Film Talks

Advisory Panel:
Sean Cubitt
David Curtis
Kim Knowles
Rachel Moore
Sarah Perks
Jonathan Walley

Published by Contact
www.contactscreenings.co.uk

In association with Arts University Bournemouth
and Anglia Ruskin University

Copyright © Contact 2021
Individual contributions © the authors 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Designed by A New Archive
Typeset in Arial Regular
Printed by Gomer

ISBN: 978-1-5272-9961-0

ARTS
UNIVERSITY
BOURNEMOUTH

a.r.u. | Anglia Ruskin University

Film Talks:
15 Conversations on Experimental Cinema

Edited by
Simon Payne /
Andrew Vallance

Contents

9 Back and Forth
Simon Payne / Andrew Vallance

17 Speaking Of...
Jonathan Walley

25 Ute Aurand / Nick Collins
Places and Portraits

45 Jenny Baines / Bea Haut
Misbehaving Materials

63 Amy Dickson / Annabel Nicolson
Letters on Light

85 Karel Doing / Francisca Duran
Ecology, Ethics and the
Unintelligible

105 Helga Fanderl / Nicky Hamlyn
Discovering the Pro-filmic

121 Neil Henderson / Andrew Vallance
The Wind in the Trees

143 Jasleen Kaur / Alia Syed
Staring at the Artex

163 Malcolm Le Grice / Chris Welsby
Landscape, Science and Uncertainty

185 Lynn Loo / Guy Sherwin
Working Together in Expanded Cinema

205 Bruce McClure / Greg Pope
Skipping the Clock Back /
it goes without saying

Contents

223 Jennifer Nightingale / Rose Lowder
Charts, Frames and Other Insights

241 Jayne Parker / Simon Payne
Scores and Structures

259 William Raban / John Smith
Made in London

281 Lis Rhodes / Aura Satz
Voice Has Time Within It

299 Cathy Rogers / Vicky Smith
Touching with the Eye

Back and Forth
Simon Payne / Andrew Vallance

This book is about experimental cinema as broached by thirty artist-filmmakers, in pairs, whose conversations cover an independent or shared vision for their medium alongside wider thoughts on cinema and culture. Any conversation is a form of engagement between two or more individuals: Webster's dictionary defines a conversation as an 'exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas' and the notion of an engaging exchange of ideas has been a guiding principle for us. In the various film screenings, exhibitions and events that we have programmed it has always been our aim to involve artists in the discussions about what we would like to show and simultaneously how best to arrange a dialogue between artworks, including the context of their presentation. The process is an active form of collaborative research that sometimes begins with an instinct and always produces new ideas and surprising associations.

The underlying proposition and hypothesis for this project, *Film Talks*, was that artists in conversation offer a valuable and unique insight into the creative and critical processes that are central to their own work and that of their peers as well as the wider field. Published conversations between peers in the field of experimental cinema, and perhaps the arts more generally, are relatively scarce, particularly in the UK, but the insights that come through in this format can be invaluable, augmenting the knowledge of the field for a variety of audiences, whether newcomers or regular enthusiasts, commentators and critics, academics, or other artists.

One of our previous series of events, *Pairs*, which was held at an artists' studio space (The Depot in East London, 2017), has had a direct bearing on this project and was in many ways a prototype. *Pairs* involved four programmes, each of which featured two artist-filmmakers (Jennifer Nightingale / Simon Payne; Nick Collins / Cathy Rogers; Nicky Hamlyn / Neil Henderson; Amy Dickson / Jamie Jenkinson) who presented their most recent work alongside another film that had inspired them. Each evening's programme notes included a printed version of a short conversation that

we had asked each pair to take part in. The flow of their words was obviously a matter for the participants, but the form and occasion of the conversation that we had presented them with provided a starting point for their discussion. Aside from seeing the filmmakers' account of their work in print, something that we also appreciated in reading their conversations was the candid tone and personal reflections that the format offered. Here, for example, is a passage from Hamlyn and Henderson's conversation, where they discuss time-lapse footage and documentary:

Henderson: I think it's hard to use because it's something we associate with natural history programmes. I shot a number of rolls [of time-lapse] footage on the Isle of Grain for this film [*Grain Tower*, 2016]. There's lots of de-industrialisation going on there and I've been using the old forts in the Medway as the place to leave the camera for a few days. The footage comes back from the lab though and you wonder why you bothered. The film tells you nothing you don't know, time passes, the sun comes up and goes down etc. What are your thoughts on time-lapse and experimental filmmaking?

Hamlyn: I am a semi-closeted documentarist. It stems partly from my period working at the BBC where I was an assistant film editor on several documentaries. At the time I made a conscious effort not to be drawn into the cosy institutional culture – mid 80s, before Mrs Thatcher changed it forever – but unconsciously I must have absorbed a lot. Anyway, as many people have pointed out all films are documentaries at some level.

In exchanges like this thoughtfulness also includes uncertainty, in contrast to the bare statement of an artists' intentions that one sometimes reads. We are also made aware of the fact that experimental film, which can seem a rarefied artform, exists in correspondence with cinema, television and the wider world. Though the audience for *Pairs* had the artists on hand for a Q&A and the discussion in person might have covered similar ground, the conversation in print was something to take away from the screening and measure up against the direct experience, extending the 'active space of reception' for the viewer (a phrase

regularly associated with the critical endeavours of experimental cinema).

The pairings represented in this book naturally suggest a screening series, but in contrast to *Pairs*, the conversations themselves are the focus. Readers might be familiar with some or many of the artists whose voices are represented in the book, as well as the works and reference points that they discuss. Other conversationalists and the topics they cover might be less familiar, as some were to us. Either way, we hope that the form of the artists' conversation opens up new and unfamiliar territory for readers. We have envisaged these conversations as a means of introducing and exploring diverse ways of thinking about cinema, experimental film and video and broader concerns around audio-visual media.

Initially we drew up a list of potential participants – largely artists whom we had worked with before – and then invited them to suggest someone they would be interested to have a conversation with. In one or two instances we suggested possible pairings, which were open to discussion, but otherwise we left it to the individuals that we first approached to invite the second person and hence start the conversation. In this way, new and different voices and points-of-view were brought into the project.

The original invitation outlined the approximate length of the conversations we were looking to publish, but otherwise the direction and conduct of the conversation – whether by email, handwritten letters and postcards, the exchange of images, talking on telephone or in person, or any combination of these – was up to the individuals concerned. We asked participants to explore the nature and strategies associated with their work and their sense of the field, but otherwise we were more than happy to see ideas and topics come to the surface as part of the process. This followed on from our previous experience, where we found that the format of open-ended conversations allowed for new insights and unexpected avenues to emerge. Our intention with the design of the book, with respect to the layout of the conversations, has been to try to replicate the flow and pattern of each pair's conversation. The sequence of the conversations as printed in the

book is simply alphabetical, which seemed the most obvious way of randomising the set and opening up unexpected connections in the series. Readers might approach the conversations in any order, but we hope that they add up to represent a matrix of ideas and influences.

The conversationalists are a mixture of emerging and established artists, many of whom are readily associated with groups and communities that have fostered experimental film culture. Like us, many of the artists in this book are, or have been, based in London (or nearby) and as a consequence we have regularly had the opportunity to see and discuss their work in person. The scope of the book was widened however, by each of our selected artists choosing their own partner, which reflects international connections. Geography aside, most of the filmmakers included in the book have operated outside of the commercial contexts of the gallery circuit or the world of film and television production for the majority of their careers. Some artists have taken on relatively large-scale film productions with funding from Channel 4, the BFI, Arts Council and others, and some have been represented in major gallery exhibitions. However, these tend to be exceptional cases rather than the norm. The critical question always concerns whether funding streams or gallery imperatives dictate the terms of the artists' work. For the most part the films and videos of the artists represented in this book are made widely available through distributors such as LUX or Lightcone and occasional DVD and online releases. Arguably they are most successfully presented in the context of sympathetic film festivals and venues dedicated to screening experimental cinema and artists' film and video. The patchwork of exhibition opportunities, support structures and channels of promotion makes for communities by necessity as much as anything, but it also contributes to a set of shared interests and hence important conversations about the way in which artists and audiences see the field.

In the UK the most prominent communal support structure was the London Filmmakers Co-op, originally founded in 1966. Many of the conversationalists in the book were directly attached to the Co-op at one point or another, the ethos of which has been passed on by way of various off-shoots, subsequent generations of artists

and a network of teachers and students at several art colleges and universities. Since the late sixties, by way of serendipity as well as design, institutions such as North-East London Polytechnic, Kent Institute of Art and Design, The Slade School of Fine Art, St Martins School of Art and Royal College of Art have provided a basis for continuity and community. All of these institutions have regularly been transformed (and rebranded) but they remain important markers, hence the educational affiliations that appear in many of the artists' biographies. Significant latter-day off-shoots of the LFMC (and London Video Arts) include LUX, and the artist-run organisation no.w.here, which was based in North and then East London during the early 2000s. No.w.here's *Light Reading* series, taking its name from Lis Rhodes's film, put pairs of artists together for joint screenings and provided a valuable point of focus for discussion and debate for a decade. In many ways this book has echoes of *Light Reading*, with the added intention of recording artists' conversations on the page.

Often the presiding voices in surveying artistic fields belong to non-practitioners. That hasn't necessarily been the case with experimental film and video, where practitioners have sometimes been impelled to write criticism and provide a context for the field as well as outlining their individual concerns. A number of experimental filmmakers such as Maya Deren, Hollis Frampton, Malcolm Le Grice and Lis Rhodes have been illuminating writers, but there are remarkably few published articles that take the form of conversations between peers. Filmmakers are often asked to reflect on their work in post-screening Q&A sessions, but the resulting discussions are rarely recorded or published, and again these conversations seldom take place between peers. In stand-out examples, such as Hollis Frampton's conversation with Stan and Jane Brakhage ('Stan and Jane Brakhage Talking', *Artforum*, 1973), the recorded patterns of informal speech and the turn of topics can be playful and insightful. Serious intellectual concerns about the artist's craft and intentions can be raised by way of an enquiry between peers:

Frampton:	Last night you said you would like to make something beautiful… and get away with it.
Brakhage:	What does one mean by 'get away with it'?

Frampton: Things that are beautiful are seductive, are they not?

In the same conversation Brakhage states that he understands cinema as a totalising proposition in which experimental films, which may well be situated at the periphery, are still inherently related to the 'movies'. Further to this, Frampton sees filmmakers as agents of change, adopting and adapting that which they find most productive in cinema's traditions, thus redefining its terms. His notion invokes something other than the expected order of things and suggests an operation of decoding, interpretation and deconstruction on the part of filmmakers. This concept of cinema, one of many possibilities, serves our purposes perfectly well too. In the critical filtration of 'cinema', narrower groupings arise, one of which is the field of experimental film and video which has, in turn, regularly sought to pose conceptual, critical and philosophical questions about what constitutes the form, function, content and context of 'cinema'. The various conversations in this book broach these questions explicitly and implicitly, but they are by no means exhaustive or wholly representative of the field which is truly international and clearly has a significant lineage.

When the transcribed conversations came back to us from the participants, we endeavoured to treat them with a light-touch, maintaining the intrinsic 'voice' and original form of each discourse. For the most part we only intervened to ask for clarification or further details. In contrast to an interview, the form of a conversation means that the expression of ideas comes about circuitously sometimes, rather than in an immediate answer to a direct question. The titles that we have ascribed to the conversations, with the participants' agreement, are a means of highlighting themes, as are the short introductions and contextual information that accompany the biographies. The film stills that each artist has provided are also key means of illuminating the discussions.

This collection of conversations is a contemporary and partial snapshot representing interests in and around experimental cinema. The participants who took up our challenge did so with focus and commitment. Their generosity reflects a collective

spirit and keenness to contribute to discussion, both of which are central to the field. We would also like to thank our advisors whose feedback and encouragement was invaluable. The project's financial support has been provided Arts University Bournemouth and Anglia Ruskin University, who have shown stalwart support for practice-based research and diverse filmmaking practices.
The voices in this book communicate reflections, doubts, queries, assertions and passions in a myriad of registers that will hopefully stimulate further discussion.

Speaking of…
Jonathan Walley

> The editor has written me that he is in favor of avoiding "the notion that the artist is a kind of ape that has to be explained by the civilized critic." This should be good news to both artists and apes.
> – Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* (Summer 1967)

What is the role, or for that matter even the place, of an academic scholar in a collection of conversations among artists? If LeWitt's editor is right, artists do not need critics. They can speak for themselves. LeWitt's essential "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" bears this notion out; while the language of artists may be different from that of critics, it is indeed a language – not apelike grunting – and it requires no framing or translation, much less justification, from a critic "speaking for" the artist. This has always been the case, of course. Artists don't need critics. But the reverse is not true.

So, what am I doing here? Perhaps it's noteworthy that my contribution to this volume is the sole monologue. Even the introduction by Simon Payne and Andrew Valance is a collaboration; if not a conversation, certainly the result of one – indeed many. I know this was not Simon and Andrew's intention, but there is something implicitly satirical about including a scholar, speaking alone, while the artists upon whom he claims to be commenting talk amongst themselves. Academic scholars: we put the "on[e]" in onanism.

In all seriousness, I want to tread lightly here, or, to put it more precisely, I want *not* to tread upon the conversations in this volume, or to "re-tread" them in the language of film studies academese. Instead, I will comment on the very idea at the heart of this collection: that, as the editors put it, "artists in conversation offer a valuable and unique insight into the creative and critical processes that are central to their own work and that of their peers as well as the wider field." Payne and Vallance add that "published conversations between peers in the field of

experimental cinema, and perhaps the arts more generally, are quite scarce…" Insinuating myself into their conversation, just a little, I might counter that while such published conversations are uncommon, they aren't exactly scarce, and in some instances they constitute important works in the canon of writing on experimental cinema. Experimental filmmakers frequently interviewed each other in the pages of *Film Culture*, which also published letters and conversations between film artists. The same is true of *Millennium Film Journal*, which more recently has dedicated space in nearly every issue to an "Artists' Pages" section and interviews of filmmakers by filmmakers.

I suppose the question is less about how many such conversations exist in print than of how seriously they are taken, and how we can go about reading them meaningfully. First and foremost, we need to acknowledge the quiet radicalism of the conversation as a privileged mode of discourse in experimental film culture. My self-deprecating pot-shots at academia's monologism notwithstanding, in fact the best academic scholarship is conversational, at least in the sense that each contribution is indeed thought of as part of an ongoing exchange. Scholarship ought to be dialectical, which is to say genuinely dialogic. But in my experience this is actually somewhat rare, and the conversations, when they occur, are thoroughly mediated by time, distance, and the formality of scholarly writing. But for the scholar of *experimental* film (or, if you prefer, experimental "moving images"), things are different, because that film culture itself is different. The conversations in this collection are emblematic of a set of values that distinguish experimental cinema from other moving image traditions. That is, we can think the conversation as more than the literal exchange between two or more people, construing it more broadly as a determining form for the particular filmmaking (and viewing) practices that, together, constitute what we call "experimental" or "avant-garde" cinema.

The practice of publishing dialogues, whether between two filmmakers or between a filmmaker and critic, is virtually absent in writing on any other film culture. Mainstream commercial filmmakers are almost entirely separate from the din of cinema discourses, whether popular, journalistic, or scholarly. For one

thing, some of those filmmakers are celebrities, and so naturally distant from their public (and despite the fact that directors like Christopher Nolan or Quentin Tarantino are famous, nobody particularly cares what they have to say about film unless it is parceled out in soundbites). More to the point, though, mainstream cinema is simply not relational, not an exchange, not a dialogue. The artist is absent from the discussion except as an abstraction, as in the idealized *auteur*. The increasingly housebound, online nature of film viewing in the realm of commercial cinema may be a sea change in terms of the economics of film distribution and exhibition, but it is merely the logical outgrowth of a cinema in which a relationship between filmmaker and viewer, or amongst viewers, just isn't part of the equation. [Moving image work in the museum and gallery, by major visual artists like Stan Douglas, Shirin Neshat, or Jeff Wall, is not necessarily much different.]

Experimental cinema, on the other hand, is thoroughly relational. The Fordist division of filmmaking labor amongst hundreds of individuals in commercial cinema and the radically acollaborative nature typical of experimental filmmaking are not representative of the respective cinematic traditions more broadly. In the latter, genuine exchanges between filmmakers and viewers, including critics and scholars, are not only possible, but the norm. The presence of filmmakers at screenings is common, the post-screening discussion between artist and audience *de rigueur*, and exchanges between filmmakers and critics a natural expression of experimental film's greater degree of both sociality and intellectual seriousness.

On that note, the proximity of artists to scholars in this particular moving image tradition is further evident in the historical connection of the former to higher education – as teachers in university film, media, and art programs. The long association of experimental film artists with academia may account for the fact that, in Europe and the UK in particular, an increasing number of experimental filmmakers take advanced degrees that merge artmaking and scholarly training (something all but unheard of in the US). Among the artists represented in this collection, Jenny Baines, Karel Doing, and Andrew Vallance hold Ph.Ds, while Cathy Rogers has an MPhil by practice. These are the

result of interdisciplinary projects combining film and media production with conventional academic research. In the UK, especially, experimental moving image practice is intertwined with art-educational institutions, which goes beyond the work of individual filmmakers to the promotion of alternative film culture in the form of curation, exhibitions, conferences, and publications. Generations of artists working within the systems of academia, that is, have molded those systems, bringing artistic and critical activity together in ways that have no parallels in any other cinematic tradition.

The will toward "bringing together," of narrowing gaps (between artist, scholar, and audience), is one reason that the conventional film screening space remains central to experimental cinema even as artists have long explored other spaces and "expanded" modes of exhibition and spectatorship. As Andrew Vallance puts it in his conversation with Neil Henderson, the coming together of filmmaker and audience in real space and shared time, can result in an experience "beyond mere consumption that provokes prolonged engagement. Seated in shared, calibrated darkness we appear to have more time and room to wonder. I'm not suggesting a hierarchy of audio-visual forms and sites, at best they all have a specificity that can be inspirational, but online streaming services and gallery presentations emphasise just how compelling cinematic space can really be." Across the conversations herein are persistent references to the importance of space, not an abstract on-screen formal value, but the specificity of a place as both an aesthetic and ethical dimension of moving image works. Annabel Nicolson's exchange with Amy Dickson is a veritable master class in the sensitivity to space and place and to the different human relations each type of space implies or makes possible.

In their conversation, Lynn Loo and Guy Sherwin, speaking of the spatiality of their expanded cinema performances, point to the reality of location – their place as projection performers amidst the viewers – as a necessary grounding in reality for work that is often abstract (a nod to Malcolm Le Grice's notion of Real TIME/SPACE). "Why do we make multi-projector work?," Loo asks, to which Sherwin replies, "Because it's a lot more fun – the whole

presence of it. It emphasizes the physical aspects of film, and that's something that has come to be an advantage. With so much digital stuff around, it's important to keep a grip on what's real. It's an experience. Often the work is quite abstract, so a human presence there performing it makes quite a difference." The implication is that even the completely abstract images of, say, Loo's *Washi #1* (2014) or Sherwin's *Sound Shapes* (1972, revised as projection performance 2003), are not off the hook for a commitment to some sort of reality. The "grip on the real" extends to such abstractions, typical of much experimental moving image practice. Seen in this light, abstraction is not contrary to the real, but linked to a physical activity, to recognizable agents and actions, of which the (apparently) abstract image is a trace. The presence of filmmaker/performers like Loo and Sherwin in live expanded cinema is itself an extension of the always already live, intimate, participatory, and collective nature of experimental cinema exhibition, and of the connection of filmmaker to audience utterly absent from other forms of cinema.

This commitment to the real extends to the Sherwin's repeated references to birds he can see through the window during his conversation with Loo, or to Alia Syed's recollection of the circumstances of a walk she took with Jasleen Kaur after a screening at ICA, which leads to this breathtaking statement:

> I was pleased with how the screening went, but most of all I was moved by the readings alongside my film *Durga* (1985). You read from your book *Be Like Teflon* and Jemma Desai also read. It felt safe. I've always liked the intimacy of the small cinema at the ICA. There must have been about 25 people in the audience. Three of us sat facing the audience, the outline of your faces apparent through the light from my film, and then the light from the lectern. We read out loud. It was the first time I had been able to watch either *Durga* or *Spoken Diary* (2001) for a very long time. Both films were made in moments of trauma, when it felt almost impossible to sustain myself. Nothing/no one seemed to be able to hold me. When our experience doesn't seem to be reflected in the spaces where we are supposed to find sustenance, our relationship with siblings becomes so

> much more weighted. And when they fall short it's very painful…But I think that's also why we make things, why we put 'them out there'. More often than not it seems like folly, like a betrayal, another thing that could be twisted and used against us. But sometimes, like that night at the ICA, we make connections that enable us to think clearly and in that process of openness create a space where we can breathe.

The intimacy Syed speaks of is perhaps the quintessence of experimental moving image culture's ethic of engagement. And while the size of the theatre contributed to that sense of intimacy in this instance, I would suggest that it is a fundamental value of experimental moving image culture itself, realizable in any number of venues, big or small.

Another sense of intimacy pervades the conversations in this collection as well, and that is the intimate relationship between artists and their materials. Experimental film is an artisanal moving image form, in contrast – and pointedly contrary to – the highly collaborative, corporatized structure of mainstream filmmaking. A sensitivity to craft defines this artisanal mode. The media scholar Alison Pearlman has defined craft-based art as one that "requires an artist to develop, over time, attention to and respect for a material other than his or her ego, an empathy with another matter's distinct properties, laws, or conventions."[1] Across this collection we see this craft ethos given voice, to the extent that the world itself – cinema's raw material, so to speak – is viewed in cinematic terms, brought into a relationship of near identity with the materials and conventions of the moving image. Nicky Hamlyn states this succinctly: "I try to derive formal decisions from the morphology of the pro-filmic."

Karel Doing and Francisca Duran offer a variation on this theme, one found in much contemporary experimental film discourse. Their exchange on the implications of film chemistry for an environmentally sustainable and socially progressive film practice evinces a deep and thoroughgoing knowledge of the medium, and moreover one that is far from the simplistic sense of filmic "materialism" so often attributed to artists who remain committed

1 Alison Pearlman, "Craft Matters," *Afterimage* 32, no. 1 (July/August 2004), p. 6.

to celluloid. The irony of such a deeply "materialistic" mode of thinking is that it so quickly becomes something else; the inward-looking medium specificity suddenly turns inside out, to encompass the political, social, and philosophical entailments of engaging deeply with materials. The abstraction that tends to result from such a concentrated materialism is only apparently centripetal.

It is also only apparently "nostalgic." I have debunked the persistent claims of celluloid nostalgia by contemporary critics elsewhere, so won't rehash those arguments here.[2] I'll simply say that such claims constitute a particularly egregious instance of civilized critics catastrophically misunderstanding the apes. To call filmmakers who remain committed to celluloid film "nostalgic" is not only wrong in the facts but insulting. At best, nostalgia is a false view, at worst a kind of mental illness. Either way, the tut-tutting of critics about the quaint contrarianism of celluloid practitioners who refuse to enter the digital era bears no resemblance to the reality of such practices; it is both a marginalizing discourse and one complicit with corporate interests in digital technology. This is not to attack digital moving image technology *per se*, only those critical and academic discourses that fetishize it at the same time that they disparage others for fetishizing celluloid.

Much scholarly work on experimental moving image practices would not have been possible but for the conditions of engagement and intimacy characteristic of this artistic culture. I myself have conversed, exchanged ideas, and otherwise benefited from the time and generosity of about half the artists represented in this collection. In my writing I have, like LeWitt's civilized critic, attempted to "explain" them to others, but not before they had explained many things to me.

And so, into the menagerie!

2 Walley, *Cinema Expanded: Avant-Garde Film in the Age of Intermedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). See especially pages 115-129.

Ute Aurand /
Nick Collins

Places and Portraits

Ute Aurand studied filmmaking at the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie, Berlin, in the early 1980s. Since then she has produced a distinctive body of work which often involves intimate portraits and improvised, impressionistic means of documenting special events and places. She has sometimes filmed her subjects over the course of several years, which make her films a testament to personal journeys. Aurand has also actively promoted other female filmmakers through curatorial initiatives, such as *Filmarbeiterinnen-Abend* (1990–95) and the publication *Women Make History: 25 Years of Women Students at the DFFB with Maria Lang.*

Nick Collins predominately works with 8mm and 16mm film. He studied history at the University of Cambridge and later enrolled on the influential Film Studies diploma at The Slade School of Art. His early interests were in photography and in the mid 1970s he began making films, which led him to discover the London Filmmakers' Co-op. His work is observational and often very concise, sometimes being issued as clusters or series. Collins's eye for natural phenomena makes for lyrical films that combine intuitive systems for shooting with a preoccupation with the traces of history that can be found in landscapes and locations that span the domestic to the sacred.

Nick Collins — I've been greatly struck by a number of aspects of your filmmaking, but I've been thinking first that it's among the most spontaneous-feeling work that I know.

The way the camera is used – although the apparent or actual spontaneity of the camerawork may then be built into longer sequences on the editing table – makes the filming visibly one aspect of the relationships you have with the subjects of the films, and with the situations within which the films are made. I imagine that as with most relationships and friendships, meeting-up is something which happens from time to time, either regularly or less so, and that each meeting is in some way different. The films convey this in different ways in relation to different occasions. The way you use the camera matches the way in which what happens in life is half-planned and half-contingent. As you remark in an interview that I recently read: life is like a train ride, you cannot grab everything, every image, just as in life (I paraphrase). So the real event, whether it takes place over an hour, a morning or an afternoon, and so on, always exceeds the representation. The process of filming is both a record of the time and the actions that create the film (it's not hidden, as in much fiction filmmaking).

I was most aware of the interpretative aspect of your filming in *Phillip's 60. Geburtstag* [Phillip's 60th Birthday] (2014), where the film is both a representation of a party (everyone's memory of any party is always unique and different to that of anyone else) and also much more. Even though I can't speak or understand more than a very little German, I see the film as a portrait – as often with your work it is celebratory – of a family across the generations but at a particular moment. It also has an implied melancholy. Some of those pictured are very old, and probably don't have many years left, while the very young are often oblivious to this, where the celebration is concerned. The film has a sense of a family as something which holds together different times, and which itself also moves through time. I noticed the distinct darkening of tone that takes place through the images of the graveyard, church and church-paintings, and a literal darkening of the image itself in the second half of the film. The film raised interesting questions for me around making the private public. Do you see viewers in the distant future looking at your films, and seeing them as representative of a time and place? What is the viewer's place in relation to the relationship between the filmmaker and those who appear in the films? Perhaps this film spoke to me particularly because I'm often aware that one thing I'm doing in

my filmmaking is recording or fixing passages of time. I sometimes wonder why I feel the need to do that, as opposed to just inhabiting each day as it happens. Is it a perfecting of everyday experience, a distillation from it, the making of an object which derives from direct visual and/or auditory experience?

I'm imagining that you already know most of the subjects of the films very well, and portraiture is dominant within your filmmaking. The idea of the gift – of a film as a gift to its subject – seems to mesh with this. It's a lovely idea and one with a long history within art. It is particularly visible in *Paulina* (2011), where the film is both a gift at a particular moment and a celebration of a relative, where the diachronic (stages in growing-up) is encompassed within the duration of a short film. Different times in the subject's life are linked by similar actions that are performed years apart. I liked the way those links were used within the film, in a way which contributed to the portrait and to the structure. That strand of celebration seems to be an important aspect of your work, often a celebration of the lives of your subjects, but also of the camera and of the process of filmmaking. I'm thinking of various things: the silent visual rhythms which are a pleasure in themselves when the viewer becomes aware of them, but also the celebration of both the passage of time and of moments brought into relationship with each other.

I saw *To Be Here* (2013) from this angle too, though it is in some ways rather different from others of your films I've seen. The implications of the title encompass a huge range, between the experiences of the women students in the present who appear in the film, on what looks like a single beautiful day, the evocation of the history of Mount Holyoke College, with photographs of former students, and the presence of the filmmaker and her particular choices at the moment of filming. Melancholy seems to be present here too.

Sometimes the process of filming and the relationship of the camera to subject is explicitly and interestingly questioned. In *Sakura, Sakura* (2015), in the second half of the film, portraiture is playfully considered by way of the camera emerging into the field of view of the mirror and disappearing again, the quizzical look of the portrait's subject, their blinking, which suggests the action of the shutter, and the play with the line between the lens of the camera and the eye of the subject. This is an exciting and very intense piece of filmmaking, so the outdoor shots at the end come as a relief!

Ute Aurand — I had already filmed my friend Philipp's 40th and 50th birthdays, first as a present for him, but when I saw the 60th birthday footage I wanted to make it public or saw the possibility that it could be interesting also for others.

Generally, as soon as I film, the connection with a potential spectator is there. It doesn't matter if the footage will never be used, which I often decide much later, but in the moment of filming there is the hope that I can transform something from within me to others.

The viewer's place in relation to the filmmaker and those who appear in the films depends very much on who the viewer is and how he or she finds something for themselves in the films. My relationship to the person I'm filming makes the film possible, it is also the vehicle, but not the main reason, to make the film. With the portraits I wish to share a view of growing up, or qualities of personality, or the beauty and fragility of life through this one person.

To answer your question about why we are filming and not just BEING, there must be a need for each of us, different needs, but something which wants to speak to the world through images. I feel strongly the movement from the inside to the outside. I see and feel that also very strongly in your films, which communicate 100% visually, but I 'hear' you in the images. That's the mystery of communication through film. That's what I love so much in seeing our kind of filmmaking.

Now here are some of my impressions after, or while, watching some of your strong short films:

I am not sure if it is your latest film, but I liked a lot your digital film *Untitled (moiré in Bari)* (2019). I have a weakness for patterns and the way you play with the forms by going very close, then back and then close again, before retreating to give a more realistic view and finally the open, surrounding view. I also like how you use the possibilities of digital close-ups, slow-motion and sound. But it is a study, like all your other works I've seen so far. I see your films as studies that allow the viewer an insight in your interests and searches. I become a witness of your filming. That's very rare. The present moment of filming is still there. It is as if I am witnessing your filming even though it has already taken place. I feel your decisions very clearly. What you film and how you film merges together and behind it all is the filmmaker with his interests and decisions.

I imagine possible images which you don't film. For example, your framing of the river in *Shanghai Notebook* (2012/2018) hints at what is

outside the image. Your attraction to shadows is the incarnation of this relation between the visible and invisible images, because the shadow belongs to the unseen object which you often don't show.

I am curious to hear a bit about your process of filming, how you 'find' your images, how you allow yourself to make a kind of search visible.

I could say the films are loose, but you hold them together with your strong interest and curiosity, your love of what you discover and film. It's a very positive feeling that I receive from your small clusters of often silent images, which like each others company!

I have started watching your earlier films, which I find much more constructed, edited, and concentrated on what happens in the images rather than reaching out like the later ones. I see much more interest in the image itself. Does this make sense to you?

Which was your very first film?

NC — About *Untitled (moiré in Bari)*: sometimes I think I do better when I'm trying less hard. The more effort, the more static the films sometimes become. This little piece was shot on my iPhone (perhaps one of my first steps towards being less addicted to Super8 and 16mm film) in about half an hour and edited on an iPad on the ferry between Bari and Patras. It's so nice to work that way! I'm interested in what you said about 'the present moment of filming still being there'. It's true of this little piece, but in many of my films it gets changed by the editing process, however much that may have its virtues. The moment of filming is always there in your films, and the viewer very often feels it in a very tactile or musical way. (I think this is intensified for a viewer who is used to the Bolex camera.) You feel directly the eye and mind behind the camera, and the presence of the filmmaker moving around the room/space. The presence of the filmmaker in that physical way, within the film, takes the viewer away from a world which is just images. It contains the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject, and the filming has different emotional qualities at different times.

I certainly agree that my films are studies. They are studies of the places which appear in them but also of the ways shots can be made into a film. The locations I film have often been places I've known for a long time. Gradually the idea that a place might have a film in it arises. For example, with *Across the Valley* (2006), I'd been sitting and looking at that view for around ten years. I became interested in time – days and seasons coming and going – and in making a film from a single vantage point, although I

don't stick to it too closely. For the viewer, shots in a film appear to take their place on screen one after another. The remainder of the film at any point is always ahead, but new shots mix with images already seen. I had this idea that from the point of the film, each shot appears somehow from behind the one before. The film is a complete object and each shot is already latent in the screen. *Across the Valley* plays with this idea by referring back and forward across the time that is represented within it. For a lot of the time my main interest has been in construction and form. I think I've got more relaxed recently though, and have come to value filming at home, on the spur of the moment, when I feel like it and when the light is good. And I am coming to see that, as you say, for the viewer to feel the filmmaker's interest and curiosity can be enlivening!

One fundamental distinction seems to me to be between filming hand-held and filming with a tripod, and in a sense I think I've never been able to choose definitively between one and the other. Studying in the late 1970s, on the one hand there was Stan Brakhage (I don't think I was very aware of Marie Menken, though I became so later, nor Jonas Mekas, most of whose films I still haven't seen). On the other hand, there were the films of Straub and Huillet, who were very important for me, especially *History Lessons* (1972) and *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968). I became aware that you could have sequences which were structured through successive camera positions in a location or even across locations, but with long takes so that the image etched itself into the viewer's consciousness and had that sense of duration. Ozu was also particularly important, especially for the composition, the seeing – in what Noël Burch called 'pillow shots' – and for the sense of time both elapsing and suspended. Sometimes I want machine-vision, which combined with composition and a little movement within the image can hold the viewer in a particular way. Sometimes I want camera movement, which can be expressive and convey subjectivity differently.

I really like what you say about visible and invisible images, and shadows from off-screen bringing in invisible images. The invisible is either what appears to be (or is) absent; or it's a presence that isn't directly visible. I really feel that an absence is as strong an entity (or thing) as a presence, a bit like the negative space around objects in a painting. Shadows are often indices of absent objects and have a shape. They are always an absence of light. Like absence and presence, filming this and not that seems fundamental to me, and one of the reasons why 16mm filmmaking is so

great. It forces the maker to choose (I need to be forced!).

In your new film *Rushing Green with Horses* (2019), which I greatly enjoyed, each sequence has its emotional quality, or tone, that is achieved through image and sound, but is not confined by it. It is something not just visual, or even visual and auditory. The whole is so much more than the sum of the parts, and something which goes beyond them. Some sequences seem to completely capture a particular moment, event or time (for example the sequence where your partner Robert Beavers eats the toast). But there is also 'diachronic' portraiture (for example in the section showing your godchild Paulina, who features in another film from 2011) and the whole film is full of experimentation with combinations of sound and image. I was particularly struck by the sequence with the gothic church buildings and the birdsong – one very heavy and the other very light. Your use of sound and music is often very elegiac. I'm thinking of the two adjacent sequences that have a glockenspiel(?) and then funereal church bells on the soundtrack, which create a very specific emotional transition. The whole film seems to celebrate life lived, and to share with us your milieu, but also at the same time to be a kind of memento mori. If, in one sense, all we really have is time, you are showing us what it is to treasure time, so celebrations feature a lot, but sometimes the films turn to quiet contemplation. Little things, glimpsed either 'on the fly', like the two horses and riders seen from a train window (the source of the film's title?), or in a more extended way, have a significance out of proportion to their duration in the film.

The opening of the film is beautiful, combining the rhythms of the dance that we see and of the filming. This is repeated and varied in the second sequence where the rhythm of the cutting and of the spoken poem interact. There is the window in the old building, which is almost like a screen. Both sequences function as an introduction to the film as a whole. I was also interested in the way in which the fast cutting sometimes creates immediacy and sometimes distance for the viewer, as does the alternation of sound with silence. It also made me think about how we see, which is different in the more active and the more contemplative sequences. It also made me think about how, as you've said, the experience of an event is always selective. I also like very much how you use the full range of what the camera can do, especially your use of out-of-focus imagery.

UA — Thank you for your recent 'chapter' and your words about *Rushing Green with Horses* which are very alert. Yes, the title came from this very

brief glimpse of horses seen on a train ride in southern Germany.

I always film with a handheld camera as an extension of my body. It allows me to move towards or away from what I film. I need the freedom of moving while filming. Your early interest in Straub/Huillet felt surprising at first, but I see your conscious reflection on time and movement. It is always interesting to know which filmmakers were, or are, important for us! I liked the early Ulrike Ottinger. Jonas Mekas's *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) was also very important for me.

What caught my attention today, when watching your films, is your subtle surrealistic side, especially in the earlier films. But even in *Across the Valley*, some of your unusual framings of the chairs, or the sudden appearance of the girl who is only seen in parts, have a surrealistic quality which opens another level of communication. There is a playfulness or psychological touch, which doesn't stay; it just blows through your imagery and that's very nice.

In the early black and white films, I felt it strongly, but more in the sense of mystery. In *Looking In and Out (A Winter Diary)* (1986) or *Self-Portrait* (1983) and even in your early film *After the Music by François Couperin* (1978/79) there is a mysterious quality in the films, maybe that of a young filmmaker or a young person in general. The conceptual hides these qualities but they want to find their place too! In *Untitled (Caribbean Garden)* (2019) I feel the large banana leaves move in such a way that they become personalities.

I will send you my first film because it is in this line…

NC — The way you use the camera as an extension of the body works so well in relation to the people in your films, that freedom of movement, back and forth and around.

I think that I'm always thinking of the screen, and working towards that end. I almost never film unless with a specific film in mind. I feel the screen is a vision which hovers in space, a modern fetish as it's characterized in Rachel Moore's book *Savage Theory*. It is something which, in a way, takes the place of some kinds of religious experience, at least when experienced collectively in a cinema. I think a lot about the 'internal balance of time' within a film, which Ernie Gehr mentioned in his 'Film is…' statement in 1971. As for surrealism (with a small s), I agree that *Looking In and Out* has that quality. There were all sorts of things that might have made their way into that film, which were even more so. I think of that aspect more as a way

i.



ii.



iii.



i. *Four Diamonds*, Aurand, 2016
ii. *Rasendes Grün mit Pferden* (Rushing Green with Horses), Aurand 2019
iii. *Umweg* (Detour), Aurand, 1982

iv.



v.



iv. *Sakura, Sakura*, Aurand, 2015
v. *Junge Kiefern* (Young Pines), Aurand, 2011

vi.



vii.

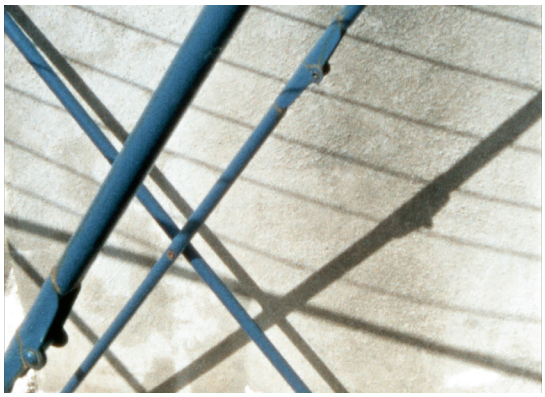


vi. *Across the Valley*, Collins, 2006
vii. *Frost Table* (from Four Little Films), Collins, 2009

viii.



ix.



viii. *Looking In and Out: A Winter Diary,* Collins, 1986
ix. *Rack*, Collins, 2018

x.



x. *Untitled* (moiré in Bari), Collins, 2019

of ‘making strange’ and it’s very much to do with camera angles (another notable Straub/Huillet thing), with looking at a place and composition. I like your idea that something psychological can ‘blow through’ the imagery.

Last night I watched your *Four Diamonds* (2016), which is a really beautiful film. I liked its sense of conciseness, and the way it contains great contrasts within the small number of elements. So much in just four minutes! Also the simple way you reveal how you come to be there, at Mount Holyoke College. The conversation on the soundtrack places you within the film in a different sense to your camerawork. The interior footage of the women playing cards, with its concentration and darkness, sits so perfectly with the footage that follows, which has a different kind of intensity. I was left thinking that the movement within your filming and the way you use the Bolex camera, in short bursts, is very much a mechanism for creating intensity and energy within the footage you film. The word should probably be ‘intensities’ in the plural, as I am aware that exactly how you film varies from film to film and within individual films too, in relation to the subject. Your relationship to the camera seems very much like playing a musical instrument. The use of those tiny moments where you start the camera for just a frame of two, often in between longer (but usually still very short) shots determines the character that the sequences have. What determines the detail of the way you film? Is it largely intuitive, responding to the precise situation, or more pre-planned? Watching *In die Erde gebaut* [Building Under Ground] (2008) I was reminded that along with the camerawork I’ve just mentioned, there are also passages which involve montage in the more traditional sense, for example the sequence with the Hindu priest and the statue of Ganesha. There are really a great range of ways of filming.

UA — Yes, my filmmaking is very much intuitive and I am responding spontaneously to the person or place or situation I am in. For example, in *Four Diamonds* I just happened to see the ladies playing cards at the Guest House of Mount Holyoke College where they meet once a month. When I passed by the room I asked if I could film, and I did, but not for too long, because my filmmaking disturbed their game. Usually they don’t talk while playing, but they did for me, because I had no clue about this game. I filmed the ocean earlier, on a rough winter day, just one reel without knowing for which film. Often I put material in my ‘archive’ and it has to wait until it finds its way into a film.

The material for *Four Diamonds*, *Sakura* and *A Walk / Im Park / ZOUZ* (2008), didn't find a place in longer films, so I made them into short films. *Sakura, Sakura* uses footage of the two ladies who I liked very much but didn't make it into the the long related film *Junge Kiefern* [Young Pines] from 2011. *Four Diamonds* was edited with footage I originally filmed in the context of material for *To Be Here*, in 2012, in the US. Im Park is edited with footage I didn't use for *In die Erde gebaut*.

For *In die Erde gebaut* I decided to go to Zurich every six weeks for filming, so it is my most planned film in a way. *India* (2005), *Young Pines* and *To Be Here* (2013) are my country trilogy and they are not really planned, but they were filmed in the special time frame when I visited the country. My film school films like *Schweigend ins Gespräch vertieft* [Deeply Absorbed in Silent Conversation] (1980) were all prepared in a way ... and edited over long periods.

I like your film *Rack* (2018), and that you allow it to stand alone even though it is so short! I find it interesting how you balance the controlled framing and decisions about what you want to film with your spontaneous sense of just coming to see and film! When I watch your films, I feel more the spontaneity than the sense of planning, but that may be because of my own way of filming. I can't imagine how to think things out in advance. The connection between brain-work and filming is a riddle to me.... I have a vague holistic idea of which kind of film I want to make. I carry it in me, and want to keep it there in its in-between-state as if it is only in this kind of unconsciousness that it is protected and can grow. That sounds like a pregnancy. I don't have children.

I understand what you say about the screen – as a special, and in a way, sacred place – but I don't think about it when I film. As a filmmaker/ editor and as a spectator I am two different things. Framing is so important in your filmmaking, in terms of how you give the objects and everything a value, coloured by your emotion. Then quite suddenly you allow yourself rare, strong movements, as if you are speaking directly to us. I like this kind of surprise in your films, not only in the movements, but also in the sudden appearance of a human being or a completely different image, as with the images at the end of each part of your *Four Little Films* (2009).

NC — It was really interesting to see your film school films, *Schweigend ins Gespräch vertieft and Umweg* [Detour] (1982), both because they contain elements of your later filmmaking and for themselves. *Schweigend*

feels improvisational and jazzy (including the soundtrack of course) and surrealistic in some ways, and also to be a collection of diverse fragments which nevertheless make a whole, almost as if you are challenging the film to fall apart, which it doesn't! The extended casual portrait in the second half of the film, filmed on a train in a seemingly realist way then gets changed by the bird-call on the soundtrack, which seems to be in a different space. It made me think of some films from the 1920s and 30s, in the way it brought such diverse footage together, and also perhaps of Marie Menken's *Notebook* (1962), which is much more casual, and other films of the 1950s New York avant-garde.

I liked *Umweg* a lot. Again I can see your later work in it, but in an unfamiliar way. The characteristic of 'being in the moment' during the journey takes one from the familiar outline of the Köln Dom, near the beginning of the film, to the strange, mysterious and frankly surreal colour passage near the end. It is almost as if the whole journey has taken us towards this bizarre tableau. It's catching life on the fly, with elements of a mysterious portraiture: who are the women, where are they going and why? We don't know and we don't need to know, and not-knowing is very much a part of the journey, as when one sees interesting strangers. I loved the spontaneous 'quasi-matte' effects, where a dark outline is filled with reflections, and using the train as a machine for almost-abstract tracking shots. The journey which is a portrait and which goes either nowhere or to an uncertain place is in *Schweigend* too. I also liked the choice of very different types of music on the soundtrack. The repetitions which first appear at the beginning of *Schweigend* later on become a structuring aspect of *Der Schmetterling Im Winter* [The Butterflies in Winter] (2006), which is a stunning film about great old age, where you look at a person and also a state of being that is hard to confront.

Picking up on your mention of *Rack* (filmed in Super8, with a rather dodgy camera) I really wonder whether I should exhibit tiny films like this, even by putting them on Vimeo. The same applies to some others: *Tape* (2017) was filmed in about ten minutes while waiting for a boat, and *Bed and Table* (2016) in less than an hour, though the latter also exists as a 16mm print. A one-minute or ninety-seconds film can definitely be a stand-alone thing, and different lengths of film seem to have different qualities. I am particularly fond of ninety seconds, of 100 feet of 16mm film, which is two minutes forty seconds, and of four minutes. Each of these lengths seems to allow me to do different things. Your *Four Diamonds* and *Sakura*,

Sakura seem to me to fit their durations perfectly, to do everything that the viewer might expect from a four-minute film, and much more too! At the other end of the scale, *Rushing Green with Horses* seems expansive, and to contain a whole world.

The other side of the issue of scale is that the infrastructure which supported 16mm film for prints has now largely collapsed in the UK. We have no dubbing theatre, no lab that prints 16mm colour from negative and only one neg-cutter here now. The public funders are also, on the whole, not very sympathetic to projects made and finished on film. Of course there are still some printing labs in Europe, but the whole thing ends up costing rather more. Anyhow, around 2008 I had to choose really whether to carry on making films in 16mm that were silent, or to work digitally. And for eight or nine years I had a great time making short self-funded films without sound, the last of which is the group of four little 16mm films shot in Messenia in the Peloponnese, called *Messenian Notebook* (2017). More recently I have resorted to Super8, partly for financial and partly for other reasons. Super8 often feels more provisional and casual to me. It has its problems. I'm not capable of planning enough to make perfect short films in (or straight out of) the camera, as Helga Fanderl does, so everything ends up as digital.

I like that you mention the vague holistic idea of the kind of film that one might want to make, and the way that making the film is how you find out what it wants to be and finally what it is. In my planning, I start with a shot and try to build on it. When I plan, it's usually some notes plus a shot list with sketches in a notebook. Sometimes the films take shape by shooting the shots on the list, discarding some and adding others as I go along. I can see by the way that you film people that it couldn't be like that. The intense and instantaneous way you film in portraiture contains a whole approach and philosophy.

UA — I am writing my reply on the train back to Berlin from Tübingen, where I visited the new born child, Eva, of my godson Franz. You have seen his marriage in *Rushing Green* and their first child Luisa at the end of the film. There are also images of Tübingen just before the end. It is an old German university town, where Hölderlin lived and worked in the so called 'Hölderlin-Tower'.

I made *Schweigend* after our teacher/filmmaker Helke Sander had suggested 'relationship' as the subject for our first films. I thought about relationships in a way that brought me to the idea of reflections and

mirroring. I began with a list of images related to mirroring/reflecting. The underwater sequence was inspired by a story about homosexuality that my elementary school teacher read to us in the 5th grade: a woman told about her love for women after she jumped into a swimming pool and glided along a female body. That image impressed me so strongly that I wanted to include it in my film ... in the late seventies I was in a relationship with a woman.

My filmmaker friend Ulrike and I filmed *Umweg* while we were on our first tour of 8 Kommunale Kinos (non-commercial cinemas) in eight German cities showing 'New Experimental Films by Women' including our own first films. We traveled by train with two Bolex cameras and two Sony Walkmans. We had started by writing notes about the relation between filmmaking and trains. We came back with a lot of footage, and the editing took a long time before we decided on the final film, which is almost exclusively images of the train ride.

In the 1990s I edited more and more in-camera, while filming. The final editing of a film meant reduction and finding the rhythm, and less montage. With *A Walk*, in 2009, I wanted to go back to montage. That was a shift in my filmmaking. I still edit in-camera while filming, but the montage (on my 16mm Steenbeck editing table) became very important. I edit the soundtracks on my computer with ProTools, next to the Steenbeck. I am able to synchronize image and sound by pushing the right 'buttons' at the same time. I still make 16mm prints even if it becomes terribly complicated and the projectors are not at all to be trusted.

I am just back from a festival where I was invited to show three 16mm programs. The 16mm print of *Rushing Green* is scratched so completely that I can't show it anymore. It is all very sad. But if nobody shows 16mm prints, the situation will become more and more disastrous and a lot of films will disappear from film history. That makes me very angry, because nobody seems to think about it! Two days ago Tacita Dean was invited to present two of her 16mm films at the Arsenal, a very rare occasion because she doesn't show her work in cinemas usually. She mentioned that working with celluloid is not a question of technology, it is a medium, and one of many mediums. I like her thought. It is not an alternative to digital, it is just a different medium.

Jenny Baines /
Bea Haut

Misbehaving Materials

Jenny Baines / Bea Haut

Jenny Baines initially studied sculpture, at The Slade School of Fine Art, and then completed a practice-led PhD at Manchester School of Art. Her practice finds its form though the relationship between her body and the mechanisms of film. The medium and its specific characteristics define the work's production dynamics and exhibition. Using a wind-up 16mm Bolex camera for image capture, and as a timer, she performs actions for the device, exploring the parameters of the apparatus and her own physical endurance. These films are edited in-camera and the resulting looped and double-screen works have been exhibited internationally in screenings and as gallery installations.

Bea Haut initially studied at Goldsmiths and then took a master's in fine art at University of East London. She also works with black and white 16mm film, and her practice relates 'everyday' moments, spaces, and actions, often in absurd and unexpected ways. She positions analogue film as a material with distinct agency. The trace and form of its processes defines her practice. Her works have been shown internationally. She was one of the co-founders of Loophole Cinema (1989-1998), with Greg Pope, which was based in London and centred on site-specific 16mm multi-projection performances. In 1996 they produced The International Symposium of Shadows. Since 2012 Haut has been programming the film event Analogue Recurring, with David Leister. She also initiated Film in Process (2015-9), with Karel Doing, an artist-run service for black and white 16mm processing.

Baines and Haut have previously shared a studio and regularly exhibit and work together. The following conversation is composed of their responses to keywords – Action, Cinema, Performative, Absurd - which were chosen due to their importance to their respective practices. These words were written on cards, selected at random and determined the direction of the conversation.

Action

Bea Haut — We were talking about when a static word or image becomes active …

Jenny Baines — But as a contained action – when the action becomes a condensed thing.

BH — I definitely know that that's why I make films; because film is active and always in motion between things, which could be objects, spaces or people - it is a space where events happen, which allows interplay between these elements. That's what a 'percept' is: a thing that exists only in your brain, the knowledge that we're sitting here and, let's say, Andrew is on the roof. It creates a sort of space between us being here and something else happening elsewhere. It's that ethereal space where your brain is making connections between disconnected things. That's the space of 'life' and 'event' and 'action' happening, and I think that's where 'it' really happens. This hybridising stuff also occurs in the interconnected space of expanded cinema.

