever have a name, really. It was never quite an agreed upon name. It went under many names and in the same way, it could be seen at these various locations in which we screened.

09:31:53 **DAVID WILSON (CONTINUED)**

We tried The Haymarket, which was left wing politics, and we soon realized, oh, we're not that. So we tried USC, kind of a more academic approach. We felt, oh, gosh we're not that. So we moved to LAICA, which was like high art, and we soon realized we certainly weren't that. So we ended up downtown, which I think was maybe more comfortable for us.

09:32:19 **AMY HALPERN**

It was beginning to be gentrified rapidly, so people who go to the bar around the corner who might be interested in films. Yeah, it was that. I want to talk about the money just a little bit. Although Morgan was paid, in fact you weren't paid by any money that the Oasis got.

09:32:33 **DAVID WILSON**

Yeah, did we know you were being paid Morgan? [laughter]

09:32:39

MORGAN FISHER

Why, yes. Yes, of course. This was known. [laughter]

09:32:43

AMY HALPERN

That's perfectly fine, but really I think was the nail in our coffin was that we actually did make a mistake of paying somebody at the very end who came to us who was a student at UCLA and threw herself at us and said, I can get work-study if I could just do some of the set up and work for you guys, if you'll sign my monthly blah, blah and pay half of it.

09:33:04

AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

That person was the beginning of the end, because that person—unlike everybody else who was here for love and the need personally to do it—was there for venal purposes and others who know what her ambitions were.

09:33:16

AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

She didn't have the same religious relationship with getting the viewers they're cookies and their parking, and she cost us our reviews in the L.A. TIMES for a year because she failed to arrange parking for Kevin Thomas. That was it—no reviews, no audience. So, that was part of what killed us.

09:33:34

DAVID WILSON

I think also that once we hired a person, that it had been so volunteer and the dues were so high—and we were actually getting burned out to be honest—but once it automatically felt like well, somebody else will handle it because we're actually paying someone, I think people just fell back.

09:34:00

TERRY CANNON

Well, that was what I was going to ask next is...

09:34:02

MORGAN FISHER

Can we just go back for a second?

09:34:03

TERRY CANNON

Oh, go ahead Morgan.

09:34:04

MORGAN FISHER

Just very quickly—can someone remind me why we left Haymarket? How many screenings did we do?

09:34:12

GRAHAME WEINBREN

They kicked us out.

09:34:13

MORGAN FISHER

Oh, okay fine.

09:34:14

DAVID WILSON

Didn't they kick us out?

09:34:15 **MORGAN FISHER**

Okay, so we hadn't decided to...

09:34:16 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

We were disinvented.

09:34:17 **MORGAN FISHER**

Okay, fine so we didn't decide to leave.

09:34:20 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

No.

09:34:21 **MORGAN FISHER**

Okay fine. I just wanted to mention that when we were at LAICA—here at SC it was an auditorium with fixed seats, but at LAICA it was a flat floor. It was a gallery space. One program we presented was a double projection of work by Dan Graham, who even then was a famous artist. I think it was a program, that I proposed it because there was a flat floor and opposing walls and we could do it.

09:34:52 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

So it was a perfect art world program. My memory is that it didn't really make, all of a sudden it was not people from the art world. It was just whoever these people are who usually had been coming, or so I remember. Dan Graham was there. Yeah, right there on Robertson Boulevard.

09:35:15 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

We had some wonderful screenings. We had Hollis Frampton, who came more than once. I think he showed two or three times with us. We showed MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, we had a whole evening— Amy you could talk about that...

09:35:34 **AMY HALPERN**

Well, that was our one sell out. That was our one sell out night. We showed DIVINE HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE, Maya Deren's seldom shown film about voodoo. It was the one night not only did we have a line that filled the house, but we had to run a second show. In fact, my memory is that Brian Eno showed up for that show. We wondered if something had gotten out. But that was the only time we had really enough of a crowd to justify doing a second screening.

09:35:59 **PAT O'NEILL**

Well, there were two actually.

09:36:00 **AMY HALPERN**

Oh, you're right.

09:36:01

PAT O'NEILL

The second one was Jack Smith, FLAMING CREATURES.

09:36:07

AMY HALPERN

That's three, because Chicky's show, the one at LAICA, was also sold out to the gills. We had to do it again for that one also.

09:36:13

MORGAN FISHER

Wasn't THE NAKED AND THE NUDE a popular program? I seem to recall that it was. [laughter]

09:36:20

BEVERLY O'NEILL

What was that Morgan? I don't remember.

09:36:23

MORGAN FISHER

Oh, that was right here at SC. I mean, I remember. [laughter]

09:36:27

DAVID WILSON

Morgan's absolutely right, and if you look actually in Terry's cases, it wasn't just us who every so many programs had to do something about naked or nude in order to bring in the revenue to keep the other programming going.

09:36:44

MORGAN FISHER

Yeah, exactly. I believe I think we should credit where credit is due. I think this was Grahame Weinbren's idea. [laughter]

09:36:54

MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)

The model, of course, there was this book by Kenneth Clark who was named after... [all talking at once]

09:36:58

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Absolutely, and that's what it was based on.

09:37:02

MORGAN FISHER

Now you have to remember, these were the days before if you wanted to look at erotic imagery you could just sit down on your computer, you had to leave the house. [laughter]

09:37:17

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Well, if you wanted it moving right.

