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Sandy Flitteman-Lewis is one of the four founding co-editors of CAMERA OBSCURA. She is the author of To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema, and is currently preparing a collection of her essays on the Jewish family in France during World War II. Recommendation: Can You Ever Forgive Me? by Marielle Heller

Danielle Chu lives in New York and works on documentaries. She loves how dense and unexpectedly intimate the city is and appreciates films along similar lines. Recommendation: Salomé Lamas’s Encounters with Landscape (2012), which illustrates the daring female body in natural spaces reaching towards the sublime.

Alicia Izarduddin is Senior Lecturer in Gender Studies at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She has published widely on gender and Islamic ethics in filmmaking in the Malay Archipelago. In addition to that, she has developed an interest in women in folk horror, negative affect, and postcoloniality. Recommendation: Indonesian filmmaker Nia Dinata.

Rebecca Liss is a freelance writer living in London. She is an editor for Kneau Reads, and one of Another Gay’s staff writers. Recommendation: Dead Pig by Cathy Yan (2013).

Daniel Kasman is the Director of Content for the curated online cinema MUBI. He is based in New York. Recommendation: Filmmaker Gina Telaroli.

Lill Pickett-Palmer is studying for a PhD in Film and Screen at University of Cambridge; their research focuses on contemporary European cinema made by or centring people of trans and non-binary experience, with a particular interest in how these artworks explore non-normative forms of intimacy and relationality. Recommendation: Happy Birthday, Marsha! by Sasha Wortzel and Tourmaline (2018).


Gabriella Beckhurst is a London-based writer and PhD candidate at the University of York, UK. Their research intersects moving image and photography, life narratives and autoethnography in art and theory, feminism, queer and environmental politics. Recommendation: Sandra Lahire and her Phenomenology Trilogy (1987–89).

Jonathan Ellis is Reader in American Literature at Sheffield University. He is the author of Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop, co-editor (with Angus Cleghorn) of The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop, and editor of Letter Writing Among Poets: From William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop. Recommendation: Sarah Polley’s Stories: We Tell (2012).

Madeleine Stack is an artist and writer. Her work has been published in BOMB, Art in America, Online: Art, and Eyeline. Recent exhibitions and performances include ‘The Mouth Takes a Bite of This Cruel Summer’ at LIIK, ‘How are you still clean? at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and ‘Feral Softness’ at The Koppel Project. She is co-editor, with Bjørk Gústafsdóttir, of Camus. Recommendation: Uljona Odžak, Sara Boulton and HP Parnell, who make the films that are, to me, the most like life. Tiny, oblique, and printed on the inside of the memory.

Emily Watlington is a 2018-19 Fulbright Scholar based in Berlin and Cambridge, Mass. She was previously the curatorial research assistant at MIT List Visual Arts Center, and her writing has appeared in publications such as Mause and Forger, as well as exhibition catalogues including ‘Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974-1995’. Recommendation: Lynn Hershman Leeson’s Tekhné (2002); Ericka Beckman’s Cinderella (1988).

Mary McGill is a writer and a researcher at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her doctoral work explores postfeminist femininities in digital visual culture. She is a regular media contributor with a particular interest in contemporary culture and female representation. She tweets at @smaisyamriggl; Recommendation: Pat Murphy’s Mate (1981) which explores a young Irish woman’s escape from Troubled-town, Belfast.

Ayanna Dozier is a PhD Communication and Women Studies Candidate at McGill University, and a Joan Tisch Fellow at the Whitney Museum, and a Helena Rubinstein Fellow in Critical Studies at the Whitney Independent Studies Program. Her dissertation examines the formal and narrative aesthetics in Black women’s experimental short films in the United Kingdom and the United States. She currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. Recommendation: Sugar Cane Alley (1983) by Eustachy Pacyzki.

Susu Laroche (Chaos Rule Us) is an independent filmmaker & photographer based in London. Her work depicts melodrama, conflict and performance for the camera. In 2017 she released her custom Tarot card deck via purgexxx. She is currently working on sound. Recommendation: The Decline of Western Civilization III by Penelope Spheeris (1998).

Nicky Waterkinson is a freelance writer whose work ranges from analysis of popular culture to more traditional academic research. She is particularly interested in questions of narrative authority, form, and the construction of female identity. Recommendation: Denis Gans’s Ergenken’s debut Mustang (2011).