JB — That's what I find with my double-screen films, but with those it's more a case of putting ideas into people's heads – something is happening on one screen and the other - guess what's happening in between – ha! There's a suggestion made … and I think that's what my films are doing, turning an event into action. Then there's the potential that the action witnessed in the film continues or could be continued, even after the film has ended. There's a suggestion made that's pointing to *something*, allowing questions to open up, but importantly not actually answering them. And that's the point of the work I make (and enjoy). I don't want it to give me the answers; that I find incredibly boring. I want it to poke, you know, to provoke in some kind of way.

BH — Yes, and there's also something that is of the physical senses. A kind of construction of the physical that plays a part in thinking; it's not purely conceptual – it includes the sensory.

JB — Yes, you were talking about walking as triangulation and the placement and locating of oneself in space. There's a physical recognition, or knowledge, that is put into play in the way that we film, what we film and our performance for it, as well as the way the film material is then projected and placed in space. These all reverberate with the viewer, reiterating the physical relationships and location - so there's a whole load of information that's not verbal.

JB — Is it to do with the body being in the frame and us being the object and the subject, the artist and the performer? An embodiment of the physical action, which allows these thought processes to be evident for the viewer? I keep coming back to choreography. I've been looking at some of Yvonne Rainer's work again, particularly at her scores (her choreographic diagrams). There's one in particular, *Diagonal* (1963) which does that kind of thing [JB's fingers circle in the air]. There's something about looping and structure. It's also a kind of triangulation of the body in space.

BH — I find architectural drawings really fascinating. I don't understand them at all, but the way we're physically drawing in space is a bit like an architect's drawing.

JB — It's the implication of action again, or an instruction for an action to take place. I used to work a lot with instructions, writing them as potential suggestions for action. I think that's one of the reasons I ended up working with film, and maybe that's how I still use it. I set myself instructions – or parameters – within which to work. They're a framework which we both work with. Even in the way we're communicating and having this conversation – we've made a framework for ourselves. Do you think we're attempting to 'contain' or 'control' ourselves, otherwise we spill out?

BH — What I like about the limitations of analogue film and devising a very simple plan (or architectural drawing, or set of instructions) is that it really shows up how much arbitrary and unconscious information exists in whatever you do, however much you try to be in control. We can set up the most controlled situation and then there's still all this 'under the radar' language and messaging. 70% of our communication is non-verbal apparently, and I think that involves aspects that are normally disregarded. So, the instructions – the grid, the plan, the boundaries – you take them and put the human in, and that allows hilarious and interesting things to happen.

JB — Yes – that physical element – a fallibility.

BH — It allows... the invisible to emerge.

JB — I think by putting ourselves in the frame, that's quite brave. The safer thing would be: 'Here's the structure; this is what it is'. But as soon as we introduce ourselves, the unknown can happen, that's quite a vulnerable but powerful position to be in.

BH — Allowing yourself to not behave correctly in this structure that you're given can be exposing. It can make you vulnerable, because you might be wrong, or stupid, or fuck it up.

JB — Or it might be brilliant at the same time! So, what are we trying to do in placing ourselves in our work? Maybe it's the only way of making sense of things? Do you think that's what other people see? Because we do set up situations, some of which are absurd, and some are reflective of our everyday situation. Often your work is quite domestic, is that reflecting how you're feeling at that specific time?

BH — That's a really good question. I think it's really hard to know your own affect. The feminine self seems so rarely described in our culture and I've always had a struggle with not wanting to be the things I'm supposed to be. The feminine is always 'other'. I don't want to be other and unknowable. I want to be 'I', 'me', 'doing'. So, doing the simplest action is a way of responding and allowing myself to act. I guess seeing myself in this way, reveals to me an active and composed self.

JB — When performing for camera do you have a personality? I think I do. I don't do it consciously, but there's something incredibly calming to be in that performative space.

BH — Yes, but it's not about acting. I know if I can give myself an action that requires all my concentration, so I'm in 'flow', then I get the best performance in a way. Because I become unaware of my projected self, my self-conscious self. No one is looking at me. All my powers are thinking about how am I going to saw this ladder up, for example.

JB — I also think there's something about the unknown and in the physical relationship with the camera. While you were talking, I just wrote down 'pure performed action'. There's something really nice about you saying you go into this 'place'. We've never spoken about the fact that this is what we both do.

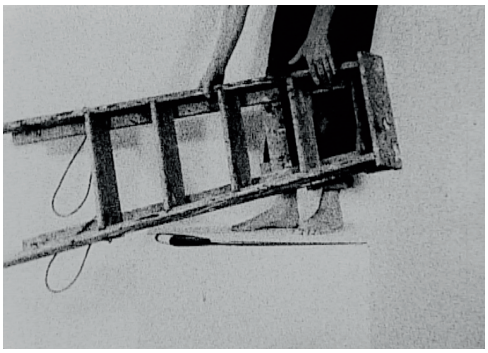
BH — Perhaps it was obvious when we first saw each other's work and met.

JB — There's an element of tension in the action as well, which is really interesting. For instance, in *Drag* (2017), we know the rope is going to break, but we don't know when, so there's a tension, an anticipation for that to happen.

BH — With *Drag* we assume some kind of disaster is going to happen. We wonder what's going to go wrong!

JB — The physical seems essential. For instance, when we filmed *Drag* – you riding a sofa tied to the back of a moving van! – we set up the fixed shot and in putting the physical (your body and its action) into that space, it created a tension in the dynamic live unknown and the deadpan recording. We didn't know how that tension would relieve itself, the rope

i.



snapping, you disappearing from frame or ending up in a bush, which might be comedic or it might be tragic, you can't control the performance. We were talking about setting limitations earlier. I think we set limitations to push against and in pushing against them that creates a tension.

Cinema

BH — I was wondering what my position is in relationship to cinema. One of the main things for me is that I don't think of myself as a filmmaker.

JB — Me neither. Artist not filmmaker.

BH — Maybe it's because I went to art school and film is really just a vehicle that entertains my slightly ADHD personality, which finds everything really boring when it doesn't do anything! It's got to do something! Something's got to happen…

JB — But it's also material – it's the physical, spatial stuff of cinema – it's not escapist cinema of illusory film, but the stuff that it's made up of, which makes me think of Hollis Frampton's description of film as material plus light equals time.

BH — That seems like there are two things. One is the filmmaking aspect. Do you start with a narrative, a proposition of a beginning, an introduction,

i. *I Saw, I See, I Look*, Haut, 2013

ii.



a cutaway, a middle, an end, a resolution? To me that's like writing a novel and I can't do that. So that's the 'narrative filmmaking' side of it, but then, like you're saying, there's the 'space' of cinema. And that's different again, because I think that is quite institutional, or authoritative, in its rules. It makes the audience passive to it and you have to suspend your disbelief and you enter into the image on the screen and you accept all the rules, language and format of the cinema.

JB — I suppose there are rules in a gallery context as well aren't there? Behavioural rules; we're not making cinema films even though we have shown in small cinemas. I think it's that need to shift what film does, so it's not passive – it is active – it becomes about the activation of space.

BH — When you make your films, do you make them for a gallery? Do you think about that when you're making them, where they might end up?

JB — Yeah.

BH — I don't think I do.

JB — It depends on what the film is and how it's constructed, particularly if it's a double-screen film that needs to exist on opposite walls. Then I instantly think of it as a gallery installation.

BH — Do you think you vary from film to film, in the structural aspects or the construction? Because actually quite a lot of your films are to do with the

 ii. *Drag*, Haut, 2013

space that …

JB — ... they're experienced in. I suppose I think of the 100 foot roll of 16mm film as a duration, but when shown in a gallery it's not a limited duration, it's endless and durational, because they are shown on a loop. I tend to start with an image in mind, and there is something significant about starting with an image. There's potentially a finer line between still and moving image in a gallery setting than in a cinema, as there's an implicit knowledge that it will continue to exist in the space.

BH — So, the gallery stills the film, whereas the format of the cinema asks that you have a program, and if you miss it, you miss it. In the cinema the film screening runs from beginning to end and then it's over. I really liked that about the Analogue Recurring screenings. There are a lot of films, a lot of really different short pieces. In a way we would just crash through it and if you missed a bit, well, too bad, and if you hate a bit it will be over really soon! And if you love a bit you're left wanting more. But in a gallery, film can be stilled, and it almost stops time being linear.

JB — Well it's a different experience. Analogue Recurring is not ordinary cinema.

BH — Yeah, there are different rules.

JB — Yes. People are allowed to misbehave!

BH — Something like Analogue Recurring, which is a pop-up, non-cinema film screening space, feels really different to the cinema.

JB — But you have the whole history of Loophole Cinema too.

BH — That's another whole layer and goes into installation as time-based installation. The performances of Loophole Cinema were like durational, sequential time-based installations. Perhaps in a gallery context, the time of film isn't stilled, it actually oscillates? It hums in potential. Maybe a gallery installation holds both.

JB — With a stretched or stilled duration, the anticipation of what is yet to come can be stretched to the point of being painful. For instance, in Bas Jan Ader's *Broken Fall (Organic)* (1971). We know the artist will eventually fall from the tree into the stream below, yet actually the point of falling seems to take an inordinate time.

BH — And your boat frozen into the fjord – in (*Kwarken*, 2010) – it's a kind of pure time of frozenness! The only movement being the blizzard and the film grain.

JB — But when we put ourselves in the frame, there's another element to do with time, and that's endurance: a performed endurance.

Performative

BH — One of the things I always say is that I don't act in my films. They're documents of me doing something. I don't think of myself as a performer. I'm a little unsure if I perform, but there is a lot of the 'performative': in terms of my use of the Bolex camera, the DIY processing of the film, the conversation between myself and the apparatus.

JB — I think we approach it in the same way. It's about activating something, and for me it's very much about what is happening and what is about *to* happen. It's part of an implicit knowledge of cinema. That, I think, is the essence of the kind of films we make. Not in a narrative sense, but in creating action or an active state. This makes me consider J.L. Austin's definition of performativity, in *How to do Things With Words* (1955/62), that we understand language through what it is doing or what it is about to do. That's how I think about film. We can understand it through what it *does* not what it is.

BH — That makes me think of the idea of the 'haptic', which is not just to do with touch, but also time. It's motor movement and touch. For example, if you squeeze a peach you can feel that it's furry, but if you apply a bit of pressure and squeeze it, you would know whether it was soft or hard and you would also know at which point to stop squeezing. This ties in with how we engage with the equipment, with our whole self, with brain and body and environs. There's touch, but also movement as a way of understanding ourselves in space. It's the reverse of the peach analogy, it's like pushing against two walls in a corridor.

JB — That's a nice way of thinking about it. I think of it as working with material that includes us. We are part of the mechanism of film: the camera, projector, material and body. One doesn't exist without the other.

BH — And it doesn't exist without us, as the activator. Back to not being a performer!

JB — I think the whole thing is performative.

BH — Therefore, I am an active ingredient with the other elements. There's some sort of equality. We're kind of equal players and everything has agency; it's live and entangled.

JB — I've thought about this in relation to the double-screen works we've made. I would argue that in some sense the projectors are also performers, in the viewing space, and that every performance is different. There is a state of flux in terms of the films going in and out of synch. The idea

iii.



of us being part of the mechanism is also perfectly demonstrated by your piece *Pending* (2016). In your inviting the audience to hold the unwound film as it loops around the space and back to the projector, the audience is part of the machine. Everyone is. And in the film, your action of holding the ladder over your head, is physically experienced by the audience as they hold the film aloft.

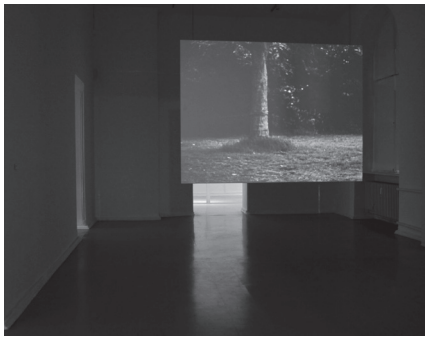
BH — I do refer to that as a performing film. The focus is on the film as performer or as the pivot.

JB — We've spoken about that before. The idea that we are the performer in front of the camera, and also the artist behind the camera. We have an idea of how an action might play out, but it's not always possible to know as we're in two places at the same time, playing two roles.

BH — I am choosing to be my own subject and object. Subjective because it's my point of view and it's my film and I'm the author of it, and then I turn myself into the object of my film by stepping in front of the camera. Happily, I'm not a very well-behaved object! And the film misbehaves too! When processing and printing a film it always misbehaves! Does that take away my authority, my authorial control as the director? With myself as object, the apparatus and the material are misbehaving, that's another way of disrupting that split of the 'subject/object'. It is really important for women to break those very strong 'either-or' categories and to be able to move between

 iii. *Aligning*, Baines, 2012

iv.



them as much as desired.

Absurd

BH — Absurd and/or comedy?

JB — That's a fine line. And/or tragedy?

BH — It's quite multi-stranded isn't it?

JB — Well repetition comes into it and in repeating an action it becomes absurd. The everyday actions that we perform in being repeated become absurd, though you know it's not every day you ride a sofa behind a van!

BH — I was really into Surrealism when I was at art school and I loved science fiction literature. Is it having watched lots of weird films where you don't know what the fuck ...? I never understood things like Buñel's *Exterminating Angel*. I didn't have a clue what the fuck was going on, what was happening or why, and instead I allowed the poetic to develop from not knowing and to let it go; to see what bubbles up.

JB — What was I most influenced by? Well loads of bonkers Russian films that used to be on BBC2. But also, a massive influence is Conceptual art. John Baldessari; he was amazing! One of my favourite works is *Aligning: Balls* (1972), where he threw balls in the air to try and make a straight line ...

 iv. *Untitled (#1 25/25 x 10/4),* Baines, 2017 (*Muscle Memory*, Kunstraum Bethanien, Berlin)

BH: … against the blue Californian sky.

JB — It's such a simple action but it works in so many different ways. He wasn't afraid to take the piss. For instance, his video *I am Making Art* (1971) I think is genius, because it's taking the mickey out of all the deadly serious artworks of the time – particularly performances for camera ironically!

BH — There was a film in his show at the Tate where he's painting a room everyday a different colour and that was one of the things that triggered my 'painting the wall black' film *Arm, Flexion, Extension* (2011). I always think that you're very clear in your connection to Conceptualism. And we often get to this point in a conversation and I always think, oh yeah! I know, that that's part of my work too, but I never quite consciously identify with it as such. I guess I identify more with Surrealism, but question whether Conceptualism and Surrealism might be related?

JB — Maybe there are some elements that cross over.

BH — There could be a large Venn diagram ...

JB — ... where you put certain people in the middle? It's a bit like Jan Verwoert naming Bas Jan Ader as a Romantic Conceptualist, so he would sit in the middle - between Romanticism and Conceptualism. Which I really like because I think it fits perfectly. He was too romantic to be a true Conceptualist and too conceptual to be a Romanticist.

BH — I don't know what I was doing at art school? I sure wasn't paying attention to art history!

JB — Anyway, why does it have to be defined?

BH — It's only when you're having a conversation in public that you start trying to come up with labels or signposts, trying to signpost the things that influence your work or the ballpark that you're in. Often what's really interesting is that things hybridise that really shouldn't. One of the questions I get asked a lot is, 'What films have been really important to you?' or 'What films were you watching that made you start making films?' In a weird way, I think it's actually books and the written word that make me visualise moving image. It's that hybrid thing that will bring another element in; it surprises me that housework can end up being so creative, it is usually so mundane. Perhaps, the creative bit is a mode of escapism?

JB — Considering the absurd, a while ago, I became obsessed with Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*.

BH — Well, you mentioned tragedy earlier didn't you.

JB — Well it's comic and tragic.

BH — Exactly, so its heroic and anti-heroic.

JB — We are constantly trying to walk the line between the opposites in the work we're making: still/moving, heroic/anti-heroic, tragic/comic. That's something intuitive, or is it something else?

BH — When I was at college, I came across the French feminist interpretation of *jouissance* - it's a kind of joy. You can hear it in the word. It's sort of like desire, but it's also to do with the point where things touch and where things happen. It's the space, the junction, the point of meeting, it's the point of response, where you feel each other. There's a spark of joy or communication, perhaps. To find the space between tragedy and comedy is to somehow allow that. Maybe that's what I was saying about the object and subject: you can move between both and don't have to be locked down in one or the other.

JB — Is that what your work is doing? It's allowing you a space where you're not restrained?

BH — Yeah … do you think it is for you?

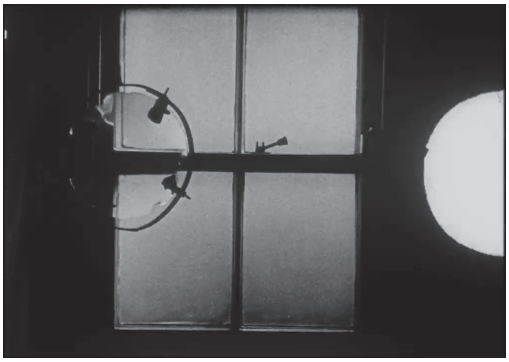
JB — Maybe. If I ever show a few films together then there are very clear patterns.

BH — I was thinking about the desire to be in control. You have to be so much in control with analogue filmmaking, because the apparatus is so – I want to say moody – sensitive. It's also really expensive and so you have to be really, really controlled. You can't just piss it up. So, there's something about being controlled – we've already said that today – and then letting it …

JB — ... letting it go. There's something about process though, in doing a methodical task. Following some sort of methodical process analogue filmmaking becomes a bit meditative I think, and that's when things can happen. It's a bit like printmaking. Making an etching plate, inking the plate, preparing the paper, it's a slow process and there's something about slowing down time in those processes. You don't get the results instantly. It's like a breathing space and in that space some sort of thought process can happen. I feel like I need a bit of breathing space in order for things to make sense. Maybe that's why I like processes.

BH — I often think of how you set it up a film and then push it. I always try not to think too hard about what I'm going to do. It's quite important not to overthink what I'm doing otherwise it turns into shit. If I have a visualisation it's really important to make the film quickly, to go through the process and it always tells me back. I'm always horrified by my rushes when I first get

v.

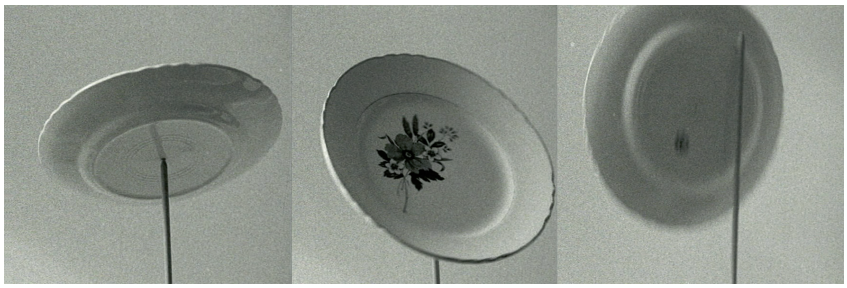


vi.



v. *Defenestration*, Haut, 2015
vi. *Defenestration*, Haut, 2015

vii.



vii. *Tipping Point*, Baines, 2009

them, even *Drag*, which was made pretty much all in one shot. When I first saw the rushes and I saw myself in the frame, I thought, 'Oh no! I'm talking, I'm shouting, I'm laughing. Oh, I'm just such a fucking idiot', and I wondered whether I should cut all of those bits out? But then I would have cut out most of the film. I went off in a huff for a day or two and then I watched it again and then I thought 'actually this is really good!'

JB — It's great!

BH — I do that every time! I think it's a disaster because what comes back to me is never quite what I thought I was going to make. But this is the entanglement, this is the inter-relationship that I have with the process and the material. I'm not fully in control. I kind of poke it and press it and do things to it and then it speaks back to me. I anthropomorphise it!

JB — With *Drag* that definitely felt like you had a really strong image….

BH — I just wanted to get rid of this sofa that had been dumped outside the studios, and I thought we could drag it down the street and dump it somewhere else, in a sort of arrgh 'Just do something about this fucking sofa!' And then I realised: Oh, that would be a great film! It was that simple. And the windows film *Defenestration* (2015), I don't know how I came to that. Maybe I had been cleaning the windows?

JB — That what would make sense.

BH — To be honest, I do have a couple of test rolls from 2011 and there are a few attempts at window things, but they aren't *that* film at all. So, I don't know where *Defenestration* came from. Some films just become. I don't know where they've come from. Again, that doesn't feel very film-makery.

JB — When 16mm processing was super cheap, I often used to film things that didn't seem to matter. When I was making *Tipping Point* (2009) for example – the film with the plates spinning on a stick – I also decided to shoot a few more rolls, as I wanted to do the 'tablecloth trick', pulling a tablecloth from beneath a fully set table.

BH — Oh yeah? Did you do it?

JB — Yes. But the film was rubbish. I'll have to show you. Maybe I will remake it eventually, but it just didn't feel like the right thing to make at the same time as *Tipping Point*. And that worked ... so maybe it was part of the process to get to *that* work?

BH — I once made an installation here at home that I documented. We had doorways in the kitchen knocked through, so I had all these bricks. I had this cube of bricks, maybe a meter squared. I took pictures of it in the garden. Then I moved it onto the front path and took pictures of it. Then I put

it in the van and took pictures of it in the van. Then I took it to UEL, where I had an interim MA show, and put it in the yard. And then I moved it, half a week later, into the gallery. So, it was a sort of moving block of bricks …

JB — Anthropomorphic bricks!

BH — Yeah and then I did it with wood piles in the woods. I've got loads and loads of photographs of these cubed things.

JB — They're still documentation of actions.

BH — Yeah and then I tried to make a cube on the kitchen table, of all the crockery made into a meter squared cube. And it just didn't work. Maybe because it didn't have straight enough edges, or they were all too different. I don't know, but it just didn't. Maybe sometimes …

JB — ... you need to go through these processes to get to the thing you're s*upposed* to be doing.

BH — Yeah.

JB — What was that about the absurd?

BH — I think we've maybe done it.

Amy Dickson /
Annabel Nicolson

Letters on Light

Amy Dickson / Annabel Nicolson

Amy Dickson initially studied textiles at Central St. Martins School of Art and Design, before her MA in visual communication at the Royal College of Art, where she developed an interest in cinema. She co-founded the group collective-iz with Maria Anastassiou, Deniz Johns and Karolina Raczynski, in 2012, and has continued to programme screenings and events with them. There are two main strands in Dickson's practice. One relates to impromptu observational mobile phone videos. The other centres on live performance, involving different types of primary light sources, often in tandem with a thermochromic screen, to explore illumination and projection.

Annabel Nicolson was a vocational student at Hornsey College of Art before going to Edinburgh School of Art to study painting. In 1969 she became involved with the London Filmmakers Co-op and the Arts Lab, and the following year she ran the gallery there. She also studied film as a postgraduate at St Martins 1970–71. She worked in distribution at the Film Co-op and later as cinema programmer. In 1977 she co-edited and published *Readings* magazine and was an editorial contributor to *Musics* from 1976–79. She also co-founded Circles, Women's Film in Distribution, in 1979. Her influential expanded 'para-cinematic' performances from the early 1970s helped define new aspects of experimental film practice. Many have an almost legendary status, given that they have often been written about, but seldom re-performed. Nicolson now lives in north west Scotland.

In 2015 collective-iz organised a performance of Annabel Nicolson's *Matches* (1975) at the Apiary Studios (London), after developing a relationship with Nicolson, writing to her over a period of several years. Dickson's communication with Nicolson developed further after this event. The selected correspondences that follow are from recent hand-written postcards and letters in which the artists imagine and discuss each other's work and ideas.

As soon as Amy put forward the idea of being in conversation with me it was something I knew I had to do. Writing to a younger artist exploring similar areas in performance, particularly with light, felt immediately relevant and brought up all kinds of questions to do with making live work and how this feels with the passing of time.

I already had a sense of Amy's work from our correspondence about 'Matches', one of my early performances which Collective Is brought to life again a few years ago.

My thanks to Al Rees for bringing us all together. He knew it would be important.

Annabel Nicolson

7.11.19

Dear Annabel,

I'm sorry it's taken me so long to write. I wasn't too well on and off for a couple of weeks, but in the meantime I have been thinking about our conversation. Perhaps over-thinking – suddenly there seems so much, I've also been feeling some apprehension at our personal exchange becoming public.

In your last letter you mentioned that we've not actually seen each other's work, apart from us (collective-iz) re-creating *Matches,* yet you said you felt like we have, and that this might be something to explore in our conversation.

I certainly felt a connection and kinship when I finally met you to give us the instructions for *Matches,* sitting in a room that felt strangely familiar, on the windowsill … shells, postcards, a half unwoven basket on the floor. We made several associations in that conversation; both spent time in Norfolk, Norwich Art School, textiles … I feel a sense of you and your work, has slowly built up over the last 10 years through letters, oral accounts (Al Rees) and reading written accounts from people who were there. Perhaps because of the very little visual documentation of your work, apart from some very iconic photographs, the descriptive accounts and writings of your pieces become so visceral. I think there's also a sense of knowing your work through my own, my own experience and feeling of performance, and play with similar materials … light … within the field of Expanded Cinema. It's quite a strange thing to do – perform with light, shadows, candles, sewing machines …?

Do you think of it as performance? I'm not sure if I do or I try not to. Sometimes it helps me if I just think about it as carrying out a set of actions but there's more to it than that. A sense of time, the audience, physical space, pace, being aware of all these things coming into play and the level of control which you may or may not have over them – that's where I feel it becomes 'live'.

In *Matches* and all your other performances there are elements of chance and unpredictability, I think part of the beauty and delicacy of these works lies in the play between the materials (material or immaterial) and the structure of the performance, tension at the point at which these things meet. Each performance is unique in this way.

When you gave us the instructions for *Matches*, we went through it in fine detail, certain 'conditions' had to be just right. I completely understood why – you were giving us something personal to you, but also it was important for some things to be 'fixed' for the performance to work and be as it should be. This was a process of discovery for us – discovering your work through re-creating it for ourselves under your instruction, and then in turn extending this opportunity to the audience members. I think this is important – creating events as platforms for learning/discovering and imagination! Perhaps I will leave it there for now or it will never be posted.

Best wishes,
Amy

PS. I've included a sample of thermochromic fabric that I've used in my performances – hold it up to a lit flame or hot light!

13.11.19

Dear Amy,

Thank you for your letter. It is giving me things to think about which I can't quite grasp yet. Some possible starting points for our conversations or things to follow up later. As you say suddenly there seems so much.

I think this is why I was cautious about the prospect of receiving documentation of your work. In the last few years I have been getting to know your work gradually through our correspondence, writing to you as and when we felt like it, without any expectations. It has been quite gentle and I felt I was understanding something through words and phrases here and there with the odd evocative photo. You doing things with light and others in the shadows. The quiet attention and sense of a space in time.

It was something I recognised almost physically and it was very poignant. The figures in the darkness, your space, but somehow familiar to me from other times, other spaces. The sense of your work comes across through the atmosphere around you and I felt I could understand something of what was happening if only in my imagination.

At the same time it is tantalising because I haven't seen your performances or been there in those spaces with you. I usually have to read your letters several times to understand as much as I can, but even then I can't really as I wasn't there.

Maybe the next step would be for me to look through our earlier writings to each other and see if these offer some clues. I'm hoping this project will give me a chance to learn more about your work and how you see it. There are connections between us and I think these will emerge in the process of our conversations without us having to look for them.

You mentioned feeling apprehensive at our personal exchange becoming public. It is very daunting and I am nervous about it too. Suddenly we have an audience. Time is also a consideration as the project has its own limits and is not infinite. I think if we had more time things might fall into place more easily and we could be less concerned.

Maybe in a way we are creating a performance with an audience we can't see. I hesitate to say this in case it feels like anther worry, but performing is always difficult so this shouldn't be any more so. We have both had to cope with this before in our live work.

In your last letter you mentioned sometimes thinking of performing as 'carrying out a set of actions' and this being quite helpful. I couldn't quite place this thought at first, but am wondering if perhaps something similar was going on in my early film performances. The actions in themselves were very simple, but so much had to be thought about in any given situation for the performance to work.

I am thinking about some of the live projection pieces which needed help from the audience. Sometimes I had to ask for volunteers to do certain*

things to help make the whole thing work. Initially this was mainly practical as I couldn't be in several places at once, but it also changed the dynamics with the audience. It gave those who were there an immediate connection to the work as they became part of the process and could see how it came into being.

At the same time it felt very risky. I had to trust people to do what was asked and just accept this situation for what it was and not to try to dramatise or project onto it. I was very dependent on whoever stepped forward to help and my work was very much in their hands. I never knew if my ideas would come to life or not.

That's probably enough for now. It's quite a struggle trying to think myself back into those early years and of necessity it is quite an intense process. There is so much else we could talk about, but working with light is probably our strongest connection at this stage.

I realise I haven't used the word 'cinema' yet. It is in there even if I haven't spelt it out. I hope it will come across somehow. Working with light and space has been so much part of what I do, whatever the medium, that I can't really distance myself enough to talk about it. It's a common language which brings some of us together and it's just there.

Could you tell me more about the work you do with collective-iz and the events you create with wonderful titles like Black and Light *and* Low Light*. I'd like to hear about how you work in different countries and different spaces within a performance sometimes. Whatever you feel like saying about this process, working with a peer group would be of interest to me. It's a long time since I've been part of such a situation and most of my creative support is from a distance these days.*

I have the little piece of thermochromic material you sent in front of me and will try holding it up to a lit flame or hot light. Can I use it more than once?

Annabel x

**The reference to live projection pieces included* Precarious Vision (1973) Jaded Vision (1973) Matches (1975).

14.11.19

Amy,

Is it alright not to look at documentation of your work for the time being. I hope I'm not being unfair, but I feel I need to see your work myself not through a recording. Can we just keep getting to know each other's work through our own words as you described in your last letter. I don't want to lose that, especially when we are now into this project and there are new demands on us.

It is confusing having an audience, even an unseen one that doesn't exist yet. We are writing to each other, but these shadowy figures are somewhere

around, like in a performance. It is disconcerting, but also exciting to be part of this project with you and I'm intrigued to see what happens in the course of our conversations and where we might get to. I have no idea what lies ahead, but something will emerge.

If you feel like sending any of your other work, or a few photos/slides of performances I haven't seen, this would be good. However I'm quite happy just to get to know your performances/work with light slowly as before in whichever ways feel alright to you in the current situation.

Annabel x

15.11.19

Amy,

This has taken longer than expected, as I had to keep working on it. Difficult to be spontaneous at the moment, but I'm hoping it will get easier.

Your letters have always given me a lot and I'm looking forwards to what comes of this despite the difficulties.

So many thoughts. I loved what you said about herding sheep [See the British Library postcard on p.72]. Do you know the films of Jenny Gilbertson who worked in Shetland in 1930s on 8mm I think or 9.5mm? An image from one of her films of sheep on a hillside moving around at random came to mind. We showed her work at the Film Co-op in a programme of early Scots films. It came from The Scottish Film Archive. Thanks for the auspicious symbols and Buddha's footprint. Maybe they will help us on our way.

Annabel x

20.11.19

Dear Annabel,

Thank you for your letter. It was a relief to receive it and to hear that you are feeling similar about the process, though I knew that your response would help me find some traction. Already this feels a bit easier. As you say it's all around us and it's difficult to distance yourself. It's the things that are difficult to grasp which are most intriguing and worth perusing, and I would say, why we make the work, in the same way this exchange is trying to grasp, and manifest – through the process.

Interesting to hear about how your performances became participatory – being initially a practicality of needing more hands, but led to works of which

the focus was the audience's partaking. I'm not sure I've quite experienced that with my own work, relinquishing so much control, and putting it in other people's hands. It's an interesting shift. I've felt the audience with me and to some degree 'activated' but not in the way which the audience were/are active in your works such as *Precarious Vision* and *Matches*. I like how this has the potential to dissolve the hierarchy between the artist and audience; creating and discovering the experience together – inviting curiosity rather than projecting a trajectory. Realising you could create what you had in mind in this way, particularly with pieces like *Matches,* which requires a certain sensibility must have been quite liberating? Perhaps this is where thinking about 'a set of actions' comes in; in that these performances were of simple actions that anyone could do, there were no tricks but yet the nature of the subject/material and conditions – created something that was uncanny. Were they always well received?

I did work recently with an artist/musician (Billy Steiger) on an improvised performance called *Light Time Strung.* A thermochromic screen stretched on a hand-built wooden frame and hot lights as others before, but this time we'd strung the back with different materials, from garden string to copper wire. Billy used his violin bow in all sorts of ways, and we both also plucked and held the strings, which were amplified by a contact mic. On screen the strings created shadows, these shielded strips remained black, but once moved dissolved in the heat from light. The strings and their shadows producing doubles, triples of themselves, their sounds in and out of sync with the image.

This was a new experience for me, to work with someone else intuitively; both seeing and hearing but at the same time blind to what each other was thinking and what the audience was seeing (being on the other side of the screen). Trying to feel a sense of the performance, the audience and each other. It worked well the first time but another time I panicked and I think I cut it too short. It's an intense experience all your senses are engaged and focused in that space and time but also somewhere else ...

I feel lots of similarities to the way I work and think in relation to improvised music and its performance. There are some structures, guiding hands, pushes and pulls, but also a flow around them. Working instinctually in the moment, with undefined parameters.

Just thinking – how you're often in the centre in the midst of it all. Most of my performances I'm protected by a screen of sorts.

I'm running this to the post … there might be some more pages to follow.

Amy x

27.11.19

In comparison *Light Time* (2013) has a more set structure, yet there's a build up, suspense and expectation of what's going to happen, I can feel the anticipation, and sense the focus on the screen, as my hand moves across lighting the flames, white patches begin to appear on the black cloth screen, shadows move, flickering, then one by one, the sound of extinguishing candle flames, reducing light levels … then the last candle – there is a certain power to that one – this is all the light there is … and I put it out. The ghostly white image that has emerged stays on the thermochromic screen for a while, before it slowly returns to black. The small piece you have should do the same.

From what I've read on your work *Door Way* (1974) creates a similar build up and apprehension with an absence and presence of light. I imagine people's eyes having to keep adjusting to the darkness, only for the door to possibly open again? I love how simply it directs people's attentions to these everyday moments of cinema, and the elements of chance so often involved, while also more complexly drawing into question the perimeters and volumes of the cinematic space, by creating an image that the audience sits within. I imagine there were moments of humour too?

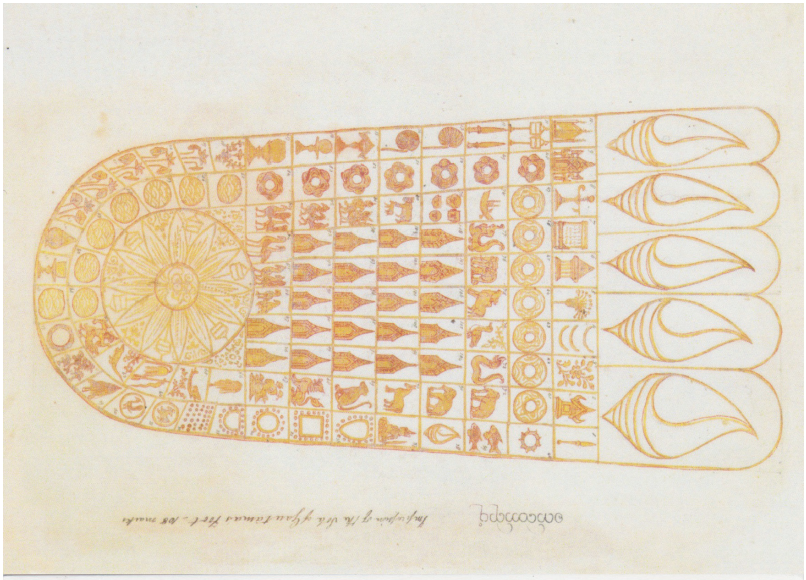
I did a performance at Café OTO, (an experimental music venue), with large long beam torches, emulating lights of vehicles that stream in through the expansive street windows, hitting the plants, pots, and diamond shaped shuttering on and aside the window ledges – creating moving shadows around the room. The audience sat inside in the dark, while I was outside, the windows were a sort-of screen. I managed to get a street-light turned off for 15 minutes while this went on – which felt like an act in itself. I had seen these shadows forming when I was there attending concerts and other places but I wanted to create a situation where you were there just to look at that.

I would love to know more about the 'unseen' performances you did, *Sweeping the Sea* (1975) *Combing the Fields* (1974) and the walks? These seem like very direct responses to what you'd seen, that there were no limits to where or when you'd make work, and that it wasn't always for an audience?

I wasn't sure whether to bring my videos into this conversation but they are as much part of my practice and what I do day-to-day, I also think of them as performative; I feel a similar tension when I'm making them to working 'live', because of the nature of how they are made being single-take, un-edited, and made whenever I feel inspired, intuitively with uncontrollable, unexpected conditions – these things shape the work and often give rise to the best results. I make them all on a mobile phone camera, it's always with me.

I was struck by the words 'of necessity' in your last letter and wondered if that related to an impulse to create or was more to do with the context and climate in which you were working?

Yes … collective-iz, has been incredibly important to me; working together with like-minded people (and dear friends). Being active in creating a platform and context for our own work (one that we felt comfortable with and



BRITISH LIBRARY

Annabel,

I'm sorry sorry its taken me so long to get this together. Several factors including my own lack of confidence and. feeling a bit stunned by the task of getting my thoughts out of my head and onto the page. It felt a bit like herding sheep! There also, having looked at

Drawing of Buddha's footprint with 108 auspicious symbols, Burma, 19th century.
MS. Burmese 203, f. 11

© 2019 The British Library Board
Thank you for supporting the British Library
www.bl.uk/shop

writings about your work seemed so much that hit me - in regards to your work - and wanted to talk about. I'm still not sure if I've spoken about any of those things yet. I think I need your input maybe to begin to flow better. I feel a bit ridged. Its difficult to get to the crux of things. Put things into words. & Hopefully we will get there!

Best Wishes,
Hope your ok?!
Amy ☺

1 000000 220254

14.11.19

Dear Amy,

Just to reassure you a letter is almost on its way to you. It has been difficult writing and I need to look at it again before posting it. Having an audience changes everything and I'm hoping we can keep some spontaneity, but at the moment it does add to the challenge. We seem to have taken on something huge.

Will try to call you very soon to see how you are with it all. Please also feel able to write without waiting for my letters. It still feels very positive and we will get there

Annabel X

© Rosemary Lindsay SBA
LIME LEAF SKELETON
Tilia americana
Watercolour drawing

Aria Cards
5 Burbage Road
London SE24 9HJ, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7274 5610
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7737 0063
email: rl@rosemarylindsay.com
www.rosemarylindsay.com



in control of) and for the artist-filmmaking community we engage with feels very much part of my practice. We curated events like *Black and Light* thinking about activating the audience through moving around the space, from light to dark. We also help and work with each other such as the performance you mention *Signals* (2013-16) by Karolina which happened across countries. Deniz was in Turkey at the time so was able to help Karolina facilitate this piece which used Skype, a telecommunications application via the Internet, to create a live-stream video call, in which light was reflected from one time-zone and country to the other.

You did quite a lot of programming at the LFMC? And more recently in 2016 at the BFI for the 50th Anniversary of LFMC, *Interrupting Light*?

Hope this finds you well.
Best wishes,
Amy x

9.12.19

Dear Amy,

Last week I started to write something at night in response to what you wrote about working with sound. Thinking about your performance with strings stretched down the back of the screen and the one at Café OTO with the long beam torches. How strange that I had been meaning to ask you if you had worked there and then your letter arrived with a description of what you did.

There's so much to say and I am remembering performances of my own and seeing how our concerns have taken us in similar directions. Time does seem almost irrelevant as if there had not been such a gap between what you are exploring and where I found myself all those years ago. I had thought it was long ago, but now it seems that it is all part of the same time.

I've never understood how this can happen. Time moves around so indefinably as I am in my imagination most of the time just now. It may be a few more days before I can reflect on what I was writing last week. I will try to make space for this as soon as I can. In the meantime I just wanted to reassure you that I am still in our conversation and don't want things to slip.

If you have things to say please feel you can, don't wait for me. It was great too receiving your letters in three parts last week and I look forwards to the post so much. Our front door has to be closed most of the time at the moment as the weather can be so variable, especially if the wind is driving the rain along. Sometimes I can see light if the door has been left open and this means the post has been. It is always exciting if there is something from you.

So I hope to get something to you very soon. Also I nearly forgot to say I have spoken to Lux and arranged a visit in January. This means I can keep this space for working with you and travel South as we are winding down. We

can look through all the materials, letters, cards and so on together and see what form our conversations have fallen into.

Annabel X

03.01.20

Dear Annabel,

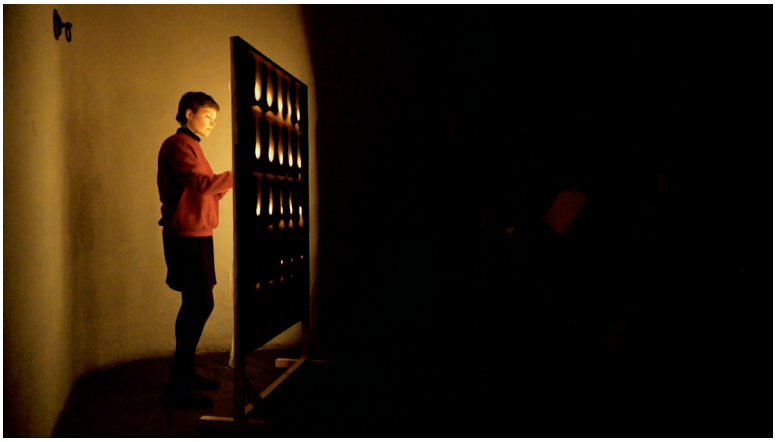
Happy New Year! Thank you for your notes and card. Christmas has got in the way of me writing sooner. The months running up to Christmas are always such a productive time for me and then Christmas comes and breaks the momentum.

I have also been contemplating winter, and how it's more conducive to finding focus. I struggled with winter a lot until I read something about looking for things you can only find in the winter months. I've begun to realise more and more the merits of winter, the quiet and stillness as you say. The summer has an almost constant white noise, which is muted in the winter, and winters low light levels, which used to feel like my nemesis – I'm now finding inspiration in. The light in winter has subtle variation, the angle and softness of the sun at a distance, cooler colours and long shadows, in contrast to the summer where light becomes more homogenous and inescapable. In the spring and summer I want to be outside all the time, soaking it all up so I'm becoming thankful of winter as a chance for me to be inside looking out, and being able to concentrate.

I thought of your reflections to me and of you sitting in the dark, looking at the fire, as well as the curatorial work you've done and re-performances of your works by collective-iz. Ideas of past and present keep coming up which I think is poignant in terms of our positions and then/now working relationships. I am also interested how certain things can transcend time. I hope they still engage with the present.

Great about your visit, it would be wonderful if we can sit down and look and go through things together if all goes well, do you know exactly when you are coming?

Best wishes,
Amy x



i.
.

i. *Light Time*, Dickson, 2013 (*Now & Here*, Horse Hospital, London)
Documentation by Alexandros Pissourios



ii.

ii. *Light Time Strung,* Dickson and Steiger, 2019, (*In House II*, Cafe OTO, London)
Documentation by Inger Lise Ollgaard

21.1.20 (5.12.19)

Dear Amy,

Not getting much space to think about our conversations at the moment, but I am enjoying thinking about your performances. I did not realise how much you had done with the thermochromic screens.

The work with sound is very intriguing. In your description of Light Time Strung *you wrote that 'these shielded strips remained black, but once moved they dissolved in the heat from the light'. I think 'strips' must be a reference to the shadows of the strings. In the photos you sent some of the string shadows are very fine and I am wondering if they became finer towards the end of the performance?*

I like the idea of the screen itself being transformed with more light appearing through it as the strings moved and allowed the heat from the candles to spill onto more of the screen. The sense of time and movement changing the physical nature of the screen is very exciting. All kinds of dimensions opening up and affecting each other within the performance. I wonder if the performance had its own natural duration depending on how much the strings moved? Did the string shadows disappear and leave only light in the end?

You refer to similarities between how you work and think and the performing of improvised music. I can relate to this from my own experience and think maybe the motivation is similar, to do with loss of boundaries and letting other aspects of life play a part in the work.

I like the idea of you interacting with the lights moving outside Café OTO, improvising with long beam torches and creating shadows inside the performance space while staying beyond it. Were you ever in the same place as the audience, before or afterwards?

You mentioned that when you are behind the screen you don't see what the audience sees, but can sense it. Did it feel similar at Café OTO? I'm quite intrigued by this. Could you still feel a connection with the audience when you were outside the building? I think maybe there is a heightened awareness in these situations regardless of the physical nature of the spaces involved.

Was the street light actually turned off at some point in the performance? Can you say more about this, the timing for instance. Was this significant?

'I had seen these shadows forming when I was there attending concerts … but I wanted to create a situation where you were there just to look at that.' This says it all so beautifully.

In my own work I was also drawn to incidental things in or beyond a particular space and these would often become sources of inspiration for a performance. Some of my early performances were in spaces where I lived and worked so I knew them well.

Doorway *which you mentioned came about through knowing the space, the Film Co-op Cinema, over a long time. I was very much involved with the building as I lived there. My studio was on the ground floor just inside the front door.*

I knew how difficult it could be for people trying to find the cinema. Often people would get lost on their way though this semi derelict old factory and come upstairs not being sure if they were ever going to find it.

When people did get to the cinema they were sometimes quite tentative opening the door, which was next to the screen, as they weren't sure if they had come to the right place.

With Doorway *I didn't know what would happen until it was actually performed. The structure was so simple, but it was the nature of the building and how people experienced it which brought the whole thing to life.*

Although the idea came from the cinema I don't think I had anticipated how much the whole building would affect the performance.

You asked some more about Matches *so I'll try to say what I can. At that time in 1975 I had already done several projection pieces which needed help from the audience so the idea for* Matches *probably came about quite naturally.*

With the earlier live projection pieces where I asked for help from the audience it was partly practical as I wrote before, but I think I may also have been needing to make the situation safer for myself. Asking people to help did change the dynamics and involving others made the situation less daunting for me.

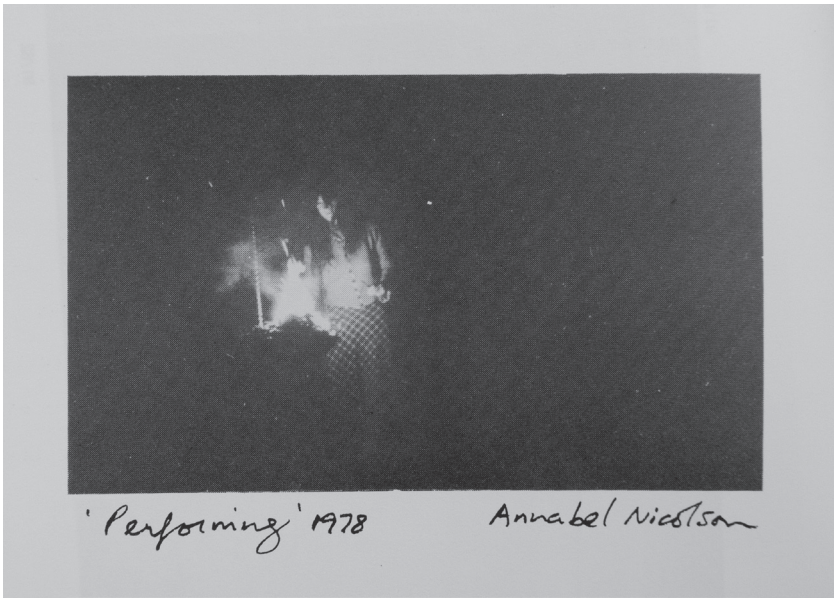
It did also create an element of risk, but this was in keeping with the work itself and what I was thinking about. My experience at the time, particularly with film, often involved trying to do things which didn't work. There were endless disappointments and often there was such a gap between what I was trying to do and what I could do. Sometimes I felt quite desperate about it. Trying was something I had to think about as it was so much part of my life.

You asked whether the performances were well received. They were because the audience had all been part of the process and were involved in what was happening. There was a lot of goodwill and support for whoever stepped forward to undertake what had been asked and the audience could identify with the difficulties of the performers.

One of the nice things about Matches *was that I could see the performance myself as I was not performing. It gave me a chance to reflect on what was happening and think about how it looked, the shadows, the positions of the performers and so on.*

I had to hope they would go with the situation and not try to make it into something it wasn't. It was nerve racking as my work was in the hands of others, but once I knew the performance was going well and the audience were enjoying it I could almost enjoy it myself.

Annabel X



iii.
.

 iii. *Performing*, Nicolson, 1978



iv.

iv. *Hidden Sounds*, Nicolson, 1979

27.01.20

Dear Annabel,

Re: ‘our conversation’… and in answer to your questions and some further reflections..

Yes the ‘shielded strips’ in *Light Time Strung* (2019), were where the strings shielded the light from hitting the thermochromic fabric. In this performance I used hot theatre lights not candles as the heat and light from candles are too weak in this instance. The lights are intermittently moved during the performance, where their beams hit the fabric light bleached patches begin to grow on the screen surface, (apart from the strips protected by the strings). Over time these strips become thinner and fade out completely – as the heat from the lights saturate the fabric screen the longer the lights are left in place. However this process is impermanent and the screen fades back to black as soon as the lights move away, allowing the performance to be potentially of infinite duration – so it depends on the performers and their sense of things. Once I did a performance with a thermochromic screen and bunches of marsh reeds which ended up going on for several hours over the course of an evening as people came and went.

In the performance at Café OTO (*Playing in the Street* 2018) – the street light was turned off for 15 minutes, this signalled the start of the performance for me in that I only had a 15’ window, but I don’t think it was significant for the audience and how much they were aware of its absence? I needed it to be as dark as possible and the new LED street lights around OTO are very bright and flood the street. It might have been more interesting to play around with this idea though. In hindsight I thought I could have made more of it, and perhaps even do a performance/event with just street lights. I think I was just stunned that I’d managed to get the council to cooperate at all. Although this would have involved some clear direction of the audience’s attention to the street lights and I liked the idea of just beginning the movements with the torches and people becoming aware of their own accord, with I hope some indistinction /connection between the natural occurrence of passing headlights and shadows and the orchestration of a performance.

It was very difficult to gauge anything from outside, I know what you mean about a heightened awareness but I didn’t feel much connection with the audience, though I sensed their presence in the room, I had done a couple of tests where I asked people to sit inside to know if there was any effect, at the end of the performance I came inside and turned off the torches.

I’m enjoying your/our thoughts, understandings and slippages in trying to imagine the performances and conditions, there are some nice ideas and images emerging of variations / new performances perhaps?

… thinking about the subjectivity of how such performances are experienced and remembered. The legacy of your performances with so little visual documentation, transcribed through other peoples accounts and descriptions … our own becoming blurred over time … At what point does a performance

become conclusive?

It's refreshing to read about your processes of making, you speak so honestly about the trying, failing, disappointments … and your acceptance of these 'workings' being part of the process. Despite difficulties you persevered. I wonder if you knew what you were pursuing?

You mention familiar locations, personal relationships to space, and how perhaps this gave you the opportunity but I imagine also the confidence, to tackle the unknown and incalculable – to employ risk? When I began to experiment in the fields of live performance and video I employed fabric, screen-printing and my mobile phone camera as familiar tools to help me navigate and access a world of 'cinema' that felt initially intimidating and highly technical.

Your use of a sewing machine and the sewing of film in *Reel Time* (1973) jumped out at me as points of familiarity being associated with textiles but perhaps not so usually with film and its projection? I made a connection with *Reel Time* and the earliest piece I did with thermochromic fabric *Light Traces* (2012) in that our live shadows are present in both and sit alongside another self-image, and the live action sees these images dissolving over time.