09:37:18

MORGAN FISHER

There had been a review in the LOS ANGELES TIMES, and as Pat as characterized us—this band of people, us—arrive at the auditorium and ready to set up, and the auditorium was filled with men. [laughter]

09:37:42 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

And each man had come by himself, so no one was talking to anyone else. [laughter] It was a room full of silent men waiting for the show to begin. I don't know if it was sold out or not, but I just remember this very peculiar sensation walking into the room.

09:38:04 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Do you remember what films were in that program?

09:38:09 **MORGAN FISHER**

I think there were some Will Hendel films. I can't remember. It was all respectable, more or less. Yeah, it was respectable. Hendel for sure, I'm pretty sure.

09:38:28 **TERRY CANNON**

I'd like to throw open for the panel a couple of different ideas, and that's the kinds of films that were being made at that time and that were being screened pretty extensively at Oasis and some of the other venues. A lot of the so called structuralist or formalist films.

09:38:51 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

I'd also like to read a quote from a filmmaker Jerry Tartaglia. I was looking at one of the old spirals the other day I pulled this quote. This was from 1985 and I'd be interested in getting your reactions, particularly since several of you were teaching in university settings at the time and after Oasis ceased operation.

09:39:15 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

Quite a few of you—I think several of you are still involved as academics. Here's the quote and I'd just be interested to get your reaction: “The situation with experimental film began to sour when the work was institutionalized. Not in the museums, but in the university system. In the 1970's filmmakers began to land very cushy jobs in the universities. Film departments were set up, money was channeled and aesthetic rules were established to help control the situation. Celebrity guests visited these film departments and promoted their work either in film or in film criticism. There were two main purposes behind the institutionalization of underground film at universities. One, employment for the filmmakers; and two, the creation and sustaining of an audience.” So, any comments on that based upon your experiences at the time...?

09:40:15 **AMY HALPERN**

It's a very sour point of view. An audience is the other half of the equation, and naturally, it's in the interest of every filmmaker to have a smart, adept, overt audience who are open-minded and are as limber as the filmmakers. But I don't see that with a negative cast that he's saying it.

09:40:34

BEVERLY O'NEILL

I also would say in Los Angeles in the '70s and in the '80s, Chick Strand taught at first at CalArts with Gene Youngblood. So they represented part of the aesthetic that we cared about. Pat was a faculty member of CalArts then too, up to 1975 and then no longer a part of that. But UCLA, there wasn't an experimental film scene at UCLA at all. They wanted video, and that's where they started in '75, they embraced the video art, [name?] that whole group up there.

09:41:26

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

They totally bypassed everything that we were thinking about. SC, I don't think you were here yet David in the mid '70's, but David has been really the only really strong presence, on par with people like Scott McDonald and Ed Halter. There's a handful of other historians like you yourself, working and teaching, but it's not been a large number. It's a small group of people. We had a group of us at Otis who taught experimental film and who shared in that...

09:42:12

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I think what Jerry is talking about was not what was happening here, but the fact that the English departments had taken up experimental film and they had taken it up not as a practice, but as a study. I think Jerry's reaction was against that kind of academization and canonization of this very small segment of experimental film, which I know that people like Jerry would feel personally excluded from because, of course, he was not canonized in that way.

09:42:46

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So I think really that's the point that Jerry's making, not the places that filmmaking was taught, which were the art departments that you're talking about or the few film historians, but the English departments where it really took hold of a great number of universities.

09:43:05

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Because certainly the young hip English professors could bring some into their classes that the students will be more interested in than poetry, and using the same tools that they used to analyze poetry. So I'm sure that that's what Jerry's reaction comes out of.

09:43:23

TOM LEESER

It also sounds like he's having a nostalgia for this sort of outside status and the origins of independent experimental film from the '40s to the '50s. I think that we hear a lot of laments over the course of the years about how experimental film couldn't sustain itself or why did it end or whatever.

09:43:45 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

But I think it just takes a natural course and dies of its own volition. The causes and conditions that created it no longer is sustainable through its life, and so by the time 1985 rolls around, you have a different set of conditions. At the same time, you have a different cultural zeitgeist that allows for different forms of experimentation to occur.

09:44:11 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

So it's unrealistic and certainly I think nostalgic to assume that what happened in 1945, what happened in 1955, what happened in 1965 and '75 is going to sustain itself to 2010. I was just joking with my students the other day and I said, yeah, USC wants me to show a film I made in 1981 and I don't even want my students to know I was alive in 1981. [laughter]

09:44:38 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Grahame, let me say something about position you're taking. I understand what you're saying, the industrialization of the academic world which began in the '80s. I certainly was very well aware of it, but one thing I was also aware of certainly in the '60s is that curiously, the university and the university system in this country in general was not interested in film. Thought of it as a kind of entertainment and that was not something that we needed to pay money for.

09:45:21 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

So the people who championed the idea that film was a legitimate area for investigation—and it was primarily feature film more than it was the kind of film we were interested in—came out of English departments. They were some of the first film writers, some of the first people who were trying to put together film histories and so on.

09:45:45 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Berkley, Los Angeles and so on were very well aware of it. I guess I'm sensitive to this because I spent time with my friend[s] Marsha Kinder and Beverly Houston and I watched them struggle trying to convince departments, Please, God let us have a film studies program.

09:46:05 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Absolutely.

09:46:05 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Until they could finally break loose from the bondage of being trapped in an English department because they saw the legitimacy of what could be done there. Actually I think did some very fine theoretical work, especially in terms of featuring [all talking at once]

09:46:21

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Absolutely, and I certainly wouldn't disagree with that and in anyway. But I do think that the English departments had a hard time dealing with the kind of films that we make, which were about visual analysis and not about the analysis of text.

