

Talking About Seeing: A Conversation with James Benning

by Danni Zuvela

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James Benning in *Circling the Image*

It is perhaps because James Benning's work is so resistant to neat categorisation that his films have rarely received the recognition they deserve. His work fuses elements of American structuralism, the narrative avant-garde and experimental documentary. While Australian audiences have been exposed to some of the better-known figures of American experimental cinema, rarely have they had the opportunity to see Benning's work on the big screen. This year's Brisbane International Film Festival (BIFF) retrospective focus on Benning's career thus represents an important acknowledgement of *sui generis* work.

Audiences were able to see a cross-section of Benning's career: *11X14* (1977), *American Dreams* (1983), *Landscape Suicide* (1988), *Four Corners* (1997) and *Los* (2001), as well as a German-made documentary on Benning's work, *Circling the Image* (Reinhard Wulf, 2003). A hugely helpful introduction to Benning's filmmaking, the documentary established his painstaking method of visiting a space and experiencing, absorbing and evaluating its particular geography. Accompanying him during the making of his newest work *13 Lakes* (not yet released), we see the care and time with which he frames each shot, and the process of filming on 16mm and recording the sound on tape. We hear Benning articulate his filmmaking approach and method ("looking and listening"), while the camera observes him filming views of different lakes. Breathtaking wide shots of the American desert landscape reference but do not mimic or copy Benning's work. It's easy to understand why: once we see a *13 Lakes* workprint shot of a vista, we realise that though the video shots look good, they are utterly eclipsed by the depth and tone captured by the film, particularly in the rippling sapphire of the water and chalky whiteness of the rocks.

Employing neither psychologised stories nor non-objectivist abstractions, Benning's approach to narrativity does not fit within the history of narrative cinema, nor with much canonical avant-garde work, and can pose an interpretative challenge to the spectator. For the first-time viewer of any of these films, the immediate impression is of radical, almost unnerving stillness generated by the long takes from a fixed camera position. Benning's consistent exploration of cinematic duration, his painstaking mapping out of a space over time, suggests that his work can be easily contextualised in the history of long take cinema, along with Straub-Huillet, Ophuls, Welles and others.

However, Benning's work cannot be fully explained by theories of the long take as they relate to forms of narrative cinema, such as those of Bazin or Mitry, as the eschewal of narrative continuity and dramatic elements, particularly characters, militates against either the long take aesthetic (viz Bazinian realism) or the synthesis theory of montage and long take (as proposed by Mitry). However, in the narrower context of experimental filmmaking,

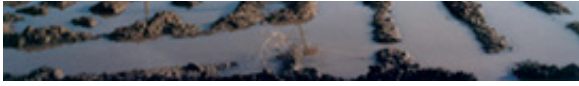
Benning's interest, in P. Adams Sitney's words, in "film that insists on its shape", invites descriptors like "structuralist" and "minimalist", and the choice of long takes becomes part of the para-cinematic refutation of dominant cinematic codes (like the highly conventionalised notion of the post-modern audience "attention span"). Benning does not consider himself a structural filmmaker, believing he has "more to say" than those detached formalist experiments generally do, and explains this method of prolonged shots as a means to investigate place.

With his mathematics background, his structuralism manifests in the invocation of rigorous compositional logic – the films of the California trilogy, for example, being composed of 35 shots of 2.5 minutes length – "pose questions" and "solve problems". Benning's long takes therefore become understandable as an authorial strategy for the organisation of documentary materials and for interrogating the act of seeing. After several minutes of looking at a single shot, the effect on the viewer is powerful. The formal elegance of the compositions somehow becomes surreal over time, as we look *into*, instead of *at*, the place. This tendency locates Benning in the history of experimental filmmakers concerned with interrogating visual perception.