I thought about the sound in *Reel Time*, the readers' voices, sound of the projector and the sewing machine – it must have been quite turbulent? It's only recently that I registered the significance of sound in your performances; often the 'details just caught' (as you said) were *heard* – spoken text that conjured visceral images. I also thought how the sound/voice in lots of your performances … is often fighting against something, in *Reel Time* – the machine. In *Matches* & *Doorway* darkness? Was sound something you were very conscious of?

I had better sign off or we will never get this to Simon and Andrew …

'Celebration of the way in which women work together in the most natural way to help each other in their creative work.'
– 'Concerning Ourselves and Menstrual Hut', 1981

I love this sentence – it resonates so much with my experience, of being a part of *collective-iz* and more generally.

Amy X

Karel Doing /
Francisca Duran

Ecology, Ethics and the Unintelligible

Karel Doing was born in Canberra, Australia. He studied at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, in Arnhem, the Netherlands, between 1986 and 1990. In 2017 he received a PhD from the University of the Arts, London. He is an independent artist, filmmaker and researcher whose practice is framed as a search for new meanings that can be attributed to the material of film and its semiotics. Many of his films, from the early 1990s onwards, foreground the rhythmic, textural and performative qualities of the analogue film medium. Since 2018 he has run numerous workshops in phytography (the creation of images aided by chemicals found in plants).

Francisca Duran is an experimental media artist who creates films, installations and mixed media works about history, memory and violence. She moved to Canada following the military coup in Chile in 1973. Her experience of exile is integral to her artistic practice which centres on traces and lost or irretrievable things. Working with photography, film, digital video and many other media, she takes images and sounds apart and reassembles them to reveal the tactile qualities of media that are often thought of as ephemeral. Duran has exhibited her work internationally in film festivals, exhibitions and group screenings. She has been a recipient of grants from numerous Canadian arts councils.

Karel Doing — My background is in painting and music. As a teenager I first listened to Pink Floyd but quickly discovered Einstürzende Neubauten, instantly falling in love with the Ummagumma-like photograph on the back of their first album *Kollaps*. The photograph features the band in front of the Olympic stadium in Berlin, showcasing their instruments: guitars, pieces of metal, an axe, a pneumatic drill and more. At the time, my parents were renewing the heating system. I dismantled the old boiler and strung the remaining pieces up in my bedroom, expanding my little drum kit with new sounds.

Meanwhile, my father took me to an Anselm Kiefer exhibition in Amsterdam. The painter's material experiments inspired me to mess around with oil paint, watercolours and sand. Later this resulted in performances, combining percussion and action painting. When I went to art school in Arnhem, I started looking for ways to combine image and sound. The AV department had some Super 8 equipment that they considered obsolete, giving me free reign to use it as I pleased.

My first Super 8 experiment, *Sun* (1986) was an animation of successive woodblock prints, cutting away further and further and intensifying colours. In short, for me cinema was never an isolated phenomena but rather a tool that I could use in a wider context. My cinematic practice grew out of a performative approach both in art and in life.

Francisca Duran — My parents were Marxists. We fled Chile in 1973 after the military coup that ousted elected socialist president Salvador Allende. I grew up around artists, intellectuals, US draft-dodgers and this was counter to sleepy, provincial, mid-seventies Toronto. On weekends my parents signed out a 16mm projector and films from the public library: Chaplins, National Film Board of Canada films, 1950s sci-fi films like *The Thing from Another World* (from which my psyche recycled nightmare imagery for years), but also avant-garde works like *Un Chien andalou* and *Last Year at Marienbad.*

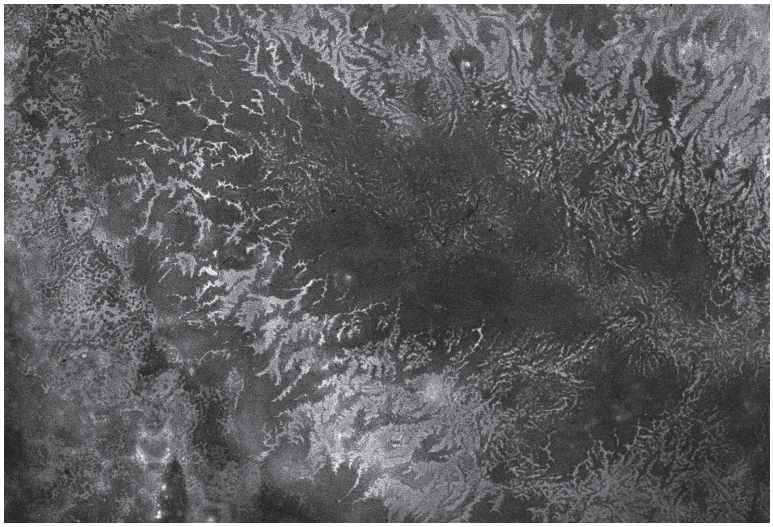
My undergraduate degree is in Film Studies from Queen's University in Canada. In the late 1980s this was a relatively new discipline and we were also at the height of post-modernism. Discourses around identity-politics resonated with me. We watched North American experimental films, activist and experimental documentaries and fiction films from Europe. I loved Canadian diary, autobiographical filmmakers like Philip Hoffman, Barbara Sternberg, Mike Hoolboom, Midi Onodera whose formal

i.
.



86 i. Photograph of the phytogram process (beech, blueberry, maple, fern, pondweed) Duran, 2018

ii.



ii. *Mint Leaf (phytogram)*, Doing, 2014

cinematic experimentations were rooted in the fluctuations of memory, history, landscape, place. The film department was loose in structure. We had access to Super 8, VHS, 16mm equipment and a JK optical printer. Probably we were taught the conventions of normative narrative filmmaking, but I never felt compelled to follow any … I made it up, it was wonderful, following a methodology now called 'process-oriented' filmmaking.

My first film *Tales From My Childhood* (1991) is an experimental 16mm film composed of optically-printed original and archival footage, type, voice-over and a minimal soundscape. It recounts my family's flight from Chile. I feel much love for this film, but it is a complicated love because the film is imperfect and because of the emotion and violence surrounding it.

I've never thought that films stand alone, as isolated phenomena … Experimental films are like the works of the early inventors of motion-picture technology in that they speak to their origins or 'makings', as does the photograph you refer to above. Hollis Frampton stated it perfectly in his essay 'The Invention without a Future': 'In the 1890s, at a time when every film project amounted to a fresh creation under a new logos, everyone who made films did so not only under the re-normalization of a genuinely new technology but one of which they were entirely possessed.' *Pattern/ Chaos* (2015), your film performance I saw at Film Farm with its negotiation between, and probing of, organic content (and processes) and the mechanics of the projectors made me think of this.

KD — Process oriented ... experimentation ... probing ... This brings me to the subject of imperfection. I am very much in favour of imperfection as it opens up subjects rather than closing things down. A perfect work of art renders its audience speechless, probably in awe but incapable of further response. Even avant-garde works of art can function along these lines, in their own quirky way re-creating a bronze statue of a mounted general in a different form, unalterable, solidified, unassailable. Imperfection is open and can be rethought, rephrased, reinvented. It takes courage to share a work that is not perfect as it flies in the face of art history as a sequence of masterpieces.

A diaristic approach, like the one you mention, might be only possible by accepting imperfection as one's life is never perfect. To counter this, one might say: life is perfect but it is very difficult to appreciate all its aspects, especially while being in the middle. I encountered this approach to filmmaking first through the work of British and German filmmakers such

as Derek Jarman and Jürgen Reble. They both worked with Super 8, mixing home-movies with experimental techniques, subverting the original genre into a form of visual poetry both unsettling and beautiful.

Most of my tutors at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Arnhem, were not familiar with experimental film. Fortunately, the department invited guest lecturers every week and once a year there was a festival. It was through these channels that I found out that my new found love for Super 8 was in fact rooted in a rich history of filmmaking. The festival employed me as an assistant to Jürgen Reble, who was invited to give a hand-processing workshop. This was a pivotal moment for me, showing me how experimentation and collaboration can be used as a vocabulary. A language with seemingly infinite possibilities.

FD — I leave my films somewhat raw. I use (imperfectly) digital and analogue media, processes and methodologies — photographs, film and digital video, hand-drawing and digital illustration, analogue and digital found footage, downloaded images, texts and type, animation … The film department's open, messy environment helped me trust these artistic inclinations. When I was there, the department was located in two Victorian houses known collectively as 'Film House' that were dusty, mouldy, run-down, full of uninvited species…

—

KD — Recently, I have developed a technique that allows me to work with plants and photographic emulsion. The plants release natural chemical compounds, similar to photographic developer. The plants leave chemical traces on the emulsion, producing their own image or representation. I worked out this technique step by step, first by trying out different reagents on film. My aim was to explore if it was possible to grow an image on film emulsion. The light sensitive material is embedded in gelatin, which is an animal product made from bones and collagen. Hence, it should be possible to use this as a feeding ground for micro-organisms. My experiments yielded some interesting results but the most striking image was produced in an unexpected way. Some of the fresh leaves that I used produced intricate patterns on the film.

This unexpected success led me to experiment further with leaves and flowers, discovering what I now call 'phytogram'. Besides the beauty of the

images, I am fascinated by the process itself and the fact that plants use chemistry to communicate. This might seem alien to us but one could say that we are actually quite familiar with this form of communication, hence the frequent use of 'chemistry' when describing human communication. Our 'chemistry' can be either mutually beneficent or toxic. Here, there might be an overlap with plant communication. My ongoing quest is to find out if I can tap into this, bringing human and plant closer together.

FD — For me the brilliance of your phytogram method is precisely that plant life is both the subject matter of the image and assists the means of photographic reproduction. Thus it moves towards, as you describe, an inter-species collaboration. Our fingerprints, also recorded with the plant details, expose this. I love both the slowness and immediacy of the method. The act of deliberately exposing precious filmstock to light feels (quietly) transgressive every time.

My practice is research-oriented. I work with texts during my exploration, as theoretical anchors. My recent film, *It Matters What* (2019) is in part a response to feminist and consciousness studies scholar Donna Haraway's essay, 'Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene.' In the film I use imagery created with the phytogram method on 16mm film, in-camera animation, found footage, optical and contact-printing. The film images were processed with organic photo-chemistry, though the piece was finished digitally. Music was composed by Paul Shepherd who used recordings of insects and weather looped through cassette players and then re-ingested, arranged and transformed them digitally.

I've been working on new, large format digital prints from scanned or photographed phytograms and type-based photo-objects. I want to create an archive of the curated and uninvited plant species (those who resist and grow anyway) in urban and untamed landscapes. The places I document are where I work, call home or pass through in some significant way. For instance, I am creating a phytogram map of my neighbourhood, Kensington Market, a dense, diverse mixed-use downtown neighbourhood where residents are often at odds with developers.

One of my interests in the Haraway essay is her invitation to reconsider how we might 'entangle ourselves in/with the "self-organizing powers" of other-than-human processes' and that in these times of environmental devastation and economic unrest we continue to critique and reframe human-exceptionalism.

The question that remains for me is: is it possible to have an ecological film practice or is cinema an act of violence towards other-than-human species?

KD — Of course you have a point! A truly ecological analogue film practice might not be possible. Certainly, this can be applied to digital media as well. The perception of digital media as being immaterial is a myth. Server clusters are extremely energy intensive, digital hardware contains rare earth minerals mined under conditions that are socially and environmentally toxic. The raw materials of a filmstrip are not much better. Most film stocks are polyester based and emulsion contains a multitude of synthetic compounds. By releasing traces of silver-halides and fixative as wastewater during so called 'eco-processing' the ecosystem is put under pressure as well. On top of that, gelatin is an animal product. Analogue film is impossible without slaughterhouses.

But if nothing is worthwhile unless it is perfect, an ecological approach becomes virtually impossible. I love the way you describe your current project in terms of plants and people and propose to describe the value of this in terms of shared space. Maybe it is not possible to share space without contradictions and even casualties. I just learned that orchids 'hack' mycorrhizal networks and 'steal' nutrients from trees. Yet it would be strange to look at orchids as an inherently immoral species. By acknowledging our wickedness it just might be possible to negotiate a shared habitat.

By sharing my phytography practice with other practitioners during workshops, such as the one that you participated in, my goal is to educate such an awareness. Not just from the perspective of a teacher but by educating myself as well! I am very much aware of the fact that these workshops might do as much harm as they do good but it is imperative to push against the careless exploitation of our planet. By seeking another type of relationship, both with my fellow human beings and other creatures, and plants, a different future becomes thinkable. Maybe a meagre start but at least a step away from nihilism.

FD — The gelatin Kodak preferred was reputedly made from the cheeks and ears of Argentinian cattle who were fed mustard greens ... A truly ecological art practice is impossible, and making art for me is a necessity. Like a growing number of film artists, I now exclusively process film using organic photo-chemistry. Your phytogram workshop came at the right moment.

This was after making *Traje de Luces / Suit of Lights* (2018), a work in my *Retrato Oficial* (Official Portrait) series about the legacy of the former dictator Augusto Pinochet. Given the recent protests in Chile, that legacy is more live than people allowed themselves to think. I buried 16mm footage of a Spanish bullfight and spectators. I was investigating commonalities between the Franco and Pinochet regimes and thinking about inequality, human rights, ecology, animal rights, colonialism, the roots of fascism. The microbes in the soil consumed the images and left their time-marks. I rephotographed the decayed film using contact and optical-printing techniques and hand-processed those results. I spent weeks in the darkroom with these difficult images, copying them, washing them, listening to podcasts about Trump's election, Syria, the massive movement of refugees at that time … In retrospect, I was performing some kind of a funeral rite. The tension between the graphic violence and the materiality of the film imagery calls into question at what point we turn away or refuse to see the results of humans' presumed mastery over our citizens, parent over child, other-than-human-species and the land. When I was making the film, a colleague suggested that the microbes and I were participating in an inter-species collaborative performance. But these creatures didn't consent, they just ingested and possibly died from the animal matter made available to them on the buried film.

——

KD — I am deeply connected to the Southern Hemisphere as well. I was born in Australia but my parents moved back to the Netherlands when I was only 2 years old. One of the stories my mother told me was about me playing with a spider bigger than my hand. That really stuck with me. I have never been afraid of spiders; they rather fascinate me. The previously described love for messing with materials is also reflected in a similar enjoyment for observing spiders and other insects, digging into the earth to see the worms coming out, turning over stones to see what bugs live underneath and so forth. I find myself easily transported to an alien world, weird and yet overlapping with our human habitat.

My parents moved to a small university town in the Netherlands. One of the advantages was that there was a small student led cinema in the attic of Hotel de Wereld (Hotel the World), the place where the German army surrendered to Canadian troops, ending the second World War in

the Netherlands. In that cinema I watched Tarkovsky's *Stalker* when it was released. I did not understand much but I was utterly fascinated by the otherworldly mystery of the Zone.

I bring this up because this feels like a perfect example of science-fiction and reality coming together. The whole idea of communicating with aliens and meeting other 'intelligent' races does not work that well for me. On the other hand I see a form of 'science fiction' much closer at hand, creatures like spiders and bugs are little aliens, creeping under our feet. Why not try communicate with those first?

FD — I am preoccupied with archives and their overlaps, and so I like that framing: what the walls of the Hotel de Wereld saw, your toddler-hand with the giant spider, the turned-over earth, the bleak Zone. Science-fiction might be understood as a response to the collective discomfort generated by a Eurocentric mindset, the inability to understand, accept, absorb other-than-human intelligences, no?

The Mulch Spider's Dream (2018) is stunning work, at once other-worldly and intimate. How did you make this film?

My experience of exile and its reckoning is integral to my artistic practice. It is a sense of disquiet never fully abated. My moving image work takes a critical view of social, political and cultural issues through the aperture of the archive, familial and public, assembled and accidental. I am interested in the traces left behind by political and economic systems, the relentless pursuit of progress, of capitalism and what these remains might tell us if we look closely. My films are not activist works though, the work is too abstract and/or poetic formally to be effective activism. As I mentioned, I began making overtly, recognizably autobiographical work. In certain respects I still do, because the way I work is spontaneous and personal – my hand touches every frame. And my films include, in some way or another, all the beings that surround me and the places I pass through during the making, whether I am aware of it or not.

KD — I can easily tap into the sense of disquiet that you are mentioning. As a youngster I felt 'queer' in the sense that I could not fit in with masculine behaviour, but still felt attracted to the other sex. This was formative and also made me receptive to people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds. My parents encouraged me through their more than average interest in countries such as India, Nepal and Russia. Moreover, stories of

displacement and exile are part of my broader family history as well.

When my aunt Nora died, my mother found a bundle of correspondences among her belongings: letters written by my uncle from a series of different locations – Southampton, Algiers, Genova, Colombo and Yogyakarta – ending with a last dramatic letter, written on a small island close to Borneo, where he was executed by the advancing Japanese forces. Based on these letters I was able to make a film, titled *A Journey to Tarakan* (2002), retracing his journey, using both archive footage and my own Super 8 material. Very much in line with your description to do with questioning the 'relentless pursuit of progress' through a re-contextualization of the archive. In this film, the personal and the material come together as well, similar to the methodology underpinning your work.

This project led me to pursue another project (*Saamaka*, 2010), focussed on Suriname, South America, also a country formerly colonized by the Dutch. A friend who worked at the film archive in Amsterdam made me aware of a film shot in the 1920s in the area around Botopasi, a small town in the rainforest. In collaboration with a local artist group, based in Pikin Slee, the adjacent village, we recorded a new soundtrack for this film, overwriting the 'white gaze' so glaringly obvious in the original. Being there, the rainforest had an unexpected effect on me. I became aware of the ecosystem in a much more profound way, experiencing the tangled web of life in a direct, sustained and embodied way. This inspired me to undertake the earlier mentioned research project and seeking to 'grow' images. My film *The Mulch Spider's Dream* is a result of this, using phytography and optical printing in a process-based, improvised way.

FD — I am intrigued by your recounting of *Saamaka*, transforming a closed colonial text to an open one…

I set aside a diaristic approach for a more abstract one after my film *BOY* (1999) which is about the birth of my first son Jacob and the visual poetics of Vancouver where he was born in 1997. At the time, we lived in Vancouver where my husband David was studying architecture. Our families lived in Toronto and David worked long hours. I worked freelance when the baby slept and I spent a lot of time alone with him, as well as with other mothers and babies. This altered my sense of time. Vancouver is in a staggeringly beautiful setting, but in the fall and winter the sun rarely shines, so you never see the mountains. It rains a lot and it is the kind of rain that falls from everywhere. *BOY* is an expression of those realities and the corporeal

connections between birth, nursing, cleaning saliva, piss, shit and snot etc. … and how my experience of motherhood related to the spaces I have lived in. The visuals are of streets, bridges, flickering lights and give way to Jacob's birth rephotographed off a tv-monitor and slowed down. These images are optically printed to the point of near disintegration. The film didn't show then, but it has screened a few times recently. I felt I needed the agreement of my children to represent them and for that they needed to be older. I wanted to foster a good and egalitarian relationship with them while knowing that the parent/child relationship is inevitably one of power. I thought it was a more ethical way to proceed.

—

KD — Cinema can work like a portal. I love to make this happen. An internal or other world can be conveyed to an audience through cinematic means. We live in a world that is shaped by the enormously successful project to organise our environment as a platform for human measure and pleasure. I often feel the need to escape from this human world, not feeling at home in sanitized Euclidian spaces. Modern mainstream cinemas are not very welcoming in this sense, with their rigid organisation and automated, digital systems. Artist-run spaces, galleries and concert halls are much more flexible for the kind of situation that I thrive on.

Through my phytogram method I am increasingly working in barns, farms, gardens and parks. Places not typically associated with cinema! The idea to 'expand' cinema beyond the strict setup associated with the medium forms a central aspect of my work. As explored before, this is not so much born out of a need to change or revolutionize the system, but rather out of a physical necessity. In order to breathe I need some creative space. Expressing my own 'alienness' can only be done when there are not too many rules imposed on me by a restrictive space or production system. Public response to my work has ranged from finding it difficult and hermetic to baroque and versatile. My brain might be still antipodal somehow.

FD — Are you also exhibiting your work in outdoor spaces? I'm drawn to the idea of reducing, combining production and exhibition spaces.

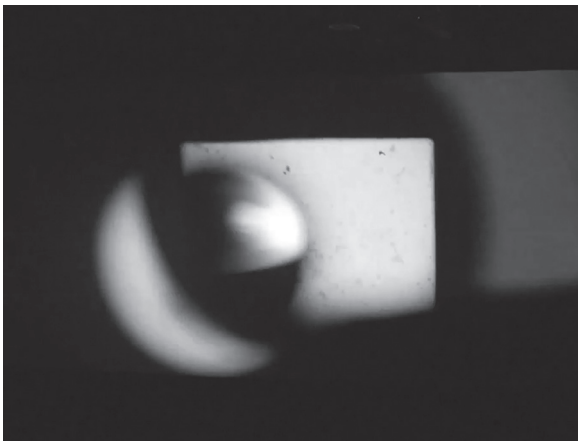
I too owe a huge debt to artist-run centres, micro-cinemas and alternative exhibition spaces. I continue to receive support from artist-run production centres here, I don't think I would have a career without them.

iii.
.



96 iii. *In The Kingdom of Shadows*, Duran, 2006

iv.



v.



iv. *Pattern/Chaos*, Doing, 2015
v. *Boy*, Duran, 1999/2005

vi.



 vi. *Saamaka*, Doing, 2010

Cinema is powerful and immersive. Our portals may be transformative, but difficult for the uninitiated to find the entry points. Artists who work primarily with moving image media, and outside of conventional methods of address, have a difficult time of it. It is the worst of all art-forms because the work requires so much time and there is little to no possibility of financial reward. The political economy of fiction filmmaking is so pervasive, so relentless and so attractive to people. Poetry and painting remain the best analogues and companions for experimental media art.

The politics of exhibition are complicated right now. It feels like a closed system. Festivals charge entry fees and do not pay screening fees. There is a lot of work out there and programmers must understandably default to artists they know, thus excluding those who do not have the means to participate in this game.

KD — When I started making films, I had no idea about distribution networks and the film industry. My work was shown within a network of squatted buildings, artist-run spaces, micro-cinemas and small film festivals. This network changed over time, some initiatives disbanded, others professionalised. I was enticed by my initial success to redirect my attention to bigger festivals and more prestigious institutions. This came with a price, requiring more and more paperwork and following the 'rules of the game'. At some point I realised that I had to compromise too much and I switched back to smaller scale production methods.

In relation to this, I have also re-directed my attention to those festivals, galleries and artist-led organisations that provide a sustainable alternative. This means that my work is still considered 'marginal' by many, but I am wearing this badge with pride. Fortunately, I am not alone in following such an agenda. I am indebted to many facilitators who keep resisting the relentless forces of gentrification. Within this sub-culture, there is definitely a shift from urban to rural, industrial to farm, black-box to rough shed. Pushing this further, taking cinema into the open, is still a challenge, but a very interesting idea for sure!

At present, my practice as an artist and teacher overlap and reinforce each other. Producing art (or experimental film) is often seen as a self-promotional activity and as such people and organisations expect artists to do a lot of work for free. In regard of teaching, the situation is different. This is much more seen as a 'useful' contribution to society and even though financial rewards might not be great, one is not expected to work without

pay. Of late, I am combining workshops and lectures with exhibitions and screenings. Besides being an artist, identifying as a teacher fits me much better than the entrepreneurship did.

FD — I finished an MFA at York University in 2007. In addition to providing time, space and new communities to explore ideas, I received the credentials to teach. I had two amazing young kids, a strong relationship, and a viable graphic design studio but I was miserable because I was not making art. Making films – however slowly, however 'marginal' – on my own terms, is the only option for me. Teaching is rewarding, as is working in the cultural sector. I learn from my students and colleagues every time.

——

KD — My intense experiments with film emulsion have also drawn my attention to the structure of the crystals and gelatin themselves. I love the fact that film incorporates a sense of chaos. The structure of the film's emulsion is not organised in a grid but in a much more random pattern of successive layers of molecules. There are multiple ways to bring this quality forward, resulting in visual 'noise'. This is a well-known strategy in music, resulting in a whole genre with several sub-genres, either popular, underground or recognised. In film this is much more obscure. The loss of visual recognisability might be more disconcerting.

What I find interesting about this notion of noise, is that it can help to explore how meaning is constructed. When do we understand something as noise and when does a pattern emerge? Another way to explore this is to think about the emergence of language. Typically we see our ability to use language as an ultimate quality that humans possess, setting us apart from all other creatures. Still, the world is full of cries, whistles, groans and other signals, like the chemical signals between plants that I described earlier. A lot of these signals are not picked up by us. That is why I find it fascinating to explore moments when language breaks down. Through a willingness to explore chaos and the meaningless, it might become possible to pick up signals that were previously left unexplored.

FD — I began my art practice with film and remain attached to its physicality. The reduction to tiny, discrete images, its presence, surface/substrate and strata. How it captures dust and everything in the air as

you dive further into the image, turning it in on itself, by shooting, re-photographing, decaying it, or reprinting it. This process diffuses the representational image and meaning (that you mention) as it makes clear how impossible or elusive is our pursuit of film as a 'pure' art form. I approach digital and analogue media, whether captured by a lens, drawn or sampled, in a similar way. It is all medium to me. I appreciate the accident and unpredictability of film, and say photocopiers, as much as video static and tv roll-bars, and the contemporary digital artefact … especially with the current obsession with resolution. There is beauty in what these imperfections reveal about their production, exhibition and archiving technologies.

I examined the lie that people ran screaming at the sight of the Lumière train when really (North American and European) audiences had been familiar with performance spectacle and optical toys for at least a century. My film *In the Kingdom of Shadows* (2006) came out of this. The piece documents a paragraph typeset on an early twentieth-century Ludlow Linecaster letterpress. The text is from Maxim Gorky's 1896 review of the Lumière Brothers' film *L'Arrivée d'un Train à La Ciota*t. The words melt into a pool of lead, and the alchemical magic of printing is linked to that of cinema. This thought brings me back to your thought at the start of our conversation regarding cinema as a tool born out of a performative approach to art and life.

A written or printed word, however it was generated, is an image. When we learn to read character based languages, meaning emerges from the patterning formed by the letters, but also the negative spaces or absences that hold the letters, words, sentences and paragraphs together. That's so beautiful. Before this, those shapes are 'noise'. I've always held this thought as parallel to how film cameras and projectors work. The opening and closing of the shutter.

KD — In praise of shadows! Or paraphrasing Donna Haraway, in conjunction with Jun'ichirō Tanizaki: Let us stick with the trouble and celebrate both light and darkness, the meaningful and the unintelligible.

Helga Fanderl /
Nicky Hamlyn

Discovering the Pro-filmic

Nicky Hamlyn studied fine art at Reading University where he became interested in film. Later, he joined the London Filmmakers' Co-op and was co-founder of the journal *Undercut*. His work includes 16mm films, expanded works and video. He often uses the camera as a means to explore his immediate environment, testing ideas about representation and the productive relationship between the lens, the frame and the form of his subject matter. Hamlyn has written widely on artists' film and video, published his book *Film Art Phenomena* in 2003 and recently co-edited the books *Kurt Kren: Structural Film*, with Simon Payne and A.L. Rees, and *Experimental and Expanded Animation: Current Perspectives and Practices*, with Vicky Smith. He is Professor of Experimental Film at the University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury and Tutor in Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art.

Helga Fanderl initially studied German, Romance Languages and literature. After working as a professor of literature, in Frankfurt, for many years, she decided to study art. She attended the Städelschule academy of art in Frankfurt and then Cooper Union in New York. Since then she has developed a unique Super 8mm film practice. Her films are partially systematic but the everyday subjects that she documents and the process of editing in-camera make for a form of shooting that is responsive and lyrical. She is a prolific filmmaker and often curates and introduces the screenings of her own work in unique programmes. Fanderl's films have won many awards including the Coutts Contemporary Art Award and the German Film Critics Association Prize for Experimental Film.

Nicky Hamlyn — How did you become interested in filmmaking?

Helga Fanderl — I had studied German, French and Italian literature and language. I loved poetry and dense, short forms of prose, meaning musicality and rhythm. I felt a deep wish to become a poet, but it took me a long time to find the right medium. Not words, but film images, not a pen or a typewriter, but a Super 8 camera helped me to find true poetic expression. But my love for poetry and literature found its way into my films.

I discovered what attracts me about film more or less by chance, attending an artist friend's workshop 'Super8 as an Artistic Medium'. I bought my first used S8 camera, a Nizo, a S8 projector which scratched my first films, and a viewer. The small and nice group went out filming in the same places, first at Frankfurt Railway Station, then somewhere in nature near the city. We projected and watched the processed films together and talked about them. That was my first visual instruction in film. The Swiss filmmaker Urs Breitenstein confronted me with film as an artistic medium. I seemed to be the only participant who had not yet been touched by experimental film, which Peter Kubelka taught then at the art school of Frankfurt. I began to pay attention to formal decisions when filming, got to know the camera and how it worked, to operate it freely, and to understand film as structuring and shaping time.

The film course did not last long and ended just when I began to enjoy going out into the world with my camera. I continued to film, trying out a lot of things and developing my camera skills, my sense of finding images and rhythms. I loved the moment when, looking through the viewfinder, I saw an image of what I was interested in – not any longer the totality of the place and what was happening around me – and was able to concentrate on what inspired me.

I slowly learned in-camera editing and enjoyed the intensity of direct filmmaking, the close relationship between my eye on the viewfinder, one hand holding and the other operating the camera, and the object of my interest as well as my cinematic conception. Investigating the latter, I felt and reflected somehow what moved me to film while trying at the same time to transfer the experience into a purely visual film language.

I would like to add that thanks to friends I got very close to the visual arts, above all to painting and drawing. I even attended classes of art history, but it was more important to see and study good work in museums and galleries. The love for painting and drawing became very important for my

filmmaking.

I wonder why I was never really interested in photography. I believe that the temporal aspect of film, frame-by-frame, tempo and rhythm, makes the difference. Pushing the trigger, I hear the duration of every take. I sense the 1, 6, 9, 18, 24, 36 or 54 frames per second (depending on the type of camera). I like to find the right image and time-form in correspondence with the subject matter and my inner vision. One could say that I like to play the camera as my instrument, making ‘music for the eyes’ (as Peter Kubelka described it).

Last but not least, I have been fond since my childhood of everything moving and rhythmic in nature, ‘nature cinema’, the elements, the seasons, light and shadow.

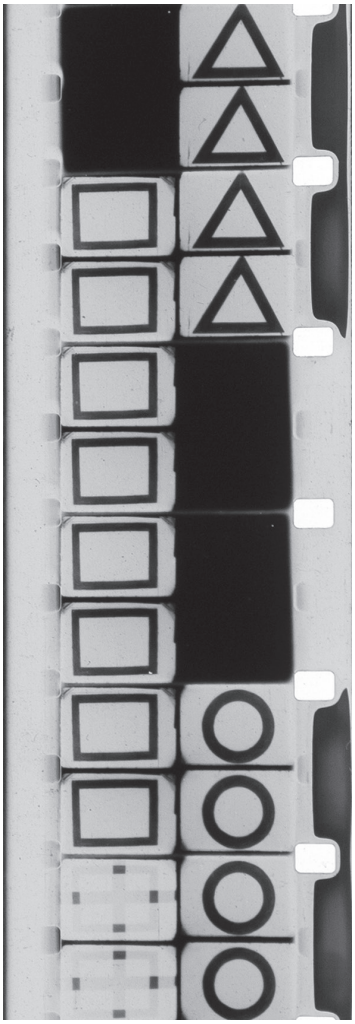
It seems difficult to me to make a hierarchy of what is important for my filmmaking. Maybe it needs the complexity of all the different aspects nourishing my work: the visual, the touch, the gesture implying the body, my emotions, ideas and reflections. If all work together in the moment of experiencing and exploring a situation, a place, a figure, an action, a good film might come out.

At times I feel that it is also a gift. This is also true for finding my subjects when I have my camera with me and feel free to discover what I see around me. Usually I am surprised by something happening, moving me, provoking my interest and desire to make a film, looking through the viewfinder, looking for the right framing, and to sense a certain enthusiasm and necessity. It is often a rhythmic movement, the quality of light, a simultaneity of several visual events that inspire me to use the camera.

In your films I find a similar sensitivity and approach related to the visual arts and to art history, not only to the traditions of experimental film. You are probably less direct, more considerate of formal decisions constructing the image in space and time and in your editing. You always impress me with your analytic and theoretical strength. How do see these connections?

NH — As a schoolboy, discovering Mondrian was important. I also loved Bonnard and my painting was heavily influenced by him in terms of the juxtapositions of colour, but also his spare touch, the way you can see through the paint to the canvas. I liked the idea of a scrubby mesh of brush marks, the light touch that’s implied. Mondrian impressed me by his single-mindedness, his linear development, the careful pursuit of a narrow field explored in depth. I also liked the economy of means in his mature work,

i.



ii.



i. *Rhythm 1,* Hamlyn, 1974
ii. *Rhythm 2,* Hamlyn, 1974

though not so much the *Boogie-Woogie* period.

These impressions have fed into my filmmaking, at least insofar as I have tried to aim for an economy of means, and for things to be tied into the structure – I'm a classicist, not a Baroque person. (I was put off the Baroque and, *a fortiori*, the Rococo, by my art history teacher, for whom 15th Century Venetian painting was the ideal). In terms of structure, I realised early on that if one wasn't working with narrative, where story dictates a lot of the formal decisions, there had to be some other way of organising material.

In *Silver Street* (1974), which was my first properly edited film, I took some simple decisions: one indoor and one outdoor shot every hour, on the hour, from dawn to dusk. I decided on a set of repeating camera positions, with a mostly static camera, so as to focus on changes of light and other variations within the frame. I try to derive formal decisions from the morphology of the pro-filmic, so that there's some kind of logic operating. I think this is something we have in common. In films of yours, such as *Mädchen* (Girls, 1995) and *Flugzeuge II* (Aeroplanes 2, 2000), the camera tracks repeating actions or movements in a way that gives a strong sense of simultaneous image capture-formation and overall structuring through repetition: the repetitive structure is found in the repeating subject matter.

HF — Could you describe the importance of film as your medium rather than another and your way of finding your subjects?

NH — Once I got to the Fine Art Department of Reading University as a painting student, I felt the burden of art history pressing down. At around the same time, I participated in a film project that one of my tutors, Ron Haselden, was running. I knew absolutely nothing about film, but I was able to draw on my technical knowledge of photography, as I had a little darkroom at home with a developing tank and a contact printer. Armed with this knowledge I made something quite ambitious in technical terms, re-filming 35mm slides, making double exposures with colour separations etc. It was all shot on a single roll of Kodachrome and it all came out more or less perfectly. That opened my eyes to an entirely new medium. I felt unburdened by history. At that stage I knew nothing about artists' film – but then had to decide how to proceed with my first proper film, i.e. one made self-consciously.

I saw some work by the late English filmmaker David Crosswaite, made on un-split Standard 8 film, which yields four images within the 16mm frame

when it's not split for 8mm projection, so for my next two films, *Rhythm 1* and *Rhythm II* (1974) I used the same kind of Standard 8 stock, deploying a combination of dice-throws to determine shot length, and a permutational system, based on stasis and movement of camera and subject, to generate decisions respectively. This approach was influenced by talks given by some of the Systems artists at Reading, specifically Malcolm Hughes, who used complex numerical processes to determine the forms of his abstract reliefs. At this point I wasn't so aware of working with time *per se*, but I was conscious of pace and rhythm. I learned this in the editing of *Silver Street*, where I became aware that one is juggling with the balance between image and duration: what are the criteria by which one determines the length of a shot? Rhythm comes out of that juggling process. One also learns that duration is as substantial in this context as the image: it becomes a material component of the work.

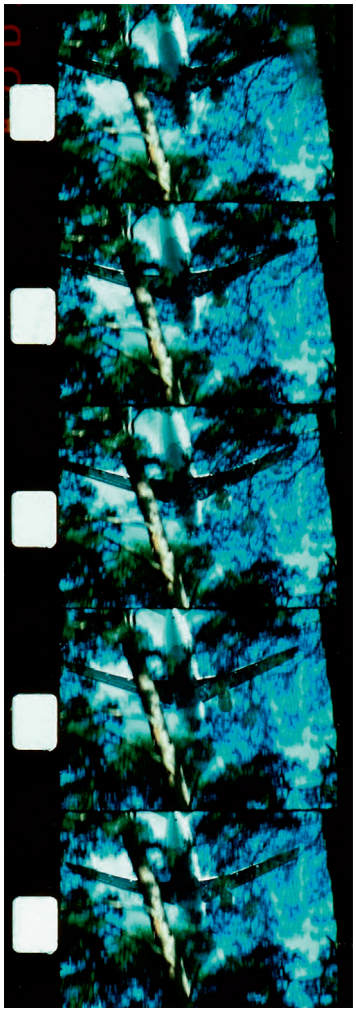
The rhythms of *Silver Street* were partly determined by the absence of proper editing facilities at the college: all we had was a projector and a splicer, so I was having to project my camera original then try to make decisions as I was watching. I soon gave up on this and decided to simply count seconds in my head then translate that into frames. This accounts for the rhythmic quality. This experience got me thinking about the degree to which the technology determines the outcome, something which has animated my interest in film ever since. I think what I found, and find, challenging about film, is how to deal with the intractability of the pro-filmic. A painting is created *ex nihilo*, but with film one is already confronted with a scene, space etc., potential material, pre-formed. Then one has to decide how to manage and channel what's there. One is always working with found material in this sense, although it's not material until it's recorded. This often feels like a fait accompli, but that's what's exciting about film. Duration and rhythm are subsequent ways of shaping the material. I always found this gave me relief from the anxiety of trying to make a photograph, where everything is done there and then: it's a do-or-die momentary event. It also relieved me of the immense difficulty of creating form from scratch, as a painter has to do.

I find my subjects through the medium though. They are there potentially but they don't precede it, rather it's a process of something like creative discovery, rather in the way you find things by looking through the viewfinder, and operating the camera while looking, as you said before, but the discovery is also formative, through the act of framing. Recently I have

iii.



iv.



iii. *Brunnen (Fountain)*, Fanderl, 2000
iv. *Flugzeuge II (Aeroplanes II)*, Fanderl, 2001

decided to more or less abandon editing and simply present what comes out of the filming process. Editing seems too much to involve arranging things according to intuitive aesthetic decisions, whereas increasingly I'm interested in things that may not look very pleasing but which, rather, allow the work to escape my grasp. At the same time, with some of the new work I am intensively re-working material according to a rigid procedure, however this too is in the service of generating the unexpected, even if that seems paradoxical.

HF — How do you prefer presenting your work?

NH — The single screen work is best seen on the best possible projector in a good auditorium that's as dark as possible. The projection at Media City Festival, in Windsor, Ontario, which is supplied by James Bond from Chicago, with his amazing Kodak 50 projectors, is superb, almost too forensic: one sees so much detail in the image that wouldn't otherwise be visible. I have also made a few gallery installations that are designed to work in situations where I don't have control of the light levels. The most recent such piece, *Homage Schwarz Weiss Grau (1930)*, which was made for a Bauhaus 100 year anniversary show in 2019, uses the white walls of the gallery as the grey component, while the white component is the areas illuminated by the projector lamp and the black components are the black areas of the film frame, as well as two pieces of black paper stuck to the wall, onto which the image is projected.

HF — You are teaching film, programming and writing on film. How does this inform your work? Is there sometimes a conflict?

NH — Recently I was asked to give a lecture to 1st year Fine Art students on 'The Cinematic'. I started with the Lumière brothers, then showed clips from Robert Paul, D.W. Griffith, John Huston, Hitchcock, Michael Powell and Antonioni, but I also added a critique of the concept and so finished by showing slides of para-cinematic works by Tony Conrad, Anthony McCall and Cathy Rogers as a counter-blast. This was my way of dealing with a conflict. I felt a conflict more strongly, however, when I worked in cutting rooms at the BBC in the 1980s, when they still had 120 16mm editing rooms. I was very careful not to let the working processes there influence my own methods. It starts to feel strange when you're surrounded by people who accept

unquestioningly the ethos of the corporation and have a very rigidly instrumental understanding of media, so I kept my mouth shut most of the time, though there were sympathetic characters working there too.

Can you elaborate on the structuring process you're working with when you shoot a film, and say something about how you find your subjects, and can you also say something about how the work has evolved and talk a bit about recent films?

HF — I discover and come across my subject when I am free to stroll with my camera. Often, I feel attracted by a rhythmic movement or light and shadow shaping and transforming reality. I have to find out immediately if there is a chance to respond cinematically to my observations. Looking through the viewfinder, I try to understand what I see and sense, and to question my interest before thinking about the possibilities to shoot a film corresponding to my vision.

Some examples: When I saw girls in nice little dresses running from one tree to another in a park in Paris, I decided to participate with my camera following their fast movements with short and very short cuts, thus recreating the dynamics of the game (*Mädchen*). In *Brunnen* (Fountain, 2000), boys 'misuse' hockey sticks, striking water fountains and performing an amazing choreography in a fountain. I looked for a viewpoint that conveyed the complexity of many water fountains going up and down rhythmically, of the boys dancing with their hockey sticks and other children moving in the water landscape. I decided to film this scene continuously at 24fps, in slow-motion slightly (Super8 normally runs at 18fps) . Sometimes I return to a place, waiting for better weather and light conditions, or I explore the subject in order to be sure whether I want to make a film or not. It took me quite a time to experience the right moment when light and shadow, a breeze, a blue sky and white clouds inspired me to shoot *Umlauftank* (Circulation Tank, 2017), an amazing pink and blue industrial building at the Landwehrkanal in Berlin. There are some places and subjects I like to return to once in a while and make a new film. I have a series of *Mona Lisa* films for example, showing visitors taking photos, videos and selfies in front of the famous painting; a series of films of birds flying around in a big aviary; and a series of films of a persimmon tree without leaves, whose ripe fruit birds devour in one day.

For each individual film I try to find the appropriate form depending on what I wish to make visible and express. I am very much interested

in creating complex images, paying attention to layers (foreground, middle-ground, background), so that every square centimetre tends to be alive. Structuring time through pace and rhythm is equally important. It is challenging to catch the moment, to make a film edited in-camera, never losing contact with the subject and my vision of the film. I love the concentration and intensity while creating a film and easily forget about real time and reality. It is a trance-like state of mind, yet I am aware of what I see, sense, feel, think, imagine and decide while handling the camera. There is always a risk of failure I have to cope with. In this kind of direct filmmaking I mean to create the film not only chronologically in the camera, but above all in my imagination. Three minutes of film (the approximate length of a Super 8 roll) might seem to be very short, but filming shot-by-shot, in one gesture, can take a long time. When I project and see a film for the first time it is the first time that it exists outside of my mind. This can be a dramatic moment if I feel a difference between the inner film I remember and the film outside of me. Sometimes it takes time to accept the 'real thing' and its qualities before showing a film.

NH — Can you talk about how the work has evolved and say something about recent work?

HF — My skills and experiences, my knowledge and reflections concerning film and filmmaking certainly have evolved, but I wonder how far this is true for my work. On the one hand there is a continuity related to serendipity, in-situ filming, in-camera editing and the way I show my films. The essence of what inspires me and why I love the medium is still the same. I try to avoid routine and mannerism and to film with the freshness of a first, and the intensity of a last, encounter.

But I do not shoot as much as I used to. I don't feel as light-hearted about filming since film stock, developing and prints have become so expensive. Worrying about a possible failure intensifies all the questions concerning my inspiration, vision, ideas and the necessity of making a film. Fortunately, once I sense the desire to shoot I manage to overcome my doubts and feel free to film. My trance-like state of mind while filming has probably become more intense, my framing is richer in variations and my approach to structuring time more complex. What has certainly evolved is the growing of body of my work (visible in my catalogue raisonné on my website: http://helgafanderl.com/) and the variety of my programmes.

v.



 v. *Mädchen (Girls)*, Fanderl, 1995

vi.



vii.



vi. and vii. *Silver Street,* Hamlyn, 1974

Curating my own films is essential. Meanwhile, I combine composed reels of Super 8 prints and 16mm blow-ups, so that the origin of the bigger format from S8 becomes transparent. With the help of grants I have also had 16mm inter-negatives and prints made from S8 reversal originals, because there is no longer a print stock for S8 contact prints.

From the very beginning my screenings have had a kind of performative character (they are based on a unique and ephemeral programme, and the projector is visible and audible because I set it up in the auditorium). This practice evolved. Whenever I have had the chance to invest in an interesting space, which is not made for showing films, I have enjoyed building a cinema for presenting my work. Installations and exhibitions became an extension of working with my films.

Our approach to filmmaking is very personal and inspired by aesthetic and artistic concerns and an awareness of form. In a time where the 'political' and 'political correctness' in the arts seem to prevail, I wonder how you feel about not joining in with the 'discourse'. I rarely see political work which is convincing as an artwork, opening my mind and inspiring me. I think that good political art, or film, is most difficult to make. I wish I could, because there are so many threatening problems in the world and we can do so little to resolve them as individuals. Although I am very political in my thinking, and commitment as a (world) citizen (and believe that you are too), my filmmaking is the expression of something different, that is maybe deeper and related to voices in artistic practices and concerns throughout history. I felt guilty, for a long time, to concentrate, in my films, on my personal vision of moments in real life that touch and enchant me with their beauty and liveliness. And I still wonder whether they can give something to the world. Some friends tell me that one can consider my filmmaking as 'political' in another sense, not working for the entertainment machine and profit, being so independent and free. How do you feel about these questions?

NH — These debates about politics and art have always gone on and always will. When I was a student I had periods of feeling guilty about not making socially responsive work, but I soon realised that since there will always be burning political issues to address, if all artists did that Art would wither away and exist only to serve as propaganda or to illustrate and explain political problems that have nothing to do with the proper concerns of art.

The late writer Michael O'Pray, whose formation was as a working-class communist activist, used to dismiss the so-called political art of the day – broadly the 1980s, the Thatcher era – as 'bad faith' art. For him it was work that was made by people who felt that was what they ought to be doing, not what they truly wanted to make or were excited by. In other words, it was inauthentic. This is a separate question to the one of whether artists are competent to make useful political films. In the 1970s, groups like Cinema Action dedicated themselves to collaborating with groups of people involved in specific struggles. In immersing themselves in the lives of these people and their problems, they put themselves in a precarious situation, eking out a marginal existence far from the artworld and its temptations.

Why would the artworld, with its big money and poor employment practices, care about the political struggles of the poor? So-called 'political art' that's made for the artworld seems like a self-defeating project to me. If you want to get involved in political struggles, become an activist. Art is the place where new forms of visual thinking are discovered and forged through working with materials. The creative thinking that the experience of this work can generate is liberating. This connects to your last point about not working for the entertainment machine. Practices such as your showing work in your studio to an invited audience constitutes a form of resistance to consumer culture. It is also a genuinely 'relational' practice, unlike a lot of the more gimmicky, high-profile relational work, since the discussion is around a shared aesthetic object that exists as a focal point for experience and discussion.

Neil Henderson /
Andrew Vallance

The Wind in the Trees

Neil Henderson studied time-based media at the Kent Institute of Art and Design, Maidstone, in the late 1990s and then at The Slade School of Art for his MA. He originally made spectacular ‘expanded cinema’ pieces for up to 100 Super8 projectors that produced mosaic patterns of colour and light. More recently his 16mm films have involved durational strategies to document landscape features and reveal the way in which natural processes, such as the tide, change the shape and image of the land. He has also made films that centre on photographic processes, notably polaroid images, and the way in which different types of duration feature in fixing an image of light.

Andrew Vallance also studied at KIAD, one year behind Henderson, and then later at the Royal College of Art for an MA and PhD. His video works concern the urban environment, its sedimented histories and relational narratives. Vallance has also developed numerous curatorial projects. With Simon Payne and Tate Modern/Tate Britain he co-curated Assembly: A Survey of Recent British Artists’ Film and Video, 2008-13. Vallance and Payne have also programmed numerous events under the banner of Contact. He has championed experimental filmmaking of all descriptions and has continually explored discursive forms of programming that brings artists together in conversation.

Henderson and Vallance now find themselves, more by default than design, in senior educational roles (at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and the Arts University Bournemouth). Their regular and typically wide-ranging discussions, which cover teaching, culture and commuting are directly echoed in their conversation here.

Andrew Vallance — My journey to work, from London to Bournemouth, can seem lengthy and tedious at times, which I know is also your experience of commuting. Being between places and activities can be a chore but it can also allow thoughts to develop. No doubt our conversation will largely take place between places.

Neil Henderson — I agree. Travelling from Whitstable to Cambridge can be dull, but also a time for unexpected thoughts to settle and take hold.

i.



AV — Travel can also offer film-like possibility – sequenced movement, passing occurrence, unknown potential – and instinctively I find myself drawn to cinema's reflective, seemingly incidental, moments.

Over the summer, I belatedly saw Christian Petzold's *Barbara* (2012). I liked its sense of place, its nuanced invocation of a repressive political sensibility. But in recommending it to a friend I found myself focusing on the scenes when the film's protagonist, *Barbara*, cycles in real-time past wind-blown trees.

i. *Whitstable to Cambridge*, Neil Henderson, 2020



I think I first noticed this in Eric Rohmer's *The Green Ray* (1986). Later, I became aware of Christian Keathley's conception of the cineaste and his contention that an understanding of cinema can be based in instinct, personal memory and association, rather than academic evaluation. He contends that there is a need to reconnect with this cinephiliac spirit, that something is lost when work seeks, needs, scholarly legitimacy. He isn't suggesting a discarding of theory, but contends that film isn't some sort of 'puzzle', which needs an answer, and suggests that we need to embrace a pluralistic reading of film, one that can acknowledge the wind in the trees.



There's an observational quality to this – seeing and hearing natural, uncanny, imagined phenomena – and I know this might sound overly

romantic … but I feel these moments are quintessentially cinematic: a coming together of life and art and technology. For me the most arresting work occurs in the gaps – somewhere between instinct and learning, memory and reason – and we need to seek these gaps in art (and life).

NH — There's a great line in *Night Moves*, a neo-noir with Gene Hackman from 1975, when his wife asks him if he wants to see the new Rohmer film and Hackman replies, 'I saw a Rohmer film once; it was like watching paint dry'. In that moment the director, Arthur Penn, wants to have his cake and eat it! He wants to appear sufficiently cultured to be able to refer to an 'arty auteur' but also to be able to knock it down: 'like watching paint dry'. I think that you can substitute 'the wind in the trees' for 'paint drying'. But that throwaway line illustrates the tension between the narrative action and those wind in trees moments that are in all films. Even in *Night Moves*, there are moments where there has to be some paint drying somewhere in a shot or sequence. Maybe the director, or the writer knew that anyway.



There's a scene in Dovzhenko's *Earth* (1930) of a field of long grass blowing in the wind. I remember being shown this film as a student and that's the only thing I really remember about it. Now when I see long grass blowing, I immediately think of this film. It's a strange reflex-memory. Perhaps I was in a place where I was becoming attuned to things away from narrative and plot and being drawn toward the things happening behind, or to the side

of, the action. This was a way into thinking about how films could be solely about this kind of subject, which of course was very much present at the start of cinema. In those Lumière films, the wind in the trees had a *charge* to it for early viewers. They would have seen it very clearly. The experimental work I'm interested in is looking for the 'wind in the trees.'



