Preamble:

This essay was written over the course of several months in 2013 and 2014. It was the first text that I wrote after giving birth, as I attempted to return to my PhD on the relationship between avant-garde film and film theory. It was written and intended for an academic publication but the editor was unhappy about my choice of subject and it became impossible to address her comments and suggestions without radically changing the text. It was then going to be published by a Spanish film journal, but their "next" issue never saw the light.

Earlier this year Morgan Fisher released a new film, *Another Movie*, a response to Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (1958). And with that film, this text became outdated, even before it was ever published.

I am grateful to the Hoosac Institute for this opportunity to share these words, in their original form. I have refrained from the temptation of returning to the text and rewriting it in light of what I have since read, seen, learnt. It is what it is. I am also indebted to Michele Pierson, Lucy Reynolds and Mark Webber, who read different drafts of the text and whose feedback was very useful. My gratitude also goes to Erika Balsom, who is a kind and wise friend. Lastly, I thank Morgan Fisher, for his generous correspondence and for his films.

Maria Palacios Cruz
London, May 2018

Morgan Fisher: the Long Take and Other Devices

In the artist's own words, the films of Morgan Fisher (US, 1942) "tend to be about the making of films".[1] They also tend to follow rules and predetermined structures, which are sometimes made clear to the spectator. *Phi Phenomenon* (1968) begins with a sign with the warning: "this film consists of an ordinary clock running in an ordinary fashion for eleven minutes". It is an accurate description of what follows: one single shot of a clock that lasts eleven minutes (eleven minutes being a relatively common length in avant-garde cinema and one that Fisher uses for many of his films).

Detractors may scorn his films for their predictability, but for Fisher, telling the spectator what is going to happen frees the audience from any sense of anticipation, allowing them to make a decision about how to engage with the work. In some ways, announcing the structure of a film is similar to watching a film for a second time: "we know how it is going to turn out but the pleasure is in the manipulation that we undergo in getting to the end that we already know".[2] Or from the way that Robert Bresson's work is engaging and suspenseful even when the title announces its own resolution: 'A Man Escaped' (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé,* 1956).[3]

Morgan Fisher's work operates within the unlikely configuration between avant-garde cinema, film industry and contemporary art, which is made possible in a city like Los Angeles.[4] Playing with the concepts of film, cinema and filmmaking, his 16mm films examine and deconstruct with wry humour the machinery of cinema. Although they would appear to belong in the Structural film tradition[5], Fisher was not included in the official Structural canon, an experience that he describes with drollness as having "missed the boat" of avant-garde film[6]. This was partly due to his peripheral position as a Los Angeles avant-garde filmmaker, the Structural group being fundamentally composed of filmmakers all living in New York (Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, George Landow, Ernie Gehr...). Even though two of Fisher's films were mentioned in the inaugural essay by P. Adams Sitney "Structural Film" as it was published in *Film Culture* in the summer of 1969, his work was altogether omitted in Sitney's revision of his text for the *Film Culture Reader*. [7] Fisher's film work was marginalised for a long time for not fitting too neatly into any of the usual avant-garde categories. On the one hand, too concerned with the specifics of industry procedures, on the other, too involved in visual arts strategies, and in particular minimal and conceptual art. During the last twenty-five years Fisher has in fact been mainly active as a visual artist, producing monochrome paintings as well as works on paper. His most recent film to date *( )* was completed more than a decade ago in 2003, and there is an almost twenty-year gap between that and his previous film, *Standard Gauge* (1984), considered by many to be his masterpiece. In the very productive period between 1968 and 1976, Fisher completed most of his thirteen films, many of which are single long takes, which we will consider in this essay as a form of rule.

In film theory, the long take is often discussed in terms of its relation to reality. For Pier-Paolo Pasolini, the long take is in the present tense, showing reality seen and heard as it happens. "The substance of cinema is therefore an endless long take, as is reality to our senses for as long as we are able to see and feel (a long take that ends with the end of our lives); and this long take is nothing but the reproduction of the language of reality. In other words it is the reproduction of the present".[8]

But the long take can also be understood as a form of self-imposed limit, which is at the same time governed by the medium of film, and thus contributes to the depersonalisation of composition that Fisher seeks in his work.

