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| Clarke, Shirley (1919-1997) |
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| Shirley Clarke (1919-1997) was an American experimental filmmaker active between the early 1950s and the mid-1980s. Born in New York City to a wealthy family, she trained initially as a dancer, attending various colleges and universities where dance classes were offered without ever completing a degree. Eventually disillusioned with her prospects as a dancer and choreographer, she turned to film, a medium in which she continued her exploration of bodily rhythm and movement.  Her first film, *Dance in the Sun* (1953), edits together takes of a dancer in- and out-doors to create a continuous flow of movement, much in the style of Maya Deren’s *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). More narrative in conception is *A Moment in Love* (1957), a *pas de deux* executed in a natural setting that cleverly uses reflections on water, a ruined house and accidents of the landscape to stage the convergences and separations of two lovers. *Bullfight* (1955) features Clarke’s former dance teacher, choreographer Anna Sokolow, performing fragments of her piece *Homage to a Bullfight*, and mixes her dance with real footage of a bullfight. A highlight is a point of view shot in which the camera shakes and swirls to suggest that the dancer-bullfighter has been caught by the bull. |
| Shirley Clarke (1919-1997) was an American experimental filmmaker active between the early 1950s and the mid-1980s. Born in New York City to a wealthy family, she trained initially as a dancer, attending various colleges and universities where dance classes were offered without ever completing a degree. Eventually disillusioned with her prospects as a dancer and choreographer, she turned to film, a medium in which she continued her exploration of bodily rhythm and movement.  Her first film, *Dance in the Sun* (1953), edits together takes of a dancer in- and out-doors to create a continuous flow of movement, much in the style of Maya Deren’s *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). More narrative in conception is *A Moment in Love* (1957), a *pas de deux* executed in a natural setting that cleverly uses reflections on water, a ruined house and accidents of the landscape to stage the convergences and separations of two lovers. *Bullfight* (1955) features Clarke’s former dance teacher, choreographer Anna Sokolow, performing fragments of her piece *Homage to a Bullfight*, and mixes her dance with real footage of a bullfight. A highlight is a point of view shot in which the camera shakes and swirls to suggest that the dancer-bullfighter has been caught by the bull. *In Paris Parks* (1954) showcases the rhythmic and expressive value of the gestures of children at play. *Bridges Go Round* (1958) also belongs to this early phase of dance cinema, which makes various New York bridges dance and twirl by means of camera movements, mirrorings and superimpositions.  Clarke’s subsequent films were closer to the aesthetics of documentary, a medium that she eventually came to question. She collaborated with Willard van Dyke in a State Department commission, making loops of representative slices of life in the United States to be shown in the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair. After this commission, she co-directed *Skyscraper* (1959) with van Dyke and Irving Jacoby, a witty film about the construction of the midtown-Manhattan Tishman Building, largely described from the perspective of the workers involved in the project.  Despite her temporary adherence to the aesthetics of documentary, Clarke’s most significant films of the 1960s articulate a radical critique of the premises of *cinema verité*, and particularly of the belief that unmediated experience could be conveyed by the camera. *The Connection* (1961), based on Jack Gelber’s homonymous play performed at the time by the Living Theatre, is staged as a film within a film: it narrates the shooting of a television documentary about a group of junkies waiting for their dealer in a rundown loft in the Lower East Side. The apparently random action, dead time and spontaneous antics of the junkies, and the reactions of the crew filming them, give the impression of life caught on the run, but are in fact carefully rehearsed. At the same time, the film-within-the-film’s director orchestrates the activities of his subjects, hectoring them to deliver the authenticity required by the rhetoric of television documentary. *Portrait of Jason* (1967) a lengthy interview with an eponymous nightclub entertainer-hustler-house servant, similarly mimes the markers of unmediated life and casual filming — the lens goes in and out of focus and the voices of the director and the crew are left in the soundtrack. Toward the end of the film, Jason, its protagonist, begins to question its own story, hinting at its fabricated nature and, by extension, at the fabricated nature of the entire film.  *The Cool World* (1963) also adopts a matter-of-fact, objective style, yet makes no attempt to hide its fictional status. Based on Warren Miller’s novel on Harlem teenage gangs, it is the most socially aware of Clarke’s films; it explores the destructive effect of poverty and economic and social discrimination on a group of African American adolescents and young adults. It combines *cinema verité* techniques, such as roving hand-held cameras and real locations, with voice-overs, montage sequences, and non-diegetic music. The film was the result of a close collaboration between Clarke and African-American musician Carl Lee, who had worked with Clarke in *The Connection* and had also been an important contributor to *Portrait of Jason*.  From the early 1970s forward, Clarke still produced some documentaries, such as *Ornette: Made in America*, about free jazz pioneer Ornette Coleman, but she worked mainly on video, often in collective projects that combined performance and dance. This is a part of her oeuvre that has only recently begun to be critically assessed and historicised. List of works *Dance in the Sun* (1953)  *In Paris Parks* (1954)  *Bullfight* (1955)  *A Moment of Love* (1957)  *Brussels Film Loops* (1958)  *Bridges Go Round* (1958)  *Skyscraper* (1959, with Willard van Dyke and Irving Jacoby)  *The Connection* (1961)  *The Cool World* (1963)  *Robert Frost: A Lover’s Quarrel with the World* (1964)  *Portrait of Jason* (1967)  *Ornette: Made in America* (1985)  *Trans* (1978)  *One 2-3* (1978)  *A Visual Diary* (1980)  *Savage/Love* (1981)  *Tongues* (1982)  *Performance* (1982)  *The Box* (1983-84) |
| Further reading:  (Cohen)  (Rabinovitz)  (L. Rabinovitz)  (Ward and Jenkins) |