

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

July 25, 2007

Circles, Eyes, Rabbits and Avant-Garde Cinema

Filed under: circles n\` bunnies — alecsothblog @ 11:02 pm

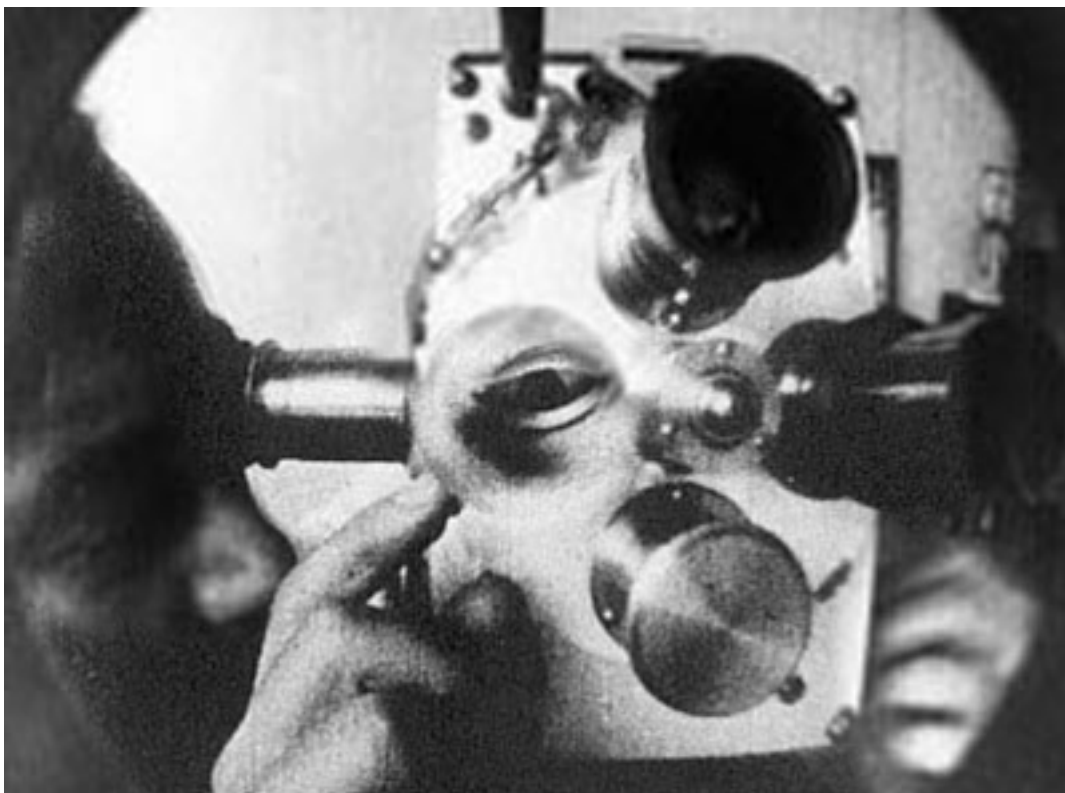
Early this week I wrote about human vision and the scarcity of circular photographs. This led to a post about the retinal photograph of a rabbit and a couple of posts about circles and bunnies (here and here). All of this got me thinking about avant-garde cinema. Surely there must be a film about bunny-eyes?

I started with the surrealists. There is eyeball mutilation in Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), but no bunnies:



still from *Un Chien Andalou*. Watch the movie [here](#) and [here](#).

Then I watched *Emak Bakia* (1926) by Man Ray. What a great little film – and I'm not just saying that because it includes Kiki de Montparnasse. It has lots of circles and eyes but, alas, no rabbits:



Still from *Emak Bakia*. Watch the movie [here](#) and [here](#).

I found more of Kiki's eyes in *Ballet Mécanique* (1924). The movie was made by Fernand Léger with cinematography by Man Ray – still no bunnies.



Still from *Ballet Mécanique* . Watch the movie [here](#) and [here](#).