09:46:33

BEVERLY O'NEILL

That's right.

09:46:34

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Which, of course, that change is very important and very dramatic. But, even still, even now, if you read an analysis of film, it's mostly analysis of narrative.

09:46:46

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Yes.

09:46:47

AMY HALPERN

There is another model, which is the model I came from, from the East coast. SUNY Binghamton, the film department there was started indeed by a literature professor, Larry Gottheim who is, I believe, a Yale, Dostoevsky scholar who had come to SUNY Binghamton, we did occasionally look at Todd Browning and other stuff.

09:47:06

AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

But he was interested in his own practice as a filmmaker. These were the times the sense was liberating the film medium out of the narrative. My God, there was enough narrative. And to do something with the medium itself, and that place was analysis [that] happened at a level of the actual materiality of the film. [all talking at once]

09:47:26

DAVID WILSON

Of course it was an exception.

09:47:27

TOM LEESER

Well, it's not an exception if you look at the San Francisco Art Institute or the Chicago Art Institute. There, those film programs actually came out of a visual practice and it actually was an extension of the practice that they were set up in and teaching, which was basically a studio-based practice, not an academic practice.

09:47:46

TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)

The academic practice was within those institutions more as a support for a visual studies practice and studio-based practice. I studied with Larry Jordan and how I got to even meet everybody at Oasis was because of Gunther Nelson's showing me Pat O'Neill's films and that blowing my mind. Then the next thing, Grahame and Roberta decided to show up at my graduate seminar and I decided to move to Los Angeles.

09:48:10 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

So the question around whether or not was it good or bad for experimental films to end up in academy is kind of just a parallel narrative in and of itself because it doesn't really matter because we study many things for many reasons. I think it's perfectly legitimate to study experimental film and certainly perfectly legitimate to historicize it and contextualize it with an event-historical narrative.

09:48:39 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

The issue I think of that Jerry's talking about is an interesting one which is basically at which point does a renegade art practice cease to be renegade and it becomes canonized, and what happens to that renegade art practice when it does become canonized? We could have a whole panel discussion just on that.

09:48:55 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

But I think that in the case of it showing up in the academy, I think Beverly points to a really important point, and that is that it's extremely important for the academy to remain relevant to what is actually going on with and in the culture at the time. Unfortunately, with many of us who do teach in institutions, we do find that the institution itself lags behind what is actually the practice by artists working out in the field.

09:49:24 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

In that case, it is very, very difficult to turn the institution around because you don't just turn around that fast. So consequently, I think it's completely commendable that we have film study programs within these academy institutions, and additionally why we have digital studies at the moment and why we're having participatory practice studies within the moment. It's just what's happening in the world and if we want to turn artists out and function as citizens then we have to reflect that world.

09:49:54 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

I think the other thing too I would say to Jerry is let's not just talk about film culture and that having happened to an independent film culture. It happened to art making period. If you were to look through the resumes of artists who would come to some maturity in the mid 60's, you wouldn't find their BFA and their MFA degree dates at the top of the resume. Maybe they had degrees; it wasn't relevant.

09:50:27 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

By 1980, every artist had an MFA, whether one was a sculptor or doing innermedia or doing film or whatever. It was just a primary requirement for being a part of the game.

09:50:43

DAVID WILSON

And the chance of that artist supporting themselves then down the line being a teacher was very, very high.

09:50:51

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Although it's interesting on this panel how many people are teachers. Well, I mean right now.

09:51:00

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Right now, yeah.

09:51:01

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Yeah.

09:51:02

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Oh, is that a question? [Grahame Weinbren, Tom Leeser, and Roberta Friedman raise their hands]

09:51:03

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Yeah, three people.

09:51:05

MORGAN FISHER

Ever taught? [Pat O'Neill, Morgan Fisher, Beverly O'Neill, Amy Halpern, Tom Leeser, and Grahame Weinbren raise their hands]

09:51:10

AMY HALPERN

We confess, we confess. I did it here.

09:51:13

MORGAN FISHER

I wanted to mention a couple of things just to go back. I think actually another filmmaker in *The Naked and the Nude* was James Herbert. Does that sound familiar?

09:51:23

BEVERLY O'NEILL

Oh, yes.

09:51:24

MORGAN FISHER

One of the great Oasis programs was right here, and that is the Rosa von Praunheim feature. That was a great moment. I had thought maybe that Grahame was going to mention when—this had to do with the idea of academization and canonization—as if it came from no where if you were to think about the quote you gave us. I thought for sure that Grahame was going to bring up P. Adams Sitney again, and he didn't. [laughter]

09:52:02 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

So I will. One of the things that we would do well to keep in mind is that Jonas Mekas and his cohorts, specifically P. Adam Sitney and Peter Kubelka and James Broughton, these were people who devoted their entire lives to making, let's call it what? Non-dominant seminar, or creating a place for it.

09:52:50 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

You could put Brakhage on the list.

09:52:52 **MORGAN FISHER**

Yeah, yeah. This is what they devoted their lives to and they did it in several ways. They did it with Anthology Archives and with FILM CULTURE. Then came the book by P. Adams Sitney called what? VISIONARY CINEMA

09:53:12 **MORGAN FISHER**

This was the culmination, so to speak, of the success of this enterprise that had been undertaken by people who had devoted years and years and years of their lives to it. So all of a sudden there was a textbook.