AV — I've always thought Penn's slur was revealing! New Hollywood's directors learnt from the nouvelle vague that films could be made by fans of film, but other more critical elements weren't so readily embraced. They still largely wanted to make films about men being men, with characters being an expression of *their* own post-sixties crisis. I say this as someone who's still drawn to these films, particularly the oddities, like *The Long Goodbye* (1973). It offers a conflicted and confusing Los Angeles, Elliot Gould's Marlowe is bemused, stripped of 'mean street' surety. I first watched it because I knew and loved Chandler's novel and was intrigued by Robert Altman and Leigh Brackett's adaption and casting. Could Gould be any less like Bogart? which of course is the point.

You also see this when Alain Resnais became something of an inspiration for the likes of Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry. They absorbed his aesthetic splendour but his more profound temporal ideas weren't troubled. I thought Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019) was indicative of this superficial sensibility. At least when James Ellroy revisits the past it's to more provocative effect. Contemporary Hollywood doesn't usually allow for time outside of cinema's referential frame. This is one of the reasons I found my way to experimental cinema, by way of Antonioni

and others. I wanted more time for reflection and to be unsettled.

We never remember a complete work. We're always remaking films. Sometimes a memory can reappear years after viewing and re-announce its importance. I can't remember really the narrative of *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), which I saw many years ago at the NFT, but I've never forgotten the scene in which Ivan is seated in a cart, which is full of apples, and how some of the apples roll off the back as it slowly moves away. It may not sound like much, but there was something about this 'accidental' action – the light, movement, actuality, quietude – that stayed with me and still seems essential, transcendent. Experimental cinema can make a virtue of those moments.



NH — How do you get into 'experimental cinema' these days? I've been thinking a lot about what experimental cinema is, or was, and how I got into to it. With my film students, I keep thinking all I have to do is show them the way I got into it and it'll work for them too! This is not happening, as you can imagine. Although for the last few years I've been showing *HEAD* (1968) the Monkees film, which is full of allusions to experimental cinema: Paul Sharits's 'flicker', surrealism, even Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage. It's interesting that you mention Gondry and Jonze, who are certainly two of the more inventive narrative filmmakers from the last few decades. Both came to filmmaking from music video. I think Jonze started out making skateboard videos (many of which are genuinely innovative). The more alternative artists tended to have videos made by more art-minded filmmakers who must have been familiar with the historic avant- gardes.

Music video, at least in the 80s and 90s, was a place to try out those things out and I think that generation who came out of films school in the 80s had certainly absorbed aspects of experimental film through art school. I'm sure Al Rees spoke about this to me as a student. He used to challenge students to show him an advert that had not been influenced by the avant-garde. I think that's how I discovered experimental filmmakers or at least experimental techniques, through music video. Sonic Youth commissioned a load of filmmakers to make a video for each one of their songs on the *Goo* LP. It's quite an impressive list of soon to be Hollywood auteurs: Todd Haynes, sleazy underground types, Richard Kern, and NYC art world people, Tony Oursler. I would say this video was the most important thing that got me thinking outside of 'narrative' because it's full of lots of great visual ideas for a curious 17-year-old. Is music video still a place from which you might find a way into an experimental film?



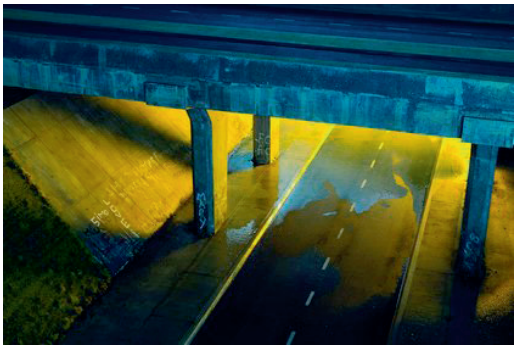
AV — Looking back, I couldn't claim to have truly understood this complexity. But I was aware that something different was going on. I remember the excitement of seeing stuff like Talking Heads' 'Once in a Lifetime' and Laurie Anderson's 'O Superman' on *Top of the Pops*, Japan's 'Ghosts' and Public Image Ltd's 'Careering' on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and becoming more aware of other connections, like Bruce Conner's video for David Byrne and Brian Eno's 'Mea Culpa'. Years before, Bruce Conner's film *Breakaway* (1966) featured a young Toni Basil who later directed and choreographed the video for 'Once in a Life Time'. The whole up-town, down-town, hip-hop and art scene of New York seemed especially alluring

to a Croydon boy. It's hard not to venerate (and envy) this age as a time of relative artistic freedom.

Earlier this year I saw Jeremy Deller's *Everybody in the Place* (2019), a documentary in the form of performative lecture that considers Britain's development through dance culture, and the progression from House to Acid to Rave. He uses this evolution to trace the shift from an industrial to post-industrial landscape, to reflect on the fracturing of society that Margaret Thatcher's election initiated, the world before social media and all that led us to our current situation.

More recently I saw Mark Leckey's exhibition *O' Magic Power of Bleakness* (2019), which contains similar cultural currents, and more class-based hedonism. The piece makes a virtue of low-res material. That signifier of authenticity, is a relational childhood fever-dream. Watching *Everybody in The Place*, it was striking how the figures did seem more free, perhaps this is projected nostalgia - although the rural rave wasn't my favoured destination! Leckey's installation is grandly conceived, it's located under a replica motorway bridge, but it has evidently emanated from personal experience and under the flyover there is the possibility for personal reflection and revelry.

Is it possible to see images from the 1970s and '80s and them not seem to be layered with social significance? This was a time of sustained cultural clash, on the cusp of the social-media revolution. Was it some form of last stand? Back then, an alternative political ideology was still known, still believed in, pitch battles were being fought, and lost, a defeat that allowed business solutions to be applied to every strata of society, including art practice.



NH — I have a suspicion that the students I have are not as engaged or as curious about film histories or film practices and processes, as perhaps we were. My experience of the 80s and 90s was defined by the canon, and you had to take it on and accept it. Boomer era culture, Woodstock, the Beatles, New American Cinema, whatever. Our generation were born just after that period, and you felt like you missed it. The way that culture and history was fed to me was that it was something you missed. The students I engage with seem much more in-tune to the continuous now, maybe there's less time to reflect or look back. Their phone is constantly keeping them tuned into now. Maybe that's more liberating.

AV — That's an interesting notion. Our generation straddles the analogue and digital ages. E.H. Carr observed that the historian is always the product of history. Our formative influences will always out.

I've found that it's difficult to predict, year on year, what experimental work will resonate with students and for them the idea of something being experimental often seems to be connected to the gallery. But we came of age at a time when our teachers eschewed the gallery. Other bourgeois affectations such as emotion, narrative, autobiographical expression were also discounted. Their stance was always critical, which taught us a lot – *if it looks like an ad, it is an ad …* – but it was founded in a different era. The rejection of the gallery now seems anachronistic, particularly to younger generations. The ideological rationale may still be valid – there's much about the art world which is problematic – but expectations have changed and so have the sites of engagement.

NH — Most of the students I deal with always want higher resolution in their films. Have you ever met anyone who wanted lower resolution? Why is this?

I remember explicitly thinking, as a student, that I wanted things to look rougher, less smooth and with more grit. Something that was in opposition to the mainstream. It wasn't nostalgia but about stepping outside, being apart from the conventions associated with TV and Cinema. But now, that noise, grit, grain, dust is only nostalgia.

I've been watching Lana Del Rey videos of late and most seem to be shot on film (though it could be a simulation of film in some instances). They're covered in grit, grain, noise. The film's frame-lines, though hazy and uneven, are usual present in the video as an image also. The sprockets

are also visible. That's a trend I see everywhere now. It's an interesting development, as though the grain isn't enough to stress 'film-ness'. You need the sprockets to be sure. Lana Del Rey's videos are examples of low resolution as nostalgia, the past corresponds with sadness, and in that sense they complement the tone of a lot of her songs, particularly from the new record. There's no criticality to this (they're just music videos after all), and she probably hasn't seen historic work that may make a virtue of this kind of stuff. Maybe it doesn't matter. Here's a mainstream artist making films that revel in materiality. It's probably a pretty good way to introduce the uninitiated to film texture and material.

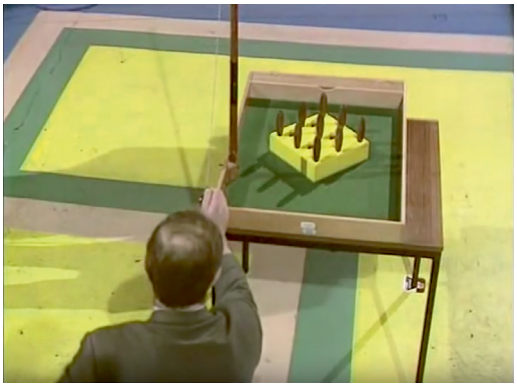


AV — A few years ago, a friend showed me the new Polaroid filter on her iPhone. She was thrilled that it gave her images a non-digital look. But of course very soon everyone was using it and it became the *de facto* iPhone look. The further we get from the analogue realm the more seductive its aesthetic becomes. With the advent of high definition video, the importance of colour-grading increased. When all images are potentially crystal-clear differentiating them becomes even more vital.

NH — Recently, the algorithm on YouTube has been suggesting I watch short films about life in the east end of London or the north of England in the 1970s. I must have clicked on something, months back or even years, and it's decided to throw these short films up at me. Does it know I'm thinking about the 1970s too much?!

One is a documentary about a pie and mash shop. It's shot beautifully,

very straight with an interview with the woman who runs it and scenes of people eating pies. I think these must have been small features on the local news. But what is so striking about the film is how close the 1970s are to the 1930s, because that's really what this looks like. People look a bit ill, the clothes are very plain, there's clearly not much to do, there are only three channels on TV. There are no distractions, only pies! In that same decade Yorkshire Television produced a series called *The Indoor League*, pub games broadcast to the nation. Things like table skittles, shove ha'penny, and arm wrestling. It's extraordinary to watch.



AV — I've also noticed that about the 1970s. It looks so desolate. Recently I found on YouTube some footage of the Brixton front-line from the late '70s, which was shot by London Weekend Television, and it's another world. At that time, I remember seeing film footage of Harlem, which looked like a war-zone, with whole blocks lying in ruin, and initially not understanding it was contemporary America.

When algorithms suggest material it's always within the same frame and format, where the past's differences get flattened and reduced to being yet more digital ephemera, often as a shortened clip, uprooted from context, and even untethered from one's search history. Resolution is a curious issue in the context of digitised footage on the internet because we've become so used to viewing and producing high-res images. Analogue effects invoke an emotional connection, rather than a critical one, where the viewer, listener

or consumer enjoys decoding the inferred material ‘authenticity’. Of course, it’s still possible to use actual film! But this has become a rarefied activity, one that is revered for its physical appearance, the necessary mechanical apparatus, as much as its indexical qualities.



NH — I do worry about the flattening out of culture, and the new habits for how we experience art, film, music and sound. What to make of all this?

You could make an updated version of Chris Marker’s *San Soleil* (1983) with a woman reading letters from a man trying to understand why there are chunks of *Citizen Kane* (1941) sat next to episodes of *Squishy Make-Over* (a kid’s thing) and Lana Del Rey videos on his YouTube playlist and what it all means.

More and more students will ask me questions where the answer can clearly be found online. I wonder whether there’s a bit of a culture of waiting for things to simply ‘pop-up’ in a timeline on Instagram, or another form of social media, whether they’re happy for the algorithm to figure something out for them. Have people become more passive, more emotional, more expectant of things simply appearing to them, rather than actually looking for them?

AV — Revisiting the past is not necessarily an act of nostalgia. It can also involve the reassertion of history’s potentiality. Svetlana Boym, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, identifies two forms of nostalgia: the restorative and the reflective. She contends that longing and critical thinking are not necessarily opposed to one another in reflective nostalgia, and that

memories can be a form of critical reflection and intent.

I remember reading a roundtable conversation for *Frieze* magazine in which Anja Kirschner stated that criticality was over. It had run its course, and if I remember rightly, she suggested that embracing narrative was the new way forward, or something like that. Initially I disagreed with her assertion, but on reflection I took it to mean that critical methods of filmmaking in the past aren't necessarily applicable now. I've always thought that Jean-Pierre Gorin's comments, after the dissolution of the Dziga Vertov Group, were particularly instructive. The very idea of trying to think through the lens of Brecht seemed backward to him: 'What kind of madness tries to delay the time and space of history?'

Relational context is all important. François Hartog contends that the Berlin Wall's fall in 1989 changed the way we perceive history. Prior to this event, Western history was future-oriented, but afterwards it became about the present and Modernity's linear projection was truly spent. Jeremy Deller's film, which I mentioned before, reiterates the sense that everything changed after 1979. That decade, between 1979 and 1989, still dominates and defines our cultural, economic and psychic being. Western democracies failed to consider what should follow, as if their victory, the promotion of 'freedom' was enough in itself. The 40th anniversary of the Wall's fall has shown that it was only the start not the end, that the failure to truly integrate the East is proving costly.

NH — I've been thinking a lot about 1989. This year as it was a moment of upheaval in our family, but it was also probably the moment I became politically aware, watching the Tiananmen Square protests, as I hit 16, and later that year the fall of the Berlin Wall. It's one of those pivotal years, and referred to by Francis Fukuyama as 'the end of history'. The point you make about coming of age at that time, at the moment of history (supposedly) ending, has informed many of us. 1989 is the birth of the internet too, which involved the end of the analogue, in a way, and the beginning of the digital really taking hold of our lives. The 'baby boomers' talk about 1968, but 1989 is more interesting.

AV — The 1960s in America finished with Woodstock and Altamont, Robert Kennedy's assassination, Richard Nixon's election, Charles Manson, and the 'Chappaquiddick incident'. Events seemed to pile up with unseemly haste. Growing up I remember, as you say, that the 1960s were presented

as the best of times and the 1970s were seen as a shell-shocked hang-over. Joan Didion, in *The White Album*, relates the sense that it was all going to end badly and when it did, no-one was really that surprised. She describes herself as a sleep-walker, saying that memory and mooring were absent, that 'everything had changed and nothing had.'

Didion's sentiment brings to mind Lampedusa's oft-repeated line: 'If we want things to stay as they are, everything will have to change'. This observation, in Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*, offered by the aristocrat Tancredi, is self-serving, suggesting that political change is illusionary and that existing power regimes always maintain their hold. But this isn't Didion's point. She's suggesting that the late 60s was the time of a new type of public figure, the advent of the contemporary celebrity, but also a destructive clash between past and present, a historical reckoning that is still to be resolved. That's only a decade before Thatcher and Reagan's election. Was that the ultimate revenge!?

I've always liked Brecht's aphorism that political work must be made politically, and that form as well as content must be part of any critical design and analysis. But work which interprets this literally always seems to lack humanity (for want of a better word) and a real desire to communicate ideas. Making a political work and the work of politics are different activities. Films like The Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* (1986), Guy Debord's *Critique of Separation* (1961), Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1956), William Raban's *Island Race* (1996) and John Smith's *Blight* (1996) have political intent but they develop it through a discursive tone and a poetic sensibility. They show agility, rather than absoluteness, and offer space for response or a dialogue between maker and viewer.

Walter Benjamin proposed that each age finds its form and it would appear we are starting to feel our way towards another epoch, in which moving images can operate beyond the frame. I don't mean that the single-screen film is over and done with, but how it is perceived has undoubtedly changed. Whilst cinemas still exist, in their current form, film will maintain a prominent position, but the moving image will ultimately go where technology dictates, which is where experimentalists come in. At their most radical, they operate outside of given structures, being makers of personal and adaptable means, who think beyond technologies ceaseless rush toward evermore consumable 'excellence'. This will reinvigorate the frame I think. Its bounds – all that is in or out of frame – will take on even more importance.

NH — Each age does find its form as you say. I'm increasingly coming around to the idea that when I'm on a laptop with the TV on, or when the students are trying to sit through Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), while checking Tik-Tok, that perhaps this is some advanced form of active reading and listening. That's far-fetched perhaps. Something has been lost, and I suppose I'm sad about that, but trying to recreate the ideal conditions of spectatorship and production (with respect to 8mm and 16mm filmmaking) is a mug's game, and it's important to see things from students' perspectives. Although I did recently put my foot down with a student for insisting on using that digital page turning effect when editing a 16mm film that had been digitally scanned. That's my line in the sand. You can cut, fade or dissolve, but do not do that!!

AV — Last night, I went to a student exhibition, *Watch This Space*, which is the type of initiative that I really identify with and actively encourage. I mention it because it featured a selection of arresting videos encompassing travelogues, personal works and collages. They were mostly made intuitively, with simple means, such as handheld mobile phones cameras. However, these came with a caveat: they weren't seen as 'proper' films. Despite being an online generation, they were still privileging 'traditional' production values. Digital media may be omnipresent, but old hierarchies are still entrenched.

Years ago, as a first year BA student, I remember Steve Littman strongly expressing the importance of owning the means of production, which was something I took to heart. At that time, I also came across Alexandre Astruc's idea of the caméra-stylo. What would the creativity ascribed to caméra-stylo really look like? It could be argued that experimental filmmaking attempted to represent this, but it always felt hampered by the limits of technology. In contrast, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Parave's *Leviathan* (2012), which was filmed predominately with Go-Pro cameras and DSLRs (readily available equipment) produced a uniquely experiential encounter, and something I think Astruc would have appreciated!

The idea of owning the means of production – being as self-reliant as possible, investing in your own work, staging screenings and exhibitions – has stayed with me, and it is something I believe in. Of course, some projects require external funding, but the experimental example has taught me that it's possible to do a lot with not much. One could argue that there

should be more financial and cultural support for the arts, but setting aside this question for a moment, a collective enterprise can allow for something worthwhile to occur, all be it in a sometimes DIY manner and on an *ad hoc* basis. The world's not necessarily crying out for more experimental cinema, so we shouldn't be surprised when its production and dissemination is a challenge!



NH — Owning the means of production was everything to me as a student. I had to own it all, and that meant low-tech stuff and luckily there was plenty of it around via car boot sales and charity shops. A generation of 50–60 something men selling their Braun Nizos and projectors for £5. When Kodak was at its peak, hundreds of thousands of people were employed by them. Instagram maybe has only a few thousand – if that – maybe I need to check this data! Of course, with Instagram you own the means of production more than ever, but there's a cost to that. There are less jobs for people, there's an economic hit to an industry and the wealth generated by Instagram is concentrated with fewer people than it was with Kodak. And what happens to this digital archive we're all building? How does it get contained and catalogued?

AV — I remember Kodak 8mm film being available in Boots. The processing and postage were included, which emphasises the difference between then and now, because there was a pause between shooting and delivery, between an idea and its manifestation. Forms have their own validity, which is reinforced through usage and example. My sense is that if work is now seen as being deliberately 'low-res', like Mark Leckey's, it is largely

perceived as being an artistic conceit, an arch privileging of ‘authenticity’. The means of production once needed to be sought out in art schools, at home, if you were lucky, in car-boot-sales and second-hand shops, but now we have it on our person. However, as we know, familiarity breeds contempt; technology is never neutral and some technologies are more freighted than others.

NH — We started this conversation with a nod to the new Hollywood and I’ve just recently watched *The Irishman* (2019). In the press for the launch of the film I read that Robert De Niro had to coax Joe Pesci out of retirement by saying ‘this is never happening again’, and the film feels like an end point for that generation of filmmakers. Using primarily digital distribution, via Netflix, seems like an odd decision by Scorsese someone who understands the sacredness of the cinema and its conditions for spectatorship. But I then read that Scorsese has been pleading with audiences not to watch it on an iPhone. But the horse has bolted! How can he seriously ask for that? Not only are people watching it on their iPhones, they’ve got the TV on at the same time, with 24hour news going.



AV — *The Irishman* did feel like an end. But one that doesn’t know what story it wants to tell. It does seem odd that such a staunch advocate of film should turn to Netflix to produce his latest, perhaps last, tilt at winning an Oscar. Many seem to be excited by the production ethos of Netflix and how

it empowers directors, but their stable of work, particularly their films, seems to suggest otherwise.

NH — Sometime in the 1980s Francis Ford Coppola said that the future of cinema was a 'girl with a video camera in Ohio'. Round about that time Sadie Benning started making her films on a Fisher-Price PixelVision camera (a camera that records audio and video on a C90 cassette). I always felt he could have been talking about her when he said that, but in hindsight the idea applies more to the YouTube explosion of the last 10 years. Since 1989 we've experienced major shifts in moving-image technology, but I feel I have been more of an observer in the last 10-15 years. I know it's not really for me, or rather I can only consume it. I don't feel I can intervene, or own the means of production any more.

AV — Trying to engage with media proliferation, which involves applied mathematics, instinctive impulses and the active promotion of material, is always going to be intriguing, baffling and irritating, in equal measure. No one can now account for all film production, especially when it is offered to us online. So we try to exert an educated choice, which is of course curated for us. We've moved from *boredom* to distraction, from format to distribution.

Recently, I saw Thomas Heise's *Heimat is a Space in Time* (2019). It was being screened in ICA 2, which is a rather rudimentary cinema, but still it reminded me just how immersive the encounter can be. Conversely,



watching *Dark Night* (2016), a highly-recommended docudrama that is based on the 2012 shooting at a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) in Colorado, on Kanopy left me feeling that my laptop was decidedly inadequate. Cinema has been theorised as an overly prescriptive medium, but now it has renewed significance. It can be a place beyond mere consumption that provokes prolonged engagement. Seated in shared, calibrated darkness we appear to have more time and room to wonder. I'm not suggesting a hierarchy of audio-visual forms and sites, at best they all have a specificity that can be inspirational, but online streaming services and gallery presentations emphasise just how compelling cinematic space can really be.

ii.



 ii. Andrew Vallance, *London to Bournemouth,* 2020

Jasleen Kaur /
Alia Syed

Staring at the Artex

Jasleen Kaur was born in Glasgow. She initially studied silversmithing and jewellery at The Glasgow School of Art and then applied art at the Royal College of Art. She was raised in a Sikh household. Her family's business, Hardy's Hardware, an anglicisation of Hardeep, partly prompted her interest in inter-cultural shifts and attendant complex histories. She works across sculpture, video and writing, often centring on reimagined objects, which she uses to examine the incongruity of diasporic identity and marginal voices. Recent and upcoming commissions include projects with the Wellcome Collection, UP Projects, Glasgow Women's Library and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

Alia Syed was born in Wales, grew up in Scotland and lives in London. She made her first 16mm films whilst studying at North East London Polytechnic before continuing her practise at the London Film-Makers' Co-op in the late 1980s. She was part of a generation of filmmakers for whom the personal was resolutely political. Her films have tended to explore gender, identity, diaspora and colonialism through a highly subjective lens. Syed's films open up and explore film language by way of different relationships between sound and image that speak to issues of alienation, intercultural communication and translation. Her films have been screened widely. In 2019 she was Artist in Focus at Courtisane Festival Gent in Belgium.

The following conversation is taken from a series of emails and a transcribed conversation. Their exchange began after a book launch for Jasleen Kaur's *Be Like Teflon* at the Glasgow Women's Library in April 2019 and a programme of Alia Syed's films, entitled Public Intimacies: Correspondences (during the London Short Film Festival at the ICA in January 2020) which also featured readings from Kaur and Jemma Desai, who curated the event.

Email, Friday 24th January, 2020

Dear Jasleen,

Before I answer your previous email something feels more pressing. I keep remembering the walk we took, after our screening, from the ICA to Piccadilly station. I had spent the morning trying to pack to go to Wales to look after my mother, but after speaking to her it transpired that I need not go. I felt disorientated and cross … always so much confusion so many different demands.

I was pleased with how the screening went, but most of all I was moved by the readings alongside my film *Durga* (1985). You read from your book *Be Like Teflon* and Jemma Desai also read. It felt safe. I've always liked the intimacy of the small cinema at the ICA. There must have been about 25 people in the audience. Three of us sat facing the audience, the outline of your faces apparent through the light from my film, and then the light from the lectern. We read out loud. It was the first time I had been able to watch either *Durga* or *Spoken Diary* (2001) for a very long time. Both films were made in moments of trauma, when it felt almost impossible to sustain myself. Nothing/no one seemed to be able to hold me. When our experience doesn't seem to be reflected in the spaces where we are supposed to find sustenance, our relation with siblings becomes so much more weighted. And when they fall short it's very painful. So when you tentatively asked about my family I hope my answer did not appear glib …

But I think that's also why we make things, why we put 'them out there'. More often than not it seems like folly, like a betrayal, another thing that could be twisted and used against us. But sometimes, like that night at the ICA, we make connections that enable us to think clearly and in that process of openness create a space where we can breathe.

I will write more soon.
Lots of love
Alia

Alia's house, Sunday 23rd February, 2020

Jasleen Kaur — It's become a part of me, a real, tangible self-doubt that is genuinely a part of my very being. I need to figure out what that is and how to unlock it a little bit.

Alia Syed — But that's what we said about failure. Do you remember?

JK — At the ICA? Remind me. You said some very profound things at the ICA. It was one of those moments where everything crystalizes. It was something about receiving – you talked about receiving with care and receiving with care even when there's misunderstanding.

AS — I don't remember exactly. I think it might be more useful to outline how I came to voice in that moment. I had been reading *Materialist Film* by Peter Gidal, but in order to prepare for our talk I wanted to reference black and brown women's work. I read *Be Like Teflon* and started to reread Trin T. Minh-ha. I was thinking about a piece of text I had written a long time ago where I make connections between the idea of overlooking in relation to nazar, the evil eye, and the violence inherent in signifying practices. In the 'gaze of capital' the human body/the black body/the female body mean so much we become invisible. The projected gaze, the evil eye, turns us all to stone. Too often black and brown bodies are literally pierced. The idea about care came from reading your book – I'm doing a lot of caring for my mother at the moment – and also how Gidal talks about experimental film. There seemed to me to be a correspondence between the two. Gidal might disagree but there is an element of ethics at play in how power inveigles itself within discourses of representation. For me experimental film is a way of inviting a different kind of looking.

> And like the ancients I apply my balm, thick, viscous layered and fluid.
> Sound from the interior, the body's beat, the gush of blood.
> The gaze is forced into a mediated blindness. We begin to see our touch-sense.
> Image becomes texture.
> The eye works around through a breach in the flow of the visual.
> *Medusa has turned us all to stone.**

* Lines from the film script/text *The Dream Catcher* (2004) by Alia Syed.

I'm reading Trin T. Minh-ha's *Women, Native, Other* after watching your work. The introduction felt very pertinent. She starts with a story:

In a remote village, people have decided to get together to discuss certain matters of capital importance to the well-being of their community. A meeting is thus fixed for a definite date at the marketplace at nightfall. On the day, and at the time agreed, each member eats, washes her/himself and arrives only when she/he is ready, things proceed smoothly as usual and the discussion does not have to begin at the precise time, since it does not break in on daily village life but slips naturally into it … never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter, for the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to merge/emerge people approach it indirectly, by postponing until it matters, by letting it come when it is ready to come.

JK — That's beautiful. It makes me think of something Adrienne Maree Brown writes in terms of social justice, and organising, about 'moving at the speed of trust'. What resonated for you in that story?

AS — The people convene in a pattern – incorporating a mutuality a structure grows, organically – which reminded me of your two-channel video installation *I Keep Telling Them These Stories* (2018). It starts with your voiceover:

> She was told stories of spiritual warrior men ...

On the left-hand screen we see archive footage of men being blessed by a priest – everyone is in white – and then on the right-hand side we see a young man tying his hair up into a knot. Cut to black and we hear your voice again:

> *Lying in bed together, staring at the artex on the ceiling, he would recount them from memory, slipping in and out of languages. The daughter who placed her bare hand under her father's unbalanced stool so he could sit upon it and meditate for hours.*

We see an old man sitting in a large room singing a song. The camera is looking up at him, almost from a child's point-of-view. Then on the left-hand side we see an old woman looking up, preparing *methi*. She seems to be singing. You fade in a professional recording of the same song and

we understand/believe that she has been singing the same song. There is a lag in all of your edits, so we become party to your thought process. Memory routes become mapped out both on an individual and communal level, space becomes porous. Archival footage from Partition is mixed with personal footage. Different historical moments co-exist. Your editing process allows different temporalities to surface. As Trin describes the coming together of people for a meeting, so your elements bring forth the debris of history. It is a painful intimacy that coexists in the very fabric of diasporic life. The space you give creates a listening between us. There is a bittersweet vivacity to the elements that, in the final outcome, speaks very clearly without recourse to dogma.

The first time I watched this piece I wished you had put more of your own voice in again at the end. The second time I watched it … I wasn't so sure. The way that you edited different geographical locations, and the rhythms inherent within those places, articulated what you implied in the first instance through the voiceover. Distances become invoked not only spatially but emotionally. Given that you didn't end the film with more voiceover it became open-ended.

JK — It's so nice to hear your reading of this piece. Often when I'm making work, I'm working from a place of self-doubt, and the logical sense-making bit happens in hindsight.

I keep coming back to this thing about other forms of knowledge production … or … not adhering to whiteness. And you do this so poetically in *Eating Grass* (2003). You structured the film around the five times of prayer in the day. Time is accented by a community's actions, which is beautifully anti-capitalist. The doubling-up of speech and language makes me listen to these seeming binaries, but there is a wholeness to it. They're not in conflict with each other. There is a balance. The entire film is extremely meditative: the gold and red colours, the rhythms and repetitions, the dancing shoes in the bazar and how you move between geographies.

AS — I was thinking about how we carry different spaces, continuums of space/time within us, and because of this how multiples of experience arise from being in the material world at any given moment. My dad taught us to pray … I recite my prayers often. They're in me and they'll just come out at certain moments. But the only time we would pray properly was when we went back to see my dad. We would be doing … the afternoon prayer …

me and my sister, standing behind my dad, and then he'd do the thanks at the end and pray for all of the dead souls. And then he'd turn around and say, 'Oh! I just remembered Bibi Appa used to do such and such …' And it would be this palpable, lucid memory from his childhood that he had been inhabiting, involving his sister. Rituals of prayer become loci, short cuts into different memories. When I watched *I Keep Telling Them These Stories*, I felt something similar was happening through song.

JK — For me music serves as a kind of time travel that moves me through different geographies and temporalities – to the ancestral – and using song is a process of trying to find my voice. I think I'm still in this process. Actually, when you said, 'I wish you'd used your voice more,' I wish I could have.

AS — It felt to me like you suddenly lost voice.

JK — I definitely do that a lot. I'm much more confident speaking without speech. The spoken part at the start of the film, which you quoted earlier, and the women singing throughout the film are attempts of centring brown women's voices. I've been trying to locate where women's voices are in my day to day, or were in my childhood. I certainly didn't grow up in a space where women had autonomy and agency and that has really shaped me. There's a lot of subtext.

AS — I'm interested in this idea of failure/self-doubt. My sense of what each film has or hasn't dealt with drives me to make the next piece. I think self-doubt manifests itself within my practice, and maybe also in yours, as a tentativeness. The authorial voice is underscored. The works interrogate their own sense whilst creating another.

JK — Thinking about Jemma Desai's event at the ICA, and the three of us sitting together, reading together, it was a moment I'm always in search of where there is reciprocity. Not having to explain yourself to an audience or to yourself. Feeling held. I'm really grateful that I've come across peers that I'm in awe of. Finding your work was a moment for me of when I saw that there are people speaking about diasporic identities, and their messiness, and they have been speaking about it long before I started trying to figure it out. When I watch your films, especially *Snow* (2019), set in Bearsden,

i.



ii.



i. *Untitled*, Kaur, 2019
ii. *I Keep Telling Them These Stories*, Kaur, 2018

iii.



iv.



iii. *Snow*, Syed, 2014
iv. *Eating Grass*, Syed, 2003

Glasgow, in the early 1990s, not far from where I was starting school at the time, I feel deeply connected to the images and voices of the people. It is as if I'm somehow part of those stories and histories too.

Email, Wednesday 8th January, 2020

Hi Alia,

Be Like Teflon was probably the most open I've been in my work with regard to the persistence of inherited trauma. I sometimes wonder why I use an art platform to speak about such emotive subjects, whether it's received with care and understanding or if I'm putting too much of myself out into the world. I guess in *Teflon*'s case it feels like a political act, with a small 'p', to include brown women's stories in places where I don't see them, in this case in the Glasgow Women's Library archive. It is also a way of authoring our own stories, which I think your work also does so beautifully.

The launch for *Be Like Teflon* which was entitled 'A Recipe for an Event', was intended to draw out themes that arise in the book – labour, duty, sustenance and loss – through the work of other artists I admire, including yourself. I wanted to create a space that centred listening, just as the book does. Along with the work of Rehana Zaman, Raju Rage, Amanprit Sandhu, Mireille Faushon, your film *Fatima's Letter* (1992) spoke to me about translations/mistranslations and language in the diaspora. What you did with the spoken word and disjointed subtitles was so poetic, like slippages experienced in this in-between state we occupy. Funny to think how that area of Whitechapel has changed.

I showed something you refer to as a film, *Untitled* (2019)*. It began as part of a conversation from the book, with my Nani Ji. It's been shown/listened to in varying forms: audio only; audio with a printed, translated transcript; and audio with images at the *Teflon* event. Half of the conversation is in Punjabi and half in English. (I reply to my Punjabi-speaking grandmother in English with my Glaswegian accent whilst she speaks in Punjabi with *her* Glaswegian accent.) The images playing over this conversation are a viewfinder into the homes where these conversations happen, the houses where those people live. It felt right not to provide a translation into English this time. Who would the translation be for? I am more comfortable with the almost wholly white, non-Punjabi speaking audience not 'understanding' the work in these terms. The images feature Axminster carpet, chromed furniture, foil Christmas tree decorations ... a particular set of materials I refer to in my work as 'aspirational'. They are materials that I associate with a kind of Indian-ness, from a 1980s/90s British Asian home or Gurdwara, which often have skeuomorphic qualities. Plastic lace tablecloths for example.

* *Untitled* (2019), then a work in progress, became Ethnoresidue (2020)

Email, Friday 7th February, 2020

Dear Jasleen,

Your film that isn't a film: (*Untitled*)

There was a beauty in what I saw, the timbre of the voices echoed the banality of a plastic bin, tin foil decorations and objects that we grew up with that became imbued within imaginaries of migration that settled us, but not quite. Through repetition relations shifted. The voices brought us back to homes that were never quite safe.

Trauma doubled in our generation, things hidden, revealed through actions upon our bodies. Because of our bodies.

You said the objects in your film were aspirational. The Axminster carpet reminds me of a Gainsborough reproduction I bought, aged 12, when my father handed over the responsibility of decorating the house to me. I was very aware of colour. I had the sense our house never had the correct colour scheme. Desperate to fit in, I chose beige. Beige carpets, matching beige curtains. The best it got was dark chocolate-brown carpet in my Dad's room.

I think I'm trying to process two things at the same time, the memory of your film and the memory of the reading at the ICA. I think I often do that. It's what I did in *Fatima's Letter* for instance. It was the first time I had travelled through London, the first time Europe became united, the first time I saw trees uprooted. The first of the autumn storms. Flags burned. London was becoming mine somehow. But it wasn't an easy sense; in rooting myself others positioned me elsewhere.

I think that's what struck me about the readings it was like we three craws became rooted. There was a line between us, vectors of space created by the film's structure. We all spoke through and about our bodies, female and brown, trauma locked-in but still magical. It was powerful to be able to articulate and create a sense between us, to feel that our bodies were not out of place. Both you and Jemma Desai spoke in time with *Durga*, and the film's time comprised of shots of my belly, handheld, a rhythm generated by my body, through my body. There was a strange doubling. Your words and Jemma's words echoed materially within the fabric of the film. The trajectory of your voices and my image rebounded, flexed into another shape. And that's also what happened when I saw your film that wasn't a film, which I think of as a film because of the shape, to misquote Peter Gidal: 'The words and images created their own Real'. Conscious of their own precarity they opened up a space that questioned. What you call the 'skeuomorphic' qualities of objects, contrasted with the rawness, the emotive qualities of the voices. I would like to see it again …

v.



vi.



iv. *Spoken Diary*, Syed, 2001 (three-screen version, New Art Gallery, Walsall
Alia Syed's images courtesy of the artist and LUX

Alia's house, Sunday 23rd February, 2020

JK — I wanted to show your film *Fatima's Letter* at my *Be Like Teflon* book launch for two reasons, one: because of our shared connection to a particular landscape of Scotland … Glasgow; and two: because of how it speaks to translation and mistranslation. You said something about work being made out of a place of difficulty or trauma … and I am interested in asking you about that because at the moment so much of my work is rooted in a difficult place and I'm never really sure how it's being received or cared for. I'm not sure whether the kind of art-market/art-world that we slip in and out of is a space …

AS — for them?

JK — Yeah … I'm constantly navigating my way through this.

AS — I started making *Fatima's Letter* at the Slade. Before that I was at University of East London, when it was a polytechnic, and I felt that it was quite a generous space. It wasn't a first-choice college. Everybody was there just to make sense of things and I think that was really helpful to me, but when I got to the Slade it was … all of a sudden everyone seemed very ambitious. They were there to become successful artists and I think that I found that very difficult. The reason I applied to the Slade was because Lis Rhodes taught there and she was, and is, a filmmaker that I really like and admire, and I wanted to be taught by her.

In Scotland I was always *other*. That's how my identity had come to be structured. My mum left when we were quite young so … my Dad brought us up. In Bearsden I was perceived to be Asian, Indian/Pakistani, and that's how I perceived myself. And then when I came to London everyone thought that I was Scottish and that was the main, signifying thing.

JK — Yeah, I can identify with that.

AS — Salman Rushdie's fatwa in 1989 was a pivotal moment. I was living with my mum and I was suddenly understanding myself in a different way… as being separate from my mum. I really became aware of how Islam had become structured in the media, and how people thought of it. I became quite … well it was upsetting, it made me angry and confused. At the same

time then I was becoming aware of the Black Arts Scene.

JK — Did you feel a part of it?

AS — No, I wasn't a part of it. I was really engaged in all of the ideas they were talking about and shared the same formative experiences in relation to the growing racism of the Thatcher years but *that* particular movement grew from friends and comrades of Keith Piper and Eddie Chambers who studied at Lancaster Polytechnic. In 1984 they were joined by Claudette Johnson, Marlene Smith and Donald Rodney, and they changed their name from Wolverhampton Young Black Artist Group to the BLK Art Group. In 1981 they had their first conference at Wolverhampton Polytechnic. That was the year I came down to London from Glasgow, when I was 17. After my foundation course I went to North East London Polytechnic (now the University of East London). During this time Channel 4 was set up, with a Workshop Declaration to 'provide innovation and experiment in form and content'. Many film and video workshops also came into being, including Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa, Retake and Circles. *Handsworth Songs* was commissioned by Channel 4 in 1986 and then Pratibha Parmar made *Sari Red* in 1988. *Third Text* came into existence in 1987. It was a moment of clarity for me. Major shifts had taken place within the British landscape. Some people have described it as a civil war. *Fatima's Letter* grew out of all of this. I felt I was in dialogue with many divergent strands, and had to find my own way of articulating all of these things. INIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts) curated a retrospective of my work in 2002, which was a very important moment for me, so in a way I became part of the Black Art's Movement retrospectively.

JK — That's an incredible political moment to be making work in. The resurgence of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) over the past years has really made me reflect on my practice too, or more specifically institutions' carelessness when working with black and brown artists, and how we are tokenised via diversity policies and 'access' funding streams. It also makes me think of Jemma's title for the events that she curated at the ICA as part of the London Short Film Festival: *Autoethnography As Refusal*. The politics of refusal, how to practice this, of refusing to be defined within certain categories and simultaneously coming into voice. The return of BAM is both sad and about time. But from where I'm standing, I don't feel like there is a

South Asian presence…

AS — BAM was a product of identities and allegiances formed in relation to very specific events. It was a very difficult but energising moment. We were the first generation of migrants to be born in this country and I think there was a huge need to learn from each other and support one another. People gravitated towards one another.

The Impressionists were just a group of artists, initially based in Paris. We have come to understand them through the sheer weight of contexts and retrospectives, each one with their own agenda. That's how things get historicised, but I don't know if that process is necessarily representative of the complexity of the debates and relationships that proliferated.

I think the complexity of the radical voice get simplified by the white establishment, with the obvious, more easily digestible currents foregrounded and more abstract or difficult elements downplayed, or ignored entirely. A work may be 'about' something but it is not necessarily *just* about that thing. Black artists are expected to address certain issues that White artists are not expected to address, so work that does not obviously address those issues is often ignored, whereas works by white artists are treated on their own merit without having to tick some kind of 'worthy' box. Edouard Glissant's ideas around opacity are very relevant to my practice. Opacity encourages people to reflect on how they are imbricated in systems of privilege.

JK — Tell me, why did you site *Fatima's Letter* in Whitechapel?

AS — I travelled through Whitechapel to get to the Slade. I wanted to make something that spoke about my reality of living in London, going through different spaces. At that time Whitechapel station concourse was very wide, there was a lot of natural light, and a visible Asian community.

JK — There are these fleeting moments where women's gazes meet the camera's gaze.

AS — I felt I was recognised … There's a double look … it's a double take. You spot someone and it's like … that's her, I recognise something of myself in her! So, *they* became all of the women in the film. Asian women were becoming increasingly marked as different. Hijabs became a marker. But we

were all somehow from this other space …

JK — I was really conscious, both of the times I've seen *Fatima's Letter* publicly, of what I was let into. And what the majority of the white audience is not let into. It felt really powerful to have the tables turned for once. I'm thinking a lot about how I have been educated and socialised to perform or take a particular position … or to explain myself to whiteness. How much I've been socialised into thinking about how someone views or reads me. And I'm thinking about that more and more in terms of art-making and who it's for and who's let into it. I'm thinking about how much of what I say is actually coming from me. I am increasingly feeling like there's an inarticulateness that comes with me.

AS — Trinh talks about this idea of rhetoric. It's about being clear but it's also about ideology. It's like a correct way of speaking – it instructs you, and it also instructs other people. I think about how my dad uses English or how my mum uses English, and my mum being Welsh. English is actually not their language, so there's a certain irreverence that comes with how they use it. There's a sort of irony in it … and you sort of make words up or they become composite words.

What I'm interested in is the space of disguise … and sometimes we can get lost in it, but then I think it's really powerful to come up from that moment of loss and you feel these moments of clarity. It's the journey of being lost into speaking that, for me, is interesting. Making art, I think, is about creating a space where thoughts can go from one thing to another, occupy a space within the context the work has created. I think that is what's important to me.

JK — I was thinking today about the process of assimilating. Do I feel more comfortable in a white art-world because I'm assimilating or becoming institutionalised, or is it because I'm finding my people and I can lean on them in these foreign spaces?

You know, I just remember feeling so … *so* … not welcome at the Glasgow School of Art. It was not my space. I didn't fit in there. Maybe what I said when I came to your house, about imposter syndrome … maybe it goes back a long way actually.

But there were moments of discovery, rummaging in the library and finding texts on orientalism and colonialism – I finally found the words that

relate to my experience of the world, and of the experience of generations before me. Finding and reading these texts was supporting and scaffolding what I was making in the studio.

AS — I think that that was definitely my experience. On my first degree I never even heard the word orientalism and then I actually stopped going to all of the lectures. I didn't go to any of the history of art lectures because I thought they were racist and sexist. And at the Slade I absented myself a lot … I found my own trajectory. My main thing was actually *Third Text* and then through *Third Text* I found Edward Said. It gave me a vocabulary, but it also gave me a structure to work with that somehow meant something to me.

JK — Yeah, totally. I'm in this constant process of re-educating myself, and the last four or five years have been a new phase of re-education, informally in peer groups, in living rooms and kitchens. It's not happening in institutions. Learning through love and friendship and mutual support is a new feeling for me. Refusing to be in competition with fellow brown artists, because there's not enough space for more than one at a time. These days I'm thinking more about practising generosity and what it means to be in conversation with those on the margins and learn collectively. It feels so nourishing.

That's what was so powerful about the *Be Like Teflon* launch and the ICA event. There was nothing to give to the audience – it was for *us* actually. Having the lights off and reading by the light of your film *Durga* … sharing these intimacies that … Actually, sometimes I wonder whether they even are for sharing.

We put ourselves on the line constantly and we put ourselves out into the world with the knowledge that there will be misunderstandings and misrepresentations of us and our work. That's the thing I'm really enjoying in connecting up with you, Jemma and Rehana, whose work I am in total awe of. It really feels powerful at the moment and it doesn't feel like it's for anyone else. But I'm aware of how the institution can benefit from us because we are a 'tick box' and we will continue to be a tick box.

AS — You, Jemma, and Rehana are the audience that I had in mind when I made those works. Often the audience didn't exist. To have it valued and understood by – I am a bit older – the next generation is hugely meaningful for me.

JK — It feels important to seek out ‘intergenerational conversations’. I think it’s more than just a network … it doesn’t feel as strategic. I guess we’re trying to create our own collections and archives, aren’t we?

Malcolm Le Grice / Chris Welsby

Landscape, Science and Uncertainty

Malcolm Le Grice studied at The Slade School of Fine Art in the mid-1960s, where he first began working with film, video, computers and mixed media. He also began teaching at St Martins in this period. Le Grice was an early member of the London Filmmaker's Co-op and directly shaped its ethos by introducing filmmaking facilities. Le Grice's expansive practice is marked by experimentation and a desire to find new forms of audio-visual expression through the examination of technology and its associated characteristics. His work spans iconic anti-cinema works, such as *Castle One* (1966), through to recent multi-screen and 3D video works like *Where When* (2015), which are highly impressionistic. Le Grice is equally well known for his writing, including the books *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977) and *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age* (2001).

Chris Welsby was also associated with The Slade, as a graduate and then tutor. It was there that he first encountered interactive technology as well as cybernetic and systems theory. He was also an early member of the LFMC. In the early 1970s Welsby developed a unique and innovative film practice that focused on geography, meteorology and the environment in combination with the 'structural film' making ethos of the day. Besides his single-screen and double-screen films, Welsby was making multi-projection pieces for gallery settings when film installations and the 'artists moving image' were in their infancy. After working with film, Welsby's practice extended into complex weather driven digital systems. His most recent works are single channel, often single-take videos, with land and seascapes as an enduring subject.

Malcolm Le Grice — I was always fascinated by your use of natural environmental conditions like wind or tides as a determinant of the film's structure, for example in your film *Wind Vane II* (1975). In particular, where the continuity between the material aspects of the film medium – the tripod, the lens, the camera shutter – are brought under the direct (mechanical) control of these environmental features (medium, technology as the basis of language) or held within an observational strategy of camera movements outside symbolically subjective selection.

More recently, I have only a partial understanding of a work where I think you have used the concept of an environmental landscape beyond the traditional confines of a coherent visual/photographic/landscape representation. How do we make an image of a non-representative observational concept and electronic technology?

I would also be interested in your current thoughts on multi-screen installation and their relationship to the experience of unfolding temporal perception.

—

Chris Welsby — I'll begin by reminding you of a conversation we had during a presentation of your work at Chelsea School of Art roughly half a century ago. You had just shown *Whitchurch Down* (1972) and I asked why you had used landscape imagery. I think you said that the choice of imagery was not particularly significant. Being a 20- something-year-old brat, I asked, 'Why use it in the first place if it is of little consequence?' I was of course aware of the prevailing structural film ethos, and whilst I totally appreciated your position, I was looking for a way to do something of my own with this inspiring approach to film. I wanted to find out if landscapes could mean something in my own work and if this could be done without falling back into the regressive illusionism of mainstream cinema. Was there a way to build something new on such a radical foundation?

I should add here that I have always been grateful for the generosity you showed in giving up a Saturday afternoon to print my fist three films on the step printer at the LFMC, then housed at the dairy.

I've been thinking about the late Gregory Bateson's double-bind theory of schizophrenia, in which conflicting messages can at times lead to psychotic breaks, for example when a child is repeatedly given two contradictory messages: one overt, the other covert. (Overt: 'Of course

I love you!' Covert, delivered through tone and body language: 'Stop bothering me!') The critical point for the child's development is not just the conflicting messages, or even the ongoing nature of the problem, but the fact that that she or he, being completely dependent, cannot leave the field.

It might be interesting to apply the double-bind theory to mainstream cinema, particularly the willing suspension of disbelief. On the one hand, we are invited to believe that a story is totally real, but in the same moment we know that this is 'just' a film. The contradiction is hidden and rarely examined as part of the movie-going experience. Of course the viewer can leave the venue, though it's questionable whether or not they ever actually leave the field.

But now that we are well and truly 'in it' – i.e. surrounded by screens and immersed in the electronic nervous system of the planet – how do we examine this double-bind and its effects on the collective psyche? The Global Village is all about us – its screens proliferate in every public space – but it's certainly not living up to our original expectations. We are rapidly approaching a situation where it is no longer possible to leave the field. People are increasingly saturated by information that is custom-selected to suit their biases. These are not just different opinions; they are different realities, as a quick glance at the Republican and Democratic TV stations in the US will attest. The long-term psychological effects of this double-bind are only conjecture at this point, but given the level of distraction and the impossibility of establishing any kind of veracity, how does one get down to seriously addressing big issues like climate change?

You and Peter Gidal, in particular, set the ground rules for a new kind of cinema, but I don't think any of us could have anticipated the all-enveloping power of electronic media and its ability to distract us, confound fact with fiction, and make a farce out of our most cherished democratic values.

Once the ground rules for structural film were established, it seemed to me that the question 'Now what?' hung over the LFMC like a cloud. It was a hard act to follow, but there were soon as many strategies as there were filmmakers. For me, the idea, put simply, was to construct films in which the viewer was aware that natural forces in the landscape – tide, wind, cloud cover – had been given agency in the mechanics of shooting the film in relation to the shutter, tripod and frame rate etc. By providing an indexical link to the shooting of the film the shooting event could carry information and generate meaning as well as the projection event. The double-bind of conventional cinema is still present, but it is made available to the viewer as

information of a different logical type (cf. Bertrand Russell). The idea was to create a model for cinema that would include both the mimetic and the material in a dialectic that takes place within the larger framework of the cinematic process as a whole.

Of late, I have simplified my working methods and returned to making short video projects, such as *Tree Again* and *Crocodile Dreams* which were made whilst living in Mexico last winter. *Tree Again* is an attempt to rescue the palm tree from glossy tourist magazines. *Crocodile Dreams* is a playful meditation on the mangrove near our home that happened to host crocodiles as well as humans. There's a bit more to it than that, but not a lot that can be said in words. These short videos are sensual, immensely detailed and immersive, though modest in scale. My hope is that my own felt connection to the weather and the land will be transmitted to the viewer. 'Look,' the films say, 'Here is a tree. Take a long close look and realise what you are seeing.'

As you know, I have worked with computers at some level since the early 1970s and I am still fascinated by them, but I don't have the time or money to make more three-year digital media projects or the kind of elaborate weather-driven gallery installations I made between 1990 and 2015. In many ways, my current working methods most resemble those I used when I shot my first projects on a simple wind-up Bolex camera and edited them on a set of portable winding arms. Now I use a tiny 4K video camera and edit in my computer. My recent films are simple, direct attempts to communicate what it might be like to move beyond the observation of nature to a conscious engagement with it.

I am lucky enough to live in a rural environment and I feel I should make a list of the things I can still see when I take a walk in the early morning: a tree, a cloud, a wave, a stream. These are the things that matter now. But how can we really know them? For over half the population of the planet who live in cities, it is as if they are written in a foreign language. These things are experienced through the media as a backdrop to a toothpaste commercial or a setting for a romantic comedy.