Kiki was friends with Jean Cocteau. Cocteau seems like someone who might have put together some bunnies and eyeballs. He didn't – but in 1950 Cocteau brought to France a young American filmmaker he admired: Kenneth Anger. While in Paris, Anger used his recently botched suicide as the basis for a film, *Rabbit's Moon*:



Still from *Rabbit's Moon*



Still from *Rabbit's Moon*

The title of the film refers to Japanese myth. "It's interesting that the Japanese do not see a face or Man in the Moon as we Westerners do," said Kenneth Anger, "but see a mythological animal, the white rabbit."

The movie shows the clown Pierrot continually failing to grasp the moon. Harlequin appears and taunts Pierrot. Later we learn that the moon is a metaphor for Columbine. In Elliot Stein's book *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*, he writes:

All of Anger's films are separate movements in one vast film, a large symphony in which all kinds of rituals occur as here with the stultifying return of zoom after zoom into the blinding full moon which looks down on the progress of Pierrot from romantic illusion to destruction. If Pierrot is Anger himself, then Pierrot's new toy, the Magick Lantern, is obviously the cinema.



Kenneth Anger on the set off *Rabbit's Moon*

Due to a studio scheduling conflict, Anger had to stop shooting and left the film uncompleted. But it suddenly resurfaced in the 1970's with a strange pop soundtrack. In a fascinating essay, Michael Cohen describes how he spent years tracking down the man behind this soundtrack:

Finding the identity of the song, and a copy of an official release, became my personal mission. I began referring to it as "the most obscure song in the world" and as "the greatest song no one's ever heard." For seven years, on and off, I searched for any clue....

The song literally seemed to have come from nowhere—as though Kenneth Anger, desperate for the perfect soundtrack, had conjured it ex nihilo from the depths of the netherworld in some shadowy deal with Lucifer. I shuddered to think what Anger must have offered in return.

Finally, in early 2004, as I was losing hope—a sudden surprise breakthrough. Through a string of coincidences involving an Australian woman named Anne I tracked down the aforementioned Andy Arthurs. He was indeed

the culprit, and identified the song as "It Came in the Night," an extremely rare non-album track by A Raincoat. A month later I ordered the single from an Australian record dealer for a mere \$10 plus shipping. At last, I scratched that seven-year itch.

Cohen goes on to do a bunch of interesting research on Andy Arthurs. His biggest single was "I Can Detect You (for 100,000 Miles)." I love the picture of him wearing binoculars. I just wish the magnifying glass he was holding was round:



- Listen to *It Came in the Night* [here](#)

8 Comments

1. There's Alba, the fluorescent bunny:
<http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html>

Comment by Jay Watkins — July 26, 2007 @ 2:43 am

2. Hey Jay, the creator of Alba has also worked round. I think it is interesting that the people on the far edges of both the scientific/poetic spectrum are attracted to this shape. Rectangles are for everyone in the middle.

Comment by Alec Soth — July 26, 2007 @ 7:21 am

3. Thanks to (Why are things so heavy in the future?) for finding this

Comment by Alec Soth — July 26, 2007 @ 7:38 am

4. Off on a tangent: there's "Harvey," a movie about a white rabbit in which no rabbit ever appears.

Comment by Joe Holmes — July 26, 2007 @ 7:41 am

5. That song sounds like a demented children's song. I'll definitely have to watch those films though.

Comment by mike moreno — July 26, 2007 @ 8:15 am

6. You're killing me, Alec. I searched high and low for a screen shot of when Bugs Bunny is seeing spots from rabbititus, but to no avail.

Comment by Zoe Strauss — July 26, 2007 @ 9:40 am

7. Incredible! Zoe, we are working on the same wavelength. Look what I just posted:

<http://alecsoth.com/blog/2007/07/26/am-i-crazy-or-are-there-bunnies-and-circles-everywhere/>

Comment by Alec Soth — July 26, 2007 @ 9:46 am

8. And then of course there is this:

<http://tinyurl.com/258nze>

Comment by Feli di Giorgio — July 28, 2007 @ 8:47 am