Using rules or predetermined structures and frameworks for his films allows Fisher to detach himself from the authorial position and releases him from having to make conventional compositional decisions. In a way, Fisher seeks to let the work make itself, using conceptual procedures that are inspired by strategies found in the visual arts, and more specifically by the work of Sol LeWitt and Marcel Duchamp. In doing so, Fisher injects his work with a rare combination of precision and improvisation, control and detachment. In Sol LeWitt's words: "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art".[9]

Although Fisher's long takes are not Pasolinian nor Bazinian – his inspiration lies closer to Andy Warhol, Ad Reinhardt and the already mentioned Le Witt and

Duchamp –, they are also infused by his great love for cinema. It is not only his work that comments on film industry procedures, but Fisher himself is, as Stuart Comer has written, "as delighted watching Warhol and Jack Smith films and reading Film Culture as he was sitting in the old 'popcorn theatres' of downtown Los Angeles devouring triple bills of Budd Boetticher, Robert Aldrich and Sam Fuller films for 50 cents a pop". Meeting fellow Angeleno filmmaker Thom Andersen was crucial in Fisher's cinephiliac development: "Thom explained to me why Fellini was not interesting and made me understand why Warhol was interesting... This way of thinking about film totally opened my eyes: that here were several kinds of film culture and that one could try to form a relationship to film that embraced all of them"[10].

In attaching attention to the long take, Fisher is not only escaping compositional decisions, but also highlighting the filmmaking process and in doing so attempting to make the viewer aware of it. As Susan Sontag has argued, films provide "something other than content to grab hold of, for those who want to analyze. For the cinema, unlike the novel, possesses a vocabulary of forms – the explicit, complex and discussable technology of camera movements, cutting and composition of the frame that goes into the making of the film"[11]. The long take is one such form that Fisher draws attention to in his work.

Rules and structures

Generally, the rules in Fisher's films are implicit, and although not verbally explicit, they are available to those who stop to consider the films. *Production Still*s (1970), a seemingly minimal work, is a document of its own production. Shot in one long take, again eleven minutes long - or four hundred feet, one of the standard unit lengths for a roll of unexposed film -, with a fixed camera, it reveals a canvas-like white frame, in fact a wall, to which a series of Polaroid photographs are pinned one after the other. These Polaroids are being taken while the film is being shot and depict the filmic apparatus and crew. "The identity of *Production Stills* lies in its scheme: a film of standard length shows the pack of Polaroids that document its production".[12] It is not surprising that Fisher describes the film as a readymade in the sense that it has been derived from a roll of movie film and a pack of Polaroid film, which are understood as readymades, "in exactly the same sense that tubes of paint in Duchamp's example are readymades",[13] and their combination in a painting makes a readymade. "But there is the larger point that Duchamp makes, that a combination of readymades, as tubes of paint in a painting, make a readymade. *Production Stills*, combining two readymades, is a readymade."[14]

The relationship to the ready-made lies deep in Fisher's family history. His father Howard T. Fisher was the founder of General Houses, Inc., a manufacturer of prefabricated houses (in other words, ready-made houses). The basis of General Houses was a panel system, the panels being all the same width except one. The system was therefore modular, which for Fisher relates General Houses, Inc. to the constraints that operate in his "non-composition" films. In a recent exhibition at the Bortolami Gallery in New York, Fisher presented 25 paintings which were in fact enlarged facsimiles of paint chips from a promotional booklet by General

Houses titled “Exterior and Interior Color Beauty”. According to the press release, “the exhibition realizes what Morgan Fisher understood when he found the booklet in his father’s files many years ago, that the groups of chips were paintings ready-made”.