09:53:31 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

There was a textbook, and that book was P. Adams Sitney's book and it created a canon and perpetuated a canon. I think that that book—which is, so to speak, a symptom, or the culmination of this collective effort to make a serious place for this kind of filmmaking—was instrumental in creating the academization of film studies.

09:54:03 **MORGAN FISHER (CONTINUED)**

So it's not to say that it's P. Adams Sitney's fault, because he was working within a context in which he was an important participant. Then all of a sudden there was a book, all over the country there could be courses that used this book as a textbook, and they did. So, it immediately created a canon.

09:54:27 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

But a counter-weight to that, Morgan, is strangely Gene Youngblood's EXPANDED CINEMA, which was the flip side of P. Adams Sitney.

09:54:35 **AMY HALPERN**

Yeah, this was the West coast version of P. Adams Sitney...

09:54:37

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I do think it was probably P. Adams Sitney's fault because of his methodology, and his methodology was drawn from literary studies. He was drawing from studies of poetry and studies of literary text, and it was not drawn from the art world. Oddly enough, it came at a moment when everybody was challenging the canon, so it made the experimental film world look very backwards-looking.

09:55:09

MORGAN FISHER

Well, to me the great mystery was where was the person who could argue with P. Adams Sitney? Where is the book that could argue with P. Adams Sitney?

09:55:25

DAVID WILSON

Well, there's David James' book. [all talking at once] 20 years later.

09:55:29

MORGAN FISHER

20 years later.

09:55:31

DAVID JAMES

No, 15 years later.

09:55:32

MORGAN FISHER

15 years later.

09:55:35

DAVID JAMES

But I think you are radically over-estimating the ways in which P. Adams Sitney was received. First of all, it was George Maciunas' attack on the structural film article. Next, there was a review by Bill Moritz in *FILM QUARTERLY* which said this book is entirely rubbish. [laughter] In fact, the only value it has is the extent to which it supplies a model which could be disagreed with.

09:56:02

DAVID JAMES (CONTINUED)

Next thing was Amos Vogel, critic's very, very negative review which totally annihilated it. Then the next thing a few weeks after that you've got Janet Berkstrom and what's her name from Santa Barbara attacking Sitney for not being up to French phenomenal logical criticism. [laughter] I really disagree with Grahame on two counts.

09:56:25

GRAHAME WEINBREN

No, but it is me David that you're disagreeing with.

09:56:27

DAVID JAMES

Because this is the second time today Grahame's attacked Sitney.

09:56:31

DAVID JAMES

First of all and Sitney claimed that he was not discussing the avante-garde, but simply one strand within it. Okay? Everybody else thought he was discussing the entire thing. So the fault is not with Sitney for his presenting his model, but for the failure of everybody else ever to present a model of comparable authority and stature which could challenge it.

09:57:02

DAVID JAMES (CONTINUED)

When ALLEGORIES came out, it was totally negatively reviewed and I, at the beginning of the book, said basically I'm trying to challenge P. Adams Sitney and historicize this and bring in all the lefty kind of politics. But nevertheless, that was only possible because P. Adams Sitney had given an canon against which I could rebel, which I could re-interpret and which I could subvert by bringing in all the other what you call them today the third streams and things like that. So without P. Adams Sitney, there was really not much to work with.

09:57:35

TOM LEESER

Well, David, I think you also have to throw the spotlight over to Mekas in regards to essentializing cinema in the way that he decided to frame it and the type of people that he decided to leave into the discourse and the type of people that he excluded.

09:57:51

TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)

I think you're absolutely right, that the history has only been partially written, and I think in a way maybe that is the upside to moving these discourses into academic areas so that more histories can actually be written. I think it's very interesting that there's a lot of attention 30 years later to this kind of work.

09:58:11

TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)

The work must have some a certain kind of relevancy and meaning to the culture at large. I think maybe at the time it's just a simple deficiency of not having the critical discourse at the time that would have been necessary to give a fuller history and a fuller point of view.

09:58:27

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Let me just come back to you on that. Maybe you're absolutely right. Maybe saying it's Sitney's fault is really not quite right. Maybe it's the marketing department that marketed that book, because then the effect that it had across the whole of the culture was enormous. Then up come in 1986, the journal that I edit and their articles that say well, actually, experimental film died in 1972.

09:58:58 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Said very clearly by Fred Camper, pretty closely by Paul Authur which, of course, was really a way of kind of backing up the Sitney ideology that was already written. So yes, you're absolutely right, everybody at the time trashed it—rightly—but at the same time, the influence that it had because—and I believe again exactly because of its methodology, which spoke to the kinds of people that could teach it—was huge.

09:59:27 TERRY CANNON

Well, nine years after the death of the avant-garde, the Oasis passed away. Before we open the floor to the audience, I'd like to ask about the demise of the Oasis.

09:59:45 TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

Now, Amy just mentioned about this person who was brought on. 1980, according to David's book, was the funding zenith of Oasis—\$8,000 from the NEA. So even though you were bringing in more money, the organization met its demise. So how did it all end? David, you mentioned some people were getting burned out, but as a collective you had—in theory—people to pick up the slack.

10:00:23 TOM LEESER

Amy and I were the two people left standing.

10:00:26 TERRY CANNON

Who were the people left?

10:00:27 TOM LEESER

Amy and I were there.

10:00:28 MORGAN FISHER

People were burnt out from the beginning. [all talking at once]

10:00:38 BEVERLY O'NEILL

Grahame and Roberta left Los Angeles, that was a huge hole. A huge loss.

