



WHAT REMAINS OF THE RECENT PAST IS THE FUTURE

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2017 FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

In June of 2017, 35 Fellows gathered at Colgate University to immerse themselves in films and discussion, as guided by Nuno Lisboa's program for the 63rd Flaherty, *Future Remains*. As always at the Seminar, Frances Flaherty's concept of "non-preconception" rules the long days and nights. While we know the week's theme, we are not privy to the film selections in advance. Several times a day, we sit together in anticipation of what may strike our eyes and ears. Not knowing the program allows a powerful investigation into our own biases, expectations, and positions; it is then in the discussions with filmmakers that we may discover anew, sometimes achieving disagreement, sometimes negotiating revelations.

The composition of the Fellows reflects the composition of the Flaherty participants writ large. The Fellows, representing over a dozen nations and multiple cities through the Americas, included scholars, curators, filmmakers, archivists, and writers, thus producing an intense combustion of cinematic philosophies or stakes. Preceding the official start of the Seminar, the Fellows arrived to the campus for an orientation. Rahmah Pauzi assembled clips and excerpts from many of the Fellows' works for a Friday night screening that exhibited a variety of approaches: animation, documentary portraiture, essay films, landscape investigations, and more, displaying exactly the wide-reaching embrace of nonfiction that the Flaherty has espoused over the years.

On Saturday, Trinh T. Minh-ha delivered a master class that no participant will forget. Walking us through her body of work, Minh-ha modeled an extraordinary intelligence toward her material, blending production anecdotes, reflections, and theory. It's a good thing we were all given pens and notebooks in our tote bags; we needed them to keep up.





Later that afternoon, former Flaherty programmers Pablo de Ocampo and Ariella Ben-Dov (also a current Board member) conducted a master class on programming and curating, which returned us to the previous night's screening by way of a tactic that combined elements of improvisation and campfire storytelling. We were all asked to recall and share a personal moviegoing experience, one that forever marked us, whatever the context or genre. Each Fellow offered a telling account. Following this getting-to-know-you exercise (alternatively hilarious, educational, insightful), break-out groups quickly curated sequences from the Friday Fellows show. I can think of no better way for the Fellows to conclude the day. We were physically present, intellectually enlivened, and still had no clue what would follow in the week to come.

The core of the experience, of course, becomes manifest once all the participants arrive. Fellows assist in many aspects of making the Seminar happen: staffing the merchandise table, assisting with microphones and audio documentation, managing the suggestive touches of social media, and, of course, helping out at the bar into the wee hours of the night, as we all continue to discuss films over drinks and on the dance floor. Every day during lunch, the Fellows enjoy visits from the guest artists for more intimate, focused conversation. Peter Nestler, Dominic Gagnon, Teddy Williams, Sana na N'Hada (w/ Nicholas Elliott as translator), Kevin Jerome Everson, Filipa César, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Laura Poitras, Laura Huertas Millán, and Vincent Carelli all graciously joined us to break bread. We thank them for their time.

One of the true highlights of the 63rd Flaherty Seminar was its concomitance with the publication of Scott MacDonald and Patricia Zimmermann's long-awaited book, *The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema*. Scott and Patty joined us on Wednesday (after the merciful morning break to sleep in or call home) to present their methodology for constructing the book. Their smart threading of select transcripts and detailed, researched history of the institution serves to buttress the Seminar, as much as it does to dispel myths. As we were all reminded, the notorious Flaherty fights are quite rare, and yet Frances would hardly roll in her grave when it comes to debate around the defining qualities of the Seminar. A productive tension between participants, filmmakers, institutional forces, and longer, wider socio-political forces provides the dynamism that continues to make the week special, even life-changing for some. The Fellows are at the frontline of this encounter.

Programmer Nuno Lisboa visited us for lunch on Thursday to discuss the readings (Giorgio Agamben on gesture and Jeff Wall on Gestus), the Seminar theme, and the week's films. If I may add a personal note, this was one of the most dynamic conversations I've witnessed in my 15 years at the Flaherty. What began as a philosophical discussion of gesture that veered into Artavazd Peleshian's distance montage as a metaphor for the program turned into a sharp political debate, multidimensional in its perspective and full of feeling. I sat in awe of the Fellows and felt proud to have experienced this moment, and the entire week. The rest, as they say, is history, a future to be determined.