Curated by Bruce Hodsdon, the films featured in the BIFF retrospective sketch out Benning's move to increasingly de-peopled landscapes. *Los*, the second film in the California trilogy, is an antonymic representation of Los Angeles. The familiar spectacle is eschewed for unfamiliar public spaces that reveal the city's inner workings, the machinations and minutiae of quotidian reality. Unglamorous images of suburban boulevards, a courthouse, industrial harbours, flight paths, workers and homeless people, compose a layered portrait of the "other" Los Angeles, an alternate city symphony of humanist interest in the place and its inhabitants. Benning's appreciation of Robert Smithson's industrial landscapes is evident here, in the shots of the car yards, dozers and trucks, and in the signature shots of oil pumps, silos and industrial machinery. Also recurrent is the motif of water that weaves through the California trilogy. *Los* opens with a beautiful shot of the roaring causeway which follows on from the irrigated landscapes of *El Valley Centro* (2000), is punctuated with numerous significant "water" shots (such as the joggers in the rain, the hosing of the empty football field and the polluted LA River) and finishes with a expansive shot of the ocean. *Los* also continues Benning's inquiry into sound-image relations. Two scenes in particular stand out for their use of offscreen space; the first, a shot of a non-descript intersection, which seems unremarkable until the roar of an unseen plane flying very close overhead is deafening. In another scene, bright light glints off the visors of scores of young-looking cops in full riot regalia shifting uneasily in the sun, as a dull rumble grows from somewhere offscreen. Gradually we make out the sound of protesters' chants, again unseen, approaching until the noise, and the cops' tension, is palpable. The shot finishes just as confrontation seems imminent, but remains unseen. Perceptual experiments such as these are a hallmark of formalist experimental cinema, but here can also be seen as researches that reinvigorate the form of experimental documentary.



Benning's landscape works, with their meticulous, reverential compositions, have been located in the history of American realist painting and photography, and also belong to the tradition of American nature writing. It is impossible to observe natural landscapes anywhere without some acknowledgement of the grim reality of human development and profiteering on wilderness, and Benning's work is shot through with both a deep respect and love of nature, and



El Valley Centro

a quiet sense of sadness at the devastation so regularly encountered. But he avoids essayism, or polemic, preferring instead critique by quotation, such as in the carefully inserted shots of ravaged

landscapes, livestock and abattoir and other evidence of human despoilment that recur throughout his oeuvre. His is a restrained ecocriticism, "a certain political meaning" expressed through multivalent American symbols. Not for Benning the heroic American modernism of some of the avant-garde masters, but a different idea of wild places, less about individual expressivity and transcendentalism, and more about observation, time and consideration, no less sacred.

The Benning retrospective also included important work that interrogates other kinds of landscapes beside the natural and the picturesque. *American Dreams* uses a three-part structure that involves the simultaneous presentation of an obsessive collection of baseball memorabilia, handwritten diary extracts and popular songs. The complexity of that film's investigation of American history and masculinity – the landscape of the mind – is so perceptually challenging it is evidently a film for multiple viewings. *Landscape Suicide* similarly uses actuality text as a kind of found object to structure the work. Actors perform transcripts of two people convicted of murder as the film, more fascinating than it is grim, probes the relation between the crimes and their locales. In his introduction at the screening, James thanked us for "coming out on a Sunday morning to watch a murder film". These are relatively early films, though, and the retrospective is carefully chosen to represent the trajectory of Benning's career over the past two and a half decades, from an interest in narrativity and the use of human figures to the exploration of landscape over time.

11X14 opens with a lengthy shot from the back carriage of the Evanston Express ride into downtown Chicago, evoking early cinema's train fetishism and providing one of the few instances of mobile camera in a Benning film. *11X14* includes two other extremely long shots as the ambiguous three plot strands disperse; a shot of two women in bed as music plays, and at the pinnacle, a close up of white smoke or steam billowing from a smokestack. That afternoon on the train home, I reflected on the changes Benning's work had made to my own ways of visualising as I looked out at winter-golden Brisbane, and was struck by the simple beauty of the smokestacks and factories of the industrial patch of the inner city. I realised I was seeing them differently – really differently, as though with different eyes. Suddenly, amidst the rhythmic clanking of the train, I was able to appreciate the colour, tone and composition of each view, the angle, texture and motion of the smoke, the textured slanting sides of the buildings and rusting long lines of the railyards. The journey seemed to pass in an instant, and I realised that I was "seeing and thinking" differently, and that for this over-familiar vista, my way of "looking and listening" had been subtly, but significantly, changed.