10:00:43 GRAHAME WEINBREN

No, no, no. You can't blame it on us. [laughter] We left in 1978.

10:00:48 BEVERLY O'NEILL

It was their fault. No, people's lives changed, people's interests changed. David was beginning to think about [the] Jurassic Museum.

10:00:59 AMY HALPERN

We wanted to get back to making our own films because this was frequently our only day off the entire week and we were spending it sitting around...

10:01:05 **DAVID WILSON**

Setting up chairs.

10:01:07 **AMY HALPERN**

...sitting around special filmmakers and setting up chairs and taking chairs down.

10:01:10 **DAVID WILSON**

But another curious thing, and I never really understood that, is that there wasn't an influx of other folks really interested like younger people, since we were getting to the ripe age of mid 30's or something at the time. But there wasn't a new generation coming up to help sustain the organization.

10:01:39 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

I think we didn't do enough to court that generation.

10:01:40 **AMY HALPERN**

What teaching full-time isn't courting a newer generation? [laughter]

10:01:45 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

[They didn't] come into Oasis with us. I think we were probably rather monolithic... When our students would come to the screenings, they saw it as our organization.

10:01:59 **AMY HALPERN**

But did they stick around to move chairs? I ask you.

10:02:03 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

No, I mean they would have wanted to...

10:02:04 **AMY HALPERN**

[overlapping] We were still all entry level.

10:02:07 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Maybe they would want a new program. I'm not sure that we thought a lot about what would happen if...

10:02:15 **DAVID WILSON**

[overlapping] Do you think that by that time, the 1980's, there was enough interest in the people of the next half-generation down?

10:02:25 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Video, they're doing videos.

10:02:26 **DAVID WILSON**

Yeah [all talking at once]

10:02:28 **TOM LEESER**

Just go back and read Terry's SPIRAL magazines and look at the debates that were happening in those magazines. It was all about film versus video in 1980. Then after the 80's passed, it became the 90's and all of a sudden net art was around. So these things just have natural lives. They don't live forever. I think the fact that if they did live forever, we wouldn't be up here. So, maybe thank goodness they don't.

10:02:54 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Interesting.

10:02:55 **PAT O'NEILL**

So we're kind of the residue. [laughter]

10:02:58 **TOM LEESER**

We're the residues, the mere shadow.

10:03:06 **TERRY CANNON**

I think it all speaks to the amazing fact that Filmforum, now 35 years later, is still existing. [applause]

10:03:22 **PAT O'NEILL**

Terry, could you say a few things about your starting Filmforum? Because you pre-dated all the rest of it. You were the first guy in town to do...

10:03:30 **TERRY CANNON**

[overlapping] Well, not really because Vanguard was started in '72, '73, and we pre-dated you by just a few months. In the fall of 1975, we started screening.

10:03:45 **MORGAN FISHER**

It was about the same time.

10:03:46 **PAT O'NEILL**

I thought it was further back.

10:03:47 **TERRY CANNON**

No, no. Fall of '75, and then our first real ongoing weekly screenings began in the beginning of 1976. I think it's just amazing—David mentioned the burn out factor, which always happens. With Oasis it was about five years, with me it was about 10 years, but there always was somebody who came forth to continue the organization on.

10:04:17 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**

Adam I think now probably has run the organization longer than anybody. It's amazing [applause]. And he's burnt out. [laughter]

10:04:35

TERRY CANNON

We're waiting for somebody to come back. Well, this would probably be a great time for...

10:04:43

DAVID WILSON

Wait, Terry, before we do that, whatever that is— I noticed something about those the two institutions—Filmforum on the one hand, Oasis on the other— is that while Oasis would have programs like The Naked and the Nude for fundraisers, you would have jazz programs. Does this in anyway account for... I mean those were your big moneymakers...

10:05:11

TERRY CANNON

Well, not really because our biggest programs audience-wise were the Material Action films. The Kurt Kren/Otto Muehl films. Those were the films we would have lines around the block. Our programming was a little bit more eclectic in terms of the jazz programs and occasional other things, but what was interesting about Filmforum was that whereas your audience, you share your audience somewhat with the Vanguard and Encounter Cinema.

10:06:00

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

We were in Pasadena, which Paul Arthur used to describe—and I never knew whether this was a put down or a compliment—he said going to Pasadena for a film screening is like if you're in New York going to Hoboken. I still don't know whether that was a...

10:06:16

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

But we had a different audience, and so we were able to do these kind of joint programs with both organizations, which I think helped our draw because we were able to, by the fact that they'd be two screenings, maybe a little more likely to get the press coverage which helped attendance. Anyway, let's have questions, and if anybody has any questions and can come up to the microphone...

10:06:54

TERRY CANNON

So are there are any questions about Oasis, about experimental film in that period from '75 to '81? Or about the films tonight?

10:07:07

MALE ONE (DAVID LEBRUN)

I remember coming to an Oasis meeting—I can't remember what year it was—and I seem to recall that the discussion that evening was over whether and how to go through the hoops of the coming of 501(c)(3) non-profit. I wonder whether that ever happened and if so or if not, was it necessary to get the federal funding, or did you get the federal funding anyway? How did that work?

10:07:33 **DAVID WILSON**
We were 501(c)(3) from the very beginning, really.

10:07:37 **AMY HALPERN**
That's correct, yeah.

10:07:40 **MALE ONE (DAVID LEBRUN)**
You did do it right away?

10:07:41 **DAVID WILSON**
Right away.