Phoebe Chen is a graduate student at Columbia University. In another life, she studied law and wrote fiction. Recommendation: Marmalade Caller by Lynne Ramsay (2003); Entire Story, by Diane Korys (1980).

Daniele van de Velde is a writer based in Perth, Western Australia. Her writing has been published in a variety of online and editorial publications, as well as academic monographs. Recommendation: the films of Japanese filmmaker Naoko Ogigami.

Sarah Jilani is a PhD student at the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge. Her AHRC-funded research examines subjectivity and deconstruction in African and South Asian literatures and film. She writes on contemporary art, film, and books for publications including Art Review, The Economist, The Independent and The Times Literary Supplement. Recommendation: Amin Maalouf’s Chief of Staff (2017).

Hannah Pavcek is a PhD candidate in Film Studies at King’s College London. Her research explores the role of sound and listening in contemporary art cinema. She is one of Another Gay’s staff writers. Recommendation: Milk by Maria Lausig (1974).


Philippa Snow is a writer, based in Norwich.
Her reviews and essays have appeared in publications including Artesforum, Sight & Sound, GARAGE, Freq, Little White Lies, and Tank magazine. Recommendation: Always Show by Sophia Takal (2016).

Marie López (b. 1992) is a practicing artist and writer. She is interested in prose, video performance and humor as acts of resistance. Her short ‘Work’ (2018) can be viewed online. She is based in Berlin, Germany. Recommendation: Born in Flames (1983) by Lizzie Borden. It’s an Afro-futurist film that is particularly prescient for our current post #metoo, late stage capitalist era.

Maya Caspari is a writer, editor and researcher. She is currently completing a PhD on the representation of touch in contemporary world literature at the University of Leeds. She has previously worked for organisations including the ICA and Frames of Reference (For) film festival. Recommendation: Kirsten Johnson’s Cameraperson (2017).

Slobhan Leddy is a writer and editor living in Berlin. Recommendation: Margarethe von Trotta. Her Raas Luxemburg (1986) is so rousing.

Phoebe Francis is a writer and researcher from London. She is currently studying for an MPhil in Criticism & Culture at the University of Cambridge, working on contemporary Radical Landscape Poetics. She has a particular interest in filmic space. Recommendation: The work of artist filmmaker Emily Richardson.

Ruth Novaczek is an Irish filmmaker based in London. Recommendation: Chantal Akerman’s comedies.

Missouri Williams is a writer based in London. Recommendation: Larisa Shepitko.

Naomi Pallis writes and directs documentaries for the BBC. She lives in London with her cat Bo and is just pleased she’s been allowed to write a thinly veiled love letter to him through the medium of Carol Lee Schneemann’s art. Recommendation: Clio Barnard, The Arbor (2010).

Jessica McGoff is a film writer and video essayist. Having produced videographic research during her time at the University of Glasgow and the University of Amsterdam, she continues to write about cinema and make video essays on a freelance basis. Recommendation: Japanese director Naomi Ogigami, an understated master of strange, funny and empathetic cinema.

Laura Staab is a PhD candidate at King’s College London, researching forms of the feminin in cinema and artist’s moving image. Recommendation: Angela Schanelec’s Marnie (2004).

Hannah Kinney-Kobro is a writer and student based in Boston. You can find her @ hannahkobro on twitter. Recommendation: Elaine May’s A New Leaf (1971).

Francesca Massarenti is a writer and PhD candidate at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy. Recommendation: Ukrainian director Kira Muratova’s Soviet-era cinema of quiet passions.

Rebecca Choong Wilkins is a writer living in New York by way of London and Beijing. Her work focuses on diaspora, migration and foreign policy in East Asia. She is a former Frank Knox fellow at Harvard and current contributing editor at the LA Review of Books. Recommendation: Documentary filmmaker Rebecca Richman Cohen, particularly her film War on Women (2010) about the contradictions of international law and national trauma in Sierra Leone.

Mythily Ramachandran is an independent journalist from Chennai, India. Besides a weekly column on South Indian cinema she contributes special features to Gulf News, a leading UAE daily. Recommendation: Filmmaker Rima Das.

