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MILLENNIUM FILM JOURNAL



ARTIST-RUN FILM LABS

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INTERVIEW & ANALYSIS

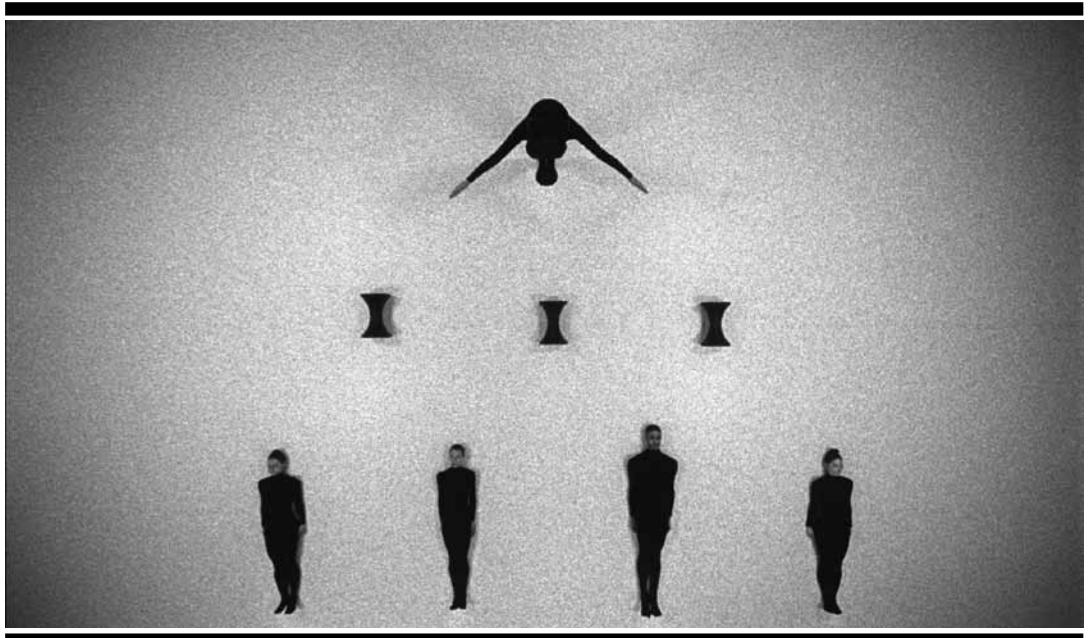
**ARA OSTERWEIL ON
JAMES TURRELL & CINEMA**

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FUNDAMENTALS



MILLENNIUM FILM JOURNAL



No. **60**
FALL 2014

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4 Introduction

REVIEWS

7 Joel Schlemowitz
Karpotrotter at the Tribeca Film Festival

11 Caroline Koebel
52nd Ann Arbor Film Festival

16 J. Ronald Green
Lynne Sachs: Disarming Drift

18 Susan Felleman
Erika Balsom's Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art

ARTICLES

20 Kim Knowles
Self-Skilling and Home-Brewing
Some Reflections on Photochemical Film Culture

28 Pip Chodorov
The Artist-Run Film Labs

38 Alison Wielgus
Inside the Director's Studio
Screening Room, Art and Avant-Garde Cinema, and Television's Pedagogical Impulse

47 Ara Osterweil
James Turrell, Dreams Beyond Cinema

72 Joana Pimenta
Serial Chance: Inserts and Intruders

COLOR

51 Penelope Spheeris, Bradley Eros and Aline Mare, Robert Schaller, Esther Unis, Joanna Vaude

ARTIST PAGES

62 Faith Holland
VVVVVV

INTERVIEWS

80 Enrico Camporesi and Rinaldo Censi
Single-takes and Great Complexities
A Conversation with Morgan Fisher

IN MEMORIAM

96 Jill Godmilow
Harun Farocki 1944–2014

Morgan Fisher has maintained a consistent aesthetic position in an art practice spanning more than four decades while evading the confines of a single medium or format. Best known as a filmmaker, his recent installations engage neither moving images nor projections, but wall paintings and mirrors. Enrico Camporesi & Rinaldo Censi's enlightening conversational interview with Fisher is paired with Joana Pimenta's precise analysis of his work centered on the film *Ø*. Both texts describe the way Fisher's cinematic work is often based on or generated by the procedures, the apparatus, or, generally, the contrivances of filmmaking. This basic idea marks the major theme of this issue, the various connections between artists' moving image and the fundamentals of cinema.

Kim Knowles's manifesto on artists' reclamation of the photochemical, for example, shows how strategies for excavating, adopting and adapting photochemical processes have released unexpected forms of personal expression and new directions for exploration, while the emergence of digital formats has opened up equally new but quite different paths. Pip Chodorov makes a different case in his insider survey of the international development of artist-run film labs, suggesting that inspiration for the many artists still committed to photochemical media comes not from the drive to produce images, but directly from hands-on practice with the materials and processes that generate images. His advocacy of artists' control of the means of production is vividly expressed, reinforced by his personal enthusiasm for the enterprise: infectious and inspiring, it is a clear indication of the vitality of the artist-run lab movement.

The issue also includes Ara Osterweil's reading of artist James Turrell's light works through the lens of filmmaking, suggesting that their relationship to pop culture, industrial technology, lighting, and projection together create a "cosmic cinema," floating free of cinema technology of any kind. Her carefully argued essay proposes another way to characterize cinema through its most fundamental aspect, changing light.

For artist Faith Holland, the most appropriate, substantial and fundamental metaphor for the Internet is not a highway or a dataspace, but the Vagina. She demonstrates this idea with relish in her Fem-Porn website www.vvvvvv.com, from which she has generously extracted a few pages for our color section. The site is shaped by short movies produced or adapted by the artist. The images of motion into and through passages and openings are unmistakably cinematic, yet a world away from the photochemical.

The point is that the artists' cinema is expanding in many directions at once, from home-brewed sparkling Super-8 films, to computer-enhanced ultra high-resolution 3D fantasies, to audacious websites — and it is the *MFJ*'s mission to discuss, document, dissect, endorse, evaluate, and embrace all of it.

GRAHAME WEINBREN



KARPOTROTTER

At the Tribeca Film Festival this spring Jon Gartenberg, the festival's programmer of experimental film, brought Matjaž Ivanišin's *Karpotrotter* (*Karpopotink*) to New York for its North American premiere. We enter the film through a long shot of the flat, brown and ochre colored Yugoslavian countryside, under a misty, overcast sky. A figure moves slowly in the distance. The narrator's voice doesn't bother telling us the fussy details of reportage; the film is more concerned with conveying its sense of the geographic and temporal particulars through poetic means: "Flatlands—opening up before him. Flat as a tray. Flat below. Flat above. Like a sea of air. The earth is the seabed, the sky its surface." After a prelude of still images documenting the making of a film from the Black Wave of Yugoslav Cinema of the '60s and '70s, we emerge in a small, rural village, awash in the saturated color of grainy super-8

film, and progress into a series of short static shots of the blue shutters, blue benches, blue wooden gates, a blue bicycle leaning against a blue metal post, and blue doorframes of the small, squarish, whitewashed houses of the little country town.

This is the "Blue Village," introduced to us in a shot of a man with a paint roller on the end of a long pole adding more blue to the side of a house, while a local folk song is heard on the soundtrack. We never learn the true name of the village, or the name of any of the other villages; the "Dog Village," with super-8 footage of dogs running about the street, "it seems that the dogs are the masters in this village" the narrator tells us; the "Miracle Village" draped in an atmosphere of thin white fog. In each village we pause for a formal portrait of the locals, dressed in their characteristic ethnic folk costume, posing for the



PREVIOUS PAGE Matjaž Ivanišin, *Karpotrotter* (2014), frame enlargement. All images courtesy the artist.

ABOVE A remote village in Vojvodina. Photographer: Marko Brdar.



Matjaž Ivanišin, *Karpotrotter* (2014). Frame enlargements.

camera in *tableaux vivant*, and singing a local folk song, in Slovak, or Romanian, or Rusyn, or Hungarian, or the Roma language. Matjaž Ivanišin's *Karpotrotter* has been constructed around super-8 footage shot in the 1970s by the cinematographer and filmmaker Karpo Godina—identified to us as “K.G.”—and retraces the farmland Super-8 roadtrip as a cinematic poem, weaving together past and present. The footage was from a work entitled *I have a house* (*Imam jednu kuću*), now lost, except for a few fragments. The various textures of the image make it appear as if the muted scenes of folk songs made it to us by way of a video copy from the original Super-8, and the more saturated scenes of the villages from newly transferred footage that has survived, while the contemporary material comes to us on 16mm film. This sliding back and forth

through past and present is the most affecting aspect of the work, the elegiac narration linking the two islands of time separated by interval of 40 years.

At moments we lurch into the present, and interview participants account stories about interesting locals, such as Ficko, the charismatic neer-do-well from the Cross Village, seen singing in robust voice and playing his accordion in the past while incidents of his bittersweet life and death are recounted through recollection and overlapping narration. Often it is only the visual qualities of the warm, muted contemporary 16mm film, or the alternatingly drab and murky or brightly colored patina of the 8mm footage informing us of what we are seeing past or present. It seems to have changed so little out in the country villages of the former Yugoslavia.