– Danni Zuvela

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Danni Zuvela: James, there are so many words people use to describe this kind of non-commercial film work – experimental, avant-garde, underground – all terms that have different but overlapping connotations and usages.

I'd like to frame today's conversation in terms of "artist filmmaking", and why film seems to be among the most marginalised artforms.

James Benning: Artist filmmakers are on the margins. I mean, there's a number who

have made a career out of it but even they tend to be marginalised. Nobody's making any money out of it. Those who do become well known are often known for their theory, which helps their films become known. People like Hollis Frampton, who wrote a lot – I think that helped his work become better known.

DZ: Artist filmmakers don't fit into the industrial film world, but then they are ignored by the art world as well.

JB: They're in-between! It's the non-commodity status of the work; it doesn't have a "value" in either world. If you're an artist in any other medium, you find a gallery and have hopes of making a decent living. A few do climb to the top of that pyramid to make a living. I've never really made money from my work, unless it's an installation.

DZ: Can you talk to me a little about your approach as an artist?

JB: When I first started out I didn't know what art was. My definition of art was drawing and painting and stuff...what I did think was art wasn't really art at all – it was the stuff I'd seen in arts and crafts festivals. Then once I got serious with film, I realised art has this conceptual side to it, which I'd never thought about, but made sense.

Now I think of myself as an artist who happens to use film, and I approach my work as an artist solving problems. I set up problems and try to solve them in an artistic and creative way and hope to find an audience, hope that someone will find it interesting...

It may be that it's no different for any other artist, but it seems especially difficult for film artists. I've been in four Whitney Biennials. A painter only has to be in two to become self-sufficient, but for a film artist, that recognition seems of little benefit. Anybody that's interested in the arts should be interested in my films – they have the same concerns as other work in the visual arts.

DZ: Can you talk to me a little about the way audiences engage with your films, and what sort of changes you've noticed in audiences over the years – have they become more receptive to fine art film? When your films were first shown, was that in a context of people having seen work they could reference yours to, like Michael Snow's and Hollis Frampton's?

JB: Back in the '70s those works still weren't seen by general audiences. I think most of those early screenings took place with just a few people in the room. A few very interested people, but they weren't huge audiences, or even big – more just a small, art crowd. I don't think most people would have seen Snow or Warhol's work, though they might have been aware of it. That awareness tended to come later.

Over time film audiences have become more sophisticated. They've been to film schools and other venues where they could see work that's different to dominant cinema. Unfortunately those places, those venues, are drying up – many places that used to show experimental film have gone out of business, or they've changed to become more accessible. That's in the US, of course – I think the audience is even larger, and growing, in Europe – in Germany, Austria, England, my work's played to large audiences who seem very receptive to what I'm trying to do.

DZ: Why do you think that might be?

JB: Oh, I don't know – it's more exotic than images of their home country perhaps, or maybe there's less attention, less drive to make narrative works than in the US.

DZ: But your work *is* narrative, in a way.

JB: Yes, it's experimental narrative...it's non-conventional, for narrative. I think it's about patience too – Europeans seem to be more patient with films, to have more understanding of the concerns and what I'm doing. I found they're very poetic in the way they talk about films with me, the way they describe films. In Germany I found people would actually take in details about images...if somebody notices the frost melting on the grass in one of my shots, for example, I get very excited that they're watching so closely. I find that the people who get bored aren't able to describe anything they've seen in the image, because they haven't worked hard enough at noticing things within the film.

DZ: Why do you think the art world continues to ignore the value of artist film? Is it because it's technologically more complex than hanging a painting or installing a sculpture?

