

Les États généraux du film documentaire; Lussas, France 18. - 25.8.2013

### **Fragment of a filmmaker's work: Ute Aurand and Margaret Tait**

3 filmprograms curated by Federico Rossin

*You started very young making films and you have never stopped. What has pushed you to be an artist?*

I became a film student at the Berlin School (DFFB) in 1979 and made my first film, *Schweigend ins Gespräch vertieft*, without knowing any rules, just with a kind of unconscious courage and the necessity to do it. I was not thinking of cinema, neither feature films, nor documentaries. I never thought of myself as an artist but always as a filmmaker.

*From your first film, you have adopted a diary film form: why have you chosen these peculiar way of making films, which mixes life and cinema all the time?*

From the very beginning I felt close to films with a strong subjectivity. But only after film school and making *Oh! The Four Seasons* together with Ulrike Pfeiffer, inspired by Mekas's *He stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of his Life*, did I start developing a more diaristic form. I bought a Bolex camera and an editing table and made my first portrait film, *Detel + Jón*. From that point on, my filmmaking developed a more diaristic spontaneity, away from writing scripts and the idea of making Art House movies. The diaristic form develops out of an inner dialogue with my surroundings, a silent visual conversation. The source of inspiration is daily life, the fountain which never stops and offers itself to everyone. It is a great joy and challenge to transform my inner dialogue into film. Years ago, I saw a mother with her baby alone walking through the streets and thought: "Mothers are the real philosophers, because they are excluded from the so called productive world, they have a different way of thinking and feeling about life." I feel like them, but put my feelings and impressions into film.

*Who are the filmmakers that influenced you? We can easily think to Jonas Mekas but I feel you are quite different from him: there's no narcissism in your work. You are just a portion of the reality you are filming. And above all, you are a woman!*

The German filmmaker and photographer Elfi Mikesch was very important for me when I began, because of her interest in mixed genres. I brought her to the school and we worked with her. Ulrike Ottinger's *Blaue Matrosen* fascinated, because of it's fragmentary structure, intended imperfection and artifice. Deren's work impressed me but remained more distant, the same with Cocteau. The beginning of Marie Menken's *Notebook*, just one short moment when a white duck swims on the upper edge of the frame, gave me a sudden strong insight into her work. I was delighted and brought all of her films into the Arsenal distribution (Berlin). Moments in Margaret Tait's films give me great joy and bring me inner peace. Seeing Robert Beavers *The Stoas* opened something completely new, without knowing where it came from something important spoke to me from behind the screen. From the very beginning, some of my school colleagues and later close filmmaker-friends like Ulrike Pfeiffer, Renate Sami, Maria Lang, Helga Fanderl and Jeannette Munoz are important sources of communication and reflection about film for me. We know each other, our differences and similarities, and that's helpful. All my film collaborations are based on shared inspiration.

*You're an European artist but in your films we can see many parts of the world: Japan, India, USA, etc. How have these travels changed your vision and filmmaking?*

My vision has changed through experiencing different peoples and cultures, and that should change my filmmaking, but it is difficult for me to say.

*In your films, there's a peculiar staccato style which make me think to music, to Webern and to electronic minimalism of the seventies for example: how much did music influence you?*

For the film school, we had to write a film review either of *Oskar Langenfeld* by Holger Meins (1967), a short, clear, and humble black and white documentary or *Momma Don't Allow*, by Karel Reisz (1955) a visual, very rhythmic, fast dance film. I chose the second. I liked the rhythm a lot, the story was not important, just the rhythm of the b&w images. My camera is always handheld, and I am moving while filming, the rhythm is essential. You can call it "music", but for me it is rhythm. Rhythm is energy and movement, rhythm creates space in my films.

*How do you manage to work like that? How much is editing process important for you and how much is the spontaneity of the shooting?*

I like both, the kaleidoscope of in-camera-editing and the mystery of the cut in montage. When I am filming I am always editing-in-camera, later on the editing table I am first reducing the in-camera-edited footage and then build the order of the whole film. How much I keep of the in-camera-edited footage differs from film to film. In my recent films like *Kopfüber im Geäst* (Hanging upside down in the branches), I have become again more interested in montage, while *Terzen* is built out of a series of long in-camera-edited sequences.