The distinctive ethnic identities of each village, documented in costume and song, might hint of the country's breakup, taking place within the ellipsis between the gathering of the original 8mm sequences and Ivanišin's contemporary film. Were these places far away from the main conflicts of the civil war? Or does it go unmentioned as a form of tactful avoidance; not to bring a painful and off-topic subject into the conversation? The film comes closest to addressing this through a few lines of poetic prose spoken by the narrator over the gathering before the camera in the Blue Village: “Their singing was moderate and shy. And never too loud. And never too passionate. And all this not to offend or wake up the giant beast that sleeps under their little feet, in the nice little ground, a beast for which they haven't found a pet name yet.”

The film's generous use of local music, thanks to song collecting of K.G.'s travels through the Yugoslavian countryside, brings as much poignancy to the experience of *Karpotrotter* as the visual picturesqueness or the poetry of the narrator. The footage of folk songs that have survived beyond the singer's brief performance for the camera. As we hear from the narrator, while we visit the Dog Village: “The world never ends,” said Marjuca, “There's always someone coming or someone going.”

JOEL SCHLEMOWITZ



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Aims and scope

The *Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRAJ)* is the first international peer-reviewed scholarly publication devoted to artists' film and video, and its contexts. It offers a forum for debates surrounding all forms of artists' moving image and media artworks: films, video installations, expanded cinema, video performance, experimental documentaries, animations, and other screen-based works made by artists. *MIRAJ* aims to consolidate artists' moving image as a distinct area of study that bridges a number of disciplines, not limited to, but including art, film, and media.

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52ND ANN ARBOR FILM FESTIVAL



Michigan Theater Marquee, 52nd Ann Arbor Film Festival. All images courtesy Ann Arbor Film Festival.

Self-knowledge and decision-making are tools necessarily sharpened by the challenges of the 52nd Ann Arbor Film Festival. Goals must be set and pathways configured and reconfigured according to the accrual of information and the play of desire. I chose Steve Anker's juror presentation, *Big as Life, 8mm Experimental Film in the U.S.: The Boston Underground, 1976-1992* for my port of entry because of the late Anne Charlotte Robertson (1949-2012). *Apologies* (1990), featuring Robertson fiercely in front of and behind the camera, proved an anchor of Anker's curation. The crystalline sense that *Apologies'* ramifications in experimental film history merited concerted articulation, possible only in an essay devoted expressly to the writing of that film, fascinated me. *Sodom* (1989), Luther Price's polemic clashing of '70s gay porn and "SOME ROMAN HOLLYWOOD EPIC FILM" on sex and catastrophe so possessed me that I had to flee the subsequent music video program, given its concern with market forces.

Introduced by Caitlin Horsmon in her "Expanding Frames" presentation *Politics: Aesthetics: Action* before appearing in the program proper, the video *Single Stream* (2014) by Paweł Wojtasik, Toby Lee and Ernst Karel about a Boston recycling center had prior iterations as a sound art project and an installation. Especially considering its topicality in the face of climate change, *Single Stream* sculpts an otherworldly space to reflect profoundly upon the inhabited one. No wonder Wojtasik cites Tarkovsky, particularly *The Sacrifice* (1986), as a touchstone.

Also seen here is the relevance of low-wage manual labor in the scheme of things, such as global capital: workers sort the conveyor belt's current of waste by hand in what seems an especially incongruent reality, given Boston's hyper-concentration of intellectual (and technological) capital. Laborers surfaced as one of the fest's stronger nets. Hope Tucker's juror presentation of her own series, *The Obituary Project*, reached its apex



with the video *Bessie Cohen, Survivor of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire* (2000), inspired by one of the numerous mass-death tragedies of labor history. Despite the sense of choreographed composition and sound of the artist's own minimal music, *The Movement of People Working*, Phill Niblock's video installation based on a catalog of 16mm films shot around the world, illuminated the harsh realities of life at its most basic struggle for subsistence. Shot on a cellphone camera, *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* (2013) by CAMP (Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran) showed workers constructing ships, their deceptively low-tech and isolated labor miraculously producing a comprehensive whole.

Portraying a Foley sound studio's fusion of gritty analog noisemaking – think breaking glass and scraping

metal – with state-of-the-art recording technology, Deborah Stratman's *Hacked Circuit* (2014, Leon Speakers Award for Best Sound Design) captures the netherworld of commercial media production. Stratman also appears on camera credits for several films by Thom Andersen, who was featured in an in-person retrospective. The captivating shorts *Get Out of the Car* (2010) and — (aka *The Rock and Roll Film*, 1967 codirector: Malcolm Brodwick) lured me to the 170-minute collage essay, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), dubbed by Andersen “a city symphony in reverse,” the sustained experience invoking Benjamin’s “aura.” Screened next was Brett Kashmere’s fascinating treatise on basketball and hip-hop *From Deep* (2013), which together with Andersen’s epic presented a compelling argument for the essay film. Bridging film

and music subcultures while igniting critical thought through declarations such as, “All art aspires to the condition of cinema,” Andersen gave credence to the 52nd AAFF as history in the making.

So did the tour-de-force Penelope Spheeris who – speaking with archivist Mark Toscano – invoked her own experience as both cautionary (“the sexism crap”) and inspirational (“don’t look back...just keep going forward”). Her humanity is especially evident when she gains the trust of “gutter punks” in *The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III* (1997) as they share traumatic histories of abuse by adults. *Penelope Spheeris: Films 1968-1998* traces the director’s compassion to her earliest days, from the diva “Warhol superstar” appeal of Jennifer (né Jimmy) in *I Don’t Know* (1970) and *Hats off to Hollywood* (1972) to the

LEFT PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Luther Price, Sodom (1989), frame enlargements.

Paweł Wojtasik, Toby Lee, and Ernst Karel, Single Stream (2014), frame enlargement.

Deborah Stratman, Hacked Circuit (2014), frame enlargement.

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Thom Andersen, 52nd Ann Arbor Film Festival.

Mark Toscano (left) with Penelope Spheeris (right), 52nd Ann Arbor Film Festival.

Penelope Spheeris, The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III (1997), frame enlargement.
Photo by John Joleaud.

Thom Andersen, Los Angeles Plays Itself (2003), frame enlargement.



LEFT

Gerard Holthius, *Hong Kong (HKG)* (1999), frame enlargement.

OPPOSITE FROM TOP

Malena Szlam, *Lunar Almanac* (2013), frame enlargement.

Els van Rie, *Gradual Speed* (2013), frame enlargement.

Sylvia Schedelbauer, *Sea of Vapors* (2014), frame enlargement.

sass and tenacity of her mother in the portrait *No Use Walkin' When You Can Stroll* (1998).

Presence registered especially intensively in such instances as the late Taylor Mead (1924-2013) cavorting in *Los Angeles Plays Itself* or the iconic woman-at-window image of Maya Deren from *Mesches of the Afternoon* (1943) surfacing in *Joseph Bernard: Super 8 Films*, a program culled from a trove of over 100 silent films. A fest ID featuring the psychedelic train tracks sequence from Czech New Wave classic *Daisies* (1966) honored Vera Chytilova (1929-2014). The anti-colonialist essay film *Les statues meurent aussi (Statues Also Die)*, 1953 by Chris Marker (1921-2012) and Alain Resnais (1922-2014) screened prior to Duncan Campbell's *It for Others* (2013), a far-ranging essay taking the Marker-Resnais collaboration as a point of departure.

Jeremy Rigsby & Oona Mosna's juror presentation, *Archaic Beasts, God's Asshole and Other Ideas of the Previous Century*, deployed provocation as curatorial tactic, from spectacular destruction in Peter Hutton's *Boston Fire* (1979) to the specter of low-flying planes in Gerard Holthius's *Hong Kong (HKG)* (1999). Rigsby noted how each of the three subjects of Friedl vom Gröller's *Erwin, Toni, Ilse* (1969) later became suicides. When it transpired that the print had parts missing, cinema's valence as absence was palpable.

For the panel Expanding Frames: *What the Hell Was That?* (which had panelists – including myself – select their favorite knotty AAFF experimental films to untie), Richard Tuohy generously conceded to showing a single-channel digital approximation of his mesmerizing 16mm dual projection *Dot Matrix* (2013, Kinetta Handcrafted Film Award). From the outset, the performance film's wildness presented containment issues: how can programmers know its true nature

apart from beholding it live? Indeed, Program Director David Dinnell based his curation in part on firsthand knowledge of the artist's earlier *Screen Tone* (2012). *Dot Matrix* as a phenomenon (Benjamin again) maximizes the sense of sharing (both inter-audience and artist-audience) – a reality of the here and now, and absence of infinite repetition, offering recourse to the digitally evolving habitat.