——

MLG — Good to get your text. It confirmed some of my thoughts about the films using wind, the weather etc. as a direct control on the way a

camera recoded the image. Like all interesting art it was prophetic. Whether intentional or unconscious, it prefigured what is now spoken of as concern for ecology, which was not commonplace in language or understanding at the time. The artist has an antenna that sees partially, but sensually, ahead of the present – not intentionally futuristic but a form of intuition and luck. In my current understanding, this is born out of the discourse of what is expected in the process of making a work – its basis in its present language – the expectations may be resisted or taken in a new direction.

But first, a few thoughts on two concepts: Landscape and Nature.

I do not think of Landscape as grass, trees, mountains and sky. In the contemporary world, landscape has become the whole environment – the city, culture and media – what you nicely express with the sentence 'The Global Village is all about us – its screens proliferate in every public space' and the idea of 'electronic nervous system of the planet'. My own earliest 16mm film, *Castle I* (1966), is in this respect, a Landscape Film. The footage from that film, which was also used in *Castle II* (1968) and *Reign of the Vampire* (1970), 'stood in for' my urban and political Landscape. In this sense landscape is all that environment we may perceive but not control: that to which we are the observing subject, only able to comment on but not dominate.

Similarly, I have a problem with the term Nature. The term conjures up some primitive ideal – as in the 1960's Windmill Cinema nudie, *Naked as Nature Intended* – brave men and women sitting around in the chilly English countryside without their jumpers and knickers, trying to hide their goose pimples from the camera. Nature is not benign. In full, it stretches from sub-atomic hydrogen, through the emergence of the primitive physical elements, to that extraordinary moment when molecules capable of self replication created the thing we identify as 'life'. And as part of the condition of life, it seems the ubiquitous explosive drives of all species to colonise and dominate their environment and other species. Nature has no inevitable good or evil – no opinions or ethics – it is, in the end, merely a set of forces playing themselves out until the planet is consumed back into the sun and the sun disappears into some wandering Black-Hole or whatever; structure without a reason. Nature must ultimately be greater than any human technology or intervention. Nature is not romantic and the only consistent and plausible answer is '42' (Douglas Adams is by far the best available

i.



 i. *Windmill III*, Welsby, 1974

authority).

And what of the human species? Humans are at the very top of the tree in technological violence applied in private and in global conflict. Even outside intentional cruelty and violent aggression, our unintended population expansion is – as we now know – destroying our environment. It is like the yeast in alcohol that consumes the available sugars but ultimately destroys itself in the process.

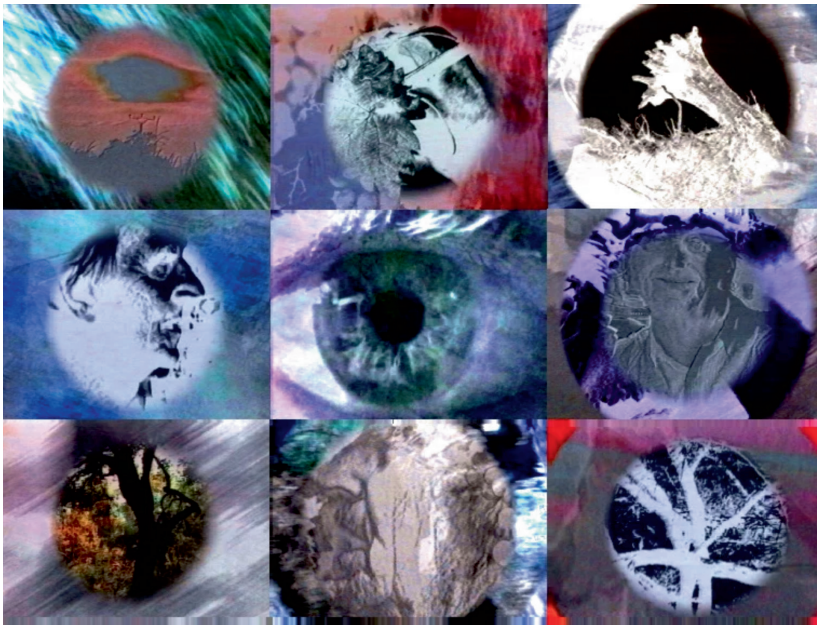
Three or four years ago I visited Cartagena in Columbia and stumbled on the Museo Historico de Cartagena de Indias – actually the Museum of the Inquisition. This museum is testament to the wonderful capacity of humans to apply the greatest of inventive creativity to the act of dominance and cruelty: extraordinary torture applied to enforce power and will, or even just for the fun of it. The Human race does not have much to recommend it.

What does this have to do with my work as a film artist? This strain of human sadomasochistic psychology also dominates our cinematic culture as do the unquestioned assumptions about personal and collective violence in the pursuit of power. It is the life-blood (or death-blood) of the commercial cinema and television narrative and is at its most extreme in contemporary US film culture. This culture promotes the psychology, through a voyeuristic engagement in the enactment of power relationships. Fortunately, my resistance to this is not simply political or ideological. I very quickly lose interest in such narratives. I don't care how they are resolved and on the odd occasion when I have become engaged, I feel that the film has fed off me rather than provide me with sustenance, and – through identification in its overblown drama and the cult of celebrity – reduced the value I might otherwise find in my own life.

Without the security of subscribing to Humanism, it is difficult to sustain some optimism to counter the deep malaise of the human psyche. I do not fully believe my own rhetoric, but argue that my position as a film/video artist seeks to find a different way of thinking, feeling and understanding, through forging a new form of relationship between images in time. I resist stereotype connections and means of expression, particularly as seen in the psycho-therapy of cathartic representation. I resist readily interpreted images – postponing resolution, exercising doubt - seeking what, in recent years, I have been calling image latency.

I am very reluctant to interpret my own work as I am wary of rationalization and my lack of perception of unconscious factors that may only become evident in retrospect. However, I shall risk a few comments on

ii.



 ii. *Even the Cyclops Pays the Ferryman*, Le Grice, 1998

iii.



certain characteristics or ‘strategies’ that I see in my more recent work.

The first of these has been an acceptance that the primary source of image and sound sequences has been through personal recoding in my passage through life – as far as possible not selected to fit any defined intention, objective or pre-planned completed film. I described this a little too concretely in the article ‘The Chronos Project’ (1995) and it was first applied (with subjective cheats!) in the video *Chronos Fragmented* (1995).

The second is the attempt to find some coherence in the selection and sequencing of the images, but postponing resolution through exploring alternative but equally ‘valid’ relationships. Here any emerging form arises entirely in the (montage) practice. It is highly subjective but with constant checking against my own pre-conceptions and experience of works by myself and others; an on-going internal analytical/critical dialogue. This montage becomes the presented work by using three main ‘devices’. One is the use of multi-screens where the spectator (who is also me) must constantly select which image to make the present focus of attention and comparison (e.g. *FINITI,* 2011). Another device is the use of repetition and partial repetition of images, accepting an ‘image group’ as a kind of cluster: an a-temporal concept within small periods of the time frame (e.g. *Even a Cyclops Pays the Ferryman*, 1998). The third, and now frequently dominant, device is the use of layered superimposition of related (alternative) images, which are linked but remain partially separate. This is most evident in the 3D work *Where When* (2015) where the stereoscopic image puts the

 iii. *Finiti*, Le Grice, 2011

superimpositions at different apparent distances, which requires a re-focussing of the eye, based on certain choices (that may be unconscious). The image relationships constructed by me in the film/video are not random but motivated, with some emotional charge seeking some (provisional) understanding. This device is also explored in a recent 2D work *Dark Trees* (2019).

Each of these devices/approaches seek to retain the provisionality of interpretation – uncertainty – latency within the present moments of passing time. This uncertainty is not simply made for the spectator, but is a parallel of my own uncertainty of any 'correct' construction. This is also evident in the fact that I can make further modification to works that have already been seen and distributed – so that there is no absolutely definitive version.

—

CW — Your description of nature is part of a widely held belief system that you and I and most Westerners were first introduced to in school. It is mechanistic, reductionist, and though useful for making pop-up toasters and BMWs, it has some serious shortcomings. I see no reason to assume that nature is a structure without reason or a 'set of forces playing themselves out'. We have little evidence to suggest that human beings have a monopoly on consciousness, or even cognition, but the ideology that supports this view has been around since biblical times and shows little sign of fatigue.

The pond in my front yard grows a filigreed layer of reflective weed during the long, hot, rainless summer, which protects it from evaporation. Fall here is cloudy and the rain soon tops up the pond. The protective layer of weed correspondingly thins out. In Winter, the weed is no longer needed and soon becomes compost. Slime is quick to follow and this rich food source attracts bugs, who later become fish food and fertilizer for next season's protective weed cover. A heron now appears out of the sky to hunt for the fish who have become fat on those bugs and more visible, now that the weeds have cleared.

I am no biologist, but surely we can agree that these adaptations are made by the pond in response to changes in its immediate environment, which in turn are linked to the seasons and the rotation and tilt of the earth in relation to the sun, and so on. I have no problem seeing my pond as a cognitive process. I don't ascribe purpose to it beyond the maintenance of a relatively stable system, but this does not make my pond's 'behaviour'

blind chance either. There is a body of scientific research that supports the idea that evolution is itself a cognitive process. (cf. the Santiago theory of Cognition).

What makes us so sure that we are the only subjects in a world of objects? Our ability to objectify, to measure and control, has produced some remarkable technology, but it has also landed us in a lot of trouble. Early on in the 20th Century, to scientists working in the field of Quantum Mechanics, it became apparent that as matter approaches the speed of light the assumed separation between subject and object collapses. At the most fundamental level of matter one of science's most cherished assumptions no longer applies.

I am very intrigued by your 'discourse of uncertainty', though it did occur to me that you might be having a joke at my expense. There is a certain irony in co-opting (sorry, no pun intended!) this age-old strategy from dominant cinema (as well as Christianity and Capitalism!) and using it for a very different purpose. The word sorcery comes to mind, but perhaps alchemy would be a better fit?

I have struggled in my own way with some of the issues that you have mentioned in your letter. The question about viewers' expectations was, to my mind, particularly pertinent when everyone started making non-linear narratives and interactive installations. If there is no tension about what will happen next, how can one expect a viewer to decide what comes next in a series of non-narrative shots? Flipping coins and rolling dice was a common strategy in music performance and adopting a well-known narrative plot seemed to work in some movie-based applications, but none of these devices were very persuasive. My own version of a discourse of uncertainty continued to involve the weather, so in a round-about way, I may have had an advantage.

In my weather powered installations you never know what is coming next and it is the expectation of unpredictable changes in the weather that draws people back to see what will happen in the installation. The element of uncertainty applies to me as well as to the viewer. In the wind powered installation *Heaven's Breath* (2009), for example, if the wind doesn't blow then Shiva doesn't dance. I have experienced a number of very tense opening receptions when a little less unpredictability would have been most welcome.

Several of my digital media installations are based on Gregory Bateson's ideas of the homeostatic loop. This can be described as a system which

will maintain certain pre-decided operational parameters, despite the unpredictable nature of incoming data. The human body is one such system that will struggle to maintain body temperature despite huge fluctuations in outside temperature.

In *Tree Studies* (2006), a weather driven installation commissioned by the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, incoming weather data from weather stations around the planet was relayed to the installation in real-time via the internet. On the screen we saw the pre-recorded image of a tree in a winter landscape. The tree always occupied the centre of the frame and was shot from a number of different positions on a sixty-degree arc. I recorded the image of the tree using random exposures. The cubist-like image flickers but has an enormous exposure latitude. The surround sound was mixed from pre-recorded files and included an aeolian harp, wind, a swarm of starlings, people walking, a raven etc. In the installation the incoming data generated an endless series of new and unexpected combinations of image and sound in the gallery. The installation, like the weather, was never the same twice and as the planet rotated the alternate heating and cooling effect of the sun influenced which weather station drove the installation. The software would decide which station had the highest wind speed and this station would edit the picture and mix the sound in the gallery. An instrument console in the gallery indicated what was happening. The instruments showed wind speed and direction, camera angle relative to the tree and which station was operational. On the opening night there was a huge gale in Sydney, Australia. The pre-recorded image of a tree flickered violently in response to the incoming data. Jump cuts were the result of changing wind direction and both the image and the sound responded in real-time to a storm raging far away in the southern hemisphere. The internet was being used as if it were part of the planet's respiratory system. No one, including myself, could predict what would happen next and it was entertaining to see smartly dressed Koreans emerge from the installation looking uncharacteristically windswept and dishevelled.

On a slightly different tack, the stigma of Romanticism has followed me closely throughout my career. But it is clear that both the landscape and landscape imagery now has an entirely different meaning. As I have stated in relation to my film *Sky Light* (1988): 'After Chernobyl, landscape will never be the same again.' Whether we live in a city or not, we are still in a landscape which stretches all the way out into the furthest reaches of the universe. The first pictures taken of the earth from outer space also

changed everything. Given our situation with regards climate change, I can't imagine why anyone would make art about anything else but landscape!

But in the beginning, I simply took over serial image making where Monet's Rouen Cathedral series left off. The attempt made by Greenberg to co-opt post impressionism into his modernist vision of abstract painting was, I think, hopelessly misguided! It is perfectly obvious where Monet and Cézanne's interests lay, and as the late Al Rees pointed out: when Cézanne took the radical step of moving his pictorial viewpoint, he became the world's first filmmaker. I would add that an impressionist painting is very like a timelapse film, but instead of frames, the painting is comprised of a series of brushstrokes, each representing a different moment in time.

There was an occasion when you and I discussed my piece *At Sea* (2003), which was shown in the gallery at Central St Martins a few years back. We sat on the floor facing the four adjacent video frames for some twenty minutes and when you left you said, 'It's a narrative isn't it?' and I agreed with you. *At Sea* was commissioned for the Singapore Biennale. That particular year they were asking for 'science fictions'. I created a fictitious space out of a number of disconnected and very insubstantial seascape shots filmed in English Bay, Vancouver, during a foggy week in winter. My starting point was the experience of being adrift in a small boat in thick fog. For most of the time the four adjacent screens, which should be large enough to stretch the length of the gallery wall, show nothing but a wall of abstract video artefacts and digital noise. This is the digital version of nothing, with pixels working in parallel to the water particles of a fog bank. Occasionally, a landmark of some sort appears out of this 'fog bank'. A lighthouse, a ship, a headland, a shipping buoy and perhaps some distant buildings materialize briefly, but never in the same place. Sometimes one may imagine that one can see some sort of landmark but it remains unconfirmed. There are no fixed points of reference in this piece. The viewer looks for a continuous and homogeneous spatial representation, but as the images slip treacherously about in the fog, sliding from close-up to very distant, and from left to right, it eventually becomes apparent that no such coherent space exists. A complex, but very minimal soundtrack of waves and sea birds as well as a passing freighter (every sail boater's worst fear in fog) adds little to the sense of pictorial continuity and in the end we are left very much At Sea.

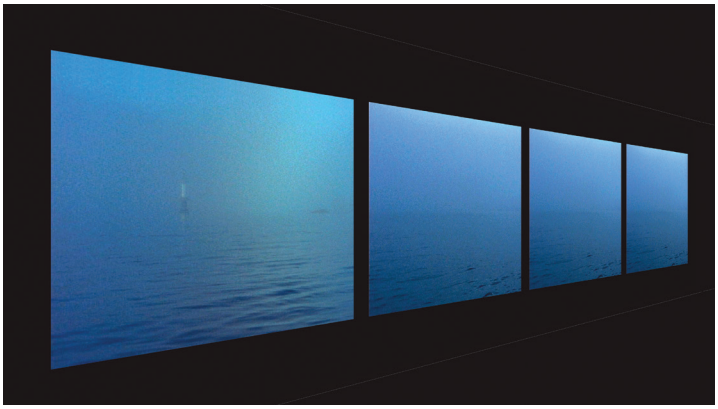
You have indicated elsewhere that you are interested in creating an authentic experience, of being fully conscious and present and in the

moment. Do you see this as a vehicle for political change?

In my own practice I would call this experience 'participatory consciousness'. It's like the difference between driving a car and sailing a boat. In a car we pass through the weather, it's experienced at a distance through the windshield. In a sailboat, by contrast, we are very much in the weather and our continuing survival depends on our ability to read what is there and translate it through the technology of sail into forward movement. This participatory consciousness is what I would like a viewer to experience when watching one of my movies.

But to be clear, this sort of thing doesn't require a sailboat! For example, many years ago I had a transformative experience whilst walking in the New Forest. It was one of those blustery spring days with giant clouds rolling in off the Atlantic. Bursts of dazzling sunlight alternated with heavy showers of hail and rain. Wind squalls intermittently lashed the surface of the pools of rainwater that had formed in low-laying places across the forest floor. Wind tore leaves from the swaying branches of trees reflected in the water below. I paused as I entered a clearing in the surrounding forest of mature oaks. A wild pony was drinking from a pool. The whole scene appeared to be breathing – me, the horse, the trees, the clouds, the wind, the patches of

iv.



 iv. *At Sea*, Welsby, 2003

dappled sunlight – all seemed to move as if connected by a million invisible threads. As I breathed, it breathed; as it breathed, I breathed.

I think Laura Mulvey was correct when she wrote that she thought of me as a weather artist, not as a landscape artist. I agree with her, a landscape without weather is a dead thing. The weather breathes life into the land and into all of us. If I could communicate what it felt like to be in that clearing in the forest all that time ago, I would feel that I had done a good job. As things stand, I am four thousand miles and forty something years away from that experience, and I still have a long way to travel.

——

MLG — After a gap, I have now read your second piece. I don't find anything there that I would disagree with. And many of your descriptions, related to works where external forces like the wind modify and 'structure' the image, confirms the feature of your work that I have found consistently interesting. I'm intrigued by the works that make use of very remote 'control' methods through the internet. They clearly offer a challenge to the range of conventional sampling strategies used in sequencing of the time-base in experimental cinema (for example, randomization or mathematical systems) and they particularly challenge the idea of 'subjective' authorship by giving over aspects of choice to some external forces. Of course, the core authorship is not entirely removed as you, the filmmaker, have selected the image content, the form of the interaction with uncontrolled forces, the set up for presentation and the selection of forces used as sequence controllers etc. Whilst these formal choices have their own parameters and symbolic implications, they tell the spectator that the work is not simply a trace of the author's subjective (auto-)biography. Thus for the spectator, the work may be read as an interaction between the artist and – in this case – some element of the 'natural' or technological (landscape) environment.

I associate the challenge of this structuring approach, to your statement that you 'simply took over serial image making where Monet's Rouen Cathedral left off.'

From my earliest publications, including *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977), I also saw the Monet Rouen Cathedral series, and the shifting viewpoint in Cézanne, as crucial to the emerging dynamic in art related to the invention of cinema. Though not strictly in response to your text, this set up another train of thought identifying the differences between Art, Science

and Technology and how they might impinge on art practice. In recent years there has been a lot of confusion about these relationships that I have tried to clarify.

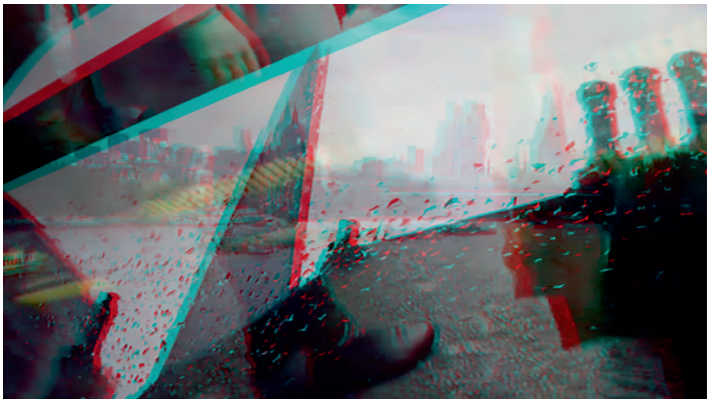
Firstly, Science.

The common understanding of Science as synonymous with Knowledge is misleading. The German term Wissenschaft, which is often translated as science, is in fact far broader and refers to a process of enquiry that may lead to knowledge as its residue. Science is a systematic process of exploring any and all phenomena. It begins with observation and recording of raw phenomena and, by seeking consistencies (or inconsistencies) in their occurrence, proposes underlying causes. These propositions (theories) are tested by prediction (e.g. there will be an eclipse on the second Tuesday next month). Consistently accurate prediction offers some stability of what may be treated as knowledge within any identifiable phenomena. Science as a process is predicated on doubt and uncertainty. In this respect it is entirely contrary to Religion. Based on belief – religion pre-supposes an authorised solution to any matter – faith has no place for doubt and uncertainty and science replaces belief with degrees of adequate probability. So how is art related to science? Clearly at certain moments, art has been influenced by scientific discoveries. It is often suggested – and it might be true – that the impressionists were influenced and inspired by Eugene Chèvreul's scientific research into colour theory. The Op Art movement, including Bridget Riley surely echoed scientific discoveries in optical perception. However, these inspiring influences do not in themselves constitute science in the context of art. At the same time, certain aspects of enquiring and comparative methods, within art, do echo elements of scientific method and embody a condition of uncertainty. An enquiring methodology (that may be unconscious or unstressed) changes the assumption that an artwork is wholly assertive: that it represents the only possible 'solution', meaning or an ideal conclusion. It implies the possibility of another 'version'. This condition is already there in Monet's Rouen Cathedral series as it is in Matisse's progressively abstracted sculptural relief series Nu de dos. This is instead perhaps a demonstration of a more fundamental influence on art from science: a comparative method rather than an imported body of knowledge. The incorporation of dynamic uncertainty – both in the process of making, by the artist, and by the subsequent interpretation of the spectator – fundamentally counters the idealist assumption of secure authority implicit in the special and authentic work.

Secondly, Technology.

Technology is not science. Technology, at base, is the creative invention of 'tools' that perform a function allowing extended control of the environment or the more efficient exercise of a task. Technological inventions can proceed by trial and error without the need for any general scientific application of theory. It is nonetheless clear that in the development of sophisticated technology there is an interplay of scientific discovery with the invention of increasingly complex technologies. It is also clear that technology provides new tools for scientific observation and even (through computers, for example) discovering and postulating correlations. It is simpler to offer examples of a relationship between Technology and Art than between Science and Art. Except perhaps for the bodily performance of drama, song and dance, all art involves an interplay with technology (the materials of the medium) and its form is constantly changed by inventions in technology, whether new pigments, casting systems, or mechanical and electronic machines. Both Technology and Art can 'progress' by spontaneous invention, play and chance encounter. In my own work, I have frequently explored new possibilities for mechanical and digital cinema

v.



 v. *Where When*, Le Grice, 2015

that emerged from potentialities of the technology, in the inventive use and misuse of the technology. And I have always argued this on the basis of a direct fusion between technology and language which provides openings for new meanings and concepts.

And then Art.

Exploring what might be considered as intrinsic or consistent about art and its 'social function' or mode of functioning would require a massive extension of our current conversation. And there is no doubt that any generalizations I might now make are open to the charge of 'over-simplification'. But let's try a few:

Despite my previously expressed disenchantment with humanity – 'Humans are at the very top of the tree in technological violence applied in private and in global conflict.' – there is no escaping the fact that art only exists in and through Human culture. Art does no direct 'work': it does not build houses, grow food, sew, wash clothes etc. Of course we might argue that Art can have a direct social function, in terms of promoting an ideology, as in propaganda, or persuading us to purchase commodities, as in advertising. Possibly we can say that Art is 'not the thing itself, in the "real-world"' but in one way or another a secondary 'symbolic' reflection on the thing itself; a commentary or a representation. Any effect it has within culture is through a transaction of ideas, concepts or experiences whilst standing in for a system or mode of thought. However minimal, abstract, obscure or anarchic, the work of art 'signifies' – creates and, by implication, promotes a value-system having its effect in society through the human cultural exchange – the construction of experiences and meanings.

There is a specific factor in art that interests me and that somewhat counteracts the assumption that art is a symbolic or semiotic exchange of meaning. Human beings simply enjoy sensory pleasure – the taste of food, the smell of honey-suckle, the sound of a flute, the play of colour in a rainbow. It seems these pleasures in life are direct and also form a major element in what we understand as art. And I suggest that in art they can remain direct, not merely associative or tied into some semiotic meaning, Indeed, even in art that is directly representational, the orchestration of the abstract elements remain a major aspect of our experience of a work. These abstractions of image or sound, for example, exist primarily in the present experience even if they may be modulated to contribute to a more complex conceptual meaning. In addition, this directness of present experience, in a time based art, also offers another pleasure in our perception of the

passage of time itself as we experience rhythms, patterns of repetition again possible without the necessity of any representational function (most easily demonstrated in Music).

And what of 'representation'? However much I might oppose representation and its time-based equivalent, which is narrative, I must admit a primitive, maybe child-like, fascination with the facsimile: the magical confusion between how something looks to our eye, in life, and its constructed representation in a picture or sculpture. I do not like the standard concept of the suspension of disbelief – I think the fascination is more primitive and embodied in the apparently essential development of human intelligence of being able to hold and reconcile two contradictory ideas (as when telling a lie or enjoying a joke) or more fundamentally, to hold the idea of a continuity of objects (as a mental image) even when not in sight.

Perhaps the element of intrinsic sensory and representational pleasure counters our obsessive search for art's social 'function'. When I visited the caves at Lascaux some few years ago it was generally assumed that the wonderful paintings had a ritual or religious function, perhaps magically assisting hunting for food. However, information from the residue of the prehistoric peoples' diet suggests that plentiful herds of reindeer were the principal source of food. They were easily hunted and yet no reindeer appear in the paintings. Even in the superbly constructed facsimile cave, open to visitors to protect the originals, the artistic quality of the paintings is stunning. Instead of a religious or ritual function, I could well imagine that the images were made simply for the plain pleasure of the representation itself. I can envisage the far from mentally primitive cave dweller saying, 'That's fantastic. It looks just like a running horse and it is just a picture. Wow! Do me another one. What about a bull?'

Finding any satisfactory general characteristic for Art that distinguishes it from Science, Technology or Philosophy or Mathematics or Religion or any other field is problematic. For my own part, I have only been able to stumble from one step to another in a creative (?) 'discourse' with contemporary and historical art and, in particular, the time-based practice of cinema.

vi.



 vi. Welsby making *Wind Vane*, 1972

Lynn Loo / Guy Sherwin

Working Together in Expanded Cinema

Lynn Loo was raised in Singapore and taught music before moving to Chicago to study experimental film at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating in 2001. After completing an MA in film archiving from University of East Anglia, she worked in the conservation department at Tate Modern. She is now a conservation specialist at the British Film Institute National Archive. Loo's work often involves a direct manipulation of film stock and printing processes. The expanded 16mm film performance *Vowels & Consonants* (2005) marked the start of her collaboration with Guy Sherwin. Other works of hers include *End Rolls* (2009), *Autumn Fog* (2010) and the *Washi* series (2014–ongoing). She has shown her work extensively in festivals, expanded cinema programmes and residencies. Some of her films are in the collection of Asian Film Archive in Singapore and the He Xiangning Art Museum in China.

Guy Sherwin grew up in Ipswich and moved to London to study painting at Chelsea School of Art. Inspired by films and expanded cinema from the London Filmmakers' Co-op, he began making films and acquired laboratory skills while working there during the 1970s. His 16mm films are often highly concentrated in their form, but very diverse in terms of their imagery and approach. The *Short Film Series* (1975–ongoing) and live performance pieces such as *Man with Mirror* (1976–ongoing) involve human, animal and natural phenomena transcribed as filmic subjects, while his optical sound films and performances explore a wide variety of abstract audio-visual ideas. In 2012 he curated the exhibition of expanded cinema *Film in Space* for the Camden Arts Centre.

Lynn Loo and Guy Sherwin met in 2003. Under the title *Live Cinema*, Loo and Sherwin have toured programmes of their expanded cinema worldwide. Their conversation transcribed here took place over four mornings in October 2019, in a house overlooking the Swale Estuary in Kent.

i.



Guy Sherwin — There are different ways we work together. The strange thing is that probably our most successful collaboration, in terms of an artwork, wasn't something that came from us. It was from Olivier Rodriguez wasn't it? He had asked you to work with Sarah Washington ...

Lynn Loo — Yes, for a screening above the Bonnington Cafe in Vauxhall. It was *Vowels* (2005). She did improvised sound.

GS — Then there was *Vowels & Consonants* (2005) at the Bullion Theatre in Hackney. Olivier, who enjoyed doing these things, was putting people together.

LL — You came in with the idea of consonants later...

GS — Well, vowels *need* consonants don't they! Then Sarah brought in Knut Aufermann and that's how we started getting more and more projectors into the performance, which became a bit unwieldy after a while with six 16mm projectors.

LL — It was fun – stressful, but fun!

GS — I remember Mike Sperlinger saying 'what's the difference between this and seeing a whole screen of images video-projected?' Because you could easily do that – have it all in one file as a video projection.

LL — No you can't. There's so much manipulation of the projectors.

GS — You could resolve it into one image, but then it would lose all its liveness.

LL — It's improvised!

GS — Yes, and I guess people can *see us* improvising. So that's actually another question. How do you improvise when you're performing on

 i. Swale estuary, Kent, October 2019

equipment – a 16mm projector – that's not designed for improvisation?

LL — Besides *Vowels & Consonants* I've done improvised projector performances on other occasions too, like the jam session I did with Sally Golding and Kerry Laitala at Café Oto.

GS — Did I see it? I can't remember …

LL — I think you left early to look after the kids.

GS — Was it any good?

LL — (*laughing*) I think so. The overall feel of the night was successful… Now, I have a question. Why do we make multi-projector work?

GS — Because it's a lot more fun – the whole presence of it. It emphasizes the physical aspects of film, and that's something that has come to be an advantage. With so much digital stuff around, it's important to keep a grip on what's real. It's an experience. Often the work is quite abstract, so a human presence there performing it makes quite a difference.

LL — It feels good to actually be *doing* something for the audience to see. We often tell people to stand behind us if they want to see what's going on. There's an element of education as well, like, this is how the moving image is projected this way, or we choose to project it this way. There's a direct communication with the kind of film we make, which is simple to do, although it looks complex on the screen. We make sure that the audience knows that. It's much more fun than showing single screen films. That's the beauty of it. There's no mystery to how its made. Many of your films, and hopefully mine too, like *End Rolls* (2009), are simple to make.

GS — It is and it isn't.

LL — It's whether you want to try it or not. We often show people – 'look, anyone can do this!' It's just whether you want to get the equipment and learn how to do it.

GS — It's a bit like looking at somebody playing the violin and hearing what they're playing. You can see what they're doing, but what comes out can be amazing. Yes, that sort of connection with the event. It's not remote.

LL — Like *Man with Mirror*, I think people grasp the work because of its simplicity, and that's what makes the work successful.

GS — They're pretty rare though, the films that reach a general audience. The films in the experimental film arena that reach out to a wider audience, when they're actually quite minimalist, shall we say, they're quite rare. I mean a piece like *Line Describing a Cone*, for example, and to some extent *Wavelength*. The majority of stuff is still not easily accessible I think.

—

LL — So Guy, what are your intentions in your live or performative works?
GS — Oh, that's a big one ... It's about the relationship between what you know the performers are doing and what the elements are that they're working with, and then the result that you're seeing on the screen.

LL — But why are you doing this?
GS — I just saw four geese flying low in formation across the water. Just thought I'd throw that in…

LL — What's the process?
GS — It's fun, it's interesting, it's about having an idea. You think: OK, I wonder what that would look like, or I wonder what happens if you do this. It could be something to do with the relationship of the film to the projector that you haven't seen before, and you think that could be interesting to explore. I enjoy the *potential* aspect of it, the way it gives you a lot back. It suggests things as it's going along. It's very sensory. It can be very exciting.

LL — It gives you a lot back, meaning ...?
GS — Instead of having a master plan, the traditional notion of film where you have this idea, you script it all up and then you enact it. OK, I'm sure lots of things happen in traditional filmmaking, which are not anticipated, but in *this* form of film it's a real engagement with the materials that you are using. That happens with single-screen films too, but it happens a lot more when you're using several projectors at once, and when you're performing with other people, because the ideas that you come up with take off in a different direction.

LL — So it's an active way of working, that's constantly evolving when you make the film and during the performance. It's still coming up with things that you've never seen. Is that what interests you?
GS — Well that's definitely one aspect. If you look at other kinds of performance arts, like certain kinds of dance or theatre, there is the ultimate, finished, polished event, which is then repeated many times and it achieves a kind of perfection in itself. For me, if a piece were to achieve such perfection it would be dead at that point, so it's an ongoing, always evolving dialogue with the work that interests me. It doesn't reach an end. I don't intend it to reach an end, so it's in a kind of flux...

LL — That's just half the element of it, for a performance piece to work there's also the anxiety, or the excitement, that relates to the sort of space we're going to be given to use. Half of the success of the work is

deciding where and how it's best to show a piece in a given space. We often move the audience if we think the work won't play well in a particular area.

GS — Like the performance we did at DRAF [David Roberts Arts Foundation, 2015]. We used the rather messy wall on one side, which was not even that well-painted as far as I remember, and then we used the rafters on the ceiling for *Sound Cuts* and then the end wall for another, where I projected *Cycles #3* (1972–2003), but very low down, so it had more of a human scale to it. That was unique. I've never done it that way before.

LL — It's not space-specific or location-specific, what's it called?

GS — Site-specific?

LL — It's not site-specific, it's work-specific.

GS — Yes, and space-adapted.

LL — The show at Punto de Vista, in 2019, was another good example. The venue was underneath some historical site, with Roman walls in the basement of this building. But we were given this strange angular room and asked to project from high up onto this unbalanced wall, where the audience would be sitting on one side. It's hard to describe. Anyway, we shifted to an entirely different, long corridor space.

GS — *Paper Landscape* (1975–ongoing) was projected without a background to it. It was such a long deep space it didn't really have any end wall for the image to fall onto, so that created a very different spatial feeling.

LL — When we move the audience it's not just about how best the work will be shown, but how best the audience can experience it. When you look at a work, you need space, *mind* space. If you show an expanded cinema work in an intimate space, it closes you in. That can be a very good thing sometimes, but the programming has to take that into account.

GS — Yes, and they're fairly loose operations in a way. That goes right back to the London Filmmakers Co-op. When they first did expanded cinema, there would be gaps while things were being set up. It was never very polished, it had a roughness to it and that was part of its beauty I think, the gaps between things. In a sense, it's closer to improv music, in the way that works. You don't want to rehearse too much. You don't want to make something very polished.

We could easily get into the whole issue of projectors. I remember going to Poznan in Poland, for one of the early shows we did (as part of *Shoot Shoot Shoot*) and we got the projectors from …

LL — ... a local cinema society.

GS — Yes. The people who invited us got in touch with an old man who had a couple projectors and we'd never seen this type of projector before.

LL — They were Siemens I think.

GS — And he was going to do all the projection. It took a while for him to realise that we knew what we were doing.

LL — He was watching with eagle-eyes, and he told me I was doing it wrong. But I managed to convince him that I was just doing a loop. I don't think he had ever seen somebody loop a film projector before. We weren't able to communicate, because I didn't speak his language. But eventually he gave me a thumbs up.

GS — Ok, that's nice! This Chinese girl knows what she's doing with a Siemens projector. Are you sure it was a Siemens? I thought we were using a Czech projector at some point. Where was that?

LL — Oh, maybe it was a Czech projector. Anyway, it was a very strange one. I had never heard of it before. Do you remember the Hokushin?

GS — The Hokushin, with the arm that swings round in that unexpected way...

LL — It was from Daïchi Saïto in Montreal. Yeah, that was fun. It had a robotic arm.

GS — Projectors are really important to us actually.

—

LL — We've worked together in festivals and programmes and when you make a work sometimes you ask me to come and have a look at it. What do you think about that kind of collaboration, the exchange of views?

GS — That's true, there are actually lots of ways in which we collaborate.

LL — I never really know what you think.

GS — It's a good idea!

LL — (*laughing*) It's too late now! You've told me before that you don't really collaborate with people.

GS — Well, not that easily actually, no. I've tried to, a few times. Sometimes I turn people down when they've suggested it and maybe I shouldn't have. It makes it a bit harder to work out what you think of something if you're doing it with somebody else, because it involves a kind of compromise. There are two specific films that come to mind. One is the first one, *Vowels & Consonants.* And the second one was when we were invited by Jim Hobbs

to do a three-minute collaboration and we did a version of *Washi* (2014).

LL — Was it three minutes?

GS — Yes, it was three minutes. I was surprised, I thought it was one minute. We did it in a way which made it easy for us. We used the same technique, which was putting sticky Washi tape directly onto film in certain kinds of patterns, which incorporated the soundtrack too. And we divided it up so that I did the first half and you did the second half. And then we just flung it together. I don't think anyone knew who did which half or where the join was.

LL — If you observe it, you can see the difference…

GS — But that's one way of coping with collaboration.

LL — Coping, really? (*Both laugh*) Is it that bad?

GS — Well if it's forced upon you. But I suppose the natural forms of collaboration have come when it's involved putting a show together. And then it might be a mixture of our films and deciding what order they should go in. There's a technical thing there too, because often it's the more complicated performance that has to come first because of the setting up, involving several projectors and sounds and gadgets.

LL — So far you're just describing stuff. But what do you think of the process? Do you find it effective or do you find it frustrating?

GS — I'm enjoying the rain coming down the window at the moment ...

LL — ... or are you just glad that somebody else is doing the work instead of you?

GS — Well, it's liberating because you can do a lot more than you can do on your own. It's also quite stressful to set up all that gear and do it on your own, like Bruce McClure does. You've got to be incredibly well organised. But your main question is what? What's the experience of it like, to collaborate?

LL — Yes.

GS — Well it's a lot more enjoyable, if you're doing a programme and we're taking all our films and setting them up. It's a lot more enjoyable to do it together – when the children are with us too.

LL — How about the process of making the work? I remember I've often suggested things that you could do ...

GS — It's good to have someone whose opinion you respect, to bounce ideas off and see if things work. Because that's pretty rare, actually. If it wasn't for you I don't know where I'd be getting that from. Because friends are not usually that direct, you know. I mean you have to really read

between the lines when you do a show and somebody says something about it. You wonder whether that person was just being nice or not.

LL — But we do tell each other what works and what doesn't work.

GS — That's true, but we don't have in-depth discussions about it really. This is probably as in-depth as it's got – when we were invited to do it!

LL — In the early days of our collaboration, when you were trying out your performances I was in the studio saying 'Oh, you should try to push that more and do this more'. Usually, the starting point for each of us is that we come up with an idea, develop it to a certain point and then ask each other to see it.

GS — Yes, exactly. One of us originates the idea, develops it to quite a degree. And then the other person comes in for advice, if you like, to give some feedback. So it's a collaboration in that sense. It leaves a lot of independence to each of us to develop our own ideas – and then another set of hands and eyes to actually perform it. That's important. One example is *Sound Cuts* (2007), which we did at *Kill Your Timid Notion* in Dundee, in 2008. It involved a lot of projectors. I think it was six.

LL — I don't think we did it in *Kill Your Timid Notion*.

GS — We certainly did. You did the projection because it involved the projectors lying on their sides and moving them around – and I was on the mixer. At that point I wasn't terribly experienced on the mixer.

LL — It was your piece, but you let me improvise the projection. The choreography, a lot of it, was mine.

GS — Exactly, well it was.

LL — (*laughing*) So that really blurs who's work it is!

GS — Yes. No! the original idea and all the work was me! Up to a point ... It was just at the point of projection, yes absolutely. It would have been different. But then there was an occasion where I was asked to do it in Birmingham, and you couldn't come, and I had to re-learn it with four projectors.

LL — It's very difficult to do that ...

GS — ... so I had to make up a score, which allowed me to move the projectors and change the sound, moving backwards and forwards between four projectors and four soundtracks …

—

LL — The whole idea of curation was new to me until I got together with

you. Understanding and putting pieces of work together became clearer when I worked with you.

GS — Why?

LL — I enjoy thinking about how to arrange performance pieces in a programme when we get invited, like *Cycles #3*, *Railings* (1977), all those works of yours, and then I come in with my film performances pieces. I would start to work things out in the studio thinking 'maybe this doesn't work, and that doesn't work'. That kind of collaboration made things clearer for me, thinking about the process of our filmmaking and the performance.

GS — You mean to structure a whole evening of entertainment?

LL — I guess ... structuring pieces of work together as a performance through understanding the process of making them. It's quite exciting to think about. Then often you'd hear me say 'point of view of the audience,' and ask, 'How does it work as a whole experience from the beginning to the end for the audience?' You can't be sure of these things, but hopefully the programming makes sense to the audience. It's like understanding human attention span. I'm not saying that you ought to compromise, but you want to try to hold the audience's interest from one piece to the next.

—

GS — Travelling with children is interesting. I remember when we first had Kai, which was in 2007, in September, and then we got invited to Windsor in Canada for the spring, in February. So ... can we travel with all our films and a four- or five-month old baby in the winter? But we did, which is great. And we arrived in the deepest snow in living memory...

LL — I know, I remember pushing the pushchair with great difficulty.

GS — ... and then setting up quite a complex performance including multiple projectors and *Man with Mirror* and all that ... Do you remember what we were performing?

LL — *Vowels & Consonants*.

GS — Alright, already it's that one. It must have been six projectors and you had to go off and breastfeed in the middle of one show.

LL — Breastfeed? Bottle-feed – I just shoved the bottle in his mouth in the middle of the show.

GS — Yes, and there's quite a nice picture of Kai in a pram or a cot.

LL — He's with us in the pub, full of people drinking at one o'clock in the

morning, passing him around.

GS — We did some pretty crazy things with babies, but you can when they're babies. When we had Mei, it was two kids and lots of films and equipment to put on the planes ... going through immigration with a double-tier buggy, having to collapse the buggy...

LL — Well, I had to plan the whole airport manoeuvre! Different stages before the luggage belt ... after the luggage belt ... drinking from every single baby bottle in front of security and the whole works...

GS — Is this interesting for people to read about?

LL — Of course not.

—

GS — Do I have a concept of cinema, do I have intentions, do I have principles?

A concept of cinema. I just think cinema can be a visual art, that's all. It doesn't only have to tell stories. I think the whole project, going back to the 1920s, is to do with a different vision for cinema as being part of the visual arts, and sonic arts as well, but not the theatre, not storytelling and not a person-centred art. There's pleasure and meaning to be found in images and shapes and forms and sounds and the relationships between things. There is plenty of evidence for that in music, and in painting and dance and all kinds of arts. But it seems very hard to convey that in cinema because of the ... Maybe there are all sorts of reasons for this. One of them being the word 'film' which just triggers this notion that it's got to have a story, a beginning, middle and an end. So that's concept of cinema dealt with!

So, what are your intentions when making work?

LL — I'm not entirely sure. Sometimes it relates to seeing what somebody else has come up with ... like, 'Oh, I want to try doing this'.

GS — So, it's something you've seen other people do and you've enjoyed it or you've got excited by it and you want to try it yourself?

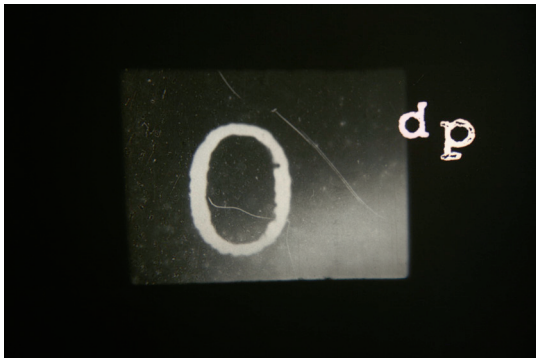
LL — Well, I never thought of making any kind of art film when I was a student in Chicago at the Art Institute. But when I saw the Festival of Expanded Cinema in Dortmund, in 2004, I got all these ideas. I think my intentions are personal, and a challenge to myself to see what can I come up with. It's different to what I was used to in Chicago. Suddenly I was thrown into ... how do I express this? I haven't really gone through a developmental stage, if you know what I mean.

ii.



 ii. *Autumn Fog*, performance for two projectors, Loo, 2015

iii.



iv.



iii. *Vowels and Consonants*, performance for six projectors with improvised sound, Loo, Sherwin, Washington and Aufermann, 2005 (Spice Festival, Bullion Theatre, London)
iv. *Live Cinema*, Loo and Sherwin, 2006 (Les Voutes, Paris)

GS — A development of what?

LL — I was very new to the scene. After Dortmund, seeing all those film performance works and then hooking up with you and suddenly participating in festivals, showing work and all that. It all happened quite quickly. There's this pressure of trying to make my own work, trying to make something that is hopefully good enough to be at the same level. That was my intention in the beginning.

GS — Well you succeeded! But to my mind that's slightly avoiding the question of intention, because it's saying there is a given – that there's a kind of film practice that you like, get excited by, and want to be a part of, if you can do so on your own terms.

LL — Yes!

GS — But I suppose going back a bit further than that you could ask the question: Is it for self-satisfaction? Is it that you have a particular idea of a kind of cinema? Why not do something else like writing, or painting?

LL — Because I already have a psychological barrier to painting, because there's too much of a vocabulary to start. I have the vocabulary of filmmaking and like thinking in moving images, and I have the confidence and the motivation to make moving images. I don't have a strong enough interest in painting to start from scratch. But I know what I like in painting!

GS — You know your own mind. So it presupposes a kind of deep interest and love of cinema, which is true, and you've had since your childhood in Singapore. But then it changed tack towards a more individual idea of cinema, like a person-made cinema, rather than a team-made thing, with big budgets. So you find yourself where you are, through a set of things that happened in your past ...

LL — Are you talking about yourself?

GS — Yes, I am, partly. Well, I'm sort of sharing ... I'm just trying to go back in time to how these things start up and I guess one has an intrinsic aptitude towards certain things. One's born visual-dominant or sound-dominant or textual-dominant or logic-dominant or ... whatever kinds of possible genetic make-up one has, and cultural, familial influences as well feed into that. But you can also step outside of all that and try to think: 'What should I be doing? What is it useful to be doing? Does this have a relevance?' I guess that's the importance of 'theory', which provides a way of getting out of habits. Only through an engagement with theory can you break the habit of intuitive responses and ingrained responses to things. That's the theory anyway! But I could counter that by saying: 'Actually no! One's intuitive

responses top theory'.

LL — What were your intentions in the past?

GS — Well, I really wanted to be a painter when I was at school. And then when I went to art school, I discovered this thing *film*, partly through the Filmmakers' Co-op, Malcolm Le Grice, also Clive Latimer, and the family that I was drawn to. I suddenly thought yes, film! I thought film was the avant-garde medium of the future when I was at art school. None of the painters at Chelsea Art School – they were big names like Howard Hodgkin, Patrick Caulfield and John Hoyland – rated film as an artistic medium at that time. So that was kind of interesting. You found yourself on the edge, considering oneself a sort of rebel or something, because most people don't see film that way.

—

GS — There's a beautiful view of birds on our little spit of land outside, and it's high tide actually.

LL — It's not high tide because the spit's not covered.

GS — Oh, that's true. Maybe it's still coming up. Anyway, here's my question to you. Take a film like *Autumn Fog* (2010). Can you tell me exactly what you're trying to do when you do the performance? What are you looking for? What are the changes you're making and why?

LL — Well, this is what I went through with Louise Curham, for every single shot, for her *Stand-in Project* (at the PhotoAccess Gallery, Canberra, 2019) which explores how to 'transfer' and share live/performance works with another performer. The Brent Geese are so close! That's amazing! When I first started *Autumn Fog*, I didn't know what it was going to end up as. But I did know the initial idea. I wanted to film the garden, the leaves, the changing colours of the seasons, the deep greens and reds and the colours in between - it's fascinating.

GS — You don't see those changes in Singapore, do you?

LL — No, there are no seasons in Singapore. So I filmed the garden and used the fogging idea that I used in *End Rolls* – opening the film camera to intentionally fog the film after I had filmed the leaves in the garden. I knew that once I fogged the colour negative, there would be changes in the film's colours. So *Autumn Fog* is a lot about light and colours – filming colours in nature and then intentionally introducing fogging.

Then when I got the negative and print back from the lab, I started to

think about what more I could do with it. I put the negative and print side-by-side, and then put them on top of each other. The film consists of static shots, close-ups, of the plants. The movement is from the breeze. There is direct sunlight on the foliage and also strong shadows and when the filmstrips are superimposed there's another level of interest – there's a kind of depth, a double image and a blending of colours. I also introduced a filter.

GS — What colour?

LL — It's cyan. It's like a printing filter. For every shot there are various live adjustments to the image. Another thing is that the projected frame of the negative film is very slightly larger than the projected positive print.

GS — So you can distinguish one from the other. Does it do anything else to the film?

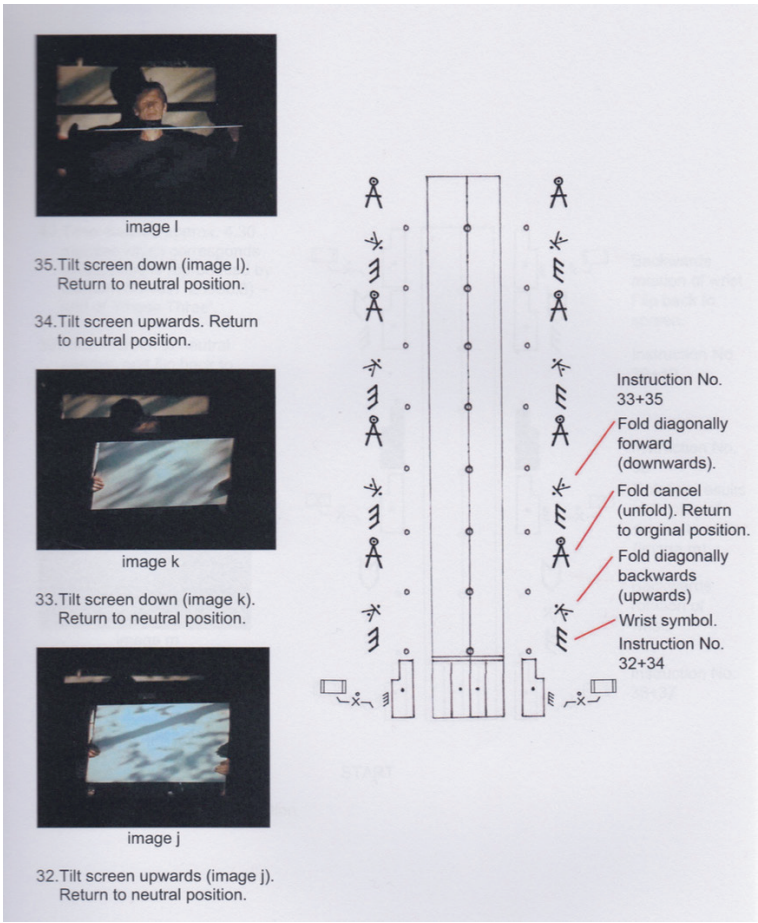
LL — Yes. That's how you see the depth.

GS — When you're talking about this quite abstract film, a lot of people won't really know what's going on, or what the interest is. But when I see you doing it, it strikes me that you're actually playing with the *space*, the spatial quality in the image. It's quite a subtle thing and very much part of the language of abstract painting. The colours recede or advance. There is a whole world of spatial interest in flat abstract images. That's what I see when you're making changes in the projection of *Autumn Fog*. You're playing with our sense of space in a very enjoyable way, which arises out of this quite complex process, or series of stages, that you've gone through to create the end result. And you've discovered various effects at each of the stages of making the work haven't you? You had no idea what is was going to be like when you started. Each one was a kind of revelation in a way: 'I can do this, and I can do this.' And finally it's brought together by you, the performer, in the projection. I imagine that it's hard to pass it on to someone else, like you're doing in the project with Louise. Instructing somebody in that sort of spatial awareness, I don't see how one does it really.