*How do you manage to be at the right distance with the people you are filming? I feel something like an ethics in your camera work: to be close to people but not too close. This is the secret of your intimate cinema for me.*

I like the idea of a brief "touch", it's not necessary to stay long to get in touch with someone or something. My approach is sometimes like a swing, to go away and come back and go away and come back again. Often I don't know the people, but even when I know them quite well, I like brief moments of communication. The same with a sound, you don't have to listen to a whole piece of music, a bit of music is enough to evoke an emotion. Emotions are echoes of an image or a sound. They stay in us. Images and sounds disappear, emotion and memory stays.

*Let's talk about Margaret Tait: she is not known here in France. Can you make a portrait of her?*

My first encounter with Margaret Tait was through looking at her films, on an editing table in the midst of the Co-op office in London in 1993. And there it was, the strong intimacy and very powerful fragility, which later I experienced in meeting Margaret Tait in person. I very much respect her career. Going through difficult times, she never gave up. She continued making and developing her own way of filmmaking. If you see *Portrait of Ga*, from 1952, it's unbelievable that she made such a film already in 1952, it is amazing! Also her very first film, *Three Portrait Sketches*, from 1951, has its own incredible way of editing. I just showed it in Berlin. Her personal tone and imagery and how she moves the camera, how she looks at the world is so refreshing, a rare gift! Margaret is a poet. No filmmaker finds her or his own way strange or difficult to understand, but others can find the films complicated or banal.

*You have met her: can you tell us something about that experience?*

We watched together her films on a golden framed screen, the size of a small painting, in her living room. There I saw *Happy Bees* a wonderful film in which she filmed her very young nephews crawling around in the garden. I saw fragments of hand-scratched film, which Margaret later used in her last film, *Garden Pieces*. Margaret had her studio in an old small church, the "kirk" out in the country side overlooking a bay; the windows had yellow glass, and it was her archive, storage and workplace. I saw her life's work shining in every corner. The light and open skies in Orkney are stunning. Margaret hadn't used her Bolex for a long time, when we started filming parts of her *Video Poems for the Nineties*, but the film was never finished. She was working on a new script for her second feature film.

*What do you think about this choice of putting your work aside Tait's one?*

I am very curious to experience our films in such a close dialogue. I will tell you after the programs, what I think and how I felt. I don't know, what this will create. I hope I will understand more about my own films and about Margaret's by seeing them together. It is a unique occasion. But looking without comparing will be a challenge.

*She has spent most of her life in Scotland and Orkneys, even if during the war she works in India and later she studied in Italy. You travelled around the world: we can feel the same spirit and love for life in both of you. You are both filmmakers of places and portraits. Has she influenced your work?*

I don't know. Maybe I will find out by seeing our films together. Margaret's rhythm, her way of moving the camera and her imagery are quite different from mine, but we share an interest in "small" things and people. Her positive poetic attitude and her courage to follow her own way, are what stays with me always.

Interview with Ute Aurand by Federico Rossin.

21. August 2012:

Program 1 10am – PORTRAITS [111']

Kopfüber im Geäst (2009) 15' Ute Aurand

Portrait of Ga (1952) 7' Margaret Tait

Halbmond für Margaret (2004) 15' Ute Aurand

Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait (1964) 9' Margaret Tait

Hier ist es zur Zeit sehr schön (2006) 55' Ute Aurand, Maria Lang

Tailpiece (1976) 10' Margaret Tait

Program 2 2:15pm – TIME PASSING [135']

Colour Poems (1974) 12' Margaret Tait

Terzen (1998) 50' Ute Aurand

Place of Work (1976) 31' Margaret Tait

In die Erde Gebaut (2008) 42' Ute Aurand

Program 3 9pm– FARAWAY, SO CLOSE [94']

Aerial (1974) 4' Margaret Tait

Junge Kiefern (2011) 43' Ute Aurand

Where I am is Here (1964) 33' Margaret Tait

Debates in the presence with Ute Aurand led by Federico Rossin.