The strobe as hypnotic formal device was also evident in *Sea of Vapors* (2014), Sylvia Schedelbauer's transcendent meditation on the lunar cycle comprised of a torrent of found images. Malena Szlam's *Lunar Almanac* (2013), the film preceding *Dot Matrix*, a cinema marvel marveling (at the moon) and at our modest position in the scope of things, bled over in a most dynamic way. Vivid colors, like those of the rising orange moon, infused the stark black-and-whiteness of Tuohy's work, and Szlam's moons (multiple in the sense that many nights of activity inform her finished film) were glimpsed (in my subjective viewership) amidst the marks repurposed from manga illustration paper of *Dot Matrix*.

Szlam's remarks provided a fascinating meta context for *Lunar Almanac*, especially regarding the filmmaker's solitude and relation to time and place in gazing at the night sky so lovingly. Indeed, such comments echo an earlier Q&A with Els van Riel on her ethereal film *Gradual Speed* (2013, Gus Van Sant Award for Best Experimental Film): to obtain one particularly sublime sequence, the director recounts identifying a coastal scene—stunning in any case—and then watching and waiting (and now I'll segue entirely into my own words) for the course of relations between sea and land to climax.

CAROLINE KOEBEL



LYNNE SACHS: DISARMING DRIFT

I have found several of Lynne Sachs's films unusually disarming. *Wind in Our Hair* starts by just hanging out with four barely adolescent girls and seems to drift with them to no evident purpose; one is tempted to say that the attention and impressionistic, closely shot fascination comes from a mother's affection that a general audience has little reason to feel. By the time a narrative event starts to shape the film, we sort of know these girls, or we start to feel that we are among them by way of the film's stylistic drifting. A non-incisive drift transforms itself into a thickening bundle of barely perceptible but compelling discourses through which one finds oneself caring about the characters, not as individualized, biographical characters, but as female beings drifting toward a world that is itself drifting toward sexual and political fission, a fission that might be disastrous or revolutionary. The energy that would feed that fission is felt in the experimental music of Juana Molina that accompanies the transcendent avant-garde film poem of the end-credits—the drifting girls have suddenly exploded into articulate girl-power and woman music, just as the drifting Lynne Sachs-made film explodes into incisive experimental film. The stirring success of the music and of the film's coda suggest a positive future for these drifting girls, while the discourses woven finely into their lives during the entire film remain frighteningly daunting.

There is an analogously disarming feel in *Drift and Bough*, though it is a totally different kind of film with no character development at all. There I was disarmed by the unassuming succession of art-photo shots of snowy Central Park, shots that seemed pretty ordinary, but that again gently drifted toward a richer collection of elements, such as the graphic lines that did things like scale shifting. The lines of duck trails through the ice-pack—lines that “drew” a kind of benign insinuation into a cold world—seemed to help effect an insinuation into my affect. By the time that film ends, I have been drawn, partially consciously, into a meditative state that I wanted to resist at its beginning. The ending—with people moving about and with bicycle taxi and camera both drifting to the right—was a break in that mood, but it still maintains

some of the meditative mood through the realization that a barely perceptible superimposition of nothing very distinguishable has occurred mysteriously for the first and only time in the film.

The disarming feeling in Sachs's films is especially strong in *Your Day is My Night*. Again the film starts by hanging out with some ordinary people, in this case Chinese immigrants in a confined space doing ordinary things. We gradually meet these people by name and hear them interact and tell stories. I won't try to develop how that works, but will just say that somehow this ordinariness changes into—not just the liking and caring about the characters that one can see in numerous effective documentary films such as *Salesman* and *Fallen Champ* and *The Square* and *American Pictures*, or in the ur-documentary *Nanook*, and even the surreal *Act of Killing*—the ordinariness in Sachs's film changes into something more than those films' liking of or sympathizing with characters, something more like loving those characters, though that seems a bit strong.

My main point is the experience across several films of this imperceptible transformation from a disarming ordinariness to something strongly opposite. The kicker for me with *Your Day is My Night* was



Lynne Sachs, *Wind in Our Hair* (2009), frame enlargement. All images courtesy the artist.



Lynne Sachs, *Your Day is My Night* (2013), frame enlargement.

that I first experienced the film as a documentary, not as a scripted film with actors performing characters via learned lines; thus, my feeling of being disarmed extended to the ontology of the represented reality. That reversal of expectation, from something like Direct Cinema to a set of carefully researched and scripted performances—including the insertion of a “fake” character, Lourdes—comes at different points in the film for different viewers, but that doesn't really change the reception structure of the film, or the films discussed above—they have little or no character or story arc but have a reception arc that moves one from being disarmed, even uninterested and dubious, to something stronger than caring and understanding.

Sachs's refusal to romanticize the glimpses of hopefulness, and her ending of the film with a quotation that re-affirms the power of the world's alienation, are important contributions to the depth that the reception-arc achieves. Though the film finally leads into territory beyond the opening close-shots of packed human flesh, beyond the later medium-shots of crowded beds within crowded rooms, and the still later long-shots within crowded apartments within a crowded neighborhood of one of the world's most crowded cities, though the film leads us beyond this over-determined within-ness to other, less impacted parts of the city, indeed leads us to a bridge that Lourdes—the outsider—introduces to Houng, one of the Chinatown shift-bedders—

though the film takes us out there to that suggestively transitional bridge, nevertheless the viewer remembers what Houng has said earlier in the film that he has no benign means to get out of this life buried deep within the world situation. He will not ever be able to go home to see his children and he will have to kill himself when he reaches retirement age, perhaps by jumping off a bridge, he says. We remember that line when we see him on the bridge with Lourdes, but we also see that Lourdes has benignly infected his alienation, and has infected the entire over-determined within-ness of the characters' lives and of the film's structure. The deep within-ness of the characters' situations has been broached by the character Lourdes, and by Sachs with her bizarre idea to make a film of these unknown Chinese and the more bizarre idea to introduce a Puerto Rican immigrant deep into this pervading within-ness; Lynne Sachs herself has infected the characters' alienation, for real, by making this strange film, and thus Sachs opens the documented people, who play themselves, to Sach's world and to the film's audience. And she opens the viewer to a well-hidden within-ness, through documentary explorations that go deeper than Direct Cinema. All this in a way that is so disarming.

J. RONALD GREEN



ERIKA BALSM'S EXHIBITING CINEMA IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Becoming, a 2003 piece by Candice Breitz, exemplifies many facets of the integration of the moving image into museum and gallery spaces, as recounted and theorized by Erika Balsom in her indispensable new study, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), in which she demonstrates how cinema, when taken up by art, becomes both old and new again. Displaying both a fascination and ambivalence with stardom and the performance of femininity, *Becoming* consists of excerpts of seven movie star turns—including by Drew Barrymore, Jennifer Lopez, Julia Roberts, and Meg Ryan—paired with the artist's fastidious reenactments of them. The uni-linear, spatial, and narrative coherence of the original movies has been undone by the properties of new media. As mounted in various international institutions, *Becoming* consists of seven dual channel installations, each displayed back-to-back on an armature, with a common soundtrack, played through headphones. While the sampled clips are characterized by colorful, rom-com glamor, Breitz's uncanny "becomings" of the stars are black-and-white, androgynous, and austere. "Due to the piece's spatial configuration," Balsom writes, "the spectator has to move around each of the seven pairs of monitors to evaluate the effectiveness of each impersonation." As with the two views of one action in Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), a dual projection from opposite sides of one screen, the viewer is made painfully aware of her inability to be in two places at once. The effect of Drew Barrymore's voice

issuing from Breitz's mouth is eerie, like a ventriloquist's dummy—as Balsom notes—but while the thrill of ventriloquism depends upon the simultaneous presence of speaker and dummy, Breitz's spectator must navigate between the visage of one and the other, unable to compare, except in memory. Moreover, the use of headphones distances voice from star and artist alike, existing exclusively in the spectator's head, instantiating the fan's mental incorporation of the star. Interestingly, on Breitz's webpage, *Becoming* becomes a rather different work. In addition to installation shots, there are paired stills of star and artist from simultaneous moments in the scenes; these images underscore the precision of Breitz's achievement ("body karaoke*"), an evidentiary experience not available in the gallery. The webpage also offers a virtual alternative to the gallery set-up, around which originals and copies were distributed in pairs, "bound together like Siamese twins."* Online, one sees a column of side-by-side thumbnails: rollover-activated stills. Minute movements of finger on trackpad (or hand on mouse) animate the tiny thumbnails—maintaining the either/or aspect of the installation—in lieu of the bodily movement and architectonics of the gallery.

I detail this one piece among many that Balsom examines in her history, analysis and typology of what she calls "the othered cinema" because Breitz's work and its multiple dualities vividly illustrate many of its key concerns. Concentrating on the phenomenon of the artist cinema post-1990 (a signal year in relation to significant technological and institutional developments), Balsom

eloquently traces and theorizes how cinema enters into art both as a material or medial artifact and a social and historical institution. Combining insights from a range film theorists (Bazin, Bellour, Mulvey, Hansen, Elsaesser, and others) with a somewhat narrower, *October*-based art theory (i.e. Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster)—as well as critical theorists employed by both (principally Walter Benjamin, but also Adorno, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Baudrillard, and others), Balsom situates this "other" cinema, not only in relation to the dominant (the mainstream feature film) and to the generally static objects of the museum, but also to the other "other" cinema—the more artisanal and radical forms of experimental film and the historical avant-garde.