JB: Galleries are resistant to film technology, generally. They prefer to show things on video or DVD. My work's always on film, I haven't put it onto video or DVD – if I want to show them in a gallery or museum I show them on film. For galleries, the setting up of projectors and having screening times is foreign to them. I mean, they could build a theatre or work on a theatre space, but if you show a film every day, a couple of times a day, before the month's out you'll destroy the print.

I'm not against new technologies. I think that films projected from a proper DVD look better than an awful, scratched print being projected. They'd have to have a proper start and finish time though – I wouldn't want people to just wander in and out. That's not what these films are about.

DZ: Your work is difficult to categorise, for a number of reasons, so it's hard to find people who might be considered peers of yours. Are there any filmmakers who you think have similar concerns to yours?

JB: I think there are no real peers, but there are some people whose work looks like mine, though it's more about an aesthetic and less about engaging with social and political ideas as mine sometimes does.

Sharon Lockhart is an artist whose work has some similarities, though. She bases her art on her observations, like the piece of a girls' basketball team practising [*Goshogaoka*] [1997]. That piece has been criticised, people have criticised the choreographed movement because it's so formalised, that it's somehow making false statements about Japanese culture. I don't understand these criticisms, or don't agree with them. I think because it comes out of observation – it aestheticises the movement – that it reveals the way Americans perceive another culture. That shouldn't be faulted, that should be applauded! You know how some people say tourism is just another form of imperialism. Well that doesn't make sense to me. People go in and maybe observe a place their way, it's not hidden – Sharon is totally honest about the choreography, it's there in black and white – it's not hidden, it's a view from outside.

I think maybe I'm lucky – because I'm looking at my own culture the culture police don't come after me!

DZ: So could you say that what you and Sharon both are trying to do is not just observe place, but re-present it in ways that might provoke others to explore their conceptions of place?

JB: I'm trying to re-present my own experience with place – trying to define how I feel about it. I don't think I can be right or wrong; the presentation is how it's filtered through

my own eyes and ears. If I go to Farmington, New Mexico and I spend a couple of months there, get to know the people and then I make a film, I'm trying to be as honest as I feel, but I still might misrepresent it to those people. But they can also be blinded, by being so close to it – I might be able to see things that they can't see. I have a right to do that, the same way they have a right to come to Val Verde, California and film me and my place. In fact I'd love that, the chance to see through someone else's eyes.

That's one reason I agreed to take the German crew on a journey through my life, to see what it was that they saw. It was interesting, actually, the way they worked with the material they got – they wanted to make me look good. For example there's this thing about car culture, I admitted to being seduced by driving long distances in this car that's not very efficient, which doesn't get great mileage, and that that's at odds with my work which has political undertones about conservation and the need to protect nature. They left that out, I don't know, maybe they think that makes me look bad, and it does take a lot to admit that you're not always perfect...they left out me understanding that I was being, at times, part of the problem, and I can see why they did that, but I think it would be foolish not to admit that...by leaving it out could make me look naive.



Circling the Image

I didn't look at the cuts of the documentary, I didn't ask to see them, and I'm actually somewhat pleased. I think it's an odd thing, to watch yourself, but I liked what they did with it. They were respectful, when they represented my work. They didn't want to use the voiceover – I told them if it makes the film better, don't be afraid to do it. I think a talking head would be very boring so we did the interview with the lens cap on.

DZ: The technique they use to construct the documentary seems to me to be a loving reference to your work, rather than mimicry or a take-off.

JB: Yes, they let things play much longer than any other documentary. They made it clear that they would not mimic my style, not compete with my filmmaking.

The director [Reinhard Wulf] is from the same station that's screened my works before [WDR, Germany]. They came to LA, we met and they talked to me at length. Their station had just bought three films of mine. I wasn't going to start the film for another year, but with their help I got started earlier. Everything just seemed to fall into place.

DZ: The documentary's very recent and was great to see before seeing your work on the big screen. How long did it take to put together?