Fisher has proposed that *Production Stills* is an effective example of a film that almost makes itself, and which fulfils Duchamp’s ideal that there can be art without artists.[15] Having established the framework for the film, Fisher tried to remove himself from its making as much as he could:

The procedures and decisions that made the film were impersonal. The roll of movie film was a standard unit of length, four hundred feet, and the pack of Polaroid film was another standard unit consisting of eight exposures; the film was made by integrating two standard units.[16]

Furthermore, the person who made the compositional and other formal decisions in regards to the production stills that appear in the film was not Fisher, but the still photographer (Thom Andersen). Fisher himself only took the last Polaroid of the film so that the photographer could also appear in it. Fisher does acknowledge that the film has a maker and that maker is he, but he is also adamant that “once the movie camera was turned on, the movie made itself”.[17]

Documentary Footage (1968) provides another example of Fisher’s use of the rule. A naked woman speaks into a tape recorder, asking questions about physical appearance: “what is your hair like?”, “are your earlobes attached?”, “are your proportions correct?”. She then rewinds the tape, plays back these own questions and attempts to answer them. Although she should be well aware of the questions – which she has only read minutes before, and are now being asked in her own voice – her answers are refreshingly spontaneous and her reactions reveal surprise, confusion and amusement. When writing about *Documentary Footage*, instead of “structure” or “rule”, Fisher uses the term “framework”, one which he created, and in response to which the performer improvised; her improvisations making the film what it is.[18]

Another film from the same period, *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973) is, as Thom Andersen has noted, “nothing more than an exposition of its structure”.[19] Originating in the premise that in a film there can be image or no image, sound or no sound, Fisher – sitting professorially behind a desk – carefully enumerates all the permutations between the four combinations of sound and picture – sync, MOS, wild sound and null – which occur in the course of the film. Sync – “the most basic and fundamental state” as Fisher says in the film – is of course the situation the spectator is most familiar with and desires. “As the film shows, it is also the least natural state; that is, it requires the most artifice, the most work. But no matter, we still want sync sound to come back. It is the most life-like, the most satisfying of the four permutations the film offers”.[20]

MOS is common film jargon that indicates that a given film shot does not have a simultaneously recorded synchronous sound – although in the finished film the sound will have been added in postproduction. A good example of this is a car

chase scene, which is generally shot "silent". There are different theories as to what MOS stands for: "motor only sync", "motor only shot", etc. According to the Hollywood legend the origin is "Mit Out Sound", broken English for "Without Sound", as German-speaking emigré directors such as Erich von Stroheim, Ernst Lubitsch or Fritz Lang might have said it. Another similar theory would suggest that it stands for "Mit Out Sprechen" (*with out speech*). Wild sound is sound that is not recorded synchronously with the picture; sound taken without the camera being on (for example, a door slam that is synced with the action in the editing room). There is no industry term for a situation with neither synchronous image nor sound, or in other words, where both camera and sound recorder are off, therefore Fisher refers to this fourth state as null. "The null case is a sort of refusal on the part of the equipment to register the scene. The action is staged as if to be shot with the camera or recorded by the recorder, or by both together, but neither piece of equipment is activated". [21]

( ) (2003), Fisher's most recent film to date, is also constructed according to a rule, but for the first time, not only is the rule not apparent nor revealed, but it should never be. As the filmmaker explains: "For a change, I wanted the rule that would construct the film to be unpredictable. The way to do this was to create a rule that is invisible. The great example of composition according to an invisible rule is the work of French writer Raymond Roussel".[22] Both of Roussel's most famous works *Impressions of Africa* (*Impressions d'Afrique*, 1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914) were written according to a series of rules (based on homonymic puns) which were kept secret until the posthumous publication of his text *How I Wrote Certain of My Books (Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, 1935)

One reason behind the wordless title is Fisher's discovery that the root of "parenthesis" is the Greek word for "the act of inserting". It also pays tribute to --- ------- (1966-67), made by Thom Andersen with the collaboration of Malcolm Brodwick. Andersen is a close friend of Fisher's, and was in fact the person that introduced him to the work of Raymond Roussel. The influence of Roussel on Andersen's and Fisher's work is twofold: on the one hand, the mechanising of composition which has allowed them to break with composition as generally understood, and on the other, the hiding of the method, which according to Fisher makes the writing of *Impressions of Africa* (1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914) so powerful, beyond the power of any literary imagination to have invented it.[23] --- ------- is a collage of images and sounds from the rock'n'roll era that was assembled by following a set of arbitrary and invisible rules – invisible in the sense that they are not apparent. The filmmakers later chose to reveal them[24], but for Fisher, not disclosing the rule that guides the construction of *( )* is a way of preserving the meaning and integrity of the film:

( ) consists of inserts, a kind of shot in narrative films that shows details necessary to the story. Inserts are the most purely instrumental of shots. We tend not to notice them because we only see the point that they make. ( ) liberates inserts from their stories so you can see them for themselves. I couldn't edit the film because that would have re-instrumentalized the shots. Instead I chose a rule that constructed the film, assigning each shot its place. The rule has nothing to do with what's happening in the shots, so what happens at each cut is a matter of chance. [25]

The rule of the single take

Ten of Fisher's fifteen single-screen films and videos are single shot works: *Documentary Footage* (1968), *Phi Phenomenon* (1968), *Screening Room* (1968 and later)[26], *Production Stills* (1970), *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973) – not strictly speaking a one take film, but as we will see, it is a special case – , *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm* (1973), *Cue Rolls* (1974), *Turning Over* (1975), *Protective Coloration* (1979), and *Standard Gauge* (1984).

As he admits, "my thinking about film was ruled by quantities: rolls and feet, and the units of time that corresponded to them."[27] Consequently, most of his films are modular in their composition, and even when not constituted of one single long take, they are often composed of several long takes of equal length or of the total length of the roll of film used.[28] Such is the case for *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* (1968)[29] and *Production Footage* (1971). When describing the former, Fisher writes:

The film is modular; made up of one-hundred foot rolls of film. The action that the first scene requires could have been performed in much less time, but the film's commitment to the modular requires the director and the actor to improvise to fill up the time, in effect to kill time. This discrepancy between the module and the action that occupies it could be called an error, but on the other hand this discrepancy calls attention at the beginning of the film to its formal foundation.[30]

The long take not only provides a form for his work, but also allows Fisher to liberate the film's time from the film's action, and vice versa. The film ends when the roll ends. For Fisher the ideal is for the length of the roll of film and the length of the action that it depicts to suit each other and end at the same time. This does not always work. In *Cue Rolls*[31], Fisher hurried the narration, worried that he wouldn't finish in time, only to slow down when he realised there was more than enough time left. In the event, he finished too soon, leaving a long silence at the end. Similarly, in *Production Footage* the camera kept rolling once Fisher had left the shot. We are neither in the terrain of the time-image nor of the movement-image, but in one in which time and film are reciprocals of one another.

A certain sense of being run over by the machine of the movies (the long take is one manifestation of this machine) is present in many of his films; perhaps most visibly in *Picture and Sound Rushes* where the very structure of the film makes sections of it inaudible, invisible and/or both. *Picture and Sound Rushes* appears to be a single-take film, but in fact is only so in regards to Fisher's efforts as the film's protagonist. As Fisher has pointed out, people who are familiar with filmmaking will see the flash frames at the beginning of each shot and know that it is not a single take, and they will also hear the beep of the tape recorder coming up to speed as it is turned on. [32] The single-take quality of Fisher's performance is underlined by the presence of a clock. In reality, the camera and the sound recorder were turned on and off during the making:

What occupies the soundtrack during the moments of silence isn't magnetic film; it's just a spacer whose length corresponds to the interval of time that the tape recorder was off. For the picture, for the time that the camera was off you have to insert black leader for the corresponding length. It's not as if the camera and tape recorder were on all the time and I removed pieces.[33]

The spacer (incapable of registering sound) and the black leader represent total absence for Fisher. It is important for him to underline that in those intervals there was never picture, never sound.[34] Also, having the camera operator and the sound recordist turn their machines on and off gives a certain visibility on screen to their off-screen presence, turning them into performers even though they aren't visible.

Removing "pieces" of unnecessarily shot film would go against the economy of the independent 16mm film-maker. The financial circumstances of independent filmmaking are one of the factors that contribute to making (single) long takes challenging. Film is too precious and expensive to afford several takes. Although several of his long take films are in fact second takes (*Cue Rolls*, *Production Stills, Standard Gauge*...), when Fisher shot a second take for *Documentary Footage* all the spontaneity was gone rendering it useless[35]. Long takes are shots that require an added degree of precision, and this appears to attract Fisher to using them.