Balsom's approach to this historically delimited field is largely theoretical. The introduction persuasively grounds the study around rapid technological changes at the end of the twentieth century; this enables a sudden shift from analogue video and its television-based materiality to digital video and large, high-quality projection. The very same changes (telescoped by a term, "convergence," that Balsom effectively unpacks) gave rise to an atmosphere of obsolescence, loss, and nostalgia around movies, contributing to the destabilization of conventional art institutional biases about film. Although she doesn't always sufficiently distinguish between museum (usually non-profit) and gallery (often commercial) *as institutions*—generally using the latter to describe a museum space—Balsom is brilliant, albeit often polemical, when she digresses to questions of the political economy around contemporary art's embrace of the moving image, often bringing out Janusian aspects of institutional culture.

"The museum is a respite from the privatization of experience," she notes, "providing a public space in which to excavate cultural memory, contest a logic of technological progress, and imagine collectively in an age of individualized consumption. However, it must be remembered that is also an ideological apparatus facing distinct challenges to attract audiences and compete for consumer dollars at the beginning of the twenty-first century." And some of Balsom's moves from theory to reality are dazzling, as for instance, her observation, per Benjamin, that "the becoming auratic of film is of the same variety as the false aura of the movie star—a perfidious halo that smacks of the 'putrid magic' of the commodity. One must sound a cautionary note against the manner in which the enforced scarcity of the limited-edition model of distribution contributes to the values of preciousness and antiquation one sees attached to the celluloid film within the gallery."

A compelling historical and theoretical examination of institutional, spatial, and spectatorial aspects of the 'museal' repositioning of cinema, is followed by chapters examining problems of indexicality, the "post-medium" condition, and how 16mm film enters the gallery with *and as* a kind of retooled aura: "spectral reanimation of contingent traces of pastness"; how cinema and its history are reenacted, recycled, translated and interrogated in artists' cinema, emphasizing "the public dimension of the institution and its status as a repository of shared cultural memory"; and the "documentary turn" in contemporary art, imbrication of fiction and fact, illusion and testimony, offering "spectators a revelatory, virtual encounter with another place and time." Each chapter includes strong, close readings of one or more exemplary works, along with brief accounts of related practices.

Some of these readings are extraordinarily sensitive; a few tend toward dismissive. Although she distances herself from Adornian negativity, Balsom harbors a suspicion of the popular and has certainly taken Rosalind Krauss's critique of MoMA and the late capitalist museum to heart; appraisals of spectacular pieces by Douglas Aitkin and Pipilotti Rist commissioned by curator Klaus Biesenbach's are harsh. There's a case to be made, in line with Balsom's larger argument, I think, that such dazzling, sensational experiences reinvent a cinema of attractions for the 21st century.

Exhibiting Cinema is a major contribution to the literature on intermediality and interdisciplinary considerations of art and film, in history and theory (a diverse literature Balsom might have done more to acknowledge and reference). Deeply intelligent and beautifully written—giving complex ideas eloquent clarity—the text would be an excellent companion to related studies, among others, those by Maeve Connolly (*The Place of Artists' Cinema*, Intellect 2009) and Christine Sprengler (*Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), as well as to a new journal dedicated to artists' film and video, *The Moving Image Review and Art Journal* (MIRAJ), of and to which Balsom is a founding editor and contributor.

SUSAN FELLEMAN

*description of *Becoming* at Candice Breitz's website: <http://www.candicebreitz.net/>

Candice Breitz, *Babel Series* (1999), DVD Installation: 7 Looping DVDs: OK Center for Contemporary Art, Linz. Photograph: Jason Mandella.



Esther Ulrus, *Konrad & Kurfurst* (2013), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

SELF-SKILLING & HOME-BREWING:

SOME REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOCHEMICAL FILM CULTURE

KIM KNOWLES

In a review of Tacita Dean's installation *FILM* at the Tate Modern, published in *Millennium Film Journal* 56 (Fall 2012), I discussed the ambivalent nature of the "death of film" discourse, and the difficulty of employing terms such as "crisis" and "loss" in ways that do not inadvertently close down discussions about the future of celluloid film. The past decade has seen a series of shifts in and re-conceptualizations of the language we use to speak about obsolescence and progress, film and the digital, the old and the new. The analog-digital debate has evolved into a diverse amalgam of positions, as it becomes increasingly necessary to acknowledge the complexities within and nuances of a technological environment still very much in flux.

Although film is now largely considered insignificant and ill-suited to a modern society

of efficiency, instantaneity, and convenience, its cumbersome machinery, awkward manual interventions, and time-consuming processes nonetheless remain a desirable form of image-making among large numbers of contemporary artists. Its physical nature is precisely its draw and its organic nature serves as a reassuring reflection of our own bodies. In a world consumed by complicated algorithms, mysterious impenetrable black boxes, and intangible data, film is a mediator that we can understand. The intricacies of film can be seen, touched, smelled and tasted. Albeit not just in the process of making, but the feeling of film also inherently lies in the viewing — the restless silver grain, the chemical compound that makes up the image, shifts before our eyes as the rays of the projector's light shine through and animate the film.

These irreplaceable qualities of celluloid are what drive the alternative infrastructures and practices that I am interested in exploring here, namely where the increased availability of film materials in the wake of their commercial demise allows artists to control and reinvent every stage of the once-industrial process of production. The new sense of freedom and liberation to which this shift has given rise reframes film as a field of discovery, a photochemical playground that offers itself to the artist in the rawness and malleable nature of its physicality. It is this fascination with materials that increasingly characterizes celluloid film culture, particularly through engagements with the past as a means of *reinvention* and projection towards a potential future, or, in other words, an exploration of the process of looking backward in order to move forward. In reflecting on some of these practices, I would like to problematize a number of discursive frameworks that have been used to discuss analog film in order to suggest ways of thinking constructively, not defensively, about its status and ongoing potential in an evolving digital world.

The British artist Vicky Smith has recently described the climate of contemporary celluloid practice in terms of a “model of self-skilling,” through which “analogue film, while disappearing commercially, is able to prevail amongst artist filmmakers.”¹ Steven Woloshen similarly points out that a do-it-yourself attitude is now necessary for the continuation of photochemical filmmaking among future generations of artists. His *Recipes for Reconstruction: The Cookbook for the Frugal Filmmaker* is part of a growing trend toward the exchange and circulation of formulas and processes that can be reproduced with minimal resources and little specialist knowledge. Professional chemicals and equipment are replaced by or supplemented with everyday – not to mention seemingly unlikely – household items such as: bleach, coffee, vitamin C, icing sugar, yeast, shoeboxes, hole punches, garden hoses, and bathtubs. These materials inherently subvert the function and use value of their professional counterparts, as they turn the contemporary filmmaker into a resourceful inventor-bricoleur-alchemist. Woloshen’s claim that making films is like making food highlights the organic nature of the film material, privileges the spirit of spontaneity and discovery, and further collapses the boundary between domestic and professional spheres. The contemporary emphasis on materials and materiality is therefore not a reactionary return to modernist arguments of medium-specificity in an attempt to valorize the position of film in a digital era; it is, rather, a survival strategy, a way of adapting

to celluloid’s unstable cultural position by establishing new practices and approaches that turn disillusionment into empowerment.

This process of rebuilding and refashioning film very often involves looking back to earlier developments for answers to current material challenges. In the wake of discontinued film stocks and the potential future threat to color 16mm film, Esther Urlus, for example, recently embarked on a project to produce homemade color film. Undeterred by professional discouragement, Urlus consulted a range of technical manuals by the early pioneers of both photography and film from the early nineteenth century onwards. The research and subsequent tests culminated in the short film *Konrad and Kurfurst* (2013), made with home-brewed emulsion based on a simple recipe of gelatin, potassium bromide and silver nitrate and then hand-tinted in the spirit of George Méliès. Urlus also published her own version of the technical manual, detailing each stage of the process — home-brewing the emulsion, spreading it onto a clear base, exposing and developing, printing, and, finally, color tinting — accompanied by hand-drawn illustrations in the spirit of the earlier publications. The booklet is at once playful and instructive, purposefully drawing attention to its own retro aesthetic, while at the same time proposing a field of invention for future analog filmmakers, which may turn out to be the only viable way to work with the medium. These DIY approaches, however, do not aim to recreate the level of perfection found in commercial film stock. As Robert Schaller states: “We’re not going to repeat Kodak’s years of hard work in our basement, so why try? Let’s do something else, something that they didn’t do because it didn’t match their objectives.”² Schaller, Urlus and Woloshen point to artistic alternatives to the production of film materials that, out of necessity, free the medium of its previous commercial constraints.

In reinventing the pioneers, then, Urlus subverts traditional narratives of technological progress, returning to the crucial moment of cinematic invention in order to map out an alternative, less manufactured, future:

¹ Vicky Smith, “Full Body Film,” Sequence 2 (2012), p. 42.