JB: They actually made it in a remarkably short period of time. We spent nine or ten days together at the end of November 2003, and they managed to cut it in about five weeks, because it went to air the first week of January this year, to 100,000 households.

It was difficult but fun to do. It's been to a number of festivals and is an interesting way to get somebody to "advertise" me – I've gotten a number of showings as a result of it.

DZ: It really shows how vital promotion is for film artists. Do you think film artists tend to be a little reticent about constructing themselves in the public eye?

JB: Artist filmmakers are, I think, generally shy of promotion but I think even if you wanted to, there's no real system for that promotion. I don't know how you would go about it. There's not a whole system like the art world's dealers and gallery system, where if you know how to play it you can get a shot at the big time. There's not much opportunity for one person to make a really big difference by promoting certain artists, though John Hanhardt was a curator who tried to do this. It's very hard.

DZ: The documentary really highlights the centrality of landscape to your method as an artist, showing the meticulous process you use, the "looking and listening", in constructing each shot. You've said previously that you see "landscape as a function of time" – can you talk to me a bit about that?

JB: I have an interest in exploring space-time relationships through film. There's real time, and there's how we perceive time. Time affects the way we perceive place. That's where I get this idea of "looking and listening". In my films, I'm very aware of *recording place over time*, and the way that makes you understand place. Once you've been watching something for a while, you become aware of it differently. I could show you a photograph of the place, but that doesn't convince you, it's not the same as seeing it *in time*. I'm very interested, now, in how much time is necessary to understand place. In my films, I tend to work with 100-foot rolls, which is about 2.5 minutes. That way I can have a little control over the window on the place that I record. I'm not convinced that 2.5 minutes is the proper amount of time necessary to understand landscapes but it is a manageable amount of time. I like to think I'm being democratic – each shot gets the same amount of time. It's just a strategy. It's important to watch for a period to choose the right time. I think that length is a manageable time for audiences. I also feel that it's a bit like going back to the beginning of cinema, using the whole roll.

DZ: You mentioned audiences – to what degree does consideration of the work's reception bear on your film work?

JB: Consideration of audience is not a part of it because, to me, the interest shouldn't be determined by audiences – it should be by myself, to understand the concept and then the audience can work out how they interact with it. My films ask you to look *around* the frame, and *at* the frame, and have a different experience to the one you're probably used to from TV or Hollywood. If we see things being signposted all the time...we become lazy, we become dominated by the filmmaker instead of having room to move.

I'm interested in the spatialisation of time. And the temporalisation of space! (laughs).

If we come to expect that every few seconds we're going to be signposted to another piece of space, then we're not going to be able to read longer images.

I'm not saying that everyone should make films like mine – good films can be made from quick cutting and attention to the articulation of juxtaposition. This does seem familiar, however, from co-option by MTV and ads. I'm not making a case that you have to make films like mine, though.

DZ: You sort of started out making more formal experimental films, then your works developed more of a narrative sense – can you talk to me about the shifts in your work?

JB: When I began those formalistic plays, experiments with sound and image relations and choreographed movement, every now and then there would be a fortuitous action that changed things, so I started planning those. Then I introduced minimal narratives – a bone to keep myself and the audience interested. Then I became more aware of life, life and death situations, general histories and personal histories, which was in a way coming back

to people and narrative but in different ways. And I started to develop all these things I'm investigating in relation to image making, image duration. It allows me to understand form, the long take static shot, it allowed contemplation of the image and ideas.

DZ: Can we talk a bit about *Los* and the California trilogy (with *El Valley Centro* and *Sogobi* [2002])? All involved that "democratic" use of (near) whole rolls you've referred to previously – 35 shots of 2.5 minutes. There must have been so many possibilities for editing.