Standard Gauge (1984) is Fisher's most ambitious long-take film, and also the most explicit in its acknowledgement of his persistent use of the extended single shot: "One of the things I wanted to do in making *Standard Gauge* was to suggest how complicated a single-take film could be".[36] The soundtrack's monologue – a autobiographical account of Fisher's time in the Hollywood film industry illustrated by the pieces of film strip that he collected during those years – is delivered by the filmmaker, just as in *Picture and Sound Rushes* and *Cue Rolls*, but this time its extended length adds to the complexity and difficulty of the film. Thirty-two minutes long, *Standard Gauge* is a reminder of film's material limits. A work that celebrates 35mm – film's standard gauge – but which is in fact shot in 16mm, *Standard Gauge* is one minute short of the maximum length of a scene in 16mm and substantially longer than 35mm would be capable of.[37] "So *Standard Gauge*, a modest little film in 16mm, does something that no film made by the industry can do. So much for 16mm being beneath 35mm".[38] This statement, which is no longer applicable in the age of digital cinema, underlines the material nature of Fisher's filmic preoccupations.

Video works

Video was different. There are feet, but the medium does not invite attention to them. There are minutes and seconds, but they aren't as present as they are in film. And the cost of the videotape was negligible. Compared with how I thought about making films, video was liberating. I invented an action, I recorded it, and when the action was over the camera was turned off. It was that simple.[39]

It is interesting to note that Fisher's rare excursions into video making (*Turning*

Over and *Protective Coloration*) also utilise the form of the long take, even though the length and structure of these works does not relate to the units of video tapes that Fisher uses in the same way that there is a correlation between his 16mm work and the units of film rolls. These works, and their use of the long take, are best understood in relation to the wider appropriation of the medium by visual artists at the time.

When the first portable video recording equipment was introduced in the market by Sony in the mid 1960s, artists quickly embraced this new television-based technology[40], exploiting the possibility of very long shots and of bypassing editing, even if that wasn't necessarily by choice at first. As Kate Horsfield, co-founder of Video Data Bank in Chicago, explains:

Editing equipment was expensive and very difficult to use; an edit could only be made through a laborious process of rewinding and marking points on each of the two reels tape, then hitting the edit button on the record and playback decks simultaneously. Since tapes were so hard to edit, the video art piece was often the same duration as the reel of tape, hence the name "reel-time" and the prevalence of 20, 30 and 60 minute pieces.[41]

Consequently, video technology was used as a tool to uninterruptedly document live performance, such as Bruce Nauman's *Stamping in the Studio* (1968), a work that shows the artist pacing back and forth his studio for 60 continuous minutes. In the 1980s and 1990s, avant-garde filmmakers that moved on to video from 16mm such as Jonas Mekas or John Smith, gradually produced pieces that incorporated fewer but longer shots, less editing (at least on the surface) and a lot more talking.

In today's digital production, the length of a long take is no longer restrained by the material limits of film or video. One could in theory make an interminably long work, "*a film that is longer than the time you have left to live*", to echo Morgan Fisher's contribution to the project "Instructions for Films" published by no.w.here in 2007. [42]

Fisher has not yet used video to surpass the durational limitations of 16mm shots. His videos are relatively short (both *Turning Over* and *Protective Coloration* are thirteen minutes long), but what video allows Fisher is to liberate the work's length from its material. In some ways, these works are a return to the movement-image of classical Hollywood, their length being determined by the duration of Morgan Fisher's actions in *Protective Coloration* and by the time that it takes the odometer in Fisher's car to turn over 100,000 miles in *Turning Over* (minus the many years that it took the odometer to get close to 100,000 miles). A comparison can be made to James Benning's recent digital work, and in particular to *20 cigarettes*, where the length of each shot is determined by the time that it takes the subject to smoke a cigarette. This approach contrasts with Benning's earlier 16mm work, where the length of each shot was determined by the length of the film roll, and the structure of the work as a whole was modular[43] - a common practice amongst the filmmakers of the structural persuasion.