10:07:42 **MALE ONE (DAVID LEBRUN)**
So it was a very early meeting?

10:07:43 **DAVID WILSON**
Yeah.

10:07:44 **MALE ONE (DAVID LEBRUN)**
Okay, yeah, all right.

10:07:46 **MORGAN FISHER**
Can I ask who was it that actually wrote the grant applications? Because I never knew.

10:07:52 **DAVID WILSON**
I think mostly Beverly actually, but we would have these wonderful meetings around the O'Neill's kitchen table drinking—I forget what it was we drank in those days—and working through NEA applications.

10:08:10 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**
We got them in on time. We managed to do it, but we did it ourselves, yeah. We didn't go to a service.

10:08:15 **TERRY CANNON**
I think most of us—I don't know about you—but when I wrote the first grant for Filmforum, I had never written a grant before. I didn't really know the first thing about it.

10:08:24 **TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)**
Fortunately, Doug Edwards, who ran Theatre Vanguard, took an interest in me and maybe it was just my youth—I was 21 years old—he said, hey, I'll get you a copy of our Theatre Vanguard grant application to the NEA, just don't ever let Judith Stark know that I'm loaning this to you. So I used that as a template and wrote our first grant.

10:08:51 **DAVID WILSON**
I don't think any of us—unless you had Beverly—had ever written a grant before.

10:08:56

AMY HALPERN

I had helped write the one for The Collective for Living Cinema, but having only slots to sign for President, Vice President and Secretary I deferred to the other three who were gentlemen. But I was involved in the writing.

10:09:10

TERRY CANNON

It was a different era for grants because now I think it's really different. You have to have well-developed boards of directors, all kinds of revenue streams. At that time, you just got a grant based upon the quality of the work you were doing. They didn't seem to be that concerned about how well your board of directors were developed, or even if you had a board of directors.

10:09:37

TERRY CANNON (CONTINUED)

There was one year, about 1979, I got a call from Virgil Grillo who was with the Rocky Mountain Film Center, and he said, we had some returns on some grants and we just decided we're going to give some grant money to some different film organizations that seem to be doing good work, so would you like to have an extra couple thousand dollars? [laugh] Can you image that happening today? Any additional questions?

10:10:04

MALE TWO (ADAM HYMAN)

I had a question in general asking about a few people who aren't here tonight. One is Amy had talked about in her oral history about the sort of influence of Bill Moritz in the formation of Oasis without ever being a part of it, sort of like funneling you all together. I was curious if any of you have recollections of that?

10:10:26

MALE TWO (CONTINUED)

And then two people I believe were involved in different ways were Paul Arthur and Susan Rosenfeld. So I just wanted to get your views on their impact on your organization.

10:10:37

AMY HALPERN

Coming in through Bill was how I came in because I didn't really know anybody here. I knew Morgan from watching him and Thom Anderson mix his amazing Muybridge movie....

10:10:51

AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

I said I think the only person I knew in the room except very briefly, Pat, was Morgan Fisher because I had watched him and Thom Anderson mix the Muybridge movie. Foolishly and innocently at the time, I imagined that, well of course Thom through the masterpiece of his quality would never have a problem again getting his films funded. [laugh]

10:11:11 **AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)**

Anyway, I knew them from that. And Bill Moritz I knew, and Bill Moritz was saying, these films which you are aware of is some filmmakers trying to do this. You really have to start a screening organization. Go to the O'Neill's house on such and such time at this meeting. He didn't come which was...

10:11:31 **PAT O'NEILL**

Bill had just learned about experimental film a couple of years before. He was a 19th century literature student.

10:11:40 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

He was doing Medieval German.

10:11:42 **PAT O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

Medieval German at SC.

10:11:45 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Yeah, at SC. He studied Medieval German literature, and he could say "nightingales in stagnant pools" in Medieval German, which was very handy sometimes. [laughter]

10:12:00 **MORGAN FISHER**

I have a memory of Bill Moritz. It's a little unfair because we don't speak ill over the dead, but this is my memory. I think he was around when Oasis was being organized, and he made it a point to say that he didn't want to be a part of it because he knew it was a doomed enterprise. That wasn't his word, but the basic idea was even if you can get something going, it won't last long enough to make the effort worth while.

10:12:34 **PAT O'NEILL**

That's right, Morgan.

10:12:35 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

He did say that.

10:12:37 **AMY HALPERN**

I was young enough and impressionable enough to take his instructions.

10:12:39 **MORGAN FISHER**

Is that more or less correct?

10:12:43 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Yes...

10:12:44 **MORGAN FISHER**

I was very struck by this. It was like, okay guys...

10:12:50 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

Drop dead.

10:12:51

MORGAN FISHER

Stand up for experimental film and I'll be cheering you on. But he was a nice, wonderful man who was sympathetic and supportive and erudite, an important presence. But he had other things to do with his time, I guess. I can only think of Bill with great fondness.

10:13:19

BEVERLY O'NEILL

I would say something about Paul Arthur. He came to Los Angeles sort of later in Oasis history. He wasn't a founding member, but he put his shoulder to the wheel with us in a very helpful way. He was a film student of Annette Michelson's. He finished his dissertation on film noir.

10:13:37

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He's a brilliant writer. I think had he lived at an earlier period, he would have been a major novelist. A very powerful presence and his commitment to experimental film matched anybody here. He had a lot to bring to the table.