² Robert Schaller, “Thoughts on Handmade Emulsion versus Commercial Filmstock” (2012) <<http://www.handmadefilm.org/writings/emulsionThoughts.html>>, accessed June 15, 2014.



Steve Woloshen, *TOP Rebuttal* (2005).
ABOVE *When the Sun Turns to Juice* (2011).
Frame enlargements. Courtesy the artist.



The Wilderness Film Expedition
(Curt Heiner, Robert Schaller, and Armand Tufenkian) in *lightning agnes* (2014), frame enlargements, positive and negative. Courtesy Robert Schaller.

The tests and experiments made in this booklet are in the tradition of the pioneers. But though they were compelled to make steps forward on this then new and unexplored matter, my interest and experiments are more akin to an opportunistic backtracking upon their findings.³

The aim here is to “resurrect the art, science, and craft of silver gelatin emulsions” in order to take the knowledge in a new direction, to reconceptualize and redefine past innovation within a contemporary context. This shouldn’t be confused with a backward-looking reactionary nostalgia of which celluloid enthusiasts are so often accused, since this looking back is accompanied by a desire to build on the past and project into the future. Although it may be implied by the reader, there is no outward criticism or stated rejection of digital technology in Urlus’s writing and in her embracing of earlier techniques. In fact, any discussion that pits ‘new’ against ‘old’ technology is conspicuously (and refreshingly) absent — it is film itself that is renewed.

The beginnings of these investigations into early color techniques can be found in Urlus’s vertical film *Chrome* (2013), which uses the autochrome process — a technique invented by the Lumière brothers in 1903, where dyed grains of potato starch blend in the eye of the spectator and reconstruct the color of the light photographed. *Chrome* was one of the ten films commissioned for the *Vertical Cinema* project that premiered at the Kontraste *Dark As Light* Festival in October 2013. Clearly inspired by Dean’s vertical format for the *FILM* installation, this epic 35mm extravaganza demonstrates, however, a vital deviation from its Turbine Hall-residing precedent. A form of expanded cinema that draws on the history of large-scale cinematic architectures of the past century, the project was developed around a desire to rethink the film experience and the traditional cinema space. The past is mined and reimagined, “propos[ing] a future for filmmaking rather than a pessimistic debate over the alleged death of film.” From this perspective, the awe-inspiring monumental proportions are not designed to provoke reverence for something sacred, as is the case with Dean’s *FILM*, but to literally “expand the image onto a new axis,”⁴ and thus open up new aesthetic possibilities. This expansion takes into account the body of the viewer and their relationship to the surrounding space, conceived as an extension of the immersive cinema setting. Considering Urlus’s chemical investigations in the context of the Vertical

Cinema project allows us to move from the micro to the macro in terms of understanding how the past can be mined to open up possibilities for the future.

The contemporary moment of media transition, and the so-called crisis of film, has thus brought about a sharpened awareness of the history of technological innovation. This is not necessarily a new development, as the growing academic field of media archaeology demonstrates. Where these current activities are distinct, and where they differ from related attempts at historical mapping, however, is in their practical application in the continuation and renewal of existing forms, practices and social structures that propose an alternative narrative of technological progress to the one of media replacement. As stated above, this inevitably carries with it negative associations of nostalgia, which frames engagements with the film material as harking back to a (recent) past when things were better, when film was plentiful, and when digital technology did not threaten the future of film. One only need consider Ed Halter’s damning review of *Views from the Avant-Garde* in 2000, the fin-de-siècle turning point (or the point of no return) in the analog-digital transition, to find evidence of this. Halter finds in almost all of the works in the festival a nostalgic attachment to the dying medium of film, and a recycling of old materialist styles and tropes. Referring to photochemical practice as a “retro genre of experimental film,” he concludes his review by suggesting that, “for film, the experiment is over.”⁵ Halter’s categorical stance has recently been challenged by Federico Windhausen, who points out there is now more co-existence between film and video in festivals such as *Views*, and that the stark division between the two mediums is no longer as relevant as it was then.⁶ But I mention the review in order to draw attention to the fact that, contrary to Halter’s

³ Esther Urlus, *RE:INVENTING THE PIONEERS: film experiments on handmade silver gelatin emulsion and color methods* (2013).

⁴ Mirna Belina (ed.), *Vertical Cinema* (Amsterdam: Sonic Acts Press, 2013), p. 42.

⁵ Ed Halter, “Views from the Avant-Garde,” *The New York Press* (October 11, 2000), online at: <<http://nypress.com/views-from-the-avant-garde>>, accessed on June 9, 2014.

⁶ Federico Windhausen, “Assimilating Video,” *October* 137 (Summer 2011), pp. 70-71.

predictions, the film experiment is far from over. In fact, one might argue that it's only just beginning.

As Pip Chodorov's article in this issue illustrates, the years following Halter's discussion of film as a dying medium have seen a worldwide explosion of artist-run film labs – a period of intense film activity that Chodorov describes as a “turning point in history.” While professional film production facilities close their doors, artist-run labs open theirs, recuperating and rebuilding discarded machinery such as cameras, projectors, editing tables, optical and contact printers, developing tanks and rostrum cameras, often with the help of other labs. Suddenly, artists have direct access to the means of production, those stages of the filmmaking process that have traditionally been controlled by professionals who work to strict industry standards and conventions. Chodorov even goes as far as to overturn the myth that shooting on film is more expensive than digital, drawing attention to the very different economies at work in using outmoded and industrially devalued equipment.

These contemporary labs follow a model that was first established in the 1960s by the London Filmmakers Co-op, where production, distribution and exhibition all took place under the same roof. The works created there gave rise to Peter Gidal's notion of Structural-Materialism, referring to the foregrounding of materials and processes. “Each film,” he argues, “is a record (not a representation and not a reproduction) of its own making.”⁷ Gidal saw this refusal of representation as a political practice that threw into relief the illusionism of commercial cinema. The current context clearly isn't the same, and simply drawing attention to film's material conditions is no longer perceived as such a radical act of transgression. But the resurgence of the artist-run film lab scene is a *reframing* not a repetition of the modes of materialist engagement, which take on a renewed counter-cultural impulse in a very changed technological landscape. As film shifts from a “dominant” to a “residual” cultural form, the materials themselves become politically charged in a way that they weren't during the 1960s and '70s. Although there may be arguments against using the word “obsolete” to describe a medium still very much in use, discourses on the processes and production of obsolescence, as well as theories of the outmoded, rubbish and waste, open up useful critical positions from which to assess current activities in the field of photochemical film.⁸ As Raymond Williams writes:

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but is still

active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.⁹

These temporal modalities in many ways provide a framework for thinking about the dynamics of artist-run film labs, with their politics of recycling and revaluing “old” objects and materials in a culture of disposability.

In the context of modernity and progress, past and present, it is important to stress that defending the possibilities of photochemical film should not necessarily equate to a rejection of digital technology. In fact, I would argue that the divisive analogue versus digital position is a highly charged and often counter-productive one. This is tricky terrain to negotiate, since, as I have argued above, the continuation of film and the engagement with its material properties is increasingly framed, whether consciously or not on the part of the artist, as a “politics of resistance,” to quote Bradley Eros. Resistance is indeed what keeps film alive, but Eros also claims that analog culture is “often a *fuck-you* to contemporary fads by discriminating artists who have experienced the difference.” This is an extremely dangerous stance, particularly when it is accompanied by the view that “*some things were just made better.*”¹⁰ Such rhetoric can only place film practice in an inward-looking, defensive, and elitist position, inviting the very criticism that plagues it, and so on, in a viscous mud-slinging circle that will not help its future development in a digitally dominated world. Film is not necessarily “better,” digital is more than a “contemporary fad,” and artists who embrace it cannot be written off as undiscriminating! The fight for the cultural relevance of photochemical film should not be reduced to such knee-jerk counter-attacks. Understanding the differences (as well as the similarities) between digital and analog media is certainly necessary, and, as some critics have pointed out, medium-specificity remains a fruitful field of enquiry.¹¹ But praising film for its “spontaneity and blindness” whilst denouncing digital for being “too deliberate, too intended”¹² leads only to a romanticized form of essentialism and, more importantly, demonstrates a lack of understanding of the digital medium. It is also important to note that digital media is itself a powerful site of resistance, and that acts of subversion are not exclusively tied to residual forms.

In addition, many artists invested in photochemical film have shown that creative dialogues can take place between both mediums, and that hybrid practice may open up other exciting avenues of experimentation. The

interest here is in widening the cinematographic palette in a way that avoids framing one medium as “better” than another. These works also overturn assumptions about their fundamental incompatibility, or what Nicky Hamlyn describes as their “unbridgeable gulfs.” In films by Jürgen Reble, Makino Takashi, Shambhavi Kaul, Thorsten Fleisch, and Siegfried Fruhauf, to name just a few, there is often a non-hierarchical fusion of elements that involves both chemical manipulations and digital transformations. Here, the film grain “speaks” to the digital pixel, often creating a new kind of image that hovers somewhere between the two. But, again, we need to be careful about how we frame this emerging field. Whereas French filmmaker Johanna Vaude considers hybrid practice an ephemeral form that transfers the old towards the new, I would propose that these film-digital fusions are as much about looking back as projecting forward, exploring and opening up new possibilities for both digital- and photochemical-based media.