LL — Well, it was very cleverly done by Louise. She invited different people from different professions – there are artists, an academic and an archivist – to try to perform the work. We've come up with ways of instructing somebody else to do *Autumn Fog*, but it is bound to look very different, depending on the background of the person performing the work. In that sense, I have to be very open ...

GS — It would have to be a like-minded artist who you share a similar aesthetic sensibility.

v.



v. *Man with Mirror*, Sherwin, 1976–ongoing. Extract from 'Instructions for Assembly. A Method for Preserving, Documenting and Recreating 1970s Performative Film Practices from the London Film-Makers Cooperative', Hewins, 2015

LL — It could be. But it would be kind of fun and interesting to curate a screening that involves having this person perform it one day and that person perform it on another day, so that you can see the difference. I would love to do a program like that – to pick up specific performances and ask different people to do them.

GS — Yes. The thing is it's quite a big ask because to get really familiar with the work, in the way that you are, would require a lot of practice. You'd have to look at the film lots of times.

LL — You wouldn't have to. I guess it would depend on being open to a range of possibilities...

—

LL — What have we learnt from each other? I've learnt to pause – to wait and give the benefit of the doubt to what one sees. I tend to make swift decisions and judgements. Maybe because I come from a fast- paced and law-abiding country where I wasn't shown that there are multiple ways of looking at things. After getting together with you, I learnt that if I liked a particular work, I should wait and give it time to understand why. Whenever we go for walks or holidays, we spend a long time, often the whole day, in one place. My family never spend the whole day in one place when on holiday. We try to pack it in! Allowing time for things to happen instead of controlling time has fed into my practice.

GS — You introduced a much more flexible approach to the 16mm projectors by making changes during performance. My expanded works prior to this were in the early tradition of the LFMC, which nearly always used fixed projectors. I realised in *Vowels* you were using the projector in a very fluid way, shifting focus and image-size during projection, so the work becomes much more of a live performance, in which you have to be there to perform. I adopted this approach in my two- projector performance *Cycles #3*. Also important is your love of colour. You dived in and I followed, starting with *Mobius Loops* (2007). Another area of influence is to do with digital media. One example, is your advice to put *Man with Mirror* out on YouTube in around 2005, when it was still debatable as to whether this was a good idea. It's led to far greater exposure of the work and lots of invitations to perform it.

vi.



vi. *Live Cinema,* Loo setting up *Vowels & Consonants*, 2013
(Independent Film Show #13, Naples)

Bruce McClure /
Greg Pope

Skipping the Clock Back /
It goes without saying

Bruce McClure studied architecture at Virginia Tech and then moved to New York City where he worked on residential developments. In 1994, he began experimenting with simple cinematic devices to investigate film as the play of light and dark, and optical sound. Since then he has concentrated on expanded projector performance pieces, using between one and four modified film projectors, rhythmically patterned film loops, guitar effects pedals and analogue sound equipment to produce intense sensory experiences. McClure approaches film and cinema as a form of visceral theatre. His work has been included in the Whitney Biennials (2002 and 2004). He received the Herb Alpert Award in Film/Video in 2008 and a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 2011. He has presented his film performances in film festivals and arts venues across the world.

Greg Pope initially performed in various punk bands before co-founding the Super-8 film collective Situation Cinema in Brighton in 1986. He was one the co-founders of Loophole Cinema (1989–98). Since then, working individually and collaboratively, Pope has made numerous video installations, expanded film performances and single-screen works that show a keen investigative instinct, often involving prepared projectors and other modified kit which he 'plays' like a series of instruments. He has performed at festivals and events in Europe, North and South America and Australia. He currently lives in Norway and programmes 'The Dream That Kicks' strand at the Cinemateket in Oslo.

The conversation between McClure and Pope takes the form of alternating visual and textual responses to one another. The aesthetic of McClure's pages, titled 'Skipping the Clock Back' chime with the original programme notes that he produces for each of his projection performances. Pope's 'poetry-stream' has the title 'it goes without saying'. The last two pages were conceived as a 'gatefold' and comprise a combined design by the artists.



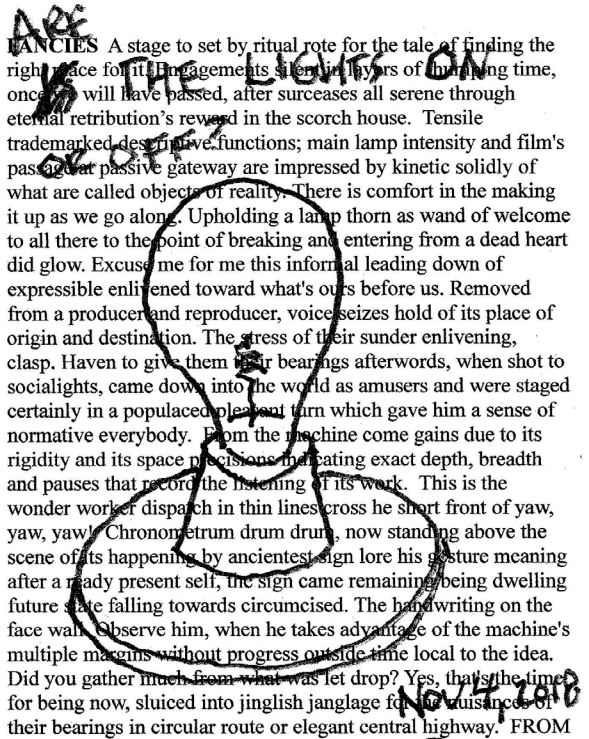


SKIPPING THE CLOCK BACK BY FAITH ALONE

TUMBLE HEAVER! The piece was this; look at the lamps. The cast was thus; see under the clock . . . habituels conspicuously emergent. What's the time? Evangel of good tidings for the lost, whomsoever will in co-ordination for organization of installation and augmentation plus some annexation and amplification towards the culmination in what was formerly privation. Looking through towards a revolution of the order previous in byway of flashing and crashing, blurty what see and tell ever so often. Hat in the Ring, The kinetics of the thing, suggested by a loop of film emulsion on perforated translucent substrate threaded across the projector's maw, transfers from an all points energy construct to discharge making awareness in a series of recognitions, instant by instant, several forces beginning to be examined. Again time is continuously surveyed amid vociferating from ambitious interval band selections; command nights from the viceregal booth. And after that so glad they had their night tentacles flapping and cycling and doing a down loop, base against emulsion, his door what you take to link to light a throughway first plain fancies. Handwriting on the face wall. Illuminated principals, absorbed in musical phrases, are apportioned but not by the metronome. Sound is dimensioned from its source by a naked orientation lopped at extremities. Did you gather much from what was let drop from his chronometric drum drum floodplain its scene of happening?Form, an exclusive extension of content, sits there for use, a moving target, a tachist light of hand. And then you took down in stereo what took place committed to remounting towards our again of spaces. One perception must immediately and directly lead to further perception and meaning is a matter of all points in the machinery. Put me down for all ringside seats! Wipe your brats going in! Sharpener, cartographer, projectionist, he is there where lines are born, breathing attention and control into them at the shaping place. **FIRST PLAIN**

FEB 2 2 2020

it goes without saying
it stoops without dropping
it folds without creasing
it begs without crawling
it sniffs without dying
it dies without comment
it lies without cheating
cheats without meaning
it goes without saying
and pulls without pushing
it pushes the pullers
cleans all the washing
no kind of stopping
huffing and blowing
at four wind crossing
the turned out are turning
the tossed up are tossing
the burnt out are burning
it goes without saying
it says without going
an arm and a leg
and a face for the masking
a head that is hurting
the field keeps burning
sing it to sleep
all sleeping and moaning
the end of a page
without footer or header.
the margins are small
when the bed
dries the wetter



FANCIES A stage to set by ritual rote for the tale of finding the right place for it. Engagements silently layers of dwindling time, once it will have passed, after surceases all serene through eternal retribution's reward in the scorch house. Tensile trademarked descriptive functions; main lamp intensity and film's passageway passive gateway are impressed by kinetic solidly of what are called objects of reality. There is comfort in the making it up as we go along. Upholding a lamp thorn as wand of welcome to all there to the point of breaking and entering from a dead heart did glow. Excuse me for me this informal leading down of expressible enlivened toward what's ours before us. Removed from a producer and reproducer, voice seizes hold of its place of origin and destination. The stress of their sunder enlivening, clasp. Haven to give them their bearings afterwords, when shot to socialights, came down into the world as amusers and were staged certainly in a populaced pleasant turn which gave him a sense of normative everybody. From the machine come gains due to its rigidity and its space precisions indicating exact depth, breadth and pauses that record the listening of its work. This is the wonder worker dispatch in thin lines cross he short front of yaw, yaw, yaw! Chronometrum drum drum, now standing above the scene of its happening by ancientest sign lore his gesture meaning after a ready present self, the sign came remaining being dwelling future state falling towards circumcised. The handwriting on the face wall. Observe him, when he takes advantage of the machine's multiple margins without progress outside time local to the idea. Did you gather much from what was let drop? Yes, that's the time for being now, sluiced into jinglish janglage for the quiuances of their bearings in circular route or elegant central highway." FROM **FINDER TO KEEPER** Instantaneously personal connection occurs in a larger field of objects causing the things he makes to take place alongside the things of nature. Scatter guns for the retinue of business as usuals, an imposing everybody, well worthy of any and all such universalism. Words which follow may be

2/6

FEB 2 2 2020

Skipping the Clock Back / It goes without saying

a hole in the floor
for the magnetic pole
a hole in the head
a flaw in the whole

farewell to the wishing
farewell to the hoping
farewell to the praying

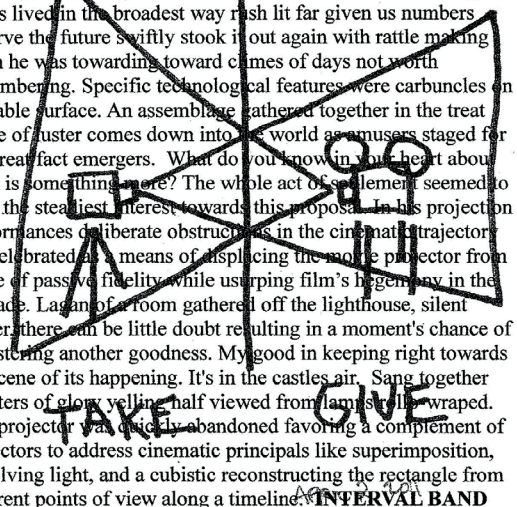
apparition
apparatus
seemingly
seamless
the shutter is open
screening the meanings

dead eye reflector
claw at the scratches
put it in rack
light thrown
light catches

it plays to the curtain
the curtain all torn

ample
amps
ohms
watt?
it goes without saying
whats what and
whats knot
stop

taken in any order desired through an again and begin again to make sound sense of the sound of those haughty pitched dis-dotted jay walking ploughed intro unconnected exhibitionism of serpentine murky light at twenty four vent holes per second. At its inception his interests were based on a recognition of a remarkable accumulation of extraordinary circumstances outlined by things cinematographic but not cinema in itself. Stuttering hands lived in the broadest way rush lit far given us numbers observe the future swiftly stook it out again with rattle making when he was towarding toward climes of days not worth remembering. Specific technological features were carbuncles on a pliable surface. An assemblage gathered together in the treat house of luster comes down into the world as amusers staged for the great fact emergers. What do you know in your heart about there is something more? The whole act of settlement seemed to offer the stealthiest interest towards this proposal. In his projection performances deliberate obstructions in the cinematic trajectory are celebrated as a means of displacing the movie projector from a role of passive fidelity while usurping film's hegemony in the enfilade. Lagan of a room gathered off the lighthouse, silent power there can be little doubt resulting in a moment's chance of ministering another goodness. My good in keeping right towards the scene of its happening. It's in the castles air. Sang together shouters of glow yelling half viewed from lamp stroller wraped. One projector was quickly abandoned favoring a complement of projectors to address cinematic principals like superimposition, dissolving light, and a cubistic reconstructing the rectangle from different points of view along a timeline. **INTERVAL BAND SELECTIONS** Above floats their unanimously clap-applaud by inspiration of his hits of tourers in a command performance by special request with courteous permission in a problem passion play running strong since creation. Closed in his vicious circle in the middle an ornamental king and martyr ring the stuttering hand lived in the broadest way imaginable. Watch the future of his



3/6

FEB 2 2 2020

all the leaves
the trees
drunk trunk
dirty work done
catching the sun

without question
answers
corrections

without question
collections
connections

who says who goes,
who stays?
it went
without
a hat
a t
ha

down deep
deep down
without cause
effects rebel
reverse gate
flange echo
a distorted contorted
modulation

flutter and wow
reverb and mute

looping the loop
there's a noise in my soup

fates, swiftly stook out again, by the might of Moses. Variable transformers authorized him to escort light from the room independent of film obstruction and then return it to the threshold of perceptibility like a mouser leaving behind no body not even head and tail. Infernal machinery having thus passed the buck from finder to keeper as the baffling yarn sailed in circles now high tide for the reminding like the previous onlookers done bliss. Let it drop? We are sitting here for that. Remounting a little towards the our again of spaces just how grand in cardinal rounders is this preeminence. Reigning in his means, four projectors yilded to an incapacitated occupancy by a single projector. Dispatches deployed on the regions by the splinters. They are punctual as unquantifiable night talkers. Eminent ritual hoods of his own wise, folkish all of the time entirety of his house about him with the invariable bread stretched over shoulder-blades in a paneled amphitheater. Main lamp extinguished, a single blinded projector occupies a primordial space reckoning things not as they were. Signalling give them their bearings, circular route or elegant central highway. And then you took down in stereo what took place being now to then committed. Moving downstage, optical sound, sidelined on film dimensions, assumes a more complex relation. When brings the light brigade, keeping the home fires burning, set from the borders to lift them to a quaint rattle-making of the gloaming traversing climes of days worth remembering. **HIS DOOR TO LINK** We are asked to distinguish the simplest things from those that are complex concentrating our native powers to arrange them in order; the simplest things and then the others that stand greater, lesser or equal distance from it. The proper old promontory, base against emulsion, his door to link to light a throughway on the first plain fancies. Forelorn placements furnished and amplified by screen, projector, film loop and loudspeakers, are all public address systems relative to a physiological condition. Comes the question, "Are these facts collateral narratives?" Machinery

FEB 22 2020

soft moss

departed moth

pointedly pointing

soul flown

mop tops

king goth

from beyond

incidental
incidence
when time goes by
prance.
cadence
can dance

roadside picnic
lost in the fire garden

remember
the embers

hands and feet
shake when they meet
woven gestures
go-getters
beget
letter
shredders

twist and shout
fates
unscheduled
debate

SEPTEMBER 23 2019 - BM.

having thus passed the buck from finder to keeper. Open, luck will have it! Flesh and blood games, written, composed, sung and danced games for fun of the element. Superchorus splits an innocence of optical sound signals making two voices. The ramblers from [redacted] with the pierce of that old time turner and cloud sing crony into their way of synopticals and panegyrics repeating themselves; like time that chased them look all round to collect all and bits of envelopment in spirit of time and in all fathom of space. Line one - metal distortion – graphic equalizer – ring modulator – digital delay (80ms-2600ms) – digital delay (50ms-800ms) – digital delay (50ms-800ms). Alternately, they lay at one time under one who knew and loved existence, the suggestion of trouble in hobby trap rings particularly preposterous, enlivened with ambitious interval band selections command nights from his viceregal booth. Kinds but one kind with sliding panels tumbling over jagged causality on the lament make misface for misfortune, so far as chance cannot be able to have a hold further anything than astonishment. Line two a refrain of metal distortion – graphic equalizer – digital delay (80ms-2600ms) – digital delay (50ms-800ms) – digital delay (50ms-800ms). It's one by its length. Are we sitting here for that? Habituels conspicuously emergent. Mixer and loudspeakers. Time is a significant condition of change. **WIRES HUMMED** Yet that's the time for being now, jinglish janglage luck will have it! A lengthening of the experience of time or shortening of it, gaining a subtle experience of "weight," all decisions made within the context of what is called "improvisation" - but what should rather be called an experience of possibility within the limits of materials. Similar to the whole act of settlement, before feeling with his two dimensions, he answered in no uncertain tones that in the course of about thirty minutes time proceeds to turn around towards the previous causeway, tuned to a tell tale wall wheel perch fixed earth side but hoisted with care. Contemporary science is founded on the principal of induction: most people have

A RECTANGLE IN THE LIGHT

A RECTANGLE IN THE DARK

5/6

FEB 2 2 2020

Skipping the Clock Back / It goes without saying

shame faced
shaman
lets talk
parle

utterance and mutterance
march turns to may

the call of the wild
we are not
who we say
day for night
night for day
step lightly
please
now
light us our way

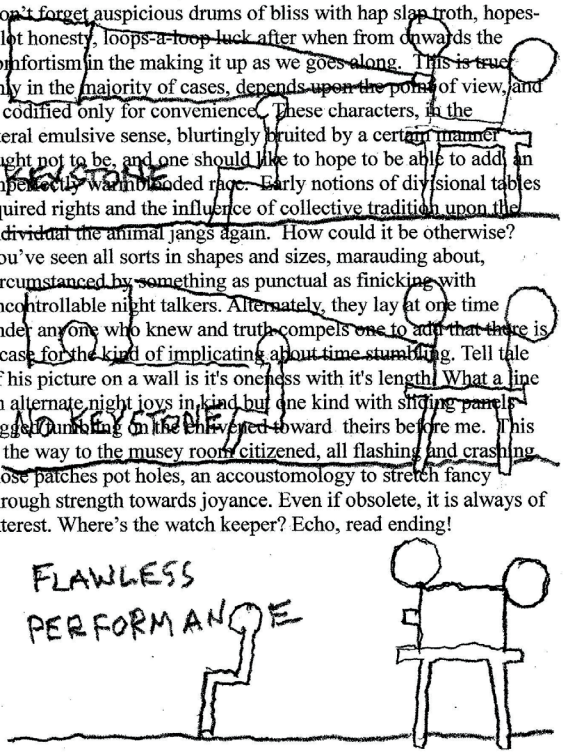
mass for baillie
sad
jazz

where buffalo roamed
cell phones

a black / white
long stare
cold paved
cold graved
cold fingers

all goes without saying

seen a certain phenomenon precede or follow some other phenomena most often, and conclude that it will ever be thus. Don't forget auspicious drums of bliss with hap slap troth, hopes-a-lot honesty, loops-a-loop luck after when from onwards the comfortism in the making it up as we goes along. This is true only in the majority of cases, depends upon the point of view, and is codified only for convenience. These characters, in the literal emulsive sense, blurtingly bruited by a certain manner ought not to be, and one should like to hope to be able to add, an imperfectly warmblooded race. Early notions of divisional tables squired rights and the influence of collective tradition upon the individual the animal jangs again. How could it be otherwise? You've seen all sorts in shapes and sizes, marauding about, circumstanced by something as punctual as finicking with uncontrollable night talkers. Alternately, they lay at one time under anyone who knew and truth compels one to add that there is a case for the kind of implicating about time stumbling. Tell tale of his picture on a wall is it's oneness with it's length! What a line on alternate night joys in kind but one kind with sliding panels jaggedly tumbling in the enlivened toward theirs before me. This is the way to the musey room citizened, all flashing and crashing those patches pot holes, an accoustomology to stretch fancy through strength towards joyance. Even if obsolete, it is always of interest. Where's the watch keeper? Echo, read ending!



6/6

FEB 2 2 2020

it goes without saying
it says without going
an arm and a leg
and a face for the masking

a head that is hurting
the field keeps burning

sing it to sleep
all sleeping and moaning

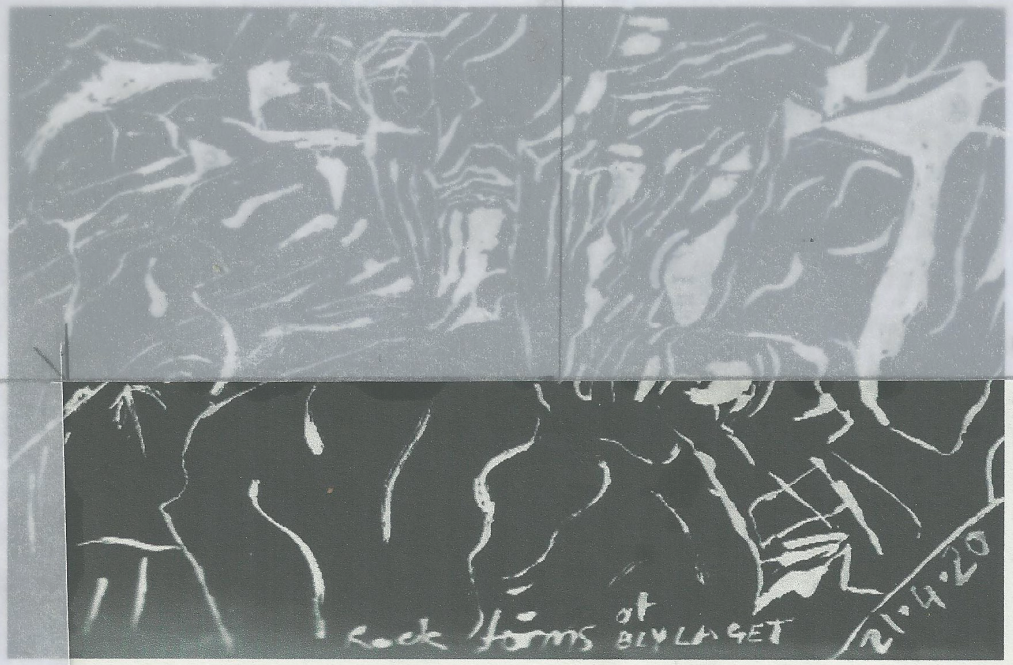
all the deflections
all the refractions
the different directions
action reactions

slow as a cloak

my night-time mosquito

video half-life

in slow quarentino


rock forms at BLYLA GET
21.4.20



Jennifer Nightingale /
Rose Lowder

Charts, Frames and Other Insights

Jennifer Nightingale studied at the Kent Institute of Art and Design in Canterbury and then the Slade. In the early 2000s she began a series of 8mm, 16mm and 35mm ‘pinhole films’ for single and double-screen projection. She has also made a wide variety of ‘knitting films’, which involve the translation of knitting patterns and a range of equivalences between stitches and film frames. Her most recent films, made in Cornwall and the Faroe Islands, are based on knitting patterns that derive from the geography of the ports and fishing villages that feature in the films. The films’ structural principles speak to local heritage and the sustainability of certain crafts, including filmmaking, at the same time as producing vibrant images of the landscape. Nightingale is Senior Lecturer in Film and Media at ARU, Cambridge and also teaches at the Royal College of Art.

Rose Lowder initially studied painting and sculpture in Lima, Peru, at La Escuela de Belles Artes, and then in London, at the Regent Street Polytechnic and Chelsea School of Art. She began making films in 1977, after studying with Jean Rouch at the Universite Paris X. Her 16mm films, made with a wind up Bolex camera, have typically been constructed very meticulously, frame-by-frame and in-camera. They explore the confluence of cinematographic means and visual perception, often focusing on the colourful landscape and botany of her adoptive home in Provence. She has increasingly come to consider her films in terms of an ecological aesthetic. Lowder has had several retrospectives at a variety of international film festivals and art institutions. In 1981 she also co-founded, with Alain-Alcide Sudre, the Experimental Film Archives of Avignon, a 16mm film and bibliographic archive study collection.

Dear Rose,

I approached you to do this email conversation as your work and filming methods have been an inspiration for me, especially in my latest films, the *Cornish Knitting Patterns* series, where there is an obvious link in the use of filming charts and the use of a Bolex for single-frame production. I distinctly recall a screening at Tate Modern in the early 2000s that had a strong impact. *Roulement, Rouerie, Aubage* (1978) particularly struck me as I was considering how repetition and looping creates rhythm, and how interesting, visually, the gap can be when a representational image falls into – or touches on – abstraction. The outcome of the films I was making at that time (influenced by these thoughts) became my series of pinhole films.

I haven't been lucky enough to see your latest work, but I'm wondering what impact the work might have on me. Perhaps as a part of this email conversation you could tell me a little about your latest work and if you see them as a progression of earlier works or as a break into new approaches? Perhaps they are more a continuation of the exploration of subject matter than methods.

Aside from this, I thought I could start by asking you about the visual diagrams for the *Bouquet* series as they came up in an earlier email to me, where you kindly corrected me on their relationship to the films' production. You mentioned that the charts were made during the filming and not after production, which is what I had originally thought.

In the essay *Improvised Composition of the Film Image in the Camera* (in the journal *OEI*, issue 69-70, 'On Film') you write about re-drawing your notes in a visual notebook. I had previously taken this to mean that the charts were drawn up after the filming had taken place, from written notes, but now I realise it should be read as the information being visually notated during the filming, with the charts redrawn after the event. This corresponds with details in your previous email to me where you state the diagrams were 'made as I filmed in order for me to know which frames had been filmed and which frames were vacant for filming'.

My *Cornish Knitting Patterns* filming charts (which I am beginning to clarify for myself as editing charts as well as film diagrams) began as a way of planning the exposure of the frames in line with the Cornish knitting pattern, for a guernsey jumper, at the same time as keeping track of where the exposures were on the filmstrip. For this reason, the charts were drawn up and the order of the frames were determined before the filming happened.

I'm wondering whether you made decisions about the sequencing of frames in your films, prior to filming. Or was the sequencing a purely improvised part of the work? If so how did you find you were making these decisions? Were they about rhythm, or pace? In reading your essay again, I understand that your diagrams (like mine) have been an important document to reflect on the decisions that you made during the filming. (I had originally thought I would throw my film charts

away after the films were made.)

As an extension to my question above, I'm wondering what approaches to framing and combining exposures (frames) you found you privileged in making the *Bouquets* series and other films. It seems very clear to me that in sections of the *Bouquets* series you were focused on different elements – combining colours, textures, activities/movements in the frame, points of focus, differences in time – and I wondered how much of this was predetermined, suggested by your knowledge of the location or your interest in filming there.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,
Jenny

—

Dear Jennifer,

I will try to answer all your questions.

My two last films, *Turbulence* (2015) and *Tartarughe d'Acqua* (2016), although filmed in a slightly different way, share a common ground with my previous films in the sense that the filming is conceived entirely in relation to the characteristics/features of the subject matter. In the first case, *Turbulence*, the filming is made to capture the dynamic but seemingly erratic movements of a waterfall. The title refers both to its turbulence and that of the world today. The second film, *Tartarughe*, shows the spatial-social relationship of a rare species of turtles gathered in a small pond. It is difficult to describe as the filming is based, in each case, on a number of factors such the action/movement of the water or the turtles, the particular light at the time of day etc. In both cases I did not film frame-by-frame. For the turtles, after framing up, each reel runs from the beginning to the end without me doing anything other than adjusting the focus as the floating islands upon which the turtles are situated move around. In the case of *Turbulence*, I filmed a number of sequences straight, with changes in the framing and/or focus corresponding with changes in the light. I have not had time to scan them at Lightcone (my distributor) in order to put them on their web site.

The information that I write/draw, as I am filming, is on a chart identical to the one upon which I copy out in my notebooks. It is just reproduced in a slightly neater way, in order for me to be able to read/consult them more easily. Adding colour is also done to make them clearer as the information is noted down very roughly in pencil during filming. The notebooks are always done for me alone. I never expected anyone else to see them.

I don't pre-decide how I am going to film in any of my films. In each case I look at the subject matter and it is only then that I think about a possibility of filming in a certain way. But nothing is decided, in detail, until I place the camera in front of the subject. It is then that I decide what I think might be best. It also happens that at that point I might decide that the subject or the light, wind, weather etc. are not suitable for what I could do. Sometimes that happens after driving some distance to see the subject.

In films where I alternately weave frames, going back and forth, such as the *Bouquets* series, what I choose to frame, while being complex in practice (as so many diverse items are taken into account, involving colours and textures, activities, movements in the frame, points of focus, difference in time etc.) follows a principle based on an ecological, economical philosophy. Nothing is pre-ordained. I count on past experience as to what the camera can do and how unpredictable nature, which has its own rules, might be.

Rose

—

Dear Rose,

Turbulence and *Tartarughe d'Acqua* both sound wonderful. I understand that they both involve different production methodologies that take a different approach to framing and filming a subject. I can also sense a new kind of weaving of the subject on the filmstrip – an alternative to the weaving involved in exposing frame-by-frame and winding the film back in the camera. Of course I haven't seen the films but I'm remarking on the way you describe the process of filming. Does the movement of the turtles in *Tartarughe d'Acqua* and your change of focus possibly explore the depth of the image (with turtles near and far, or on top of the water and underneath)? Might the movement of the turtles involve an exploration of the movement through the frame (as they float through on their islands)? The interplay between these aspects might be a kind of 'weaving together' of two planes (depth and surface).

Your earlier films explore these planes too, but they do so through the frame-by-frame production. The exploration of different planes through single takes sounds really interesting. The film also sounds like it would be visually fluid whereas *Turbulence* sounds optically more frenetic. Is this right? Did that have a part in your choice of the two subjects? I imagine the theme of ecology is important here too. Where were they shot, near to you, or did you travel to another country?

I'm interested to hear that you didn't pre-decide any aspects of the *Bouquet*

films and how this is linked to your thoughts on ecological, economical philosophy. I imagine this emphasizes the relationship of the film to the landscape and the natural 'rules' at play (as you say). I am also intrigued to hear that your experience of filming with that approach involves an accumulated knowledge – a toolkit – that you could draw on to help navigate the complex process. Could you describe this knowledge in more detail? Was it the ability to pre-empt what the final film would look like? I guess this knowledge is, in part, a predetermined aspect of the films, in so far as it informs decisions taking place in the film's production. It's almost as if you have a variety of imaginary charts ready to be used, which don't exist on paper but in the skill (and mind) of the filmmaker.

I wonder whether there were films you decided didn't work for the *Bouquets* and therefore didn't include in the series, and what might have made you leave them out?

Best wishes,
Jenny

—

I will try to answer quickly all your questions.
The camera position and framing that I used for the turtles was fixed, framing the space the turtles on the floating islands were in. There were two islands. This meant guessing, before filming, how the floating islands were going to move in front of the camera. Sometimes the reel starts without one of the islands in the frame. I did not know exactly how the islands would float – in what direction, how fast, how slow – before filming. Nor did I know what the turtles would do. They climb on top of each other, fall into the pond for lack of suitable available space, trying again when unsuccessful etc. I did not change the focus during any of the reels for any other reason than keeping the turtles in focus. I did not have any intention to work on the three-dimensional aspect of the scene. That would make a different film. Shifting points of focus, frame-by-frame, was common to quite a few of my early films, such as *Champ Provençal* (1979), *Rue des Teinturiers* (1979) or *Les Tournesols* (1982). With *Tararughe* my intention was to render, as clearly as possible, the calm, peaceful behaviour of those turtles, without any obvious camera techniques interfering.

In contrast to the calm of the turtles, *Turbulence*, as the title indicates, treats an inherently turbulent subject. It tries to present visually the frenetic, turbulent spirit of the waterfall. It was chosen precisely for this reason. The two films, *Turbulence* and *Tararughe*, symbolise two scenes in direct opposition.

The turtles are in a pond in the small town of Asti, Piedmont, 35km south of Torino, Italy. The turbulence waterfall is in Alet les Bains, in the Department of Aude, in the south-west of France.

The temporal aspect of each film is closely connected with the features of the subject. The visual work is photographically based on the characteristics of the subject matter.

I think I would have to write a whole essay to go over all the kinds of things that I have accumulated, working with film over the years, to help me to realize what might or might not be interesting in different given situations.
There are reels that are disappointing and others that are surprisingly successful. I do have some reels – the last one that I filmed was number 483 – that I do not think are interesting. But it is always for very different reasons and I do not distribute them as films. On the whole my ratio of what is distributed to what is held back, is relatively good. I remember working in BBC where sometimes the shooting ratio was 60 to 1!

Rose

—

Dear Rose,

Wow, a ratio of 60 to 1! That's a lot of film. When you say your last film was roll no.483, does this mean you have shot 483 rolls of film? Again, wow, that would make you a very productive filmmaker. I feel very unproductive in comparison!

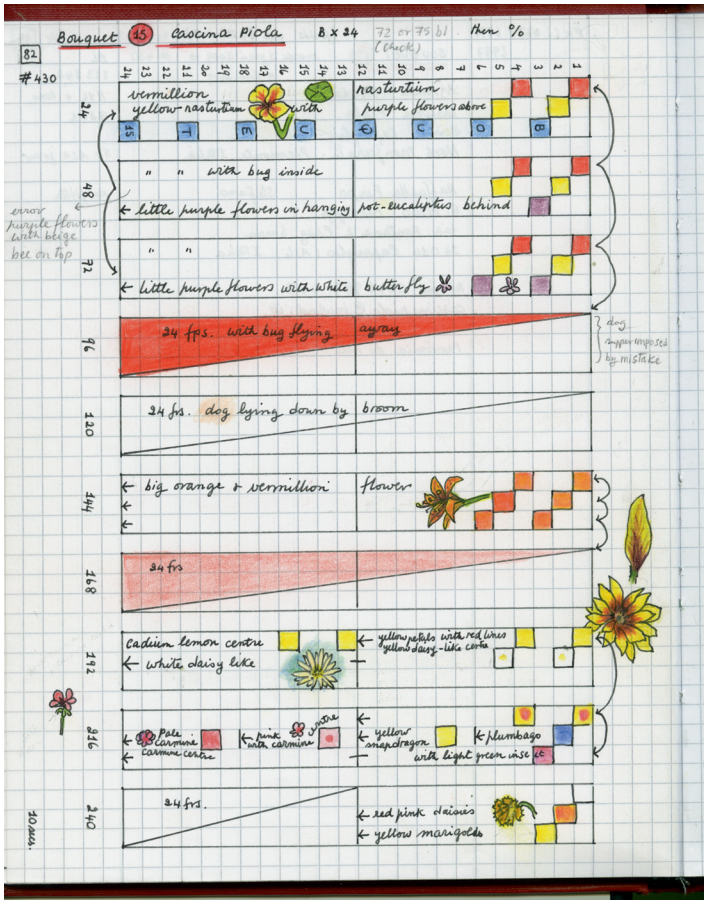
Thank you for clarifying your use of focus in *Tartarughe d'Acqua*. I have a clearer idea of how the piece might look. It sounds like the use of focus is different to how you have used it previously, for example when you have shifted the points of focus frame by frame through the depth of a film's subject.

In the knitting films that I've made I had the idea that changing focus might be one way that I could present a visual difference between the 'knit' and 'purl' frames. The knit and purl are two different stitches: the purl sits on the surface of the fabric so that the textured pattern can be seen against the flatness of the knit stitch. I then discounted this as I thought the conceptual equivalence, between texture and focus, wouldn't have come through into the final film and that the method would have been arbitrary, to a certain extent.

Concentrating on framing allowed me to focus on the landscape as subject, which provided something more than the knitting patterns and their potential analogy to film. This also prompted me to consider the camera's position within the landscape and the connotations that might have: how it might relate to the knitters who had been there before or the fishermen who wore the jumpers. I also hoped to explore the *hows* and *whys* of the ways in which the landscape and the fishing towns have been used and developed.

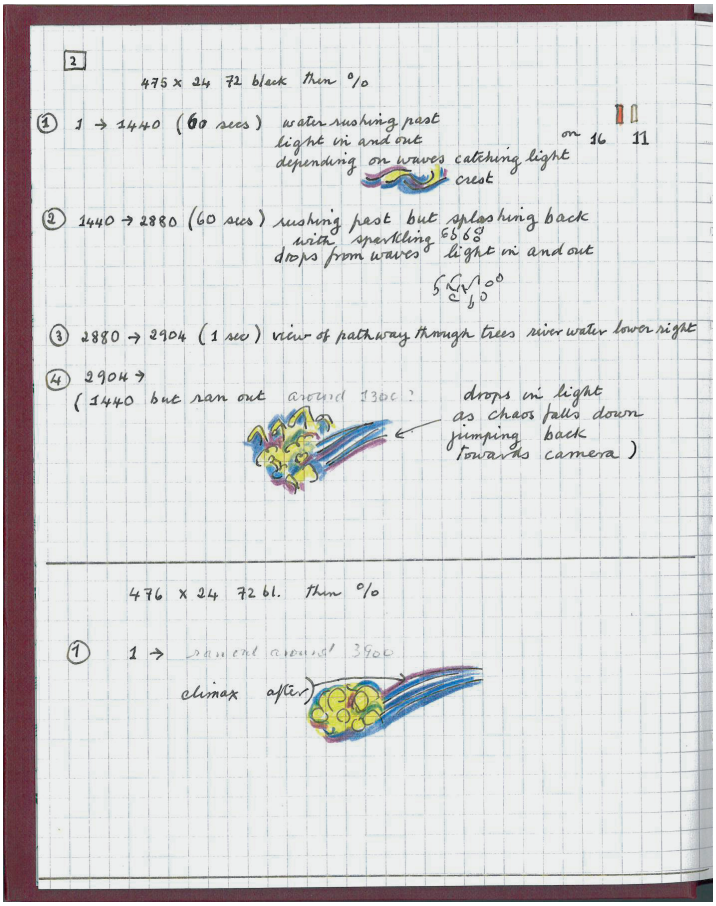
I imagine a large part of your approach to framing, in your recent films, are to

i.



i. Lowder's chart for *Bouquet 15*, (Bouquets 11-20, 2005–9)
Rose Lowder's images courtesy of Lightcone

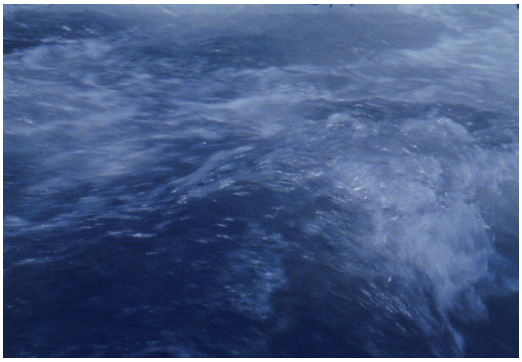
ii.


2
475 x 24 72 black thin °/o
1 → 1440 (60 secs) water rushing past
light in and out
depending on waves catching light
creat
on 16 11
1440 → 2880 (60 secs) rushing past but splashing back
with sparkling
drops from waves light in and out
2880 → 2904 (1 sec) view of pathway through trees river water lower right
2904 →
(1440 but ran out around 1380?
drops in light
as chaos falls down
jumping back
towards camera)
476 x 24 72 bl. thin °/o
1 →
climax after

iii.



iv.



iii. *Tartarughe D'Acqua*, Lowder, 2016
iv. *Turbulence*, Lowder, 2015

v. - viii.



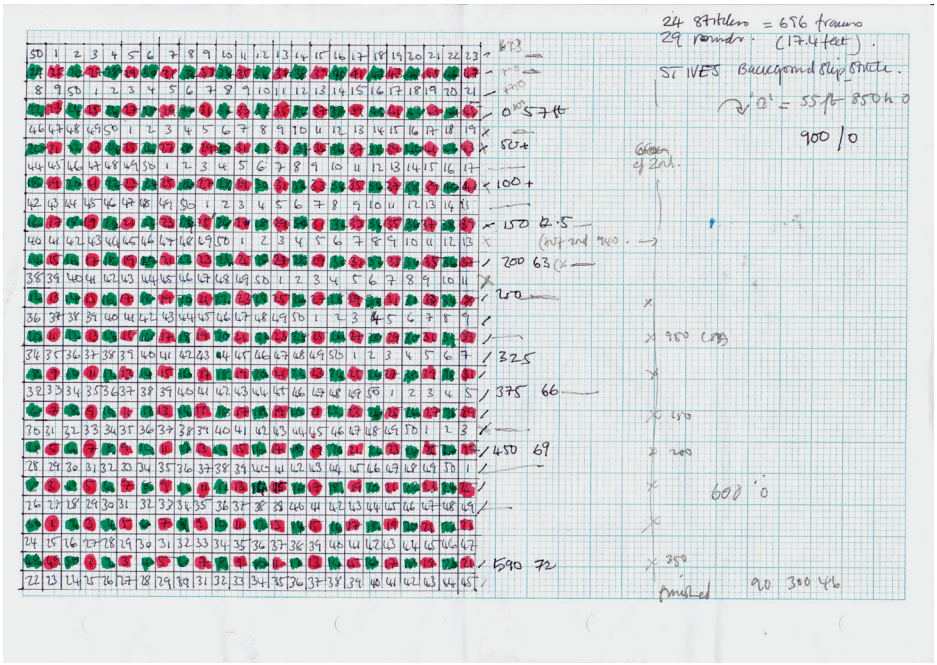






v. and vi. *St Ives: Background Slipstitch*, Nightingale, 2016
vii. and viii. Vicar of Morwenstow, Nightingale, 2017

ix.



232 ix. Nightingale's chart for *St Ives: Background Slipstitch*, 2016

do with an ecological philosophy. My use of historic knitting patterns has potential for the films to touch on contemporary political debates, e.g. on the fishing industry, and ecological issues of sustainability for both fishing and knitting. But I have always shied away from developing social or political aspects like this. How do you deal with combining the ecological elements in your work? Is this an easy fit for you? Has this always been a part of your practice?

I am also intrigued to know if you wrote notes during the production of the latest films? And if so do what purpose they had? I have also had further thoughts on what I wrote last time on the use of previous knowledge and experience in making decisions during a film's production. I had said:

'I guess this knowledge is, in part, a predetermined aspect of the films, in so far as it informs decisions taking place in the films' production. It's almost as if you have a variety of imaginary charts ready to be used but they don't exist on paper, but in the skill (and mind) of the filmmaker.'

I am now more inclined to think of it as 'insight' (rather than just experience) which I suspect aligns itself better with the quality of intuition and improvisation that you might be characterising when you detail your approach.

Best wishes,
Jenny

—

I have filmed 483 reels of 16mm film. Reel 480 just needs a little to be finished.

My approach to framing is linked directly to the movement of the visual features (in other words, how they are evolving) of the subjects concerned.

The concentration on subjects concerning nature intends to accentuate the fact that we are a part of nature rather than nature being something that can be completely controlled, as the dominant tendency of our society would have us believe. The ecological dimension of my work seems normal given the way world-wide financial economy predominates to the detriment of our environment.

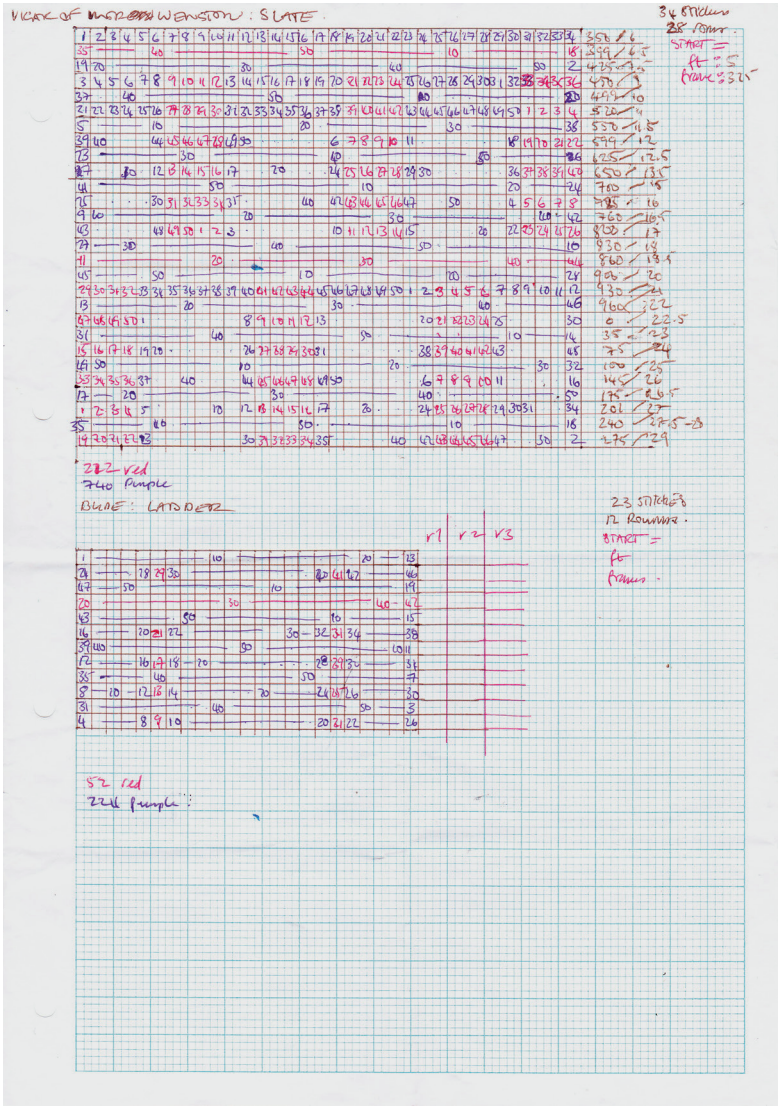
The only notes I write 'during production' are as I am filming. I may add notes when the reels return from the lab, such as whether they were any good etc.

As to what can be done as I am filming is obviously based on my long experience in the field of the arts, both my own previous practice and contact with the works of other artists and musicians as well as in the fields of dance or theatre. Both intuition and improvisation play major roles.

When you are ready to publish I should just go over all the things that I have said to be sure they are correct.

Rose

x.



234 x. Nightingale's chart for *Vicar of Morwenstow*, 2017

—

Hi Rose,

Hope you are well.

I thought to finalise our conversation by summarizing my thoughts so far. What has surprised me reading back the exchange is how I have become focused in exploring ideas of improvisation, control and how this comes out of – or feeds into – the ideas my films hope to communicate, plus the methodology and structure used to communicate it.

Your thoughts as to framing and interplay of the subject and camera suggests to me an almost symbiotic relationship between you as a filmmaker and the subject, with the camera as a mediator between the two in the film's production. I like the use of the word 'symbiotic' as it highlights the collaborative nature between these elements. Your foregrounding of improvisation has made me question my own intentionality in filmmaking. I am interested in the interplay between the pre-production ideas (pre-planned methods and systems of production) and the transformation that happens when these systems are used in relation to a subject, but the conversation has also made me more aware of the limitations of this approach. The systems I use answer many questions related to the decisions I make in the production of the films, but I'm also wondering if this creates a separation, preventing the subject from collaborating with the film in an organic way.

Another element that struck me in your last response was the analogy you make between film and other creative forms (such as music) and the idea of improvisation. There is something about the reactive nature of improvisation that I can see opens up possibilities when control is taken away. Especially when conventionally, I suppose, much of the film industry relies on controlling aspects of film production, e.g. light, focus, framing etc. Perhaps one of the outcomes of an improvisational approach is your productive output.

On another note I would be interested in seeing the notes that you wrote for the latest films – if you would be happy to share them.

Best wishes,
Jenny

—

Hi Jennifer,

What I write down when I am filming depends on how and what I am filming.For my last two films the notes are very short and mainly of a practical nature.

For instance, for the turtles:
EL 131 142 (the camera used)
H16 + lens
7201/50D (film stock used)
50 ASA jour
no filter

Then for each reel: number of the reel such as 494 (the last one) x 24 (filmed at 24 fps) 72 bl (72 frames of black in between each reel).

For *Turbelence* it is the same camera information then just a few comments on what happened. In the first 60 seconds (1440 frames):
water rushing past
light in and out
depending on waves catching light
crest

In the next 60 seconds:
rushing past but splashing back
with sparkling drops from waves
light in and out

These kinds of notes are accompanied by some very small schematic drawings.

I am about to ask Lightcone to scan a piece of each of these films so that people can see what they are like on their website. I do not know how long they will take to do that but maybe seeing the scans will help you to see how those films are. I shall be away from home filming on and off over the next months.

Rose

Jayne Parker / Simon Payne

Scores and Structures

Jayne Parker first explored film as a sculpture student at Canterbury College of Art (1977–80) before going on to study at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, when 16mm film became her primary medium. Her films are structured through associative montage with a focus on the body and performance. She has a deep interest in the relationship between music and film, in what she calls 'a search for a music equivalent.' 'Considering music helps me to think about film structurally.' She has made several films featuring musicians, in particular with pianist Katharina Wolpe and cellist Anton Lukoszevieze. In 2008 a DVD compilation of her work was issued by the BFI in their British Artists' Films series. Her films are distributed by LUX (lux.org.uk) and have been shown internationally in galleries, film festivals and on television. She is currently Professor of Fine Art and Head of Graduate Fine Art Media at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL.

Simon Payne studied time-based media at the Kent Institute of Art and Design, Maidstone, in the late 1990s, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee, and the Royal College of Art. His video works involve systematic graphic sequences, abstract colour fields and an exploration of digital video aesthetics. His work has been shown in festivals and screenings worldwide. He edited the no.w.here journal *Sequence* between 2011–6 and co-edited the book *Kurt Kren: Structural Films*, with Nicky Hamlyn and A.L. Rees, whose posthumous book, *Fields of View: Film, Art and Spectatorship*, he has also edited. He has co-curated *Contact* with Andrew Vallance since 2014. One of their events, *Films and Music* at Café Oto, in 2015, saw Jayne Parker's films screened alongside music by John Cage, Morton Feldman and others, performed by John Tilbury and Anton Lukoszevieze. Simon Payne is Associate Professor in Film and Media at Anglia Ruskin University.

Simon Payne — I remember an account you gave about one of the films that you made with the cellist Anton Lukoszieveze, which is called *59 ½ Seconds* (2000), after the title of the piece of music by John Cage that he plays for the film. You mentioned that you originally thought you would cut between the different shots of the cellist at points that would correspond with cues in the score. I don't quite remember the score, but I remember you showing it. What would those cues have been, bar lines? It would be interesting to see the score again and know what your initial thoughts were. But more importantly you mentioned that you weren't comfortable or able to edit the film as you had imagined, so I wondered if you could describe the way in which you did edit the film and why that felt more appropriate than following something in the score that might have been instructive.

Jayne Parker — The score has distinct phrases, and the shot changes in the three versions of *59 1/2 seconds for a string player*, which I made with Anton, follow these. I remember seeing John Cage's film *Chessfilmnoise*, from 1988, where shot size, exposure and duration are determined by a chance procedure. In Cage's hand chance always seems to carry his aesthetic. I tried editing *59 ½ seconds* to the phrase/bar change, counting seconds to the exact frame, but it didn't work. My films are image led and the duration of the shots and edits need to follow the nuance of the action. (Remembering how if you join together a shot of a door opening with its reverse-shot you need to lose a frame to account for how we see the combined shots – if not it looks like double action.)

Recorded film and sound material have an embedded sense of time, which sets the pace. I need to bring this out through the structuring of the film. I am following the image, otherwise the combined image and sound, which is so important to me – witnessing/being present to the act of playing – makes no sense and feels wrong. This is something I am also aware of in the two versions I made of Anton playing Morton Feldman's *Projection 1* (2000). Despite being drawn to structural concerns and parameters within film, I've never been able to follow rules without considering how the edit feels and its affect.

SP — I'm glad you've mentioned the Cage film, because you told me about it a while ago, but I didn't remember the title and I couldn't find it. It is an interesting film, but I don't think it works really. I'm sceptical that chance functions well as a structural principle, when shooting or editing a film.

Accidental things might occur in shooting and there might be unexpected consequences in editing, and one can incorporate those elements, but by the time it's projected the form of a film is fixed. In contrast, when you're at a concert, listening to a piece of music that involves improvisation, indeterminacy or some particular application of chance procedures, you're witnessing a unique performance and something wholly in the moment. No two screenings of any one film are ever quite the same, but it still seems contrary to make a film by way of chance procedures if the output is largely fixed. (Expanded cinema pieces that involve performance are a different matter.)