Writings

Morgan Fisher has written extensively about his films since the 1960s and his work in painting since the 1990s, devoting himself over the past two decades to an analytical revision of his work. His, less frequent, writings on work by others, demonstrate once again Fisher's interest in the long take.[44] His essay on *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) is centred on an analysis of the film's last shot, a shot he also describes in the narration of *Standard Gauge*:

In the last shot of the film he's walking along a highway at night. He speaks in an interior monologue, wondering what his life might have been if he had never accepted the fateful ride. Then, with sudden conviction, he speaks these words: "But one thing I don't have to wonder about – I know. Someday a car will stop to pick me up that I never thumbed." At that moment a police car overtakes him, and he is arrested. He seems almost to welcome it. He has only to predict it, and the future occurs. His shifting to the future sense makes the scene jump forward, revealing as a certainty the outcome that the character's fatalism has long foreshadowed. And yet this disjunction in time, a kind of ellipsis into the future, takes place within a single continuous shot.[45]

The last shot of *Detour* breaks the unity of time that generally accompanies the unity of space of the single shot, and in doing so produces in the spectator (in this case Fisher) a sense of conceptual vertigo or disorientation. It demonstrates that if a single-take film is complicated, then a single shot in a film with many shots can be complicated too, especially when the shot represents an entire sequence or scene.

Fisher has dedicated several writings to the work of Alfred Hitchcock – a director for whom films often take place all but entirely in a single confined space (*Rope*, *Rear Window*, *Lifeboat*) – and has written extensively on the long takes in *Under Capricorn* (1949), the perfection of which Fisher claims "inspires awe".[46]

In programme notes for a screening of *Under Capricorn* at the Harvard Film Archive, he explains: "in a scene in a continuous take, everything necessary has to happen but nothing beyond. And the execution of the scene is as exacting as its composition [...] one mistake in the least detail, and there is no alternative but to start over again".[47] And yet, film is an expensive medium, one that does not allow an independent film-maker to start all over again many times. Unlike Hitchcock, Fisher does not necessarily seek to orchestrate every single detail in his long-take films (except perhaps in *Standard Gauge*), but rather he uses the long-take as one of various parameters within which to work.

In another essay on the same film by Hitchcock, "Under Capricorn and the Difficulty of the Long Take", Fisher identifies another difficulty of the long take for mainstream filmmakers. On the one hand, long takes have to be "perfect" in their execution. But on the other hand, if too perfect, they carry the potential risk of bringing the viewer's attention to their execution, and therefore to the production of the film, and to the film's status as a film – the antithesis of

Hollywood's intentions. "The longer a shot goes on, the more likely we are to notice that it is doing so and hence the more likely we are to notice the shot as such, as a shot, instead of the story that the shot is bringing us". [48]

In Fisher's films, once we notice the long takes, we begin to notice the other strategies in play, which bring our attention both to the notion of the artist as a creator as well as to the idea of cinema as a machine. Fisher's use of the long take is also designed to end the spectator's innocence, to encourage the viewer to "understand how it is that a film comes into being, where it comes from, so to speak, and what it must have undergone (in the material sense) before it appears before their eyes as shadows on the screen".[49]

Refusal of montage

For Fisher it is not a problem to bring attention to his long takes and their production. Quite the contrary; he uses devices that underline the absence of editing and the uninterrupted passage of time – the "real-time" quality of the long take. For example, the clocks in *Phi Phenomenon* and *Picture and Sound Rushes,* or the constant (verbal) reminders of the time that has passed in *Production Stills*.

The absence of editing – or rather the resistance to editing – characterises all of Fisher's film and video work, a fact which is remarkable if we consider that he worked as an editor in the film industry in the early 1970s, an experience that he describes in *Standard Gauge*.[50] Even *( )*, which looks like it's been edited, is a resolute negation of editing : "*( )* is what I have called a construction, and as a construction *( )* is a refusal of editing altogether".[51] Once Fisher chose the shots, the film was made, because the rule assigned every shot to its place in the structure. One could argue that this all-at-once aspect of the work – a single rule applied to the collection of shots that make the film – makes *( )* a sort of one take film too.[52]

The long take allows Fisher to deliberately avoid editing, and moreover to foreclose that possibility. It also forces him to accept that unforeseen accidents and events will come to integrate the work, and that he will not have complete control neither on the production itself nor on its reception by its audience. This is where Fisher's approach echoes that of Andy Warhol, whose use of the long take is emphasised in films such as *Blow-Job* (1964), *Empire* (1964) and *Sleep* (1963). In a text about *Camp* for Artforum in 1966, Thom Andersen writes that films without cutting are films of pure intelligence because whilst cutting manipulates the viewer's mind at will, in a continuous take the filmmaker doesn't have the same kind of control over the spectator. [53] For Andersen, the pure intelligence of Warhol's films is perhaps why people find them so disturbing.