Although in a perpetual state of instability, photochemical film practice shows little sign of giving up any time soon. The future is still uncertain, but there is enough desire, invention, collaboration, recuperation, and imagination to believe that it will continue to thrive through grass-roots communities, self-skilling and exchange of ideas. As the film collective Process Reversal claims, “the time that we are facing with film today is in fact the most exciting opportunity in the history of the medium – as the film industry collapses all around us, we are being left with a chance to re-invent the medium in an image that was neither intended nor desired by the commercialism of the medium, one that explores new ways of seeing, new ways of hearing, and new ways of speaking about film.”¹³ The tone is one of excitement, not lament, not of mourning for something already dead, but of a deep investment in something still very much alive. This is the true spirit of analog film culture. “Let's make home brew emulsion films!” says Urlus. “Let's make a lot!” Call it naïve, but the energy is infectious. What is there to lose in thinking that all is not lost?

⁷ Peter Gidal, “Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film,” *Structural Film Anthology* (London: British Film Institute, 1976). Available online: <[http://www.luxonline.org.uk/articles/theory_and_definition\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/articles/theory_and_definition(1).html)>, accessed June 17, 2014.

⁸ In a recent conversation, James Holcombe, a British filmmaker and head of the no.w.here lab in London, told me that he was skeptical about referring to film as obsolete since this seems to contradict the very lively culture surrounding the medium.

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 122.

¹⁰ Bradley Eros, “more captivating than phosphorous,” *Millennium Film Journal* 56 (Fall 2012), p. 47.

¹¹ See, for example, Malcolm Turvey's recent talk at Concordia University, in which he explains “why a defensible version of medium-specificity still remains viable today.” “Medium Specificity Defended,” Arthemis, April 9, 2014. Online at: <<http://arthemis-cinema.ca/en/content/malcolm-turveys-talk>>, accessed August 29, 2014.

¹² Tacita Dean in “Tacita Dean: Save This Language” <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b040llzm>>, accessed June 19, 2014.

¹³ Process Reversal website, <<http://processreversal.org/about-process-reversal>>, accessed June 14, 2014.

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THE ARTIST-RUN FILM LABS



Workspaces, Studio Één, Arnhem, Netherlands. Courtesy Karel Doing.

PIP CHODOROV

In 1978 in France, the discussion to start an artist-run film lab threatened to tear up the filmmaking community. Today, nine such labs are up and running in France, and two dozen more across Europe, Canada, South America, Australia and Korea. What happened?

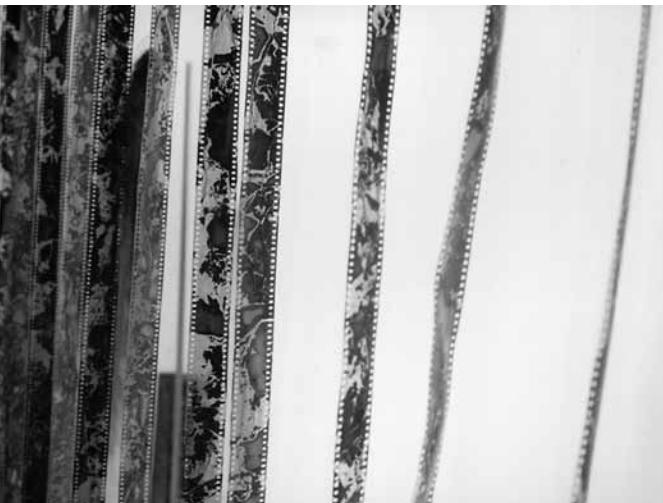
In a day and age when one would expect film labs to be disappearing, the opposite appears to be true: the creation of new labs is accelerating across the globe. The difference between those that are closing and the new ones opening is simple: the new ones are not for profit; they are run by artists. They are not out to make money with their labs; they are out to make films. Not only their own films; their goal is to open the doors to anyone who wants to work on film material, whether they are beginners or expert filmmakers, whether they make experimental films, contemporary art or performance pieces. No services are offered at these labs: the filmmakers must come get their hands wet and do the work themselves, the more experienced members helping the neophytes.

Here is a short history of the movement. September 30, 1960, the New American Cinema Group manifesto proclaimed: "We are not joining together to make money. We are joining together to make films... We don't want rosy films, we want them the color of blood." [Mekas et al, 1971] This proclamation led to the founding of the New York Filmmakers' Co-op in January 1962, which to be a member of one only had to deposit a film; the films were rented out and the greater share went to the filmmaker, the rest to help the co-op survive. This eliminated the Hollywood distributors and empowered the filmmakers. In October 1966, the London filmmakers' co-op started, inspired by the New York group (New York filmmaker Steve Dwoskin

was a founding member). Malcolm Le Grice and others in London had been developing and printing their own films in Malcolm's garage on equipment he built himself out of drainpipe and lumber. From the beginning, the London Co-op was also a community lab and darkroom.

In 1969 the London Filmmakers Co-op got its first physical space where distribution, screenings and production all took place. Many filmmakers made work on this primitive equipment, which allowed them certain kinds of free, hands-on experimentation. Though they moved several times during the first decade, from 1978 to 1995 they had a permanent home in Camden Town. A huge body of experimental film work was made there, from structural films to expanded cinema. Many people came through London to learn about DIY filmmaking. One of these people was the Dutch filmmaker, Karel Doing.

In the mid-1980s, Karel and two other students were able to acquire a lot of super-8 equipment from their school that wanted to throw the equipment out and buy video. At that time, the only lab in Holland that made super-8 prints was closing, and they managed to buy that printing equipment as well. They set up their workshop, Studio Één, in a squatted monastery in Arnhem and opened it up to anyone who wanted to make films or strike prints. In the beginning, Karel didn't know much about developing or printing. He invited the German alchemist filmmaker Jürgen Reble to come do a workshop, and he did some research in the UK. Soon Studio Één became the most active lab for super-8 printing in Europe. At one point in the 1990s, he was developing more films from France than from Holland.



LEFT Workspace, Studio Één, Arnhem, Netherlands. Courtesy Karel Doing.

RIGHT Workspace, MTK, Grenoble, France. Courtesy Etienne Caire.

OPPOSITE Screening, MTK, Grenoble, France. Photo Valentina Avon. Courtesy Jerome Noetinger.



One of the first visitors to a Studio Één workshop was the French group Métamkine. Originally a loose performance group making their own slides, super-8 and live music, Métamkine became in late 1989 a core group of three people: Christophe Auger, Xavier Quérel and Jérôme Noetinger. Getting more involved in hand-developing super-8 and later 16mm for their performances, they were able to set up their own darkroom in the artists' squat, le 102, which is still active in Grenoble. In order to learn more about the techniques they wanted to do, they traveled to Arnhem to see Karel and his machines. Knowing about Studio Één and the London Filmmakers' Co-op helped them imagine their own lab in the South of France.

In 1992, their lab, MTK, opened its doors to any filmmakers that wanted to hand-develop or print super-8 or 16mm. By that time they had acquired an optical printer and a contact printer and could hand-develop in black-and-white or color. Filmmakers came from Geneva, Paris and Brussels to learn how to process or print their films. I was one of those filmmakers, and at the time I didn't even know one could develop super-8 film at home. In fact, it was easy! Suddenly the possibilities of personal filmmaking were endless. Shooting a film was no longer simply pressing a button and letting machines and technicians do the work. Now it was a hands-on process from start to end, in which a

multitude of personal choices led to a new look: a non-standard color scheme, a chosen level of abstraction or surrealism, graininess or roughness. One could modify the chemical recipes, the times or the temperatures, or skip processes. On the optical printer, shots could be slowed down or accelerated, zoomed in, flipped around. On the contact printer one could play with exposure, superimposition, loops, negative imagery, reprinting many generations, color separation, or any new technique we could invent. And it cost pennies, as MTK only charged us for materials. We invested time instead of money, and we got our hands dirty.

At the time I visited Grenoble in 1994, Métamkine was well organized: there were special Russian reels and tanks to hand-develop 8mm and 16mm, a darkroom with large sinks, a double-boiler to keep the chemicals at a constant temperature, printers to blow 8mm up to 16mm or to make positive 16mm prints from negatives, an editing table, a light table, etc. The filmmakers who worked there had learned how to make their own photo chemicals from basic elements and all the material they had accumulated was available for fellow filmmakers' use. If you were unfamiliar with lab techniques, one of the members of the group was always around to give informal training; know-how was handed down in an oral tradition.