10:14:00

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Paul was the kind of person that he had wanted to I think could have positioned himself like P. Adams Sitney. He had a very good exclusivist view of things and in a kind of a narrow range and this and that. Paul wasn't like that at all with us at Oasis. He was very open to everything. He came and talked with us at Otis.

10:14:25

BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

He taught experimental film. He took over the classes for Morgan and I co-taught experimental films that maybe you [Grahame Weinbren] and Roberta taught at one point. Yeah, Paul picked it up. It is to me a great sorrow, and I know it is to you too David, that we lost Paul two years ago, and to Roberta who was a colleague of Paul's at Montclair University.

10:14:48

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

Well, interestingly enough, I was very excited to run into him at Montclair when I first started. We got together and you know reminisced about Oasis and said, let's do it here. He was on sabbatical that term, and he said, as soon as I come back we're going to start bringing people here, and we had made all these plans.

10:15:13

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN (CONTINUED)

First person we decided to bring was Pat. Was also the last person we brought because Paul unfortunately died very quickly. But he made sure to even until the very last minute, he was planning to be there and interview Pat, and then just died really a week before or something like that.

10:15:40

MORGAN FISHER

I can say a couple of words about Susan Rosenfeld, who was my friend in life at the time. She was as active as anyone else and conscientious as anyone else. I think one of her jobs was to type the program notes. She was also for a while for maybe longer than anyone else the Oasis archivist. I think the archives at the end were donated to the American National Archives.

10:16:13

AMY HALPERN

Yes, they went to the...

10:16:15

ADAM HYMAN

The Smithsonian.

10:16:15

MORGAN FISHER

The Smithsonian, thank you. To the Smithsonian.

10:16:16

AMY HALPERN

But, the Archives of American Art that used to be in the Huntington Museum, and then they joined the larger Smithsonian. I had them in order, and actually folks we were complimented on having one of the most really well put-together archives they have ever received.

10:16:38

MORGAN FISHER

Are the archives available?

10:16:39

AMY HALPERN

Yes, the last I spoke to the gentlemen in charge, they had not yet been digitized but they might have been subsequently in the past couple of months.

10:17:03

BEVERLY O'NEILL

There is a fair amount of material with us at our house, which Pat's assistant has uncovered. And Terry, you uncovered some of it.

10:17:11

TERRY CANNON

Yes.

10:17:11

BEVERLY O'NEILL

You were the first person to find it. So we have more material to add to the Smithsonian collection.

10:17:18

TERRY CANNON

Can Morgan continue?

10:17:19

MORGAN FISHER

No, I'm finished, thank you. [laughter]

10:17:25

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

Let me just say there were two other people who had been very involved in the beginning. One was Lyn Gerry and the other was Udo Serke, who also died unfortunately in a motorcycle accident not that long ago. But it could have been 10 years ago for all I know.

10:17:39

DAVID O'NEILL

Was it Udo actually a part of...

10:17:40

ROBERTA FRIEDMAN

Yes and Tim Shepherd!

10:17:46

TERRY CANNON

And Robin, what kinds of things did you do with Oasis?

10:17:57

ROBIN PALANKER

I did the publicity. I did the posters. I'm not a filmmaker but I collaborated on Grahame and Roberta's films, and that was my interest. I'm going to parallel a line that Roberta said. I wanted to see everything, that's why I was there.

10:18:16

TERRY CANNON

Any other questions? I think we're getting near to the end of our time.

10:18:23

MALE THREE

Individually splice and developed their own films, or did you pass it on to somebody else and work on it? Was it hands-on for all of you making your own films?

10:18:40

PAT O'NEILL

Well, the screening had nothing to do with production. We received made films and just presented them, but we were making films in various ways.

10:18:51

DAVID WILSON

It was a very hand-on practice at the time. I think I understand where your question is coming from. Yes, we did the splicing ourselves. Some films in sharing the group we did the actual developing ourselves, but no, it was a very, very physical hands on practice for sure.

10:19:23

PAT O'NEILL

The films came in cardboard containers with straps around them in the mail and we would splice them and make sure that we had them ready for projection. A little anecdote was one mistake that we made was with Yvonne Rainer's *STORY OF A WOMAN WHO...* a little on three reel film. I was the projectionist and I projected the first reel and then I projected the second reel—what I thought was the second reel, but the credits came up at the end and I had a reel left. [laughter]

10:19:58

TOM LEESER

I have to let Pat off of the hook here. He was not the projectionist.

10:20:01

PAT O'NEILL

So we started the screening over again and ran it.

10:20:03

TOM LEESER

You were not responsible Pat, I was responsible...

10:20:06

PAT O'NEILL

I had no idea.

10:20:06

TOM LEESER

You were responsible for Whitney's reel of film rolling down the aisle and falling off the projector.

10:20:13

PAT O'NEILL

No, that wasn't Whitney ,that was Warhol's CHELSEA GIRLS [laughter]

10:20:19

DAVID JAMES

We got to give the last question to the person who's done more than anyone else in bringing this whole event to life, Stephanie Sapienza.

10:20:27

STEPHANIE SAPIENZA

Well, I don't know about that David, but one side comment—it was just amazing listening to all of you, that your voices have become sort of iconic and engrained in my brain because although I wasn't there for all of your oral histories, I edited them all and did the transcripts for all of them. It's interesting hearing all this gel and hearing the conversations as opposed to everybody's individual threads. But one thing I wanted to comment on—and it's kind of a meeting out of the last panel we had—

10:20:56

STEPHANIE SAPIENZA (CONTINUED)

And I hope this doesn't come out sounding all over the place—but it's amazing the amount of discussion and all the transcripts or oral histories, and today and earlier about how money factors into everything that we're trying to do or that we did do in the 70's. It's amazing to me that we had this conversation about art and entertainment and about how these other threads can lead to “art stars” as somebody called it, Lucas becoming this massive... having all kinds of money available to them.