Similarly, the sometimes-criticised detachment and predictability of Fisher's films manifest their intelligence. Moving, self-aware, funny, didactic… Morgan Fisher's work turns film into a form of research, producing a "knowledge effect"

as Thom Andersen writes the French theorists would put it.[54] At the same time, his films and videos interrogate and experiment with compositional strategies. The long take is one of the devices that Fisher uses in order to construct his films, or rather, to let his films construct themselves.

Maria Palacios Cruz
London, Summer 2014

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[1] Fisher Morgan (1975) "Untitled Statement", San Francisco Cinemateque Calendar, in Folie, Sabine (ed) & Titz, Susanne (ed), *Morgan Fisher: Writings*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2012, p. 77.

[2] Fisher Morgan. Interviewed by Mark Webber (phone). June 2005. (unpublished)

[3] In the unpublished interview with Mark Webber (June 2005), Fisher mentions reading an article by Susan Sontag on Bresson and how he was impressed by the idea that in Bresson's work there is no suspense of the usual kind.

[4] Born in Washington DC, Fisher moved to California in 1964 in order to study film at USC having previously earned an art history degree at Harvard.

[5] In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue at Raven Row, curator Alex Sainsbury writes : "Most of his thirteen films were made in the 1970s and are associated with structural film: film that closely examines the means of its own production". Haddon Sue, ed (2011), *Morgan Fisher: Films and Paintings and In Between and Nearby*, Exhibition Guide, Raven Row, London.

[6] Fisher, Morgan, "Missing the boat" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, pp. 79-84.

[7] And subsequent versions of the essay, as it appears in *Visionary Film* – the longest and perhaps best-known version of the text.

[8] Pier Paolo Pasolini (1967), "Observation on the long take" in D. Campany The Cinematic, p. 86

[9] LeWitt Sol (1967), "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10, June 1967, p.79.

[10] Stuart Comer quotes Morgan Fisher in an unpublished interview with Mark Webber, 2005. In Haddon Sue, ed (2011),

[11] Susan Sontag (1964), "Against Interpretation", Against Interpretation and Other Essays, London:Penguin Books, p.12

[12] Fisher Morgan (1985/2012), "Production Stills" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p.31

[13] Fisher Morgan. Interviewed by Mark Webber (phone). June 2005. (unpublished)

[14] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[15] Fisher Morgan (1985/2012), "Production Stills" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p.31.

[16] Fisher Morgan (1985/2012), ibidem.

[17] Fisher Morgan (1985/2012), ibidem.

[18] Fisher Morgan (2005/2012), "Documentary Footage" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 20

[19] Andersen Thom (2012), "Pebbles Left on the Beach" in Folie, Sabine (ed) & Titz, Susanne (ed), *Morgan Fisher: Two Exhibitions*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2012, p. 199.

[20] Andersen Thom (2012), ibidem.

[21] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[22] Fisher Morgan (2005), programme notes for the screening *Thom Andersen and Morgan Fisher*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, presented by Galerie Buchholz, Cologne.

[23] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[24] The first rule is suggested by the film's title: the film is made up of pairs of shots in which the second shot is longer than the first. In each pair, the first shot is longer than the first shot of the previous pair, but shorter than the second. A second rule assigns a colour to each shot and arranges the shots around the colour circle. A third rule refers to the direction of the motion in the frame, which alternates.

[25] Morgan Fisher in Haddon Sue, ed (2011).

[26] "*Screening Room* is a tracking shot into the room in which the viewer is seated watching the film. The film is site-specific, but it can also exist in as many instances as there are places to see a film" (Fisher Morgan, "Screening Room", (2005/2012) in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p.25).
To date, there are thirteen "versions" of *Screening Room*. The first was produced in 1968 for the Third Independent Film-Maker's competition at St. Lawrence University in New York, and the most recent in 2012 for the Austrian Film Museum Vienna, on the occasion of the exhibition "Morgan Fisher. The Frame and Beyond" at the Generali Foundation.