Xavier helped me process my first roll of Ektachrome. The whole process was magical. I was not only amazed to see how beautiful the film was when it emerged wet and shiny from the fixer (color film is even more beautiful before it is fixed with solid, milky colors...), but to see how one could also tailor the processing, by over- or underdeveloping, by changing the chemistry, or by leaving the film in negative. Most super-8 film is reversal stock like slide film; I had never thought a super-8 negative could exist. But it is the chemicals that determine the result of the processing and not the film stock.

These simple facts and techniques, which allowed me to rediscover the film medium, lent even more enthusiasm to my experimentations. At the time I was seeking to make my films different and more personal, and I was uninspired about what subjects to film. Chemical manipulation seemed to open up an infinite number of possibilities, no matter what I had captured. It was also an economic discovery: this process was 90% less expensive than professional lab costs, with better technical control and immediate results. In light of all this, it was easy to be motivated to film a lot more.

In France before MTK, there had never been an independent lab open to the public. There had been, though, a lab project in 1978, discussed during a symposium in Lyon. At that time, it seemed possible

that the National Cinema Center (CNC) would help filmmakers who called themselves "independent," "different," or "experimental." The filmmakers were asked to get together, to reach an agreement and to make a coherent proposal to the CNC, who wanted to negotiate with only one representative of the group. Despite the rivalries and tensions that already existed in the filmmaking community, about 70 filmmakers, representing a half-dozen groups, temporarily put aside their dissensions. Most of these filmmakers preferred setting up an open, publicly-financed production workshop with cameras, printers, animation stands, and editing tables available to all. Others disagreed, wanting to create a selection committee to mete out direct, selective and individual support to specific projects. They felt such a workshop would be redundant considering the existence of professional labs, whose quality it could not equal. No experimental filmmaker would know as much as a professional technician and the films would all look alike because they would all be produced with the same equipment. In addition, they were against an organization which would serve the whole country but which would necessarily be centered in Paris. Those who defended the workshop project argued that all filmmakers need equipment to shoot and develop, that all filmmakers must make prints, that all professional labs were centered in Paris in any

case, and that this was the just and democratic way to share out public funding. Moreover, it was not a simple question of opening just another laboratory because these filmmakers wanted their own *London Filmmakers Coop*, an epicenter which would bring together all French filmmakers equally, with not only a lab, but also a screening room and a distribution cooperative. Others fought for a less democratic mode of operation; the rift was political and ethical. In September 1978, in Lyon, faced with the impossibility of reaching an agreement, rivalries between the different camps rose to the surface and in a chaotic storm of cries and insults, the project fell through.

Fifteen years later it happened naturally and without state funding. Between 1992 and 1995, filmmakers flocked to Grenoble from all over France, Belgium and Switzerland to work at MTK. Due to the lab's success, we had to book our visits four months in advance. Soon the lab was overrun with visitors, and Xavier and Christophe complained that they had no more time to work on their own projects. In July 1995 they called a meeting of all the filmmakers who had come to the 102 to announce that their lab would become private again. But they were ready to help other groups form similar labs in other cities. "All you need is

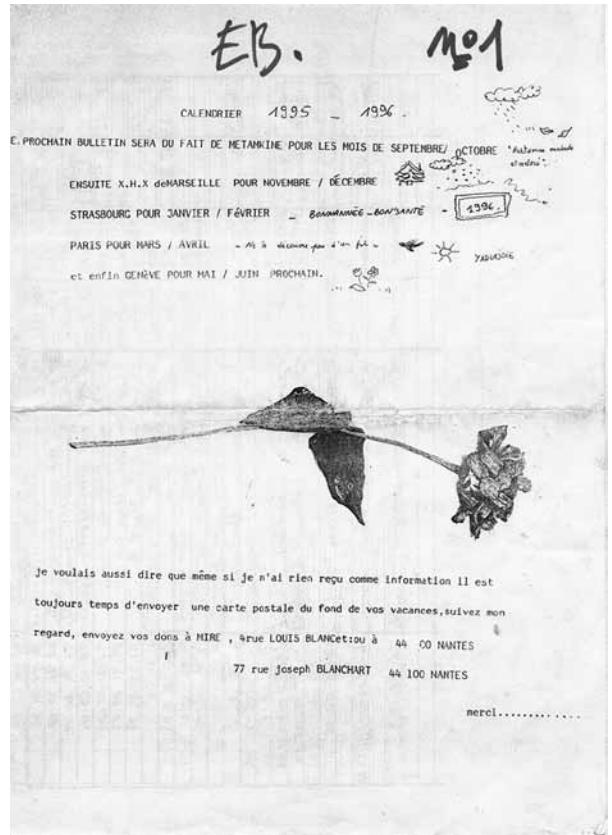
a dark room with running water and you can start your own lab," they told us. That was all we needed to hear in Paris. A group of ten filmmakers, myself included, started *L'Abominable*, which opened to the public in June 1996. At that time, similar labs started in Geneva, Le Havre, Nantes, Brussels, Marseilles, Strasbourg and elsewhere, often within non-profit groups that had already been screening experimental films for several years. There was still a big demand in Grenoble, so in November 1996, MTK raised some funds and opened an even bigger lab, with three darkrooms.

In Paris, after a long search, we found a basement in the suburbs and the equipment we needed to start processing and printing. We bought cheap equipment from auctions and even found some in junkyards. Thanks to the technical skills and wizardry of Nicolas Rey and Christophe Goulard and all others who helped out there, almost all of this material was set up and working in a matter of months. We also got a lathe in order to make our own machine parts, screws and lens adaptors. Soon we had over 150 members and we were training new people to use the machines on a regular basis. Many films were produced at the lab in those years. It was in 2003 when the call came from London.



Workspace, *L'Abominable*, La Courneuve, France. Photo Mia Ferm. Courtesy *L'Abominable*.

Front page, *L'Ebouillanté Newsletter*, v. 1.
Courtesy filmlabs.org.



The London Film-Makers Co-op had lost its space in 1995. A national Lottery Capital Development fund helped open a new space in Hoxton Square called the LUX Centre for Film, Video and New Media in September 1997, bringing together the Filmmakers' Co-op with London Electronic Arts, an organization for the promotion and distribution of artists' video. The co-op got its own floor in a new building, with separate rooms for the printers, processors and editing equipment.

Looking back, the late 1990s seemed like a utopia for independent filmmakers in Europe, with so many possibilities to use machines that only a decade before would have seemed inconceivable to get one's hands on. Thanks to the digital revolution, many of the state-of-the-art machines were rendered "obsolete" overnight, and the artists were able to acquire, adopt or rescue the most amazing technology. And here was the London Filmmakers' Co-op, moved from a cold desolate building with a leaky roof and broken windows to a new purpose-built building in Central London.

Within two years however, the new LFMC/LEA organization was deep in debt when funding

cuts came. They did not own the new building, and eventually the Lux Centre closed its doors in 2002. The printing equipment went to a lock-up in the Arts Council of England where it sat for two years. Two young filmmakers, who had no connection with the history of the previous generations, got the idea to set up a new lab, and they were eventually able to rescue the equipment and create No.W.Herelab, currently in Bethnal Green. Karen Mirza and Brad Butler came to *L'Abominable* in Paris to learn about printing and processing and setting up their space. The knowledge therefore came full circle 35 years later, from England to Holland to France and back to England, handed down from filmmaker to filmmaker and improved along the way.

Starting in the late 1990s, the French labs stayed in touch through a photocopied newsletter called "L'Ebouillanté," sharing news about each group, equipment wanted or on offer, chemical recipes, new films in production, etc. Soon we realized there were quite a few labs in other countries, and we needed a new initiative to create an international network. In December 2005, the first international meeting of



TOP Exterior, *Atomo47*, Porto, Portugal. Courtesy Ricardo Leite.

ABOVE Exterior, *nanolab*. Daylesford, Australia. Courtesy Richard Touhy.

OPPOSITE, TOP Workspace, *Labor Organisation*, Berlin, Germany. Courtesy Labor Organisation.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM Workspace, *Filmwerkplaats*. Rotterdam, Netherlands. Photo Denis Guzzo. Courtesy Florian Kramer.



artist-run film labs took place in Brussels, organized by Nova Cinema. Many people attended from around the world, including Canada, Eastern Europe and even South Korea. At that meeting we started a new international collaboration: some people proposed to manage a mailing list, others a website, still others offered to host future meetings. Through this network (filmlabs.org) we have been able to find homes for machines or film material with groups who needed it, share knowledge and experience, rescue equipment from commercial labs closing in different countries, even convince companies to produce film stock and group together to buy it when there is a high minimum order. We had meetings in January 2008 at the Rotterdam Film Festival hosted by Worm Filmwerkplaats, and in September 2011 in Zagreb during the 25fps festival hosted by a younger lab, Klubvizija.

After fifteen years, *L'Abominable* was painfully evicted from its basement in Asnières in late 2011, but

in early 2012 we were offered a much bigger new space in La Courneuve in what used to be the kitchen for the public school system. We tore out the ovens and put in our processors: the extractors in the ceiling and the drains in the floor were magically right in place. We now have walk-in refrigerators for darkrooms, and the optical printer sits in the *bureau du chef*! Nicolas and Christophe are busy installing a giant Oxberry printer that we could only dream about in the last century.

