This is the published version:

D'Cruz, Glenn 2013, Trauma/memory/expanded cinema: the films of Dirk de Bruyn, in 2013: Beyond Film: Proceedings of the Film-Philosophy 2013 conference, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, pp. 8-8.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30054766

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2013, The Author.
Abstract

Abstracts for Dirk de Bruyn Panel

This panel responds to the work of experimental filmmaker Dirk De Bruyn who has been creating film works for over 35 years; mostly in the hand-made, 'direct animation' mode. He also performs live with multiple projections of his films in a highly embodied mode of expanded cinema performance. His work is renowned for its intricate, suggestive layering of sound and image, and use of sumptuous, blooming fields of colour, and speaks to several of the conference themes in its consistent engagement with memory, affect and expanded cinema.

http://otherfilm.org/dirk-de-bruyn/


Spatial Hauntology in Dirk de Bruyn¹s Conversations with my Mother

Derrida's neologism, hauntology, unsettles any simple formulation of Being as presence. For Derrida, ontology, or what is, always has a spectral dimension that disturbs absolute distinctions between past, present and future. This philosophical perturbation finds its most apt formulation in the figure of the ghost.

Dirk de Bruyn's documentary film, Conversations with my Mother (1990) is a ghost story in this Derridean sense. The film stages a trans-generational dialogue between de Bruyn and his mother, which interrogates the relations between the living and the dead with specific reference to de Bruyn¹s father, a literal absence that nevertheless dominates the work. The filmmaker revisits various familial dwellings with his mother, engaging her in sometimes truculent conversations about a variety of topics: the trauma of migration (from Holland to Australia), the alienation that comes from having to learn a new language and customs, domestic violence and mental illness (de Bruyn's father suffered from mental...
illness, which had tragic repercussions for the family). Both the filmmaker and his mother approach these topics with candor and raw honesty.

This paper argues that the film exemplifies what I call ‘spatial Hauntology’ a cinematic practice that uses personally significant locations as the mise-en-scene for disquieting Ospectral¹ encounters that transgress the boundaries of language and memory. Put differently, de Bruyn¹s film summons the figure of his deceased father to mediate between rival epistemological and ethical claims about past events. By revisiting the scenes of past traumas, de Bruyn and his mother are forced to reconsider established verities about the nature of their relationship, as the spectator is made witness to the spectres that inhabit the protagonists¹ past, present and future.

Glenn D’Cruz,
Deakin University, Australia.