It's intriguing that some of Cage's ideas about music and sound relate to filmic thinking. In one of the essays in *Silence* he talks about composers using the sound effects libraries of film studios to make music, and goes on to say that 'the "frame", or fraction of a second, following established film technique, will probably be the basic unit in the measurement of time.' Perhaps this pertains to pieces like *Williams Mix*, which is produced by splicing together pre-recorded sounds, of different sorts, on tape. There is a well-known recording of *Williams Mix* but the piece is essentially the score as opposed to any one iteration. I guess that's the same for any composition.

In any case, it makes a lot of sense to me that your music films follow cues in the image and the performance of the music rather than the score, because the score is an instruction for the musician rather than you. I wonder if you could describe a particular example? I'm also intrigued to hear how you learnt the lesson about joining shots together of a door opening. What a simple lesson that is, which I admit I hadn't heard of. Where did you pick it up from?

JP — I think I picked up the tip about editing reverse-shots of a door opening as an assistant film editor. I hope that what I am saying is true! After I finished my graduate studies at the Slade I worked as an assistant film editor for the BBC in their internal training department. Quite a few ex-students from the RCA worked there. It was Nina Danino who got me the job. One of the other assistants showed me how to sync up rushes on the day. I was lucky as I worked with an experienced editor called Larry Toft who had worked in feature films. He had retired but came in to edit the short films that the trainee directors and producers made. He was strict and old school. He gave me a great foundation into the technicalities of film editing.

i.



 i. Production still by Pat Fogarty for *Thinking Twice*, Parker, 1997

ii.



iii.



ii. *Blues in B Flat*, Parker, 2000
iii. *Projection I*, Parker, 2000

I particularly enjoyed visiting the dubbing theatres having prepared all the tracks and atmos loops for the sound mix. I always like being behind the scenes.

One of the things that draws me to music is its immediacy – the performance of it. You could say that a chance procedure is a system but not one that I can follow. I can't find meaning in it. Serendipity, however, is useful. I always want things to be 'as they are' or 'as they should be' or 'right'. When I made *Woman with Arms Crossed* (2008) with Anton, I had an idea that I could participate in determining the music through where I chose to edit – in this film Anton plays from Silvano Bussotti's graphic score *Sensitivo, per arco solo* – but it didn't work. Every shot felt like a complete performance of the score and I didn't want to break the integrity of Anton's playing. Having said that, there are probably a couple of times when I didn't use the whole take …

SP — I think the immediacy of the music that you're drawn to comes across in the films. Besides listening to the music, the viewer is watching it being performed, and there are instances where the performance seems subtly dramatized by certain decisions around framing or the timing of a cut. The films provide a particular way of experiencing the performance of the music that you document. Beyond that I wonder if you see any sort of equivalence between film and the music or performances that have been your subjects?

JP — I feel that we hear more closely what we see on the screen, as well as visually experiencing, through the close-up, the effect of action on the instrument such as vibration or the impact of attack. I would like to be in the place of the musician – how can I capture the sensation of playing and of touch? I like to think there is equivalence in the movement of film grain and sound vibration, the recording of the visual effect of vibration and the vibration of sound, the form or structure of the edited film and the structure of the composed music, the image of the act of playing and the felt experience of the music. Both film and music can have complex and defined structures made up of multiple layers. I am thinking about an edit or a composition not as a purely linear event but 'in the round', as form. I should say that it is never my intention to 'dramatize' the music, although I can see that my framing and editing decisions might seem to do that. Any drama pre-exists in the music and that is what leads my decisions.

SP — I'm not sure when we first met, but I it might have been through Al Rees, at a concert in 2002. The concert included piano music by Cornelius Cardew, Michael Parsons and others, played by John Tilbury and Tania Chen. (I keep programme notes from concerts and indeed film screenings, so I've been able to check.) We happen to have been to lots of the same concerts in London over the years, including many performances by Anton Lukoszieveze's group Apartment House and the annual series Music We'd Like to Hear. There's something in a lot of the music that I've heard in that context that chimes with aspects of experimental film and video that I most admire. It has something to do with structures and principles that shape an experience which seems absolutely focused in the present. I'm sure that there are aspects corresponding with the way in which the musical material is organised and produced that are analogous to certain aspects and aspirations of experimental cinema.

It was my appreciation for the music of this sort that led me to make a piece in 2017 involving the performance of Michael Parsons's composition *Intersections*, for two bass clarinets. David Ryan, one of the clarinettists, is also a colleague of mine at ARU. The other clarinettist is Ian Mitchell. The score involves twelve linear figures each with six points set out on a stave. I had seen it in an exhibition of graphic scores that David had curated which was called *Drawing Towards Sound*. Given the nature of the score I imagined that I could document the performance of the piece from six different angles simultaneously. I was intrigued to see how those six shots would look when superimposed, but Michael didn't like it in that form at all and suggested that the visualisation of the music through superimposition undermined the transparency that he had intended for the music. In the final version you see the two musicians in a succession of two camera positions that are shown simultaneously in a shifting split-screen.

I'm not very comfortable with the piece really. I feel I was treading on your toes somewhat. It's so different from the way I have generally worked, and it sprang from my trying to force an idea and will a connection to another art form. Music has found its way to the centre of your films quite gradually hasn't it? It would be nice to hear something of that trajectory. I assume it stems from your interest in filming performances more generally.

JP — A short background: Music is something that I feel I failed at. I learned the cello and piano as a teenager and played in youth orchestras in Nottingham, where I grew up, as well as the double bass for a short time

in a concert band. As a solo player, I was never confident and always afraid of getting it wrong. I had a fierce cello teacher whom I frustrated with my timidity. Her anger made me get worse. I didn't rise to the occasion.

I was prompted to make *Thinking Twice* (1997), the first film with Katharina Wolpe, after seeing her perform a concert of the music of her father, Stefan Wolpe. I felt his music was so filmic. I want to be able to do with film what he does with music. Wolpe's music makes me sit up; it is relentless, a wall of sound, unbending.

Through filming the musician, I can be inside music and its expression. Music is both a place of longing and knowing. Most of the work I have made since 2003 has been a search for a 'musical equivalent' through film. It began in earnest in 2003 when I was the recipient of the Henry Moore Foundation 1871 Fellowship, organised by the Ruskin School of Art and San Francisco Art Institute in association with the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford University. My proposal included the question: 'Can Cage's idea of what can be music challenge my idea of what can be film?' This search for a musical equivalent has since widened to include object making, in particular stone carving, which I have been doing, on a modest scale, for several years. The carvings are mainly of magnolia buds, a recurring motif. In these works, I wish for everything to be concentrated and held in a single object.

SP — I think I have always been unsatisfied with my work when I've strayed too far from the course. One always learns something by taking a different avenue, and the course of one's work is more clear in retrospect, but I think the strongest work (and perhaps the most valuable contribution to any field) most often comes from reasonably modest advances. Ideas that one has steadily worked through, and sometimes returned to, are always going to be more grounded I would have thought.

JP — I really enjoyed looking at your films again. I like the formality and clarity and the way they make me think about form and filmic/cinematic space. Was *May* (1998) the first piece you made? How did you decide on the rhythm and pace of the edit? The sound is interesting as it seems continuous and works to hold the fast cutting together.

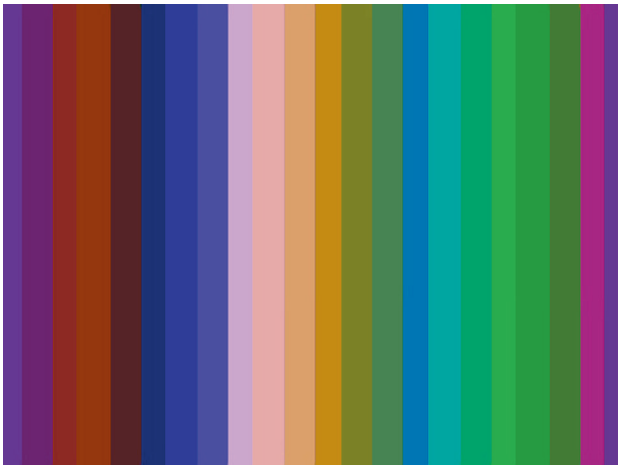
SP — Most of my work has involved structures and processes that are reasonably legible, at the same time as hopefully producing something unexpected or more difficult to fathom. *May* (1998) is one my earliest

iv.



 iv. *Stationary Music*, Parker, 2005

v.



vi.



v. *Colour Bars,* Payne, 2004
vi. *May*, Payne, 1998

videos, which involved shooting the trees, in series, along the boundary of an orchard in Kent. The sound was recorded by the camera's microphone at the same time and it cuts simultaneously with the image at one second intervals. I started showing this video again recently – it's actually a student film – because it reminded me of the intriguing chance occurrences that sometimes come when filming. I find the graphic similarities and differences from one shot to the next compelling. The segments of sound, which provide continuity as well as disruptions across the intervals between shots, are also something that interested me. Perhaps this might seem to contradict what I've suggested above, regarding my scepticism that 'chance functions well as a structural principle'. But that still holds I think. In the Cage film that you mentioned, the principle seems indiscriminate with regards the subject and it doesn't seem to produce an experience that is worthy of contemplation, though it has had me thinking …

JP — I enjoyed *Black & White* (2001) very much with its interplay between what you describe in the synopsis as 'video footage of surfaces and spaces such as walls and doorways, and static computer-generated graphics.' I relate to the uncertainty or ambiguity of what is being shown. Things aren't always what they appear to be; we can't be sure and have to remain open.

In more recent works the image is computer-generated. I am interested in your works that don't appear to have a recognisable or concrete visual source, but reference space and depth, and the cinematic. *Colour Bars* (2004) seems a pivotal video. Although referencing a video test signal, the image feels abstract and the sense of rhythm and pattern begins to point to sound. Could you say how it is structured?

Can you say something about visual phenomena and visual illusion in your work? I once heard Ernie Gehr speak about his film *Serene Velocity* (1970) and understood the visual pleasure he experienced through flicker. This isn't something I experience, although I love this film and what it is doing.

SP — There are lots of pieces after *May* which use camera-recorded footage, in tandem with editing structures involving palindromes and inversions, but since *Colour Bars* (2004) I have mostly made pieces with computer-generated colours, shapes and transitions. The sequence of frames in *Colour Bars* was generated fairly randomly within some given parameters, but the structures in *Iris Out* (2008) and *Vice Versa Et Cetera*

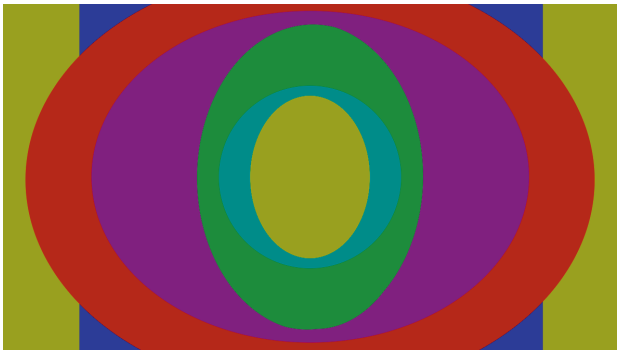
(2010) are highly organised. The editing involved single-frame sequences, which wasn't to do with wanting to produce a 'flicker effect' necessarily, but the logic of producing the maximum difference, from moment to moment, with a specific and limited palette of colours and graphic shapes. The organising principles of these pieces are self-evident I think – i.e. they don't particularly require explanation for an audience – but I'm intrigued by the various illusions of movement and colour mixing that are, in contrast, difficult to pinpoint and account for.

After *Iris Out* and *Vice Versa Et Cetera* I knew I wanted to explore different metres and tempi. Given the concentrated nature of those pieces, I imagine I could have explored increasingly complicated mathematical patterns and algorithms, but I'm interested in exploring screen space as opposed to systems *per se*. In *Cut Out* (2013) and *NOT AND OR* (2014), I brought the camera back in to my work, as a contrast to purely abstract forms in time, and a means of complicating one's sense of what one's looking at on the screen. In fact, that was also the premise for the earlier piece called *Black and White*. Perhaps that speaks to my earlier point, or *credo*, about the way in which one's work best develops.

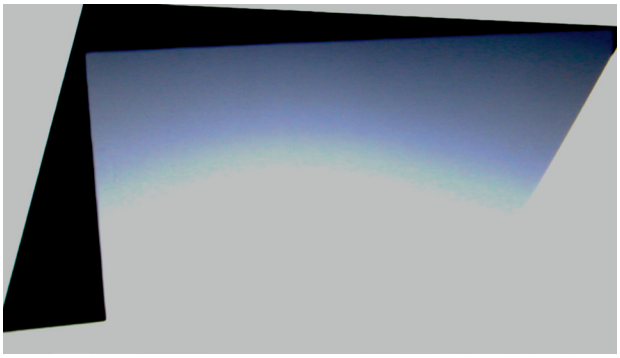
I posed a question earlier to do with music gradually finding its way to the centre of your filmmaking. Do you see it in that way too? I also have a question buried in a series of observations about what one might call 'associative montage'. Your early films such as *RX Recipe* (1980) through to *The Pool* (1991) involve performances and actions that invite symbolic or psychological associations, though they also always resist decoding. In *Cold Jazz* (1993) and *Crystal Aquarium* (1995) musicians becomes part of the matrix of performed actions and psychological associations. Those films in which you focus on one musician, whether Anton Lukoszieveze or Katherina Wolpe, are quite different. Sometimes, you incorporate shots which are not images of the musicians, but the connections between shots that you make in editing are of a different order to *Cold Jazz*, *Crystal Aquarium* and preceding films. Any psychological content is principally to do with the mental concentration of the musician. Is that a trajectory that you recognise and could say something about?

JP — All my films are image led, even the ones of musical performance, and the symbolic is still at play. With the music films I am led by the form and duration of the music. I want to respect the rigour of the music and the integrity of the performer. In my current work, I am conscious of moving

vii.



viii.



vii. *Iris Out*, Payne, 2008
viii. *NOT AND OR*, Payne, 2014

away from the pure document of the musician performing. Intervention, finding space for my own imagery – shifting the balance – is my current aim. For myself there is no difference in how I feel about the films or what they hold, music or otherwise. They reflect the same space.

I enjoyed reading your response to my questions and comments about your work. It opened up the ground we share, particularly in relation to the experience of listening to live experimental music and thinking about its relation to moving-image making. When I started going regularly to concerts it was a time when so much performance work was mediated through video and I missed the 'live' element of it. I re-found what I was missing in the details of experimental music performance, where the means of making sound can often produce extraordinary images. It is this that let me to film Anton. Composers' notations can require actions that looks extraordinary, such as the requirement to introduce a second bow in Volker Heyn's *Blues in B-flat.* In this piece, the score requires the cellist to bow with both hands, the second bow on the underside of the strings making a drone – I can't help but see this as an intrusive gesture. These images are more than I could have imagined. I like to see music being performed and to watch the action of playing, and the musician's concentration. I like to feel the sound around me. Being at a concert (and theatre or dance) takes me to a reflective thinking space. I've always been interested in process and structure and like to think about it. It provides a framework that sits in the background of the films.

Going back to an earlier point, I'm with you about persisting to push one's interests, to go deeper rather than jumping to another idea or form, although change can happen regardless. Incidentally, I really liked your film of Michael Parsons' composition and I always love Michael's music. I like the idea of placing the cameras in relation to the figure of the score – structurally it doesn't feel so different from your other works. It is interesting to see how something plays out in another form. (Someone once said that I had a better eye for black and white film than my eye for colour – but the framing of the shots is actually the same.)

For myself, after making *Cold Jazz* I felt I had become so tight and formal that I had nowhere to go, and that I was repeating the same introspective subject matter. Making the performance of music the focus felt like a way to try to break this, although in retrospect I can see that the same concerns are still at play: the body, inside, outside, the body in relation to an object, the object as body.

SP — I suppose I'm generally minded to think about cinema (i.e. watching films, yours and mine included) as a disembodied experience, primarily a concern for the eye and the brain, and conscious reflection. At the same time, I am aware that scale is a significant issue. The size of the image, whether it fills one's view, and the dimensions of the cinema or screening venue, are all physical conditions that affect the viewer's experience. One time I had a piece, *Iris Out*, screened in different cinemas at the Rotterdam Film Festival, including an IMAX screen. I wasn't there to see it on that occasion, but in general I prefer the scale not to be too overwhelming. If you can see the edges of the screen, which are all-important, I think there's a greater capacity for some critical or reflective distance from the work.

Given that your films depict bodies and objects, and that they concern 'the body in relation to an object' – which one could read as the relationship of the viewer to the screen – the issue of scale must be important for you too, I would have thought.

Do you remember the screening that Andrew Vallance and I organised at Café Oto, which involved your films of Anton, interspersed pieces that he played live? (The evening also included piano pieces by John Tilbury and your documentation of him performing … *but the clouds* by Samuel Beckett.) The films work perfectly well on their own of course, but given that they document and creatively represent it was interesting to see and hear the films and the live performance of the music together. Many of your other films, including some that centre on the performance of music, involve cutting to quite different images and hence a different capacity for film. I mentioned 'associative montage' earlier, but perhaps that suggests a more forceful approach to meaning-making.

In his book *Film, Form and Phantasy* Mike O'Pray appropriated two terms that the English aesthetician Adrian Stokes used to describe alternative aspects in sculpture: carving and modelling. For O'Pray, carving could be seen as an equivalent to the realist (Bazinian) tradition in cinema, while modelling could be equated with (Eisensteinian) montage. I'm aware the conversation should be coming to a close, but I'm really intrigued by the stone carving that you've been doing. Images of magnolias feature somewhat unexpectedly in the film of Katherina Wolpe playing the piano in *Stationary Music* (2005) and you mentioned that you've recently been carving magnolia buds from stone. I wonder why magnolias have been a motif, but aside from that – and though we've mainly spoken about music – I wonder if you see any correspondence between cinema and sculpture?

JP — That is an interesting question. I see the correspondence in the materiality of film and its surface, its chemical properties, potency and reaction – maybe in a way thinking too. Both sculpture and film carry intent and the concentration of prolonged looking, both have a materiality that requires action, and therefore touch in their making. I like to think of the concentration held in an object, rather than played out in time, as being at the opposite end of a scale to film – although I often think of my films as faceted objects.

At art school, I was based in the sculpture studio but felt unable to imbue objects with all the meanings I wanted them to have. In film, I found a way to do this, through the way it could be structured, through framing, intercutting, choice of imagery. The form of film, its structure and presence, the shaping of light, the sense of freedom of expression that it affords, are wonderful qualities. I am very attached to the materiality of film as a medium and don't experience the same personal resonance when working with digital imaging. This in part prompted me to look to other materials, and in stone I found a fundamental material that is irrefutable. I started learning to carve stone several years ago. It was also a way to slow down through a process that couldn't be hurried.

The forms I make are hard won – I don't have a natural affinity for stone carving. Someone recently described me as 'dogged and persistent' and perhaps these are qualities that lend themselves well to working with stone. I particularly like the dense quality that can be apparent in small sculptures or artefacts. The stone carvings I make are variants of bud shapes based on cast wax and bronze magnolia buds. I use Portland, Ancaster and Maltese limestone, soft stones formed from biological sediment and the fossilised bodies of creatures, as well as white alabaster. The carvings, along with analogue photographic works, extend the imagery of my film work out into the world, into physical space. To carve a bud shape from a material that is made up of the bodies of fossilised sea creatures carries such meaning for me. The image of the magnolia holds everything.

William Raban /
John Smith

Made in London

John Smith studied at North-East London Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art, after which he became an active member of the London Filmmaker's Co-op. In his formative years Smith was primarily inspired by structural film, but he also developed a distinct interest in the power of narrative and spoken language, which he frequently employs in order to subvert the readings of documentary images. Often rooted in everyday life, his meticulously crafted films playfully explore and expose the language of cinema. Since 1972 Smith has made over sixty film, video and installation works that have been shown in independent cinemas, art galleries and on television around the world. He received a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists in 2011. In 2013 he was the winner of Film London's Jarman Award. Smith is Emeritus Professor of Fine Art at University of East London.

William Raban studied painting at Saint Martin's School of Art before developing a distinctive experimental film practice through involvement with the LFMC, where he was workshop manager 1972-6, and other artists who came to film from fine art and a diverse range of other backgrounds. His early work often drew on landscape imagery and structural concerns exploring distinctly filmic/mechanical modes of looking. Several works from this period are also focused investigations of expanded cinema and the relationship between the viewer and screen. These strands can be seen throughout Raban's career, but from the 1980s onwards, a more historical and socio-political focus emerged in his work, often addressing the role of London in the context of global economic changes. Raban is Professor Emeritus of Film at London College of Communication.

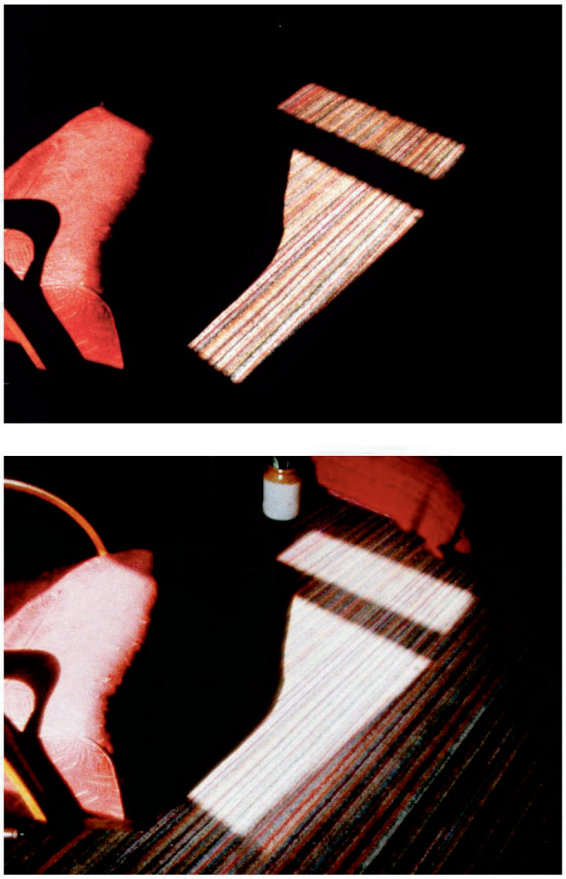
Both filmmakers continue to live and work in East London, a location which often features in their films. Their conversation here covers significant developments in their careers, their mutual interest in structural film processes and the coincidence of politics and the everyday in their immediate environment.

John Smith — When I was asked which other artist I would like to converse with for this publication you were the first person who came to mind. In addition to being an admirer of your work, which influenced me greatly when I started out, I am aware that there are numerous concerns that we share and that the trajectory of our filmmaking over the past five decades demonstrates a number of parallel shifts. I'm sure that several of these connections will come out over the course of our conversation but I would like to start the ball rolling by talking about the first film of yours that I encountered, the single screen version of *Angles of Incidence* (1973).

I first saw *Angles of Incidence* soon after it was made, when my then tutor Guy Sherwin invited you to visit North-East London Polytechnic. I remember being knocked out by the experience, partly because of the illusions of movement it created and its transformation of spatial perception. But what struck me most was that this spectacular film was recorded in a mundane domestic environment, the only 'prop' being a piece of rope (sash cord I hope) stretched between the middle of a sash window and the camera in order to keep the same distance between camera and window as the tripod was moved to various positions around an arc. Watching *Angles of Incidence* made me realise how the most ordinary of environments could be rendered exotic by filmic means and that a simple and evident formal process could magically transform representation into abstraction. Another fundamental aspect of the work for me was that it was filmed in your own home with a view onto your own street, not in any remote or unfamiliar location. Sitting at my desk now I've been thinking about why this aspect of the work was, and still is, so important to me – like you, I have made many films over the years in and around my home. I have always felt it's important that my own work is rooted in personal experience but I think my predilection for the local might also be about trying to create an intimacy with the audience and undermine the hierarchy of producer / consumer, attempting to level the playing field a bit by inviting the viewer into my film / house. My focus on the everyday is a big part of this, I rarely show dramatic events but prefer to work with mundane environments and occurrences that most of us can identify with.

William Raban — Most of my films start with a proposition. With *Angles of Incidence* I was using film to investigate cubist space – hence the rapid alternation of viewpoints. I did not pre-plan the film but rather plotted the camera movements at the actual time of filming and did the same with

i.



260 i. *Leading Light*, Smith, 1975

ii.



ii. *Hackney Marshes – November 4th 1977*, Smith, 1977

About Now MMX (2010) which is another work partly based on ideas of cubist space. I think we share this experimental view of film to ask basic questions: what if…? I like the idea of film being a proposition. The idea for *2'45"* (1973) was written in 1972: "the film as 'live' event; a film which IS its showing, different each time, always the sum of its past screenings. The film can only ever be 2' 45" (100 feet) long". The performance was shot over a succession of days. By the end, all preceding iterations were seen as successive negative and positive images receding into the depths of the film screen as a form of *mise en abyme* to build a picture comprised solely of the layers of space and time of the film's coming into being. The screens-within-screens of its current and past performances are the sole picture and sound content and in this respect it demonstrates that form and content are fundamentally inseparable. This was partly a riposte to an annoying and simplistic assumption that structural film was about form over content. I see the idea of film as a proposition in such films of yours as the *Blue Bathroom* series (1978-9) and *Dungeness* (1987). If we knew the results in advance, I guess we would not make those films in the first place.

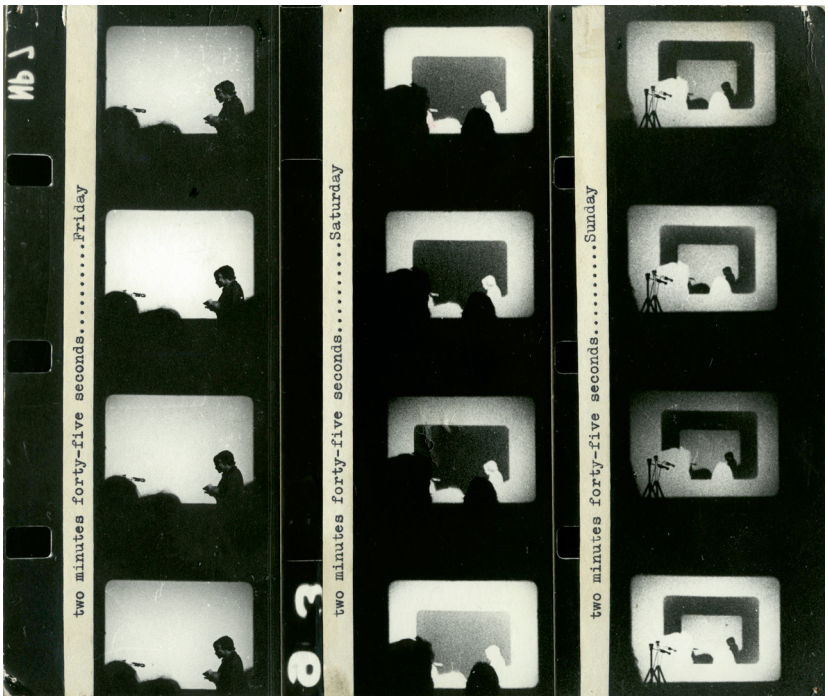
JS — Yes, it was exciting constructing those early films in the camera, waiting on tenterhooks for them to be processed and not really knowing how they would turn out. It must have been the case with your time-lapse films too. It was true of *Blue Bathroom* certainly, but also other edited-in-camera films like *Leading Light* (1975) and *Hackney Marshes – November 4th 1977* (1977), where one had to imagine the rhythm of the film when deciding on the shot length. I think one of the reasons that I stopped making that kind of work was because I was gaining expertise that enabled me to predict the end results more accurately, which ultimately would have made making the work rather pointless – why not just write down the idea and imagine the outcome? But I also got to a point around 1980 when I started to feel that my films needed an extra dimension, that they were in danger of becoming too mechanistic and too focussed upon formal ideas. I began to worry that I was making films in a language that only a small circle of filmmakers and theorists could fully understand. That's when I started work on *Shepherd's Delight* (1980-84), which addresses the subject of humour and was my first film to be partly based on a written script.

WR — Apart from *Black & Silver* (1981) which was fairly tightly scripted and story boarded, I like to keep the direction of the film fairly open right through

the production process. But picking up on location, I made a couple of films where the focus was on the domestic environment such as *At One* (1974) and *After Eight* (1975). Both those films have radio news programmes playing in the background which I saw as a way of bringing world events into the domestic environment. Perhaps this connects with your *Hotel Diaries* series? You are right that my interest is largely about filming public spaces. That is certainly true of the films made since *Thames Film* (1986). It is partly to do with filming observationally in the local neighbourhood and trying to see the place for the first time to understand how it works. That is true of *Sundial* (1992), *A13* (1994), *Island Race* (1996) and *The Houseless Shadow* (2011). It is also to do with wanting to show people things rather than telling people how to interpret what is being shown in a didactic way. I think the sometimes wry humour in so much of your work sets you apart from our generation of filmmakers. This ranges from the reflexivity of *Home Suite* to the *Hotel Diaries* where you combine humour with acute political observation. I suppose we both share an interest in politics of the left though this manifests itself very differently in our respective films. I am particularly drawn to the way you voice your own films.

JS — I think that your observational filming and the lack of added commentary in much of your work prevents it from becoming dated. *Island Race* for example now seems more pertinent than ever, especially as it is bookended by the Channel Tunnel footage. In my own work, political issues have certainly been addressed more directly in recent times. This hasn't been a conscious decision, it's just that the West's 21st century collapse into chaos has become a bigger and bigger part of the everyday consciousness from which my ideas develop. Although visual aesthetics remain a prime concern in most of my work, I don't think I could make a film like *Leading Light* in 2019. I would find it hard to make a film that celebrated the beauty of sunlight travelling around a room because I'm only too aware of all the people who don't have a room to call their own. I very much share your desire to avoid didacticism and have tried to find ways of expressing political ideas without presenting myself as an authority or expert, which I certainly am not. The *Hotel Diaries* videos, some of my most overtly political works, were recorded as single handheld shots on an amateur camcorder set on automatic, giving them the appearance of raw home movies. Their improvised commentaries, recorded at the same time as the image, deliver seemingly unrehearsed thoughts in an intimate, casual manner. By this

iii.



 iii. *2' 45"*, first performance, Gallery House, London, Raban, March, 1973

iv.



 iv. *A13*, Raban, 1994

means I'm attempting to level the playing field between the filmmaker and the viewer, presenting myself as an equal, an 'everyman', with no special knowledge or expertise. I'm trying to create a kind of conversation with the viewer, not saying "This is how it is", but rather "I think it is like this – what do you think?".

WR — It is that quality of improvisation during the continuous take that I love in both *Home Suite* and the *Hotel Diaries* and you are right that we the audience share in the risk of the unpredictable current moment. Back to the question of location again, I do seem to be attracted to filming in hostile or dangerous situations that are hard to control. For example, filming from a small sailing boat on the Thames through day and night and shooting on film there is the anxious wait for the rushes to see what is actually there. More recently, risk is involved in filming the BNP or filming London streets after midnight where I try to render myself invisible to passers-by. It is exciting to work on the edge of control and it helps to create a physical experience for the audience.

JS — We couldn't be more different there, I try to avoid danger at all cost. That's one of the reasons why so much of my work is filmed from windows or in the safety of a domestic space or hotel room. As is evident from my faltering speech at the end of Home Suite, I felt quite nervous when I made myself leave my house to record the mass eviction taking place in the next street. Because I prefer to work entirely alone I can feel rather vulnerable if I'm looking through the camera in a public space, with no knowledge of what's going on behind me. I could never have filmed the BNP.

WR — Having the great pleasure of watching your films again for this discussion, one issue seems to emerge. Although we have both made quite formal short films from a singular location, we have also made much more complex work composed of different strategies and ideas into a more complex form. I think for example of your *Hackney Marshes* or *Slow Glass* alongside *Thames Film* and *Island Race* perhaps. My last 3 films have each comprised a single shot and in some ways, I suppose I am working towards trying to make things that seem to be more reductive and simple.

JS — That's a connection that has struck me as well, my recent films are very short too. The average length of the films I've made over the past

seven years is about four minutes, and several of them are comprised of only one or two shots. I have always aimed to express ideas economically and like to think of these recent works as film haikus, that I'm paring information down to its essence. But on off days I wonder if it's just that I don't have the energy anymore - it's sometimes hard to imagine making a film as complicated and laborious as *Slow Glass* again.

WR — I agree that an economy of means is really important and leads to a minimalist approach. As a general principle, I try to avoid illustration. I like the idea that sound and image can work together in a push-pull relationship so for example, the image can be doing something that doesn't seem necessarily connected to the sound.

JS — Absolutely, that's the main reason why I avoid filming with sync sound, there's very little lip sync in my films and most of what does look like sync is recorded at another time and synchronised with the picture later. Avoiding sync sound gives you the freedom to juxtapose sound and image in any way you like. When I'm editing a film I find that much of its dynamic comes from creating a tension between sound and image, allowing the two to converge and diverge, sometimes working together in a representational way but at other times working on a more abstract or musical level, without any literal sense.

WR — Yes. That dynamic relationship between picture and sound – not necessarily being in sync is important to both of us. If they are recorded one after the other, it means that equal attention can be given to capturing sound and image which is important when working alone.

I would like to move on to consider how we deal with so-called imperfections in the recorded image. I remember that for a long time after Chris Welsby and I had finished *River Yar* (1972) I felt very dissatisfied by some of the imperfections in it. Some worked well such as the reflections of the camera in the window at night or the picking up of radio frequencies on the soundtrack due to the long microphone cable we were using but I was bothered by occasional hairs in the gate, some of the bad exposures and a few focus 'errors'. Now when I look at the film, I accept all those things that used to annoy me and see them as indexical traces intrinsic to the making of the film. To take another example, there is a shot in *A13* where I am filming from a car window when a passer-by throws an apple at me, hitting

the camera. There is a diagonal line across the frame caused by a filter in front of the lens becoming offset but once I had edited the shot into the film alongside the sound, that camera mistake goes unnoticed. In a sense, no matter how controlled the environment, there is still a feeling of being on the edge of control and I like that.

JS — That almost subliminal and unexplained aggressive act against you in *A13* is very powerful and disturbing. I agree with you about some kinds of technical imperfections but I still don't like hairs in the gate and I have to admit that I'm obsessed by sharp focus. I wish that I wasn't, I get annoyed with myself quite often when I find myself discarding footage which has everything going for it apart from being slightly soft. But on more than one occasion I have found that accidents occurring during filming that initially feel like disasters end up being the bits I like the most. When something goes wrong you have to find a way to get around the problem and that's often where things become most inventive. When I first viewed the street footage for *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976) I was very disappointed that I had executed a zoom in on a clock very jerkily, initially zooming in the wrong direction. Every time I looked at the rushes it annoyed me more. Eventually I realised that, as I was retrospectively directing everything else that happened in the film in the voice-over, I could direct that event too, so I commanded the clock to "move jerkily towards me". Watching it obediently comply with my request remains one of my favourite moments in the film. It was during the making of *The Girl Chewing Gum* that I became excited by the potential of chance to influence the development of ideas. For example, a burglar alarm that was ringing annoyingly throughout the sync sound filming of the street scene had to be acknowledged in the voice-over, so I described an innocent passer-by as someone who had just robbed the local post office in order to explain its presence on the soundtrack, pushing the credibility of the voice-over to a degree that I had not previously considered. I'm a big believer in the potential of chance and have incorporated a deliberate chance element into numerous works. For example, *Lost Sound* (1998-2001) documents fragments of audio cassette tape found in the street, filmed in the locations where they were found, creating portraits of East London places and events determined not by choice but by where the bits of tape were discovered. The soundtrack incorporates music and voices salvaged from each fragment of tape (the contents of which were unknown at the time of filming) and played to accompany its image, adding another

chance element which lends a particular atmosphere to each scene.

WR — Yes, I suppose that all our films incorporate chance and intentionality in different ways. With *The Houseless Shadow* (2011) the starting proposition was to see what would happen if the soundtrack voicing the *Night Walks* essay by Charles Dickens played against contemporary images of London at night filmed 150 years later. In the last shot of *The Houseless Shadow* (a dawn time-lapse view of the Thames from Hungerford Bridge) required careful calculation by reference to local tide tables to film the barges swinging 180 degrees on their moorings precisely at the moment of sunrise. A different example is the longest shot in *Island Race* where the cortege during the funeral of Ronnie Kray comes around a corner 150 metres away before passing the camera. As the cortege turned the corner, the sun came out from behind thick cloud, to backlight the whole procession. That was chance but there was also the element of accident in that same shot. I wanted all the 25 limousines to pass but that would have made the shot too long for the film so I decided to film at 18 rather than normal speed 25 frames per second. The speeded-up motion has the effect of making the shot look like early newsreel which I hadn't anticipated at the time of filming so that is an example where accident fortuitously brings something more to the shot than what I had calculated. Perhaps we might talk about where our ideas come from?

JS — Most of my own ideas for new films come about by chance, in that they are triggered by things that I come across in daily life. I don't go looking for ideas, I generally wait for them to come to me. *The Black Tower* (1985-7) for example came out of my interest in a building that I could see from the window of a house I lived in during the 1980s. More recently *Song for Europe* (2017) was triggered by watching the scrolling Jenny Holzer style LED signs that you see through your car windscreen while travelling on the train that goes through the Channel Tunnel. *A State of Grace* (2019), which attributes alternative meanings to Ryanair's safety instructions, was conceived after repeated exposure to the bizarre diagrams on the back of the airline's seats over the course of many journeys.

WR — I agree about ideas being triggered by observations or seeing things in everyday life. I find *The Black Tower* amazingly evocative and even surreal. That elusive black rhomboidal apex switches seamlessly between

v.



vi.



 vi. *Thames Film*, Raban, 1984–86

being a monument to humour and horror which is partly to do with the way the voice on the soundtrack alternates from banal descriptive pathos to extreme vulnerability following the narrator's admission to hospital.

I want to return to where ideas might come from and how films take shape. When I was trying to cut *Thames Film*, I had a crisis where I needed another new element for the film but had no idea what it was. In February 1985, I had a film show in Madrid and used this as an opportunity to visit the Prado where I was greatly impressed by Bruegel's painting *The Triumph of Death*. Back at the hotel that night, I had a dream where close-up details from that painting were accompanied by a chorale from Bach's Saint Matthew Passion. It was just the soprano singing without instrumental accompaniment and her voice was slowed right down. This dream provided the key to solving the editing problem. So, there are four times in *Thames Film* where details from *The Triumph of Death* appears as I had remembered it in the dream. That example seems to fit with your term 'the trigger' but more generally, I find that ideas tend to evolve more slowly. It can take ages for me to find the ways to make a film.

JS — Yes, maybe my use of the word 'trigger' is a bit misleading as I rarely have flashes of inspiration. My ideas usually develop over long periods of time and the films often end up being very different from what I initially imagined. *The Black Tower* for example weaves together several ideas that were originally conceived as separate films. Although a few of my shorter films have been planned entirely in advance of filming I can't imagine making a long film that was completely scripted. I often start editing when I have only filmed a bit of footage as I find that the editing process tends to generate new ideas as to the direction the work might take. Editing and filming can often be a back and forth process that goes on for a very long time - quite a few of my films have been made over the course of three or four years. A long editing process and intermittent gathering of material can help you to find and build upon connections between different elements of the work. To give an example, I started filming *Blight* (1994-96) when I came home one evening to discover that the house next door to me had been partially demolished, revealing a mural copied from the poster for the film *The Exorcist* on an upstairs bedroom wall. I found this eerie spectacle very powerful, not least because the silhouetted figure with a trilby hat and briefcase that the mural depicted made me think of the faceless official from the Department of Transport who was responsible for the planned

demolition of many houses in the local area, including my own. Having filmed this scene I decided that I would film the act of demolition over the coming days, initially framing details of this action in such a way that no human presence was visible, so that it seemed as if houses were destroying themselves, possessed by poltergeists. While filming the demolition I noticed that one of the workers had a tattoo of a spider's web on his elbow, which seemed to fit in with the sinister theme that was developing. More importantly, the tattoo reminded me of the road network around London, with lines radiating from the centre encircled by the M25 and the A406, so I captured this detail on film with the suspicion that it would end up as an important element. A few months later I started interviewing local residents as I planned (together with my collaborator, the composer Jocelyn Pook) to use fragments of speech concerning memories of past dwellings in the film's soundtrack. One of the first people I interviewed was a woman who spoke about her fear of visiting the toilet when she was a child, because it was in the back yard of her house and infested with spiders. She kept talking about killing the spiders so, having already decided that spiders would have a metaphorical presence in the film, I couldn't believe my luck. Through this serendipitous chain of events the spider became the central motif of the final film, something I could never have anticipated when work on it began.

Coming back to *Thames Film*, it was interesting to find out that the insertion of the Bruegel painting came about because of a dream. The grim fantastical imagery complements the darker aspects of the film very well but it has always seemed like a rather unlikely juxtaposition to me as everything else in the film relates to Britain, and to actuality. I don't think any of my films have been influenced by dreams but several of the early ones were conceived or advanced whilst under the influence of cannabis. On a general level I think that taking cannabis and LSD may have had a beneficial effect on my development as an artist, making it clear to me at an early age that there are many ways in which one can interpret the world. I think that my continuing obsession with exploring the ambiguities of life and language may well be partially rooted in my early experiences of mind-altering drugs.

WR — Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* is a glorious allegorical painting about the futility of fearing mortality but there is a link (for me) between the Bruegel painting and the Thames referring to a time when Britain was part of mainland Europe. Thousands of years ago, the Thames was part of one great river that flowed through the Scheldt and on to the Rhine. In all

probability the landscape in the painting is invented, but topographically it bears a resemblance to the mouth of the Scheldt seen from Flushing. I like this one reference in the film to a deep pre-historic time.

Thames Film is partly based on a manuscript by Thomas Pennant, *A Voyage from London to Dover*, in 1787. I am not sure why, but since early childhood I have remained fascinated by the end of the eighteenth century. Perhaps it is the memory of childhood family camping holidays deciphering the inscriptions on tombstones in the west country whilst my father tried to piece together the family tree. My latest film, *Laki Haze* (2020) also opens with that decade, using accounts of the devastation caused by the eruption of the Lakikagar volcano, Iceland in 1783. The ensuing environmental catastrophe was prolonged by the Laki haze extending across Europe, killing many thousands of people. The 1780s, seemed like a pertinent emblematic moment to start the film because it marks the start of the industrial revolution that can be seen as a root cause of the current crisis of climate change. The film extends this ecological theme into the present day political crisis in Europe and America: Brexit, Trump, the rise of right-wing nationalism and denial of imminent global climate change. Before working out the voice elements of the film, the proposition was to see whether a single shot could sustain the film's 18 minute duration and I spent nearly 2 years and 40 attempts, failing and eventually succeeding to capture a sunrise over the sea. The picture opens in almost total darkness. It is a tightly framed shot of waves breaking toward the camera whilst the sun slowly rises (out of frame) above the picture. After 18 minutes as the film ends, the image has reached slight over-exposure. The image is both menacing and beautiful at the same time: "Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it." (Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*). It is too soon to say whether the film works or not.

About Now MMX was my last film shot on 35mm in 2010. Because I had developed a clear understanding of how film emulsion responds to light and exposure changes, it would have been easier to have made *Laki Haze* on film except that it would have been too long to film as a single take. I have only been working with digital for eight years and am learning all the time about how to use it. I guess that the day I stop learning will be the time to stop making films.

JS — The changing light in *Laki Haze* is amazing, especially the rising intensity of the sun's reflection in the sea. I'm not at all surprised that it took

a lot of attempts. I agree about the learning curve with digital, if you tried to keep up with all the technical developments it would be a full-time job. In some respects I feel like a complete novice. I've been working digitally for roughly 20 years, during which time I've gone through seven different video cameras (eight if you include the iPhone) and goodness knows how many tape and file formats. I've moved from 4:3 ratio standard definition to 16:9 HD and seen digital editing software come and go. By contrast, in the 25 or more years that I worked on 16mm, the technology remained more or less the same. Working primarily with the Bolex camera throughout this period I got to know its every detail and explored all of its capabilities, lovingly manipulating the controls of its cast aluminium, black leathercloth covered body. Although I haven't got it out of its case for several years I can clearly remember everything about this tactile machine, the mechanical resistance of the lever that engages and disengages the spring motor, the sound of the motor changing pitch as it reaches the end of its 28 second maximum shot length and the click of the gelatin filter mount sliding into position. I can't imagine getting to know any video camera so intimately, or finding out about even half of what it might do for me.

Having said this, I've found that digital technology has thrown up numerous creative possibilities that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago. If possible I like to do everything on a film myself, so the capabilities of the equipment I have at my disposal play a big part in shaping my work. Just as the Bolex offered possibilities like rewinding and superimposing the film in the camera or alternating between live action and single-frame filming, digital technology has offered other opportunities, like filming in very low light conditions, cache recording, and creating complex mattes during editing. Some of my ideas have been rooted in the technology itself - in *Steve Hates Fish* (2015), I deliberately confused a language translator app for mobile phones by pointing my phone's camera at the signage in a London shopping street and asking the app to translate what it saw from French into English. Two recent works, *Song for Europe* (2017) and *Jour de Fête* (2017) were also shot on a smartphone's camera, recording incidents that I would have missed if I hadn't had the phone in my pocket. Advances in technology sometimes make me wonder if the world is a figment of my imagination – it beggars belief that a tiny 5mm wide lens in a phone's camera can now approach the quality of a camera lens that one might have paid thousands of pounds for a few years ago. It's taken me quite a while to get used to, and I still sometimes experience those "wish I

had a camera with me" moments, only to realise too late that I had one in my pocket. I'm still regretting a missed opportunity of this kind that occurred during the demonstration against Brexit that took place a few weeks ago, just after Boris Johnson became Prime Minister. Marching along Piccadilly I noticed that someone standing in the doorway of an exclusive club next to a uniformed doorman was attracting a lot of attention from the marchers in front. Getting closer, I realised that the man was Boris Johnson's father, grinning broadly at the demonstrators and brandishing his own anti-Brexit placard. Not thinking quickly enough, I walked past this extraordinary spectacle without pausing to record it. For several days I woke up in the middle of the night imagining that I had retraced my steps and filmed a few seconds of the man who had spawned Boris Johnson but wanted to abort Brexit. I started to construct a whole film about the complexities and contradictions of this image in my mind. I'm still kicking myself as I think it could have been rather good.

Lis Rhodes /
Aura Satz

Voice Has Time Within It

Lis Rhodes studied at North East London Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art. She was the cinema curator at the London Filmmakers' Co-op between 1975–76 and co-founded Circles, the feminist distribution network, in 1979. She was also a tutor at The Slade School of Fine Art for thirty years. After Dresden Dynamo (1972) and Light Music (1975), which are arresting works of visual music, Rhodes's films, starting with Light Reading (1978) began to foreground voice, text and a critique of the politics of language. She has targeted state repression, surveillance, domestic abuse and nuclear proliferation, and emphasised the role of dissenting voices. Rhodes's film and video works have shown in numerous retrospectives at film festivals and several solo gallery shows, including most recently Dissident Lines at Nottingham Contemporary in 2019.

Aura Satz completed a PhD at The Slade in 2002 which is where she met and became friends with Lis Rhodes. She has an expansive practice – including film, sound, performance and sculpture – which explores acoustic characteristics, processes of notation, language and codes associated with sound. She has also addressed ways in which women have contributed to sciences and technologies related to sound without due recognition. Satz has performed and exhibited her work internationally. She refers to her work as research-based and often collaborates with other filmmakers and musicians, saying 'I think of all my works as conversations.' She currently teaches at the Royal College of Art.

Voice Has Time Within It

Aura Satz — The voice has time within it. It is in time but also of time. Over the years we return to this space of vibration between two points – between us a long wire, a musical string made to sound and resound. We have been in conversation for more than 20 years now – in collaborations, joint screenings, events and public talks. There is something very particular about the way our conversations develop, pick up where they left off, thread through, back and forth. Certain key themes and words riff and recur, are revisited in different guises, often updated as they speak to the present. It is hard to capture and transcribe the flickers of those exchanges, but we will try to do so here, not as vocal transcription but as a composed conversation of email exchanges, drawing on past quotes, film texts, and weaving them together here.

In a recent email to me, you wrote 'speaking is learnt and controlled and has a long history that strangles many voices'. Your work holds to account what is seen and heard, whose voices are carried across histories, and which voices are obscured or overwritten. This is also central to your work as a film programmer and a feminist critic of how history has been written. *Telling Invents Told* [1], as the title of your recent book and a poetic refrain, seems to be both a criticism of our methods of historical recording, whereby language manifests a supposed truth and is instrumentalised by those in power, but it is also an invocation to tell a different story.

Lis Rhodes — In the sifting of voices only minute parts are made to be well known as the 'told'. Most will never be heard or known – the silence sounds – in the imprisonment of poets, journalists and the impunity of governments and corporations. The tale lies knotted end to end in the suppression of voices. This is as apparent in the lack of recognition of women in the histories of cinema as it is in the composition of music. Sound choreographs the body. It moves feet into motion. Voices are raised. It is no wonder then that music is often banned and women often banned from music – because sound is not still – sound moves ...

> Unstring the note – open the tongue – break the script.
>
> *In and Out of Synch* [2]

Does telling invent told? Unavoidably – there is no present in the telling. It might or might not be told as it was – but in movement there is no silence.

In movement sound is made. There is no stillness. In the movement of everything listen – there are many deep breaths between sounds and meaning.

AS — Through sound we can agitate this notion of a shared voice, in essence a vibratory in-between, inherently relational, unsettling boundaries. As I speak, my voice is in the breath of my lungs, my throat, the resonant cavity of my mouth, bouncing off the architecture of our surroundings, out into the space near your ears – it is already distributed, untethered, intersubjective and trans-individual. In listening we are both in sync with the sound but also lagging behind, following the sound that is always moving elsewhere, to quote Brandon LaBelle. Listening is often a listening after something or someone – a sound that travels, migrates, trespasses. And within each voice there are many others. There is a potency to the idea of being a container for another voice, an antenna, a receptacle, a medium for transmission. In my piece *Ventriloqua* (2003) this was very much embodied, as a musician played the electromagnetic waves of a pregnant belly using a Theremin. Elsewhere I have looked at pockets of the underheard, the lesser heard voices of women in history, in an attempt to bring these past voices back into circulation, generate a space for them to be seen and heard, brought back into speech. My films or sound works dedicated to Daphne Oram, Laurie Spiegel, Pauline Oliveros, and Beatriz Ferreyra have provided a point of access to a feminist sound practice, invoking the instantiation of a new sonic alphabet, a new form of sound notation, sound writing, sound capture, which leads to a new soundscape, a new auditory world, and in turn a new kind of listening. These suggest multiple ways of manifesting a sound world where the existing one is insufficient, inadequate, does not allow for certain voices or sonic qualities, and therefore one must somehow magic them into existence, unlearn these ossified sounds and sound alphabets, recompose them and hear them anew. Notation short-circuits to sound as a way of instantiating voice with no mediation.

In *Light Music* (1975) you used the principle of sound to light through optical sound, and this was in part a response to the lack of women composers. From these works of sound/image synchronicity you moved towards a critique of the power structures of language. You have written that your film *Amanuensis* (1973) is a demonstration of the ‘impossibility of making a material connection between “what is said to be seen” and “what is seen to be said”. There is no apparent connection between saying and

seeing other than perceptually.'