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Fucking Whiteness: Orientations, Desire, and Race in Camille Billops's Docu-Fantasy

The KKK Boutique Ain't Just Rednecks

Longtime wife and husband filmmaking duo Camille Billops and James V. Hatch open their film The KKK Boutique Ain't Just Rednecks (1991) by defining their project: "a docu-fantasy about the ways racism changes our souls.\(^1\) Using a narrative structure taken from Dante's Inferno, Billops, with the assistance of Hatch (who here plays a more secondary role), presents the film as a journey through a labyrinthine boutique with designated stops along the way, each with "its own madness and its own punishment." With names like 'Wall of Grease', 'May I Touch Her Here', 'Mea Culpa', 'Room of Racial Slurs', 'Dressing Mammy', and 'American Dream', each episode of the journey uses games or sketches to 'comically' provoke the audience into considering their relationship to the subject matter.

In interpolated interviews, the questions posed to participants include: "Have you ever been or are you racist?", "Is there racism in your family?" and "Do you have a racial preference for your romantic partner?" Risqué and grotesque images appear in the boutique, creating a tense viewing experience, which confronts and challenges the assumed racial neutrality of desire.

"Imagine a boutique where people can change their race, do it with fun jokes, fun clothes, and enjoy racy game shows. The people you see passing through the boutique are not actors. They are our friends and family helping us make the movie. Through the tour of the boutique we meet our enemies: they are us: you and me." These words are spoken by Hatch as the camera enters the KKK boutique, following several false starts—an opening sequence featuring a pit bull wearing an ascot barking at the camera, followed by the title-track song and a poetic voiceover from Billops, and a shot of Hatch and Billops in a field of sunflowers where he braids her hair and she cuts his. These false starts—incorporating the portrayal of 'real' intimacy between Hatch and Billops—signal that viewers should be wary of what is authentic in what follows. Throughout The KKK Boutique, fantasy is used as a way of digging into what drives racism and racialisation— as Laura Marks writes in The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senser (2000), fantasy can be used to deconstruct dominant histories, creating new conditions for new stories.\(^2\)

Welcoming fantasy into the documentary genre calls into question documentary's assumed neutrality, its effort to reveal an objective truth. Billops emphasizes her interpretive role, explicitly showing her directorial hand: there are moments where she interrupts the interviewer or appears on-screen with her partner, complicating the idea of unmediated footage. This intervention is important: it becomes clear that simply asking someone to tell the truth about their racialized desire(s) does not necessarily mean that the question will be answered with honesty or thought.

In her essay, 'Eating the Other', bell hooks recounts overhearing white jocks openly brag of their desire to "fuck" as many women of different races as possible, with "Black women being high on their list." hooks's anecdote demonstrates that the 'desire' for racialised bodies is still intimately connected to the language of rights and property. Desire is shaped by social and historical structures that influence how we orient ourselves and our attractions around bodies. Orientations, the philosopher Sara Ahmed writes, "are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach." These directions are not simply chosen, but more often than not inherited. The KKK Boutique explores what bodies inherit and how they orient themselves and their desires for others through interviews, mock
narratives, and games exploring interracial relationships. In the segment ‘May I Touch Her Here?’ four men play a game involving cardboard cut-outs of women of different ethnicities. An unamed Black male host asks them where they would like to touch the women, branding a ludicrously large white woman's breasts. The game is over, four real women, whose relationship to the male participants are not known. The women are featured. When the game is over, four real women, whose relationship to the male participants are not known. The women are featured. When the game is over, four real women, whose relationship to the male participants are not known. The women are featured. When the game is over, four real women, whose relationship to the male participants are not known. The women are featured.

How should we understand whiteness? I define whiteness as the continual reproduction of a power that is built upon the subjugation of certain bodies, which are deemed neither to inherit the positive value of white whiteness nor to exist within its sphere. Inheritance in this context refers to how bodies cluster around whiteness because it provides the assurance of a tune darker than me. If whiteness is inherited, then it is also reproduced. Whitenedness is reproduced by being seen as form of positive residence: as if it is also reproduced. Whitenedness is reproduced by being seen as form of positive residence: as if it is also reproduced. Whitenedness is reproduced by being seen as form of positive residence: as if it is also reproduced. Whitenedness is reproduced by being seen as form of positive residence: as if it is also reproduced. Whitenedness is reproduced by being seen as form of positive residence: as if it is also reproduced.