JB: Well there's the 35 factorial – you've got 35X34X33 and so on. What I did was I took one frame from the workprint and mounted them on 35mm frames and edited them on a slide tray. I knew their length – each roll was 2.7 minutes so I could slide the head or tail to fit, and I knew the sound and I considered that when I was ordering the films. I also thought about the interrelation between the movies, and how they were connected. Each one seemed to lead on naturally from the prior film.

DZ: I haven't seen *El Valley Centro* or *Sogobi*, but I noticed bodies of water feature strongly in *Los*.

JB: Yes, those are part of the film and they also connect all the films of the trilogy, the references to water. *Los* opens with a spillway that carries on from and has this progression throughout, to the ocean...there's the wetlands, the LA River and the guys spraying water on the stadium.

DZ: How did you proceed to order the films? What sort of logic determined the choices?

JB: Well, I tried not to have immediate juxtapositions but to cut to make you aware of shots' relationships. The only place where there is an immediate juxtaposition is in the shot of the graveyard, which comes after the abattoir scene. There's cross-referencing, also, to make the experience more spherical.



Los

DZ: I was struck by how strongly you could feel the presence of human beings in the shots that are ostensibly "just" landscapes (traffic noise, for example). Even though you tried to focus mainly on figureless landscapes, people keep wandering in (a kind of metaphor for encroaching development, maybe). It must have been hard to be unobtrusive in some of those scenes where there are folks wandering around.

JB: Well, at times I had to tape the camera to a railing, or hide it somewhere. When I was filming outside the LA County Jail and people – families – were exiting, I hid the camera in a box and

dressed as a delivery man, and made believe I was looking up an address. I generally never do that. I also did it on the homeless street, where I put the camera into a box. They dumped a whole lot of people out of mental institutions and they were just forgotten, or discarded, wandering around on the streets. One lady interacts with the camera; she's one of very few people who do. It still feels ethically wrong to do that...I always ask workers' permission if I'm going to film them. I had to ask these Spanish-speaking workers weeding in the field if I could film them. They were like, "why are you asking us – you're the white guy". They were weeding right up to the camera. They wouldn't take any money, either, I tried to give them some money to go and buy some beers but they wouldn't take it. That made me feel about this big (small hand gestures).

DZ: Can you talk a little about how “art” figured in your background, and about your work in art education?

JB: I came from lower middle class parents who didn't read. My dad was into hunting, my mum did the housework, you know. I had no idea what art was. I could draw though, and people said, “Well, you're an artist”. My models of art were the sidewalk art fairs – I came to it with very little awareness of what art was, and what I thought it was, it probably wasn't.

When I first picked up a camera, I was interested in film about conceptual ideas – I happened to use film to become an artist, a way to looking and listening.

I used to think you couldn't teach someone to become an artist – they either were or they weren't. I think now that you can provide basic training, starting with teaching how to listen and how to look – learn the basics of how hard it is to pay attention. Mine [teaching classes] are kind of like performance classes where the students become active viewers. We go on excursions, and they do it, the students, they show up at 4am, and we'll go down a mountain road in the dark and go to the top of a hill. Gradually, as it gets more and more light, they'll look around and they'll realise that we're in a place where a forest fire had been...they become aware of a change in sounds, sights...it's about the articulation of change, the little subtle changes that take place over time, watching the sun come up. I try to get them to pay attention, and they appreciate it.

The point of it is not to translate that immediately into art, either, but to think about seeing. The students are enthusiastic and these are very successful classes. I'm most proud of going against my own conviction that you can't teach art. Their success as artists makes me very proud.

DZ: Your work emerged after the big explosion of avant-garde work in the '70s, and your work is often referred to as structuralist – can you talk a bit about the context of your work?

JB: When I started making films I realised that they'd already gone through a lot of the material of film stuff, the investigation into form. I was very interested in exploring form but quickly gave into ideas, history...I'm a diaries person. My work is more personal than some of the structuralist stuff.

DZ: I heard that your first contact with experimental film was when you saw *Meshes of the Afternoon* [Maya Deren] [1943] on television?