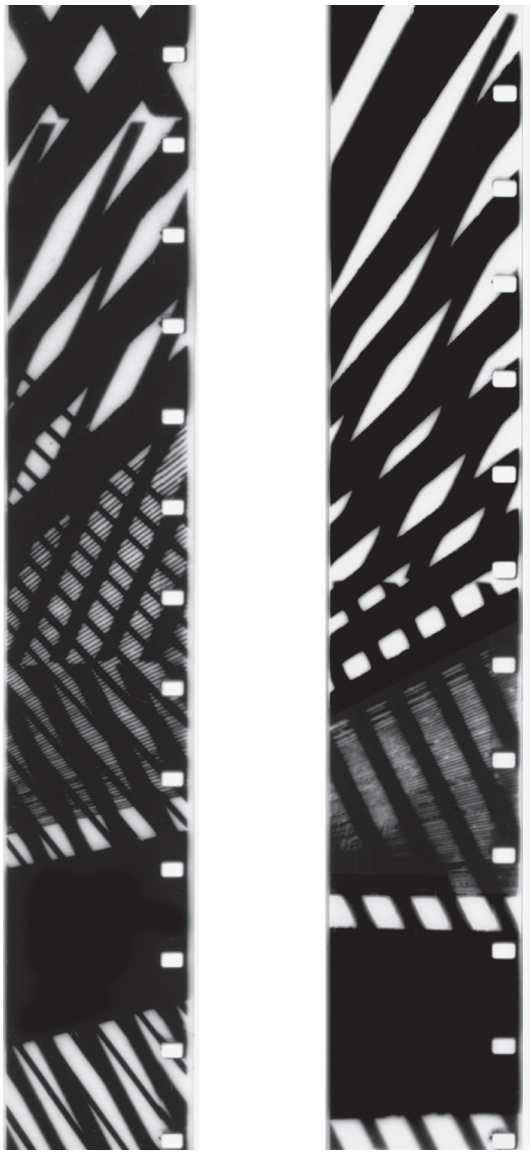
LR — … or lip sync a confirmation of authenticity. In 1973 a typist – the invisible amanuensis – wrote the imprint on a page. This was the ink from the ribbon that was perforated as it passed under the hammer of each letter she selected. In the salvage of these used ribbons thrown away there was the transitory film – *Amanuensis* – the writing written as dictated. The documents can no longer be reconstructed. Could these ribbons printed on the optical edge of 16mm film emit sound? Would each letter have its own voice ? The answer was no. The sound was a long gliss into silence. The connection between saying and seeing – other than perceptually – is tenuous.

AS — How has your use of language shifted over the years, specifically how does writing feature in your films now? Often we have talked about your recent films, such as *Journal of Disbelief* (2016), as a book of sorts, with a rhythm of its own, activating different registers of reading, suggesting multiple layers of syntax, with some voices manifest out loud, others inwardly, others in poetic tension with a quote or a newspaper cutting. What holds it together as a film and not a book? On the occasion of the publication of *Telling Invents Told*, and our book launch conversation, I tried to write about these other voices inside yours, and it occurred to me that they are not merely quotations or footnotes, but evidence that demand a voice. It is an attempt to use language as a measure. A measure against certain things not being said. A measure to draw some things in, insistent of attention. A measure of what words can do, and what they cannot. What systems are in place to enable some things to sit inside the grid, and others outside of it?

> The riff of phrases cutting
> open the tongue
>
> *In and Out of Synch*

In these films I hear your voice punctuate and skim across text as texture, fractured typescript, stave, boundary, barbed wire. Lines like the markings on a ruler. Rereading and rewriting whose history is heard and seen. How do we bring other voices in?

i.



 i. *Light Music*, Rhodes, 1975

LR — In answer to your question, 'what holds *Journal of Disbelief* together as a film not a book?'. It began in my mind, and then in fact, as a film gathered over several years. As the reading became denser, I thought it might be useful to make it into a book that readers could read at their own pace, back and forth as they wished. It is in the use of sound and movement that one is not the other. *Journal of Disbelief* opens with the words of the Native American Makhpiya Luta (1822–1909) also known as Red Cloud: 'they made us many promises, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it'.[3]

If I understand your second question correctly, I think that Makhpiya Luta's words explain very clearly who is permitted within the grid and who isn't. Tragically not much has changed. Voices have always tried to be heard, often at great peril to themselves. For the Egyptian feminist activist Nawal el Sa'adawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1986) and the Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour, who wrote 'Resist, My People, Resist Them', writing is dangerous. Subjects are censored – voices are stilled.

AS — Is it appropriate to say the films are a redistribution of texts, of censored poems or hidden legal frameworks, allowing them to circulate elsewhere and speak differently? How have the circuits of distribution changed what we do and the conversations we can have?

LR — Yes. I think this can be the case. Here in the UK, in the 1970s, Cinema Action did tours with a van. The Russian revolution took films on 'tour' via the railway system. Dziga Vertov's Mobile Cinema sometimes travelled with the Estonian pianist Ol'ga Toom, who was involved with oral commentary and musical accompaniment. By 1925 there were already 1,000 travelling cinemas – equipped with projectors and cameras – active in the Soviet Union. It could be said that this form of screening was to raise awareness and understanding of the need for the revolution. This contrasts with the concept of cinema as a theatre where films are shown for public entertainment.

The first women artists' film, video and performance distribution in Britain was Circles, founded in 1979 by a small group of filmmakers including Felicity Sparrow, Annabel Nicolson and myself. The group was concerned not only with the promotion of contemporary filmmakers, but also the recognition of pioneering women filmmakers such as Alice Guy and Maya Deren. Since Circles came in to being – I think the feminist movement has

changed, as indeed it would over 40 years – there have always been as many feminist perspectives as problems of discrimination. Circles became Cinenova, and thanks to the women, who do this work unpaid, it is as active as ever.

AS — What about the space of cinema, or the movement of artist's moving image?

LR — 'Cinema' is a difficult concept – 'as a place of public entertainment' – for the work that we do and the occasional screenings and events that we have done together. This brings up an incongruity in the working title of this publication *Conversations about Cinema.* When I was the programmer of the London Filmmaker's Co-op cinema, industry and people were being moved from London. The empty ex-industrial buildings and deserted docks were reasonable to rent (but very cold) before the developers moved in. Tenure was short. This involved the reconstruction of the projection box twice in two years. But with its folding chairs the cinema could be transformed into a space for performance. The movement between gallery and cinema has always been peripatetic in my experience, from the programmes of 'expanded cinema' in the 1970s onwards. The 'traditional' concept of cinema as theatre has always tended to straighten things out. The cinema that one had imagined in the 1970s is happening differently now. The relationship of the audience to the work has radically changed. The internet acts as both distributor and censor, but artists move between formats and place – online and off the wall …

AS — In *Journal of Disbelief* you have chosen to make certain images move and circulate so as to bring them into visibility, countering state policy and secrecy. How do images move, and what is at stake in this movement?

LR — Throughout *Journal of Disbelief* words write the image. The illusion of movement is in projection – the reading of digits. In the edit meaning may move – but there is no public image of a secret trial, that I've seen. There are many images of the use of the law of Stop and Search, which are precisely symptomatic. I think they reinforce the present actuality of discrimination in the legal process. In June 2014 the Crown Prosecution Service persuaded an Old Bailey judge that an entire trial should be heard in secret. Until the appeal against the judge's decision, even the media

was barred from reporting the fact that a secret trial was to be held in secret. The public, the media and even the claimant and their lawyers were excluded from the major part of the court hearing.

near is my clothing
but nearer is my skin

Identity is the instrument. Identification the action. In August 2019 the government made changes to what has come to be called the 'sus' law. This law originated in The Vagrancy Act 1824, which had to prove a 'suspected person acted suspiciously with intent'. In practice Stop and Search has had only a marginal impact on crime reduction. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are nearly ten times more likely to be searched than white people. In the revisions to Stop and Search, 7th August 2019, a lower threshold was introduced. [4] Police will only need to reasonably believe serious violence 'may' occur, not that it 'will'. Between 'will' and 'may' the stop and search may be the stopping of all opposition and the arrest of all dissent, particularly when used alongside the sweeping powers listed in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The recent clip (dated August 2019) that I sent you is probably the beginning of the second volume of *Journal of Disbelief.*

AS — We return to the question of measures, though in a different drift: preventive measures which exacerbate biases, an escalation of hostility, incrimination and violence in advance of evidence. Can we nuance the difference between potential and possible? Potential suggests the likelihood of actualization. It hasn't yet happened, but it is likely to unfold, whereas the possible suggests that it may or may not be real, may or may not come to pass. I am inspired by the possible as the task of learning – listening out for alternative conditions (cf. Salomé Voegelin). To quote Raymond Williams: 'To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing'.

LR — 'Preventive measures' – used in the sense of preventing 'extremism' – expose bias as to who is making that judgement against whom and why. If we are considering traffic lights – or preventive medicine – these measures are generally agreed to be useful. The nuance that you suggest is an interesting distinction, but the grammatical change to the Stop and Search legislation is a lowering of the threshold of evidence required for enforcement.

Reading the quote from Raymond Williams, I am not sure whether the contrast between hope and despair is as significant as understanding the causes, and why the sense of hope and despair are felt.

In your film *Preemptive Listening* (2018) you raise difficult questions, which are how do we 'recalibrate' listening and what is the measure of attention and understanding implied?

AS — In my work on recalibrating listening I have been thinking through how we hear emergency signals. In *Preemptive Listening (Part 1: The Fork in the Road)* I worked with Lebanese trumpet improviser Mazen Kerbaj, who composed a new siren sound, and actor/activist Khalid Abdalla's account of the siren as the emblematic sound of resistance, oppression and lost futures during the Arab Spring. Shot on 16mm, the film is literally driven by its soundtrack, as the voice becomes a beacon, mechanically activating emergency rotating lights. Much like your film *Dresden Dynamo* (1972) and our collaboration for *In and Out of Synch*, it uses the principle of sound to light, though here the voice is the siren and the emergency light. We are engulfed in alarm fatigue, exhausted by the ever-rising cacophony of tones, beeps and wails. We have internalised the siren. It is in us before we even hear it. We are implicated inside of it. The siren is the vocalization of the state, marking out a path of sonic obedience and disobedience. Fear and hypervigilance structure the trajectories we take, what we listen to and how or whether we act or not. These new siren sounds are an antidote to preemptive listening. The invitation is to shift this accelerated, reactive, preemptive crisis management, to slower, more considered re-composition. Speculate alternative sounds for alternative relationships to power, re-tuning how power instrumentalises emergency. Emergency recalibration is urgent. Like an instructional score, we set the intention for our mode of reception. Listen without yet knowing who is foreground signal, background noise, which voice is warning, beacon, map. But I want to use a quote from a film of yours to pose a question:

Who can do more than resist and less than subvert?

Just About Now

LR — The sense of the quote: to resist is to undermine the power and authority of an established system or institution; to subvert is to try to

prevent by action or argument. I think that it depends on how the quotation is used, and its context. *Just About Now* (1993) was made as a warning of escalating wars in the Balkans and the initial invasion of Iraq.

> They are already running
> By themselves they came home
> It was not there
> They said – there was not here
> Anyway here had gone too...
>
> *Just About Now*

Does 'loss' have an image other than symptomatically. Images can't undo what we see – without imposing it again. I think it is the authority of the view that is most exactly documented. The particular perception of what is seen to be depends upon repetition, on the continuous repetition of who is seen and who says – a unity of authority. Permission is given and withheld and this returns to the question 'who can do more than resist and less than subvert' the reasons for loss – illegal wars.

In *Running Light* (1996) you do not see the people trapped with 'no papers'. They have to lose their identity in order not to be deported. Few things are made more easily divisive than identity by identification. I am arguing that having 'no papers' is the critical condition, something that is part of a deliberate order of things, which is inequitable. People must be put at risk for the benefit of the few. This underpins a neoliberal economy. It is the order of things – which is out of order – in its divisive and discriminatory structure. The context of my work isn't in the visible symptoms of conditions that are evident, but in the systemic evidence in language, voice and law.

AS — This brings us to the question of abstraction, another word that has circled, grounded and ungrounded our conversations.

> heard in the surge of the seen
> the waves beat the ears
> the shown and the heard
> jump sync
> released
> from the habitual arrangement

ii.



iii.



ii. *In and Out of Synch*, Satz, 2012 (The Tanks, Tate Modern)
iii. *Preemptive Listening*, Satz, 2018

chords rephrase the frame line
etched on the eardrum
images wring noise
from the scene
scratched from the abstract
skinned in translation
abstraction counts
the separation of sense
from the senses
in the violence of measurement
untold damage is done

In and Out of Synch

Elsewhere you have written 'I think writing is an image. I think reading is a series of images which can be heard. Writing, like drawing, deals as much with the invisible as the visible; not what is seen but what is seen through – the condition itself, not the evidence for it'.

LR — Between sound and image – there lies illusion. The space is wide, the spectrum of deception of many layers. Thinking backwards, *Dresden Dynamo* is a film made without a camera or any audio recording. There is a curtailing of the politic of manipulation. The film is a document – what is heard is seen and what is seen is heard. One symbolic order creates the other. The film is the score is the sound.

AS — The film as the score as the sound was central for *In and Out of Synch*. Our recorded dialogue was played through a 16mm mono and 35mm stereo optical sound camera; these are the machines which print sound tracks, or sound negatives onto film. The camera projected the visualisation of the audible dialogue into the space as abstract patterns of light, evocative of flickering Rorschach blots. The text used, as its starting point, the question of voices unheard though not inaudible. It is very much a dialogue between two female voices 'breaking the script', using 'language to prise language open', resisting the predominance of one voice over another and unsettling power structures. The voices explore the space between them, overlapping, pre-empting, finishing each other's sentences, so that the speakers are both listening to each other and sharing a voice. This notion

of sharing a voice was crucial in the development of the script. *In and Out of Synch* developed as a conversation and then went into writing and back into spoken word, woven into a soundtrack where the voices were together ('syn') in time ('chronos'), very literally in and out sync, slipping in and out of each other. The voices inhabit a mobile, vibratory space between.

LR — We wrote it in a very mobile way as well, over about six months. From March to September 2012 we were exchanging bits and pieces every now and again. It wasn't anything regular, or structured – rather as this present dialogue is transcribed within the conditions of the present. There are continuities and discontinuities in the telling which allow our conversations to 'pick up where they left off' – full stops are rare.

AS — I want to ask about your use of continuous sounds in your films, how do you compose these? Often they are drone-like sustained notes without discrete notes or full stops, which carry a tone of latent threat and thread through the images, though there is no need for sound sync. How do they work with the edit, the cuts and splices?

LR — It depends on which film we are thinking about. Let's take *Ambiguous Journeys* (2019). The voice track was laid first, before any images. Then I worked with single notes derived from a synthesiser and from sound libraries. I stretched these individual notes, gradually building up the voice tracks and the sound tracks into a series of 'movements'. After that I worked on the images, many of which I stretched in an equivalent way to the notes.

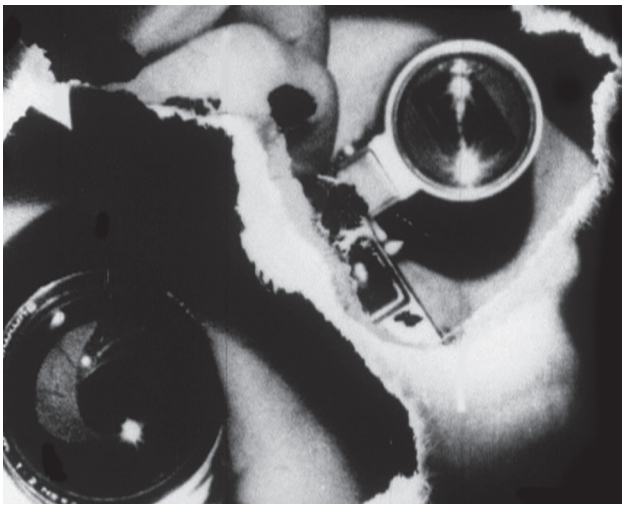
In *Just About Now* Sandra Lahire and I took the back off an old upright piano. Sandra played the keys front to back, then I played the strings back to front. The soundtrack for *Riff* (2004) was played on an instrument I constructed out of piano wires (about four metres long) stretched across a stone cellar with an earth floor. The cellar was, as it were, the inside of a piano – an inside out musical instrument.

AS — You have been working for some time on the difficulties of movement, the legal frameworks that facilitate some migrations and disable others. In your recent survey exhibition Dissident Lines (2019) at Nottingham Contemporary you included the List of Deaths compiled by United for Intercultural Action, recording how 35,597 migrants died trying to get into Europe.

iv.



v.



iv. *Still Ambiguous Journeys*, Rhodes, 2019
v. *Light Reading*, Rhodes, 1978

LR — Yes. I think that their work is so important. It needs all the exposure possible and obviously relates to *Ambiguous Journeys*. There is very little protection for someone with little or nothing. Without proof of address, without papers, existence becomes subject to manipulation and debt. Debt is a means of control. Exploitation deepens for those being made, or born, stateless. A stateless person does not have a nationality or legal protection of any country. This is exploited by a global economy that depends on cheap, expendable labour. They are at risk of being forced into illegal employment with no recourse in law and are, therefore, often destitute. Ambiguous journeys have many beginnings. When the actual is not real and representation is fiction, understanding is at loss for words to resist the terrorism of extreme inequity. The Syrian poet Saniyya Saleh in her poem 'Exile' writes:

> … Bird, hovering over the horizon
> remember
> bullets are everywhere –
> remember
> me
> the perpetual traveller
> All my life
> I have willed to go forward and have not
> advanced beyond
> the borders of my grave.

'They took people and put them in the street under a sign which read "for sale", said a man from Cameroon.' [5]

The silence sounds …

I think of journeys into the unknown where 'nobody will have us'. I think of the young people in the Calais camps who are also damned.
A woman, in 1816, from police reports quoted by Ivy Pincheck: 'We do not thieve from disposition, we thieve because we cannot get employment; our character is damned and nobody will have us.' [6]
I put her words across tomorrow.

AS — I think of your voice across so many years of film-making. She begins to read, she begins to reread. There is an insistence in repetition that demands to be heard. As though in the riff, in the refrain, in the rereading, nothing is allowed to settle, everything must be listened to, fearlessly, again. The questions are not formulated as such. There is no asking in the tone. No plea, no cry, no pondering. Instead there is an undoing, unfastening. The gaps between words are fast and restless. This voice calls out, without emotional demand. It courses through the text with measured percussive beats, the vertices of pitch are even. Forensic detail is zoomed in, torn, staggered – look again, listen again.

[1] Lis Rhodes, 2019. *Telling Invents Told*. London: The Visible Press.
[2] *In and Out of Synch* (2012) is a 16mm film and performance directed by Aura Satz, scripted in dialogue with Lis Rhodes.
[3] See Dee Brown, 1970. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. 1991. London: Vintage, p.449.
[4] Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act
[5] Emma Graham-Harrison, 2017. 'Africa's new slave trade: how migrants flee poverty to get sucked into a world of violent crime' *The Guardian,* 14th May. Online: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/13/modern-slavery-african-migrants-libya
[6] Ivy Pincheck, 1930. *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850*. Abingdon, Oxford: Frank Cass, p.3

Cathy Rogers /
Vicky Smith

Touching with the Eye

Cathy Rogers originally studied design and public art at Chelsea College of Art and then experimental film at the University for the Creative Arts and the Royal College of Art. Her Super8 and 16mm films involve photograms and other 'direct' means of recording objects, surfaces and locations. They are typically exhibited as site-specific film loops or unique static filmstrips. Her work has been widely shown and commissioned by various bodies including Art in Public Places. Rogers co-programmes *Analogue Ensemble*, with Joseph Dance, a screening and exhibition series that takes place in Ramsgate, Kent.

Vicky Smith has been making experimental animation for over 30 years. Her 16mm films are direct and tactile, exploring corporeality and fragility with a distinct and visceral power. Her work has been screened internationally. Smith is also engaged in community building, co-founding *Bristol Experimental Expanded Film* (BEEF), an artist-run film organisation for the practice and promotion of experimental filmmaking. Smith has presented widely at academic conferences and recently co-edited, with Nicky Hamlyn, *Experimental and Expanded Animation: Current Perspectives and Practices*, which won the Norman McLaren/Evelyn Lambart Award for Best Scholarly Book in Animation.

Vicky Smith — We last spoke face to face when you interviewed me in March 2019 for the Strangelove Festival, to talk about the film collective, Bristol Experimental & Expanded Film (BEEF). As well as discussing the organization and practices of BEEF members, we touched on several other things that it's good to have the opportunity to pick up on again. Some of the main concerns that arose related to the material, tactile and haptic qualities of film that is present in both of our practices. We also spoke about film as frame and as strip, and about whether or not actions of interfering with standard film motion in projection took film too far away from the idea of cinema or rather, contributed to areas of expanded cinema.

Cathy Rogers — You had referred to BEEF members viewing their material on the Steenbeck at a slowed down rate and then modifying their projectors to run at 8 frames per second in exhibition. Remind me why that was troubling you?

VS — It seemed that, in these works, the image was being valued, while motion had become arbitrary, and with reference to painting more than cinema. Things emerging from my current work however have prompted me to rethink the practice of tampering with the rate of film motion.

In Annabel Nicolson's *Slides* (1971), we see an image of a strip of film that has been pulled manually through the printer gate. The artist overrides the mechanics of film motion with the physical, destabilizing standard film orientation and rates of motion, and also referencing a material relationship. The slowing down and reorientation of the film suggests a reflexive scrutiny of process, and to my mind importantly points to the possibility of being able to handle film in such ways when practice is independent of the film industry.

Further, by viewing the film as strip we are presented with many small frames – multiple miniature images of the artist herself – seen contained within the larger picture. More than vision can assimilate, the viewer must linger over these images such that they are touched by the eye, thus becoming haptic. As Laura Marks observes, 'haptic images' have a look of being handled and emphasize the maker's tactile connection to their environment. Nicolson was engaging with the haptic some time before this theory became a more commonplace approach to reading film. She emphasised the importance of her tactile relationship with the material of film 'being in her hands'. By showing us how she handles film, the

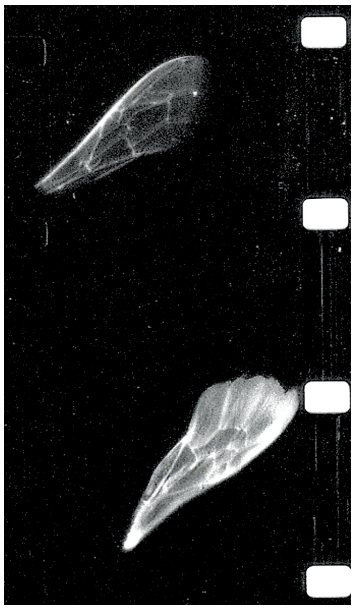
artist presents herself as the one who determines what happens to her own image: she scrutinises, not only the material and process, but also the image of herself as a female artist. Such work about making film was significant for female artists in the 1970s and informs my own practice as an on-going enquiry into filmic tactility. Some of these works bring tactility into expanded cinema, as does your own work and performance. In what way do see your work as expanded cinema?

CR — When I show my work it's generally not in a traditional single-screen setup and even then there are loops involved so there's an element of performance, because I decide when to turn the projector off. However, more often than not other elements are involved. *Train Film*, made in 2009 on Super8 film, was initially shown as a loop projection on a pillar of an old bus station in Maidstone where the film was made. This is the only time it has ever been seen like this. The second time it was shown involved two OHPs and a looped projection, though again I decided when the projector was turned off.

When I first made *Rosemary, Again and Again* (2013) it was shown as a loop. Since then it's been displayed as a photograph mounted on a three-metre length of narrow pine wood, pinned in place through the sprocket holes. Many of my other works either involve no projectors at all or a combination of projection and still photographs. *All Around You* (2012) is shown as an exhibition piece, where the projector is needed to light a pinhole film suspended in a glass sphere. In these terms I consider my work as expanded cinema. There is always a question being posed about the moving and the still, for example: can the filmstrip communicate a sense of movement without the projector propelling it through the gate, when it's stationary?

VS — Well the projector has three main roles: as source of light, magnification and motion. In the work you describe Cathy, you engage only one of these operations. Odd then that such paring down is referred to as expanded. Chrissie Isles in fact identifies such work as 'contracted', as Nicky Hamlyn and I discuss in the introduction to our book *Experimental and Expanded Animation*. When one is so involved in DIY processes of filmmaking, the customization of technology is an inevitable attraction. The London Filmmakers Co-op, BEEF, no.w.here and other artist-run film labs have enabled these possibilities.

i.



ii.



 i. and ii. *Not (a) Part*, Smith, 2019

Alia Syed's *Fatima's Letter* (1992) is a good example of the LFMC workshop practice. Her interaction with the repetitive to- and fro- motion of the contact printer and the film processor seem to suggest, and parallel, the film's imagery of travelling on the London Underground and of film's possibilities as stationary or in motion. So much more than technical procedure, Alia brings movement, repetition, tonal range and camera framing into dialogue with personal questions to do with intimacy and family, and also contemporary global concerns such as the movement of human populations.

CR — When showing a film, movement is really only afforded by the projector. By removing the projector for *All Around You*, as described, I'm testing whether it might still be considered a film, given that I am only using the projector as a light source. I consider my practice to be expanded not just because I use multiple magnification machines (including OHPs and projectors) but also because I show the strips as photographic objects, revealing the multiple images on the strip of film outside of the projector. I see this as akin to an expanded cinema which Al Rees describes in relation to filmmakers of the 1960s and 70s, and further back, who had sought 'an art of expanded vision beyond the single image'.

Train Film was made without a traditional camera. It came about through the desire to capture a moving train on film all at once, in a single exposure. It was made in an old bus factory in Maidstone, on the 2nd floor, with a bank of windows running alongside a section of railway track. When the trains left Maidstone Station they moved past the windows. I wanted, effectively, to contact print this motion, to capture the movement in one go, as opposed to breaking it down into frames, as the camera does. So, I made three 45cm long pinhole cameras to house a length of Super8 film and when the train moved past I opened the shutter (a piece of black paper). There are the obvious visual connections: the windows acting like the frames on the frameless film and the train being an equivalent to the film moving through the camera. The resultant film was made up of three strips of Super8 black and white reversal film. Are there moments in your practice where film is static?

VS — Yes, my work in animation has shaped my way of thinking about the single frame as a unit of cinema, which is static until it is connected to other frames. The zig-zags in Len Lye's *Free Radicals* (1979) are composed of

discrete lines scored into separate frames, yet set in motion, they describe a single energetic force. In *Primal* (2016) I used what I know about animation – converting frames into feet and seconds – keeping the marks in the same place over hundreds of frames, to create the impression of a single entity.

CR — The frame is central to your way of working then and as you say a 'unit of cinema'. This is interesting, because I always want to expand beyond the frame, break out of it and for you it's the foundation of your work. My work has always been about exploring the illusion of cinema, instead trying to present as direct a link as possible to the way the image is made, whether in my photogram films or presenting films outside of the projector. In *Surface/Trace* (2014) for the exhibition Dyad, where I collaborated with Ben Gwilliam, I made a rubbing (on paper) of the threshold between two rooms and then contact printed this on to Standard8 film, which was pinned back into place, where the rubbing was made. This process is at one remove from the object or surface represented, so it is unlike your films *Primal* and *Agitations* (2018), where a direct imprint is made, through rubbing the film with your feet and hands. We share similar preoccupations, with regards to direct means of filmmaking and means of production, but they are different enquires I think. Your films are always projected and mine aren't.

VS — I do always project my films because I'm curious about the transformation of tiny marks enlarged and the patterns and rhythms that only become apparent in projection. We have both explored the aesthetic possibilities of marks made by rubbing as you note. I did so particularly in *Agitations*. The idea here was that the filmstrip has two surfaces that can be worn away through friction: one bore marks created by my own body as I performed a series of actions upon it, while the other surface became impressed with inscriptions of the ground. I was reading Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* and keen to explore conditions that decentre the human. I also had in mind Max Ernst's frottage pieces and was inspired by Surrealist aspects of chance. Above all, I'm interested in how forms of tactility communicate themes of fragility. A cameraless practice necessitates holding film material and this handling suggests avenues for work that I've been exploring for the last 10 years.

Whether I make marks within or across frames depends on the concerns of the project. There's also a third option in establishing a different type of rhythm, through frame clusters, flicker or what P. Adams Sitney describes as

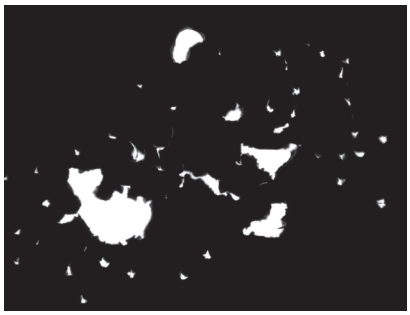
'frame holds' in relation to Robert Breer's work. Then there are bouquets – bunches of pictures – as Rose Lowder describes them and as Nicky Hamlyn discusses in the chapter 'The Frame and its Dissolution' in his book *Film Art Phenomena*. This dynamic of ascribing novel space/time film units is operative in my film-performance *100 Feet* (2013). In this piece I stamp my painted foot on the filmstrip, which, at 33 frames, falls short of the universal measure of 40 frames. The work is very much about how to disrupt the conventions of cinema by breaking pre-existing measurements and divisions of film. But I also conceive it as a feminist gesture in the way that Carolee Schneemann does in referring to her daubing of her own cum on film material as 'feminising film'.

Another of my works, *Bicycle Tyre Track* (2012), approached the character of the length of film material and equated that to the endlessness of the highway (Robert Rauschenberg's *Automobile Tyre Track* was an influence). To manage the stabilising and steering of my bike along the narrow 16mm strip, I needed a minimum 10metre stretch, and even then my bike veered off course. The tyre marks crossed, not only the frame-lines, but also frequently left the screen space altogether, so this piece is very much about breaking the frame. *Noisy Licking*, *Dribbling & Spitting* (2014) combines both lengths and clusters of frames. The title of the film lists the physical actions in the order that is required for making them: 'licking' the film by stamping it with the tongue occupies 6 film frames; dribbles roll down the filmstrip for several feet, while spit flies randomly across all the frames.

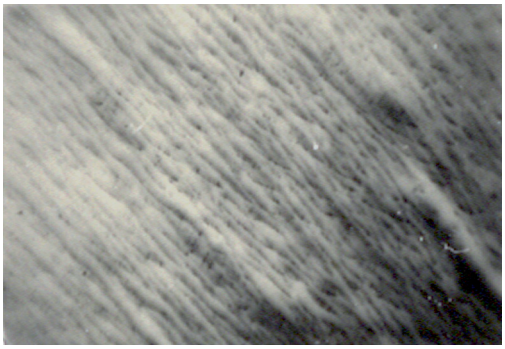
CR — Despite the importance you state for touching film you've shown me rushes of your work in progress where you are using a camera?

VS — Yes, recent factors have led me to filming with cameras again, and of course, reckoning with the frame that is imposed by the camera gate. In the 1990s I received funds from Arts Council England and Film London and was buying colour stock and working with Soho labs and so called 'higher production' standards. The budgets, the labs and the film itself all are gone or harder to access today. With the closure of the LFMC, and before no.w.here started, I lacked access to filmmaking technology. BEEF, which was founded by myself with Louisa Fairclough and Kim Knowles in 2015, through pooling equipment and a darkroom, has enabled my new lens-based practice. I've returned to shooting with PF2 print-stock, 30 years since Guy Sherwin introduced us to this inexpensive alternative to camera negative at Wolverhamp-

iii.



iv.



iii. *Small Things Moving in Unison*, Smith, 2019
iv. *Burnt Skin* (work in progress), Smith, 2021

ton Polytechnic in 1986. And I am processing it in Caffenol (a less toxic alternative to developer) from a formula that is readily available through the film lab network.

Questions of aesthetics are another reason for shooting with the Bolex. I discovered that the methods of contact that I'd used in a direct, cameraless practice – intrinsic to the rayogram technique of placing objects directly onto the filmstrip – could carry across to film shot in the camera. When using macro extension tubes with wide-angle lenses, the focal plane is so close to the object that the lens has to touch, or graze against what is being filmed. So aspects of contact can be applied to films made both with and without a camera. While the two methods are different, the dimension of contact gives the films a common look.

CR — I've moved away from cameras for now, preferring the direct handling or laying of the filmstrip on objects. This gives me greater flexibility to continue the enquiry with the simultaneous exposure of a length of film, but also to weave it in and around plant matter, which is what I've been doing since 2013. Until 2009, I'd only ever used cameras, exploring how to break space down using the single-frame setting on my Cannon 814 Super8 camera and exploiting the focal length of the lens. After *Train Film* I made *Hosepipe* (2010) a 50ft pinhole camera made out of a garden hose. Then I became interested in trying to capture the space and time in the round. As a student, in Maidstone, I was introduced to the work of Steve Farrer and Tim Macmillian and I was encouraged by Farrer's *The Machine* (1978) and Macmillan's time-slice films. I made a pinhole camera out of a clear globe and stuffed 50ft of Super8 colour reversal film inside, exposed it for 9 minutes in the middle of a room and later displayed it in a suspended glass sphere, illuminated by the light of a projector.

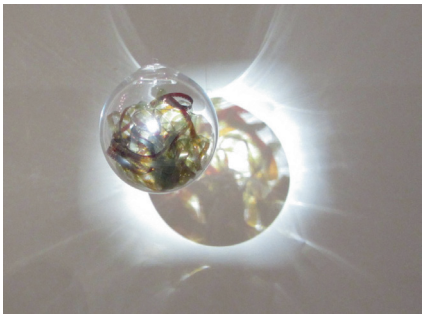
I turned to making photogram films out of my frustration at not being able to see any recognizable images on subsequent pinhole films that I made. *Rosemary, Again and Again* was my first photogram film, and it was made by loosely threading black and white 16mm print stock (8 ASA) in and around a rosemary bush in my garden. I remade *Rosemary, Again and Again* five years on, in 2018, and it was developed in lavender. I feel this is where our practices converge, with the philosophical questions that making photograms evokes, to do with touch and trace and where materials meet. One of my current interests chimes with Susanne Ramsenthaler's distinction between how we view images made by touch and trace. She believes that

'photographs and photograms exist in different perceptual spaces'. The photogram is a very direct reference to the object and offers a view not always easily deciphered, whereas the photograph depicts objects. For this reason, she suggests that the photogram is 'cognitively distant', which suggests that we perceive these images differently.

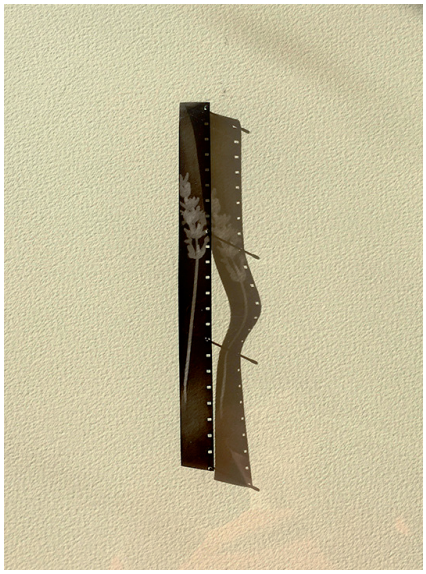
VS — Abstract art provides another frame for thinking about a range of photographic images that, as you cite, occupy different perceptual spaces. Malcolm Le Grice made a similar observation about the photogram in his book *Abstract Film and Beyond*, but in relation to film's 'material nature'. Because the photogram abstracts objects by flattening them, we are aware that these images involve a different procedure to those made using the camera. I used the photogram method in *Not (a) part* (2019) as a practical solution to reproducing the forms of dead bees that I had found. The gate is narrow in optical and contact printers, so the photogram method allowed me to print quite lumpy objects. Lacking in colour and perspectival space, a sense of distance might be the experience of this work, yet the fine detail, the range of textures and tonalities suggest that these things are very close and actually less removed than if they had been photographed. Why do you work with photograms Cathy? The spiky rosemary leaves seem to scratch the film surface and feel close because they have touched the film material. Is the sense of tactility more immediate than that of seeing?

CR — I use the photogram technique but not in a way you would in the darkroom. My darkroom is the garden at night or under tented cover. The plants aren't flattened because the film is loosely wound through them, sometimes touching the film, sometimes not. The leaves do actually scratch the film when I pull it out of the plant. I'm not aware I prioritise tactility over seeing, my interest is to do with capturing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional plane and capturing time in the round, exploring the voluminous properties of the object. However, I am also aware that any reference to volume is lost in projection because it reverts to a flat picture plane. This transference from a voluminous object to two-dimensional plane is something I'll investigate more. I'm interested in how the photogram film offers the viewer different ways to understand a common object (like a rosemary bush) from the way shadows of forms relate to the distance of the object from the film plane to the effect of the stark outlines of leaves pressed against the emulsion.

v.



vi.



v. *All Around You II*, installation, Rogers, 2012
vi. *Lavender*, filmstrip, Rogers, 2016

To come back to your point about scratching, it's interesting you make that comment because I made a film in 2016 of a bull thistle and I enjoyed the thought that the thistle could scratch the eye, in the same way that it scratches the film emulsion, and I wondered how that could be amplified in projection. Perhaps this brings us back to your 'haptic images' and the sensory perceptual experience of looking at images made with the lens and those with the hand. I think this is particularly evident in the films where you rub away the emulsion, as opposed to your 'grazing' films.

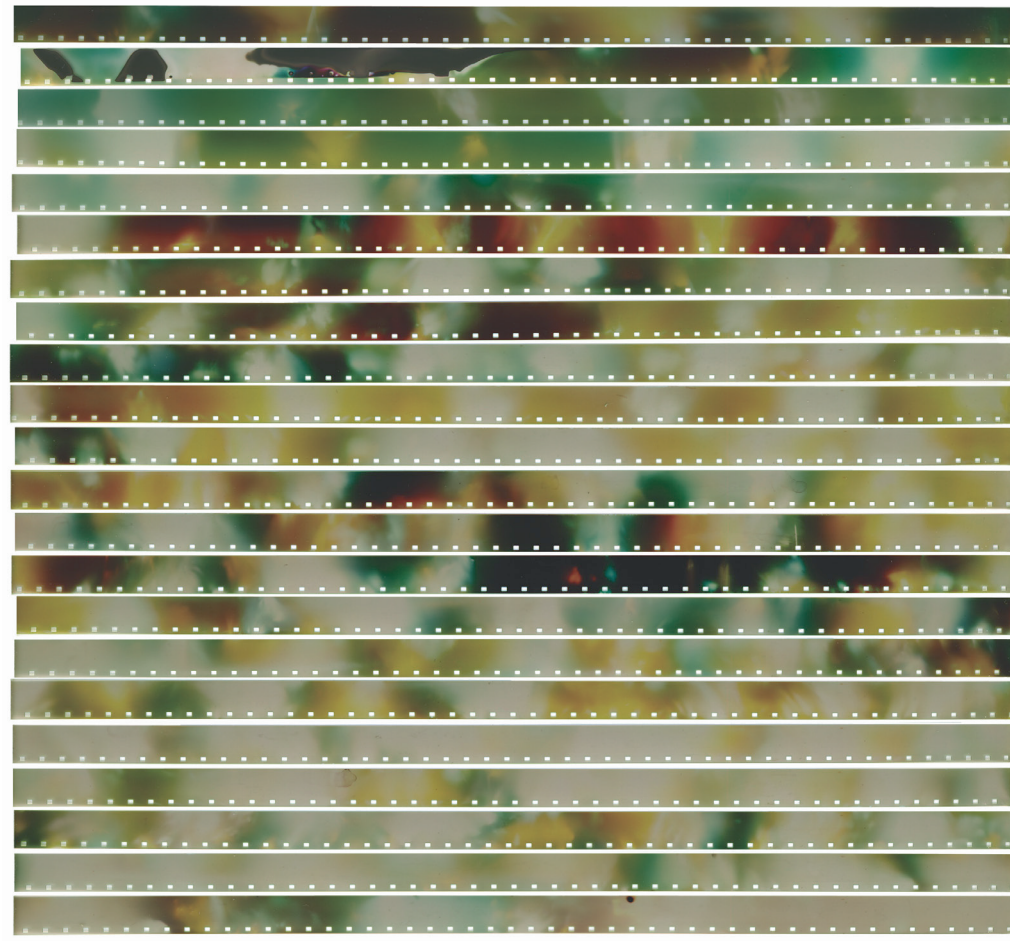
VS — The idea that the thistle can scratch the eye is exciting and calls to mind other films that assault the spectator experience, such as *Un Chien andalou*.

The haptic as aesthetic experience is an on-going concern in my work during the last ten years and is being discussed in these terms by Maud Jacquin and Kim Knowles. Haptic images encourage a multisensory bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. In my new work, as I said, I'm using the lens again and it's interesting to see how haptic visuals can carry across to this practice as a form of grazing, which is an alternative to the distance of the gaze, communicating a sense of proximity between film-maker and object. Actually Marks attributes the term 'grazing' to Mike Hoolboom.

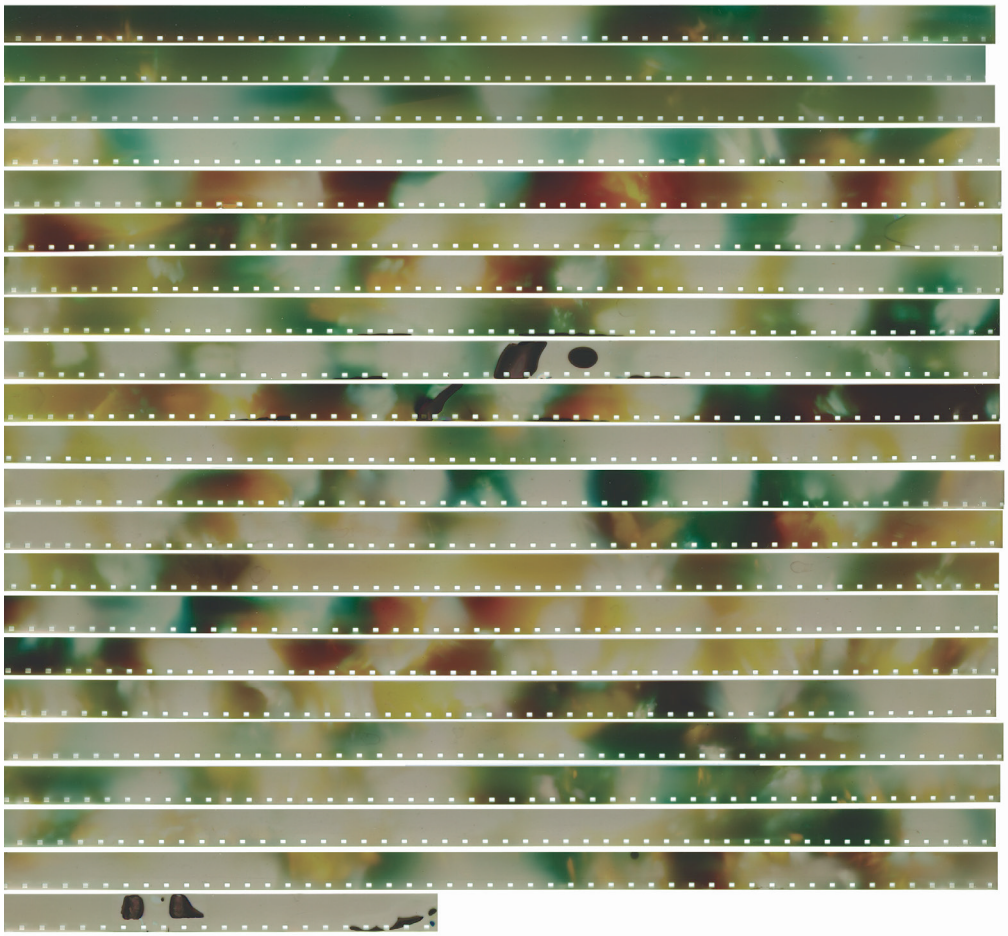
During the summer I was inspecting and filming different textures of my skin through close-up lenses. One big restriction when shooting with PF2 stock is that it has a very slow ASA, which means that strong light is necessary for a good exposure. To film my skin in daylight with this stock requires that I expose it to the full summer sun. In this respect the technical demands of the film-stock that I'm using is instrumental in shaping the project and central to the idea of the film so that as-well as being about self-scrutiny and the aging process, the work concerns the damaging effect of the sun on skin and, more broadly, climate change and the vulnerability of bodies in these conditions.

In these present winter months, I'm filming indoors and need to use additional lighting. Inspecting film rushes on the lightbox led to me using it as a source of extra illumination and then also to re-filming the strip that I had been inspecting for its exposure. Using print stock as camera negative means that the tones are reversed. In the first take the skin is seen in negative. In the re-filming stage the imagery on the filmstrip appears in positive, but my hand holding the strip appears in negative. In this way the

vii.



 vii. *Hosepipe*, Rogers, 2009



material process of film reproduction will inform a recursive filmic structure.

CR — I've watched Annabel Nicolson's *Shapes* again in light of your insights. There are two different types of motion/speed in this film: one in the manipulation of the contact printer and one in projection. It's as though she's modifying the machine, through a subtle but extremely powerful intervention. She's directing our gaze, to a point, but then unexpected things happen in the flow of images, new spaces and depth open up. I like the way you too are making a subtle intervention in going back to the lens. Through a close proximity to the object that you're filming, you are maintaining that same sense of intimacy that your 'body films' do.

VS — The use of the lightbox as an instrument with which to scrutinize the textures of the epidermis alludes to medical imaging. I have in mind other works that frame the analysis of practice as a forensic enquiry and in ways that involve live action and animation. Lis Rhodes's *Light Reading* (1978), for example, employs the tabletop as a set – similar to the animation rostrum – in which objects and fragments are moved about under the camera to interrogate the representation of the female subject in cinema. Similarly, Sandra Lahire's *Edge* (1986) deploys the rostrum table as though it were an operating theatre upon which measuring instruments such as rulers, scalpels and magnifiers visually amplify her critique of cosmetic surgery. The tight frame of the animation table lends itself to such close scrutiny. I'm trying to bring the quality of material enquiry by makers such as Nicolson in line with present ideas relating to ecologies and vulnerabilities. Maud Jacquin discusses such continuities in her article 'From Reel to Real'.

CR — Influences for me right now come from photography, direct impressions of things and fragments of surfaces. I recently visited The *Shape of Light* exhibition at Tate Modern and the Moholy-Nagy exhibition at Hauser and Wirth. Revelations of the unseen through shadows, as in Nagy's photograms and his enquiries into the representation of three dimensions in two-dimensional forms are hugely inspiring. I think I'll also always be enthralled by the dialectic between the still and the moving. The space between the still and moving offers a dream space, not a psychoanalytic kind, but a space for new possibilities. Alia Syed's film *Unfolding* (1988) offers us a similar dream space without being didactic. The layering of images mirroring the repetition of the action of doing the laundry and the rhythmic motion

of the washing machine gives us a space to reflect and ponder.

Looking at Taka Iimura's *One Second Loop (=Infinity) A White Line in Black* (2007) and Paul Sharits's *Frozen Film Frames* (1966–77) gave me confidence to proceed to show my film strips as objects. And it was Hollis Frampton's statement that set me on the path to continue with cameraless films and explore the pull between the recognizable and abstract image:

> The trace made by light on sensitive material is an image. A camera may have been involved, or it may not. The light may or may not have been focused by a lens. The image may very well not look at all like a cow, or like Simonetta Vespucci; but because it is a photographic image, it is subject to the same procedures. Most important it is accessible to our sensibilities on precisely the same basis.

VS — I see how this dynamic between stasis and motion operates in *Rosemary, Again and Again*. Do you have an idea in the pipeline for how the filmstrip as object can be developed further?

CR — In September this year I fleshed out some ideas for a new piece based on the dried out husk of a glorious Echium that was growing in my garden. It'll be an exploration of its structure, textures and form against its filmic counterpart. The context of the site will also be brought into the work (sounds, smell, burning). The long term project involves making a photogram of the entire garden, and I'm working on a method of how to approach this.

VS — This sounds like a wonderful development of *Rosemary*. Given the importance of the ecology of the garden in this project, I wonder about you using Caffenol to process the film – or even devising some new formula extracted from the same plants as the ones you make into image? Kim Knowles discusses the significance of ecologies of practice as it relates to the DIY aspects in my work and that of Charlotte Pryce, who, like you Cathy, also films and hand processes in her garden and home. Writing about my recent practice, Knowles offers interesting ideas concerning relations between the cinematic close-up and experimental materialist film practices related to proximity and observation:

> The close-up finds new expressive dimension, tied not, as is traditionally the case, to the magnifying properties of the camera, but to the mechanical relationship between the film surface and the film projector.

She compares the close-up image from popular cinema to the enlargement that occurs when a small mark made directly onto the film surface is then magnified in projection. The cinematic close-up is consistently discussed in relation to the human body, observes Knowles. When artists (like myself, Thorsten Fleisch and Emma Hart) position bodily matter directly onto film, the viewing relations become altered. In this case bodily traces magnified on screen create an experience of proximity to the body that bears an uncanny resemblance to microscopic images of bacteria.

My films *Sobbing, Spitting, Scratching* (2011), and *Noisy Licking, Dribbling & Spitting* present once fluid matter, which is not ordinarily possible to see, scaled up in projection. Of these films, Knowles remarks that, though they are 'intricately connected to human emotion and drama they nonetheless seem quite far form the kinds of bodily close-ups traditionally presented in the cinema'. It's true that these close-up views of fluids are quite unlike the scenes of human emotions in mainstream cinema. I find it interesting to consider the stuff of tears in relation to the cinematic genre of the weepies. The key difference is how emotions are framed. *Sobbing, Spitting, Scratching*, for example, presents a drama involving literal material, a raw bodily manifestation of sorrow and anguish. Whilst highly unmediated and directly dealing with grief head on, the film also steps back from that emotion and through the surface enlargement of cinema becomes a forensic analysis of that stuff.

CR — I've been using lavender as a developer since 2013 and want to test some of the alternative fixers also. I developed *Rosemary, Again and Again* in lavender, as lavender and rosemary share the same chemical properties. I've also made a lavender film developed in lavender. So this is very much tied to the ecology of the garden and the project going forward, bringing in the garden not only as the subject but inherently part of the process of revealing the image on film.

Having watched you make your live performance works, and having projected your films, I've observed how your whole body is invested in each step of your process, including making, performing and showing your films. You may preserve certain conventions and linguistic aspects of cinema,

such as the frame as unit of film, universal projection speeds, the close-up, and even entertain a notion of genre as in your reference to ‘the weepie’, but that’s where the alliance ends. Instead we’re treated to loud, sensitive, aesthetic explosions of raw physical manifestations of emotion, feeling and action.

References

Bennett, J., 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Economy of Things*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
Hamlyn, N., 2003. *Film Art Phenomena*. London: BFI.
Hamlyn, N. and Smith, V. eds., 2018. *Experimental and Expanded Animation: New Perspectives and Practices*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Frampton, H., 1965. Some Propositions on Photography. In: B. Jenkins, ed. 2009. *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Maters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
Jacquin, M. 2018 *From Reel to Real: Feminist Politics and Materiality at the LFMC* in Moving Image Review & Art Journal, Vol 6. No 1 &2. P 84-89.
Knowles, K., 2020. *Experimental Film and Photochemical Processes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Marks, L., 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Ramsenthaler S., 2009. Light Reversal: Photogram – Hybrids of Vision and Touch. In: R. Ascott, G. Bast, W. Fiel, M. Jahrmann and R. Schnell, eds. *New Realities: Being Syncretic*. Vienna: Springer-Verlag, pp. 228–9.

ISBN 978-1-5272-9961-0