In The KKK Boutique, Bilbops and Hatch examine it were a property of persons, culture and places. In The KKK Boutique, Bilbops and Hatch examine it were a property of persons, culture and places. In The KKK Boutique, Bilbops and Hatch examine it were a property of persons, culture and places. In The KKK Boutique, Bilbops and Hatch examine it were a property of persons, culture and places.


The ‘Dressin Mammy’ stop is particularly interesting. In this segment, Bilbops uses the body of her white husband, Hatch, to explore somewhat problematically – how the stereotype of the mammy figure in the United States shaped peoples’ perceptions of and interactions with Black women. In Black Sexual Politics, Patricia Hill Collins writes that the figure of the mammy functioned during slavery as a means of making the dehumanization of Black women acceptable. In the majority of depictions, the mammy appears as a large and asexual Black woman whose sole desire is to be of service to a white family. The film shows how desire is racialised – the stereotypes that populate our public consciousness influence and affect our encounters with one another. By having the mammy stereotype as a stop on the journey to self-discovery, Bilbops is suggesting that despite her perceived sexual fidelity this figure carries a problematical racialised sexual history: white slave masters often raped their slaves, and, as Angela Davis writes in Women, Race, and Class, Black women enslaved in the home were a frequent target. When Hatch ‘dons’ the Mammy attire he wears a mask and costume created by Bilbops and her sister, Billie. This costume exaggerates the hips and breasts of the mammy and the mask is painted almost entirely black with oversized red lips. To top it all off, Hatch dons a headwrap. The sight is uncomfortable, but every moment is proudly shown. The film shows how desire is racialised – the stereotypes that populate our public consciousness influence and affect our encounters with one another. By having the mammy stereotype as a stop on the journey to self-discovery, Bilbops is suggesting that despite her perceived sexual fidelity this figure carries a problematical racialised sexual history: white slave masters often raped their slaves, and, as Angela Davis writes in Women, Race, and Class, Black women enslaved in the home were a frequent target. When Hatch ‘dons’ the Mammy attire he wears a mask and costume created by Bilbops and her sister, Billie. This costume exaggerates the hips and breasts of the mammy and the mask is painted almost entirely black with oversized red lips. To top it all off, Hatch dons a headwrap. The sight is uncomfortable, but every moment is proudly shown. The film shows how desire is racialised – the stereotypes that populate our public consciousness influence and affect our encounters with one another. As a result of the film the participants are led into a ‘vault of memories’ – a place where memories of racism are passed on to children. What this segment is suggesting is that racism is not something to move on from or forget but rather something that needs to be analysed and actively discussed with children, friends, and family. If we forget these histories, we foreclose the possibility of change. Many red-faced Sobranes, over and over again, ‘He trained me’. Bilbops tells us that she ‘wants black men to touch her and when they do, she calls the police’. One of the other guides, Dorothy White, tries to soothe Sobranes to no avail. Her desire, and subsequent disavowal of it, uncomfortably evokes the way that white women have historically used the idea of “true womanhood” to participate in the subjugation of others. This particular room is filled with individuals who have literally been petrified by their racism. A final conversation takes place in which Bilbops describes racism as a disease that Hatch lists as it is his own personal mindkill – as a long time Civil Rights activist, he sees racism as a topic to continually return to in his work and argues that it is his responsibility to do so. Both the filmmakers, those who have been petrified by these need to be processed in a ‘safe’ place, otherwise they spread through the body and take root. But this scene reads as a missed opportunity – it feels like the filmmakers are trying to wrap this deeply troubling examination of internal prejudices in a way that’s too neat and digestible for the viewer.

But then, as they leave the memory room, Dorothy turns to stand inside and asks: ‘You gonna give up being white?’ He responds: ‘You gonna give up being black?’ ‘No, not yet,’ says Dorothy, ‘because you keep me black!’ This exchange is followed by a chorus of laughter – from both of them. When we discuss racism, we are always discussing white supremacy. Dorothy’s response – ‘you keep me black’ – pushes against the idea that colourblindness can be achieved in our society. Racialisation can be deployed by whiteness whenever it sees fit. The film plays upon these contradictions – how racism is both something that is denied and enacted at the same time, the necessary result of a governing structure that places a positive value on whiteness. In exploring the relationship between whiteness and how we desire bodies, whom we date, whom we love, The KKK Boutique Ain’t Just Rednecks deals with the uncomfortable socio-history of fucking whiteness.