JB: I was watching TV in the early '60s, switching between local cooking shows and Saturday cowboy movies, and on public TV they had *Meshes* on! It was eight years after that till I first started playing with cameras, so it wasn't like I rushed out and started making films immediately! But it definitely affected me...it was just so different to anything I'd ever seen, especially on TV. I had a lot of stuff to work through before getting a camera, though.

DZ: I'm intrigued by the fact that you're a mathematician. Can you talk a bit about the role of maths in your life and work?

JB: I was studying maths, which is very creative.

DZ: As someone who's hopeless at maths, I have some trouble with seeing how it's creative – it seems so logical and machine-like to me.

JB: Oh, maths is very creative. It's beautiful, when you solve things. An elegant proof...my work is a bit like proving things, I think. Plenty of filmmakers have been mathematicians as well – Hollis Frampton, for instance. You can see maths in almost any film – in narrative film, even – say for example the way the light hits a wall. It's beautiful, and it's all maths.

DZ: So is maths a big factor or influence on your work?

JB: The biggest influence is always the work just done. The works influence each other, interact with each other. Ideas keep being refocused. Right now I'm working on a trilogy that goes back to *One Way Boogie Woogie* [1977]. I started out making films with text and image, then I felt I'd exhausted that, and I wanted to go back to portrait films, working on portraits of place, so I decided I'd make a film of 35 shots that were 2.5 minutes long. I've just finished making *13 Lakes*, where each shot is half sky, half water.



13 Lakes

Now I'm working on *Ten Skies*, which will be ten shots of sky, using a normal lens. I had a look at some of the shots and it really got the detail, I didn't think it would but it really did. The funny thing is because of the shape of the frame, it's kind of like looking at the sky through the sunroof of a car! I'm really interested in the ways the sky changes in reaction to the landscape below – how the clouds look above the mountains, over flat lands, above a forest fire, which was kind of creating its own weather system...There's this one shot where these two white clouds are in the frame and then this black cloud from behind comes up and covers the whole frame – it makes a wipe! The whole thing is very dramatic, and it's just cloud movement.

All the shots end up with a dynamic quality, I never saw that before, I never had the courage. It took me 50 years to look at the sky like that! I call it "found paintings". I think of my landscape works now as anti-war artworks – they're about the antithesis of war, the kind of beauty we're destroying. The *Ten Skies* works came about because I'm thinking about what the opposite of war was.

DZ: This work sounds like it would be beautiful installed in a gallery setting.

JB: At first I resisted, I didn't want to be marketed in those terms, as a commodity – I felt I'd be ghettoised, and I wouldn't be happy about that. It's all my fault, I suppose, that I haven't done more gallery work. I don't really have an opposition to the work being show on DVD, though – I don't think it's the technology that's the problem. Galleries would have to rethink the way they present work so people don't just stumble in and check it off the list, you know, and move on. With remaking *One Way Boogie Woogie*, I was thinking it could work side by side with the old film at the same length, that way you could make an interesting comparison. I'd still want a theatrical screening, though, showing the old and then the new. Not having them together, side by side, you'd have to make the comparison from memory. I think this could be interesting...the installation might be not as interesting as the theatrical memory.

I wouldn't want it to be running the whole time in the gallery, though – I would want it to be shown from beginning to end. I would insist on a starting time, and chairs, not just having people coming in and out. I'm encouraged by how it looks on DVD, and I think I'm interested in returning to installation work. But it does seem quite difficult...I'm lucky people have watched my work, that people have shown it at festivals and on TV.

DZ: So...why do it? I mean that in the nicest possible way...Why would anybody want to make artist film?

JB: It's because you can't do anything else.

For me, it doesn't have to be film, but I'd have to be doing some sort of art production. It's like Ani Di Franco says: "Art is what I do when I get up in the morning." It's a blessing that I can't function without it. I work all the time, in my mind, I never can stop...I have fun, then I'll get an idea and have to grow that, even when I'm doing other things.

You never clock out as an artist. You can't quit the job either. It's somewhat obsessive.

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