[27] Fisher Morgan (1979/2012) "Protective Coloration" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 58.

[28] This does not apply to *240x* (1974), *Projection Instructions* (1976) and *( ). 240x* is a rare exception in Fisher's filmography, his most conventional film in that the lengths of the shots are determined by the same criteria as in conventional films: they are long enough to include the desired action.

[29] The (2) in the title indicates that it is a remake. Fisher had made the film with a different actor but there were technical problems. The first version is never shown.

[30] Fisher Morgan (2005/2012) "The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)", in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p.13.

[31] "*Cue Rolls* appears to be a continuous five-and-a-half-minute shot, the visual subject of which is a synchronizer through which four strands of black and white leader are running continuously. As the soundtrack makes clear, Fisher has applied what once was a standard industry practice (for making colour corrections and other modifications before final prints were struck) to a situation in which it would seem to be entirely irrelevant. Specifically, a single continuous forty-foot shot of four strips of leader moving through the synchronizer was "analysed" into ten-foot segments that were subsequently A and B rolled so that the ten-foot segments could be resynthesized into a convincing illusion of the original, uncut shot. The leader moving through the synchronizer was a plan for the negative cutter who would edit (or who, by the time we see the film, has edited) *Cue Rolls*". (Description by Scott MacDonald in the Arsenal distribution catalogue : http://films.arsenal-berlin.de/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/449/lang/en_US (visited on 28/08/2014)

[32] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[33] Fisher Morgan. Interviewed by Mark Webber (phone). June 2005. (unpublished)

[34] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[35] He writes: "And the film that you see was the first take. There was a technical rehearsal, but no rehearsal of her answers. I did a second take, to have something to fall back on in case the first was damaged in the lab, but she had given everything to the first take. In the second, she was trying to remember her answers from the first, and the effort showed" (Fisher Morgan (2005/2012), "Documentary Footage" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, 20).

[36] Fisher Morgan (2008/2012) "The Last Shot in Detour and Some Earlier Moments" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 210.

[37] 35mm has a limit of about 10 minutes

[38] Fisher Morgan (1985/2012), "Standard Gauge in Three Parts" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, pp. 66-67.

[39] Fisher Morgan (1979/2012) "Protective Coloration" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 58.

[40] Kate Horsfield argues that artists were drawn to video because it "reversed the process of television, giving people access to the tools of production and distribution, giving them control over their own images and, by implication their own lives".

[41] Horsfield Kate (2006), "Busting the Tube: A Brief History of Video Art", Feedback: The Video Data Bank Catalog of Video Art and Artist Interviews.

[42] "Instructions for Films" took place at the occasion of the Zoo Art Fair in 2007. For more information see: www.no-w-here.org.uk

[43] Thirty-five two and a half minute segments in the California trilogy, sixty one-minute shots in *One Way Boogie Woogie,* thirteen eleven-minute shots in *13 Lakes*, etc

[44] Other than the texts on Hitchcock and *Detour* mentioned here, these include essays on Blinky Palermo, Andy Warhol, Carl Andre and Ad Reinhardt.

[45] Fisher, Morgan (1984), *Standard Gauge,* in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 260.

[46] Fisher Morgan (2011), "Under Capricorn" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 229.

[47] Fisher Morgan (2011), ibidem.

[48] Fisher Morgan (2011/2012) "Under Capricorn and the Difficulty of the Long Take" in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 230.

[49] Fisher Morgan (1975) "Untitled Statement", San Francisco Cinemateque Calendar, in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 77.

[50] Fisher worked for Roger Corman as a second editor on the low-budget feature *The Student Nurses* and as the principal editor on *Messiah of Evil* (also known under a number of titles including *Blood Virgin* and *Second Coming)*.

[51] Fisher Morgan (2004/2012) "( )", in Folie & Titz (ed), 2012, p. 74.

[52] Fisher Morgan (2014), email correspondence with the author.

[53] Thom Andersen, "*Camp*, Andy Warhol", Artforum 4, Summer 1966, p. 58.

[54] Andersen Thom (2012), "Pebbles Left on the Beach" in Folie, Sabine (ed) & Titz, Susanne (ed), *Morgan Fisher: Two Exhibitions*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2012, p. 198.