10:21:25 STEPHANIE SAPIENZA (CONTINUED)

It's interesting to think about how a lot of this is driven economically. I don't want to say something as crude as we do our best work when we're lean and hungry, but I think to some extent, some of the successful Filmforum has been that we've had this one lean and hungry person always leading us through. The organization stayed lean and hungry, but I think it's just interesting to hear some of the economic threads and I didn't know if you guys wanted to comment on how you perceive money as being a factor.

10:21:54 STEPHANIE SAPIENZA (CONTINUED)

Oh, and I'm sorry one other quick— Adam had asked a question about what use there is and maybe keeping experimental film as a separate thread from maybe art or entertainment or literature or something like that. My one comment as an exit to this rambling diatribe is that it does actually allow you to keep it— because there's no money in experimental film. There never is and there never has been, and keeping it as a separate critical thread does keep it there, which is a blessing and a curse maybe. I don't know, that's my rambling comment.

10:22:29 BEVERLY O'NEILL

I think that your point is right, that we have been lean and your generation is following, unfortunately, in the same provisions. What's interesting is that it's still alive, and it's amazing to me to walk into REDCAT and see that Steve is here—Steve Anchor and Berenice Reynaud—who donate their time to make sure that the screenings happen on Monday nights, because they're not paid compensated for that. That's not part of their salaries at CalArts, they give their time to make sure it happens because it's part of their practice. They're curators and they want to be sure that they can keep their own art practice alive.

10:23:11 BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)

Thom Anderson has done the same thing for Filmforum and then curating, taking work abroad and so on, voluntarily. Adam does this to the same way, making his living under other circumstances. New work comes out—Julie Murray, Jeanne Liotta—new surprising work comes out— Debra Stratton, amazing. Another generation has it in its hands, and there you are startled; the work has been made by God knows what means, and it has gotten into showcase. Lisa [Marr] and Paola [Davanzo] here from the Echo Park [Film Center]... [applause]

10:24:09 **BEVERLY O'NEILL (CONTINUED)**

The debate is whether you do it digitally or you do it on film; but it moves, it's happening in the dark, we sit together collectively, we care about it, we engage, we stay on line with frameworks, we read David's book, we read Steve Anchor's book, we follow Berenice's articles, Tom's articles. The energy is there voluntarily, brilliantly.

10:24:36 **BEVERLY O'NEILL**

The same with Grahame who is doing the MILLENNIUM FILM JOURNAL, which has really just an incredibly strong, a brilliant kind of thrust. It's just a pleasure to get it on a quarterly basis. So, the will to make things that move in the dark is there, whether you want to look at it at 12:00 a.m. in your pajamas on your laptop, or you want to come down to REDCAT, there's some brilliant work going on and thank God that the tradition lives on in a new way and a different way.

10:25:14 **PAT O'NEILL**

Another way to frame it not only with regard to the art world so much as regard with the industry, is I realized at some point that what I was doing was not profitable. If it were profitable, somebody else would have done it, would be doing it. Then I'd either be working for them, or I'd be doing something unrelated. So, that's kind of how it comes around, I think.

10:25:36 **TOM LEESER**

This comes up in discussions with my students a lot, which in terms of, well, what are we teaching to? Are we teaching to a career or we teaching something else? I think it's we're in really dangerous territory if we start to think about our art practice so close to the notions of activities that generate revenue. I think that in a way, we as artists we have a fundamental impulse that drives us towards creativity and inquiry.

10:26:10 **TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)**

If we allow that to get too close to compromising relationship to practices that solely generate revenue, then obviously our inquiry and our creativities are also going to be compromised. I think that the bottom line, we have to evaluate just the separation between what makes money and what actually is our impulse, which is really an intangible and I think something that's quite existential, and when those two things get too close together, then sort of funny things start to happen. I think that artists generally tend to think in different ways and function in different ways than people who are just primarily interested in accruing money in one way or another.

10:26:57

TOM LEESER (CONTINUED)

But at the same time, to be realistic, one else has to realize that there's an overlap between what you do for a practice and what can actually generate money. Just going into those sorts of things with a certain awareness is important.

10:27:15

DAVID JAMES

One of the things that made the collaboration between Oasis and Filmforum so fruitful for everybody involved was that Filmforum was on Monday night and Oasis was on Sunday night. So that the guys could come and get two shots worth of fees and proceed along. So, tonight's been Sunday night and it's the great occasion for the Oasis reunion. [laughter] It's good to see so much Oasis on a Sunday evening. This has been a fabulous weekend. We have to end, unfortunately. I don't know under what circumstances it may be renewed for speaking now on behalf of the School of Cinematic Arts, I wanted to thank all our filmmakers, all the critics and panelists who've come from so far.

10:28:01

DAVID JAMES

Especially the two main organizations that have made this possible: Filmforum, from Terry and Mary Cannon, through somebody else and Stephanie and Adam. Then on the other hand, the visions and voices people, especially Daria Yudacufski and Alex Ago, who is still not here. He's in Mexico celebrating. But anyway, on behalf of all of these people speaking on behalf of School of Cinematic Arts, thank you all so very, very much for making this such a fantastic weekend. Thank you all. [applause]

end of tape