

# ROBERTA FRIEDMAN & GRAHAME WEINBREN

with Z'EV & EARL HOWARD

SEVEN TENSES OF CINEMA

Notes by Grahame Weinbren

As a formal scaffolding for this program we are proposing a typology of cinematic temporality. But it is an indefinite typology, arbitrary and temporary, constructed only so as to encompass this particular set of film works in a single stroke-- certainly not put forward as a general principle of The Cinema. The emphasis is on the different kinds of time-reference films may make, pointing forward or back, to beyond a particular future or before a specified past, looking from a past moment to a period to come or back from a hypothetical future to a non-existent past. The scheme involves understanding each work on this program as establishing a tense, so that by the end a grammatical range has been designated that extends from pluperfect to subjunctive.

But isn't it true that all films are imperfect, projecting out of an unwinding present into a profilmic past?

The program:

1. (future) Z'ev, or Filming Steals the Soul-- with Z'ev performing on his own instruments, and Anthony Forma, camera.

The film is not yet made, though it is more than intended, so it is indisputably a future film. For those cases where one might feel that the events themselves must have been more interesting than the film, here are the events.

2. (perfect) Murray and Max Talk About Money (1978-79, 16 minutes)-- with Murray Kamelhar, David Wilson. Sound: Dennis Phillips.

This film is perfect tense in the sense that all the events it contains are fixed in the time they were recorded, through the device of decomposing the footage into morphemic units, and then reconstituting it so that any genuine indication of the reality referred to beyond the limits of the frame is obliterated. The content of Murray's and Max's speech, in other words, is mostly obscured; it is possible, however, to guess what they would have said.

3. (future perfect) Future Perfect (1979-80, 12 minutes)-- Camera: Anthony Forma, saxophone: Earl Howard.

If there is one idea behind this piece that is central, it is in its attempt to include the inscription of that aspect of filmmaking which could be thought of as the reverse of memory. Filmmakers are constantly looking forward, hypothesizing how things will be after certain tasks have been accomplished, and this film is in the future perfect in its unfulfillable desire to imagine itself after the filming is completed, after marks are drawn on the film, after a soundtrack is added, after it is complemented by a live performer, after it is finished. But of course it is uncompletable, always lacking some final element. The film was made as a base for a musical composition by Earl Howard, and this is the first time he is performing with it. His contribution is one of several tendencies written into the piece as self-critical elements-- since it is clear that the self-reference on which Future Perfect largely rests is a quality that demands to be questioned, undercut. Howard's composition, based as it is on the soundtrack of the film alone, highlights the irrelevancy of the image track in its self-containing reflexiveness. Here, then, is another sense of the title-- coming from the general requirement that perfection is always relegated to an unattainable future moment.

4. (pluperfect) Cheap Imitations Part I: Méliès' "India Rubber Head" (1980, 5 minutes)-- with Stuart Fox, David Wilson and Lois Freeman's machine. Sound: Dennis Phillips, Robin Palanker.

This film both depicts an afternoon last winter when we shot it (past) and incorporates a reference to a much earlier film (past past)-- made in 1903-- which itself presumably depicts a series of activities previously performed by people now long dead (past past past). The description was provided by C. Noll Brinckmann as part of a theoretical paper about properties of film-space she and I are collaborating on. Two things are interesting: first that the description radically misrepresents the Méliès film (it contains several mistakes, one of them crucial); and second that the remake does not even manage to follow the description. Thus it is perhaps this work that should be categorized as imperfect, a bargain basement 'second'.

5. (subjunctive) Sol-- Music: Schumann, Five Pieces in Folk Style, op. 102; second piece (langsam). Performed on the record by Pablo Casals, accompanied by Leopold Mannes.

This is a hypothetical film, but surely no less of a film because of it.

6. (present) Earl Howard, saxophone solo.

7. (imperfect) Margaret and Marion Talking About Working (1979-80, 22 minutes)-- with Margaret Levine, Marion Cohen, Joan Strausbaugh. Set: Robin Palanker. Camera: Anthony Forma, Noll Brinckmann, G. Weinbren. Sound: Jim Hart. Script and direction: R. Friedman.

The situations referred to in this film extend out of a thirty-year past into the present and future. Margaret has lost her job after thirty years; Marion is returning to work after her children are grown. They, like Murray and Max, are siblings, whose lives have been reasonably difficult like those of most humans, but they neither complain nor regret. Staring at walls (real or filmed) is also an experience replete with presentness, as is working, where the main issue is usually the passage of time. In some ways this imperfect film completes a series for us.

This program could not have been done without Anthony Forma, Robin Palanker, Dennis Phillips, Carl Stone, to name only people who have helped us most recently. It is absurd to suppose that an artist, or pair of artists, working in film, is a solitary unit-- his/her dependencies reach far, and it hardly makes sense for us to take the entire credit (or blame) for our films. We work within a network of collaborators.