Over thirty labs are now active throughout the world from Athens to Reykjavík and from Bogota to Seoul. This evolution indicates a turning point in history: the closing of commercial labs has thrust the machines and knowledge into the hands of the artists themselves. State of the art equipment that cost a fortune just a decade ago is now free for the taking, if one is lucky enough to have a truck and room to set it up. The cost of making work on film has come down, quality control has gone up, and the filmmaker can

now master every step of the process, if we so desire, even from mixing emulsion and spreading it onto clear film for shooting, right through to the final print with optical sound. Our equipment is older than we are but we can always fix it if it breaks, virtually for free. Our films too will outlive us. Our film prints can be screened anywhere: on cheap 16mm projectors that work all over the world. There are no format wars, no compressing or codecs, no backing up or transcoding, no upgrades or obsolescence problems, no corporations to force us to buy new equipment. We are not in an economy but an ecology, a grassroots network, filmmakers helping each other, outside of the capitalist system.

Furthermore, we don't work with "images," but with organic, physical material that comes from the earth: salts, silvers, minerals. We are not so much concerned with what it *looks like*, rather with what it *is*. We are inspired by the process, speaking through a magic substance that captures light and re-emits it, the density and sensitivity curves surpassing any of the new technologies, and being ultimately more preservable. The flickering of the projector with a shutter, a more and more rare experience these days, provokes a psychophysical phenomenon in the retina and visual cortex called the Phi Phenomenon, especially conducive to creating the illusion of motion like lucid dreaming, which video's Beta Effect does not share.

Any medium can be used for expression, poetry and story telling. In our tiny yet global community, we are maintaining the freedom to use our medium of choice, however archaic it may seem to the commercial 'entertainment' industry: film. This is filmmaking in the digital age: working slowly and by hand, inventing new techniques and styles, exploring uncharted territories in cinema.

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INSIDE THE DIRECTOR'S STUDIO



Screening Room,
Art and Avant-Garde
Cinema, and Television's
Pedagogical Impulse

ALISON WIELGUS

Robert Gardner and Derek Lamb, *Screening Room* (1972 – 1981). All film stills courtesy Studio 7 Arts.

It's 1977. It's 1:35 A.M. You are at home in Boston, ensconced on your sofa. You turn on your television set, flipping to Channel Five. At first the screen is all black, with the sound of a couple arguing emitting from the set's speakers. While questioning whether something is wrong with the broadcast, a black and white image of a couple appears on the screen. As the couple fights, the image skips. Soon you fall into a rhythm with the image and sound; the fight getting at the frustration and repetition inherent in romantic bickering.

If you stick around for a few minutes, you'll learn that the film is *Hapax Legomena III: Critical Mass* (US, 1971) made by the experimental filmmaker Hollis Frampton. The film was spotlighted on *Screening Room*, a late-night television program that aired from 1972 to 1981 on ABC's Channel 5 in Boston. An interview show hosted by Robert Gardner, a filmmaker and academic, *Screening Room* prided itself on thoughtful and thorough conversations between Gardner and his guest roster of experimental filmmakers, animators, documentarians, and scholars. Part of an overhaul of Boston's Channel Five (WCVB), an ABC affiliate taken over by the Boston Broadcasters, *Screening Room* emblemized television's potential as a pedagogical tool. Balancing interviews with precisely chosen films and film clips, the show covered a wide range of filmmaking styles, from early documentary styles to government-sponsored public service cartoons to the most difficult works of the avant-garde. *Screening Room* illuminates the relationship between programming shifts in television at large, the evolution of WCVB, and contemporary trends in the world of art and avant-garde cinema. While scholars like Lynn Spigel have laid groundwork in discussions of the relationship between modernist art and television in the 1950s and 1960s, *Screening Room* illustrates television's increased role as a vehicle for arts education in the 1970s. While it placed an uncommonly thorough spotlight on the world of avant-garde cinema, *Screening Room* also serves as an example of the deepening connection between avant-garde cinema, the academy, and shifts in television's approach to not only the avant-garde but also to film as a legitimate art.

WITH HARVARD ON OUR SIDE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF WCVB

The road to *Screening Room* and WCVB was paved with legal battles with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that stretched on for seventeen years. On November 26, 1957, the Boston-Herald Traveler Corporation and WHDH radio founded the station WHDH-TV on Channel Five. Originally an ABC affiliate, the channel became a CBS affiliate in 1961. Almost immediately, the FCC began investigating allegations of impropriety in the granting of the

television license, requiring WHDH-TV to renew their license every six months. As early as 1963, Robert Gardner, a documentary filmmaker and the founder of Harvard's Film Study Center, and Oscar Handlin, the Winthrop Professor of History at Harvard University, applied to the FCC as the directors of the newly formed Boston Broadcasters Incorporated for the rights to own and operate a station on Channel Five. A commercial enterprise, Boston Broadcasters was focused on the potential of arts television programming.

Throughout the 1960s, the FCC held a series of hearings to consider which corporation would be granted Channel Five's license. The Boston Television Corporation, the Charles River Civic Television Company, and the Hub Broadcasting Company also stepped up to fight for the channel's ownership. In 1969, Boston Broadcasters won a construction permit for a new Channel Five, but due to ongoing legal battles, WHDH held the license until 1972. After seventeen years, three Supreme Court decisions, two U.S. District Court of Appeals Rulings, and five rulings by the FCC, the war ended. The Herald-Traveler ceased publication three months after losing the station, crippled by its loss of revenue. When WCVB took over the channel, they also reverted back to being an ABC affiliate. In addition to Gardner and Handlin, the board of the station also included Dr. John Knowles, the director of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Gerald Houlton, a professor of physics at Harvard University. The station got off to a slow start with its new programming, as it needed to resolve certain debt issues and restructure staff before implementing a major overhaul. Though news staff from WCVB was retained, children's programming and local educational and information shows soon filtered into the schedule.

Key to the formation and ideology of the channel was Robert Gardner. A filmmaker himself, Gardner came from a storied Boston family. In 1957, he founded the Film Study Center, which began as the visual arm of Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology. Gardner was an apt choice for such a job, as his filmmaking practice was explicitly ethnographic, based on his training as an anthropologist. His film *Dead Birds* (Documentary Educational Resources; US, 1964) surveyed the Dani of New Guinea, an indigenous people, while utilizing ambient sound and a poetic voice-over. In 1974, he made *Rivers of Sand* (Documentary Educational Resources; US), a look at the Hamer of Ethiopia, and in 1986 he made *Forest of Bliss* (Documentary Educational Resources; US) about daily life in Benares, India's most holy city.

While Gardner's own filmmaking took him to remote corners of the world, he was also invested in the community surrounding Cambridge. In 1965,

he was appointed the chairman of the Massachusetts Commission on Arts, a fifteen-member group made “to advise the legislature on programs for increasing public enjoyment of the state’s cultural resources.”¹ His investments in the community of Boston were reflected in WCVB’s programming. In 1973, the channel began to broadcast local programming like *Good Day!* (1973–1991), a Boston morning show that occasionally took its production on the road (and served as one of the templates for *Good Morning America*). Gardner himself began production on *Screening Room* in 1972, with its first episode airing in November 1972. He managed to convince the station management to utilize his filmmaking contacts, resulting in *Screening Room*’s late night broadcast, in an attempt to capture the attention of Boston’s large student population. The program and the station answered the recent demand for “quality” programming or shows that not only had higher aesthetic values but that also contained some cultural value for the audience.

MERGING ART AND TELEVISION: COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC ARTS BROADCASTING

On May 9, 1961, Newton N. Minow delivered a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters that would set the tone for discussions about television throughout the decade. Recently appointed as the Federal Communications Commission Chair, Minow was concerned with television’s influence on the nation. Citing the 180 million viewers and over one billion dollars in profit, Minow noted in “Television and the Public Interest,” that while quality programming did exist, it resided in “vast wasteland.” This rhetoric pervaded discussions about television throughout the decade, as Minow used the FCC to urge networks to consider programming differently. In addition to advocating for more responsible programming by the networks—“[i]t is not enough to cater to the nation’s whims, you must also serve the nation’s needs,”—Minow explained that a station’s license renewals would no longer be pro forma; that the FCC would seek to develop a model for pay television; that they would seek to develop technology for UHF (Ultra High Frequency) stations; and that they would start considering international television as an imminent possibility.

By the mid-1960s, television’s relationship to highbrow culture had begun to shift. Even network television was adjusting to the shift that art’s role in society had undergone. As European art cinema became relatively popular (at least on the East Coast), networks began to broadcast programming related to the arts and the avant-garde. In 1965, CBS reporter Mike Wallace interviewed filmmaker Stan Brakhage, often cited as a father of the American avant-garde, and in 1966

the network broadcast a special entitled *Shots from the Underground* with a feature on artist Bruce Conner, who specialized in film collages that commented on celebrity and political spectacle.

Local television pushed its arts programming even further. WNDT, a local New York station, produced *The Art of Film* (1963–1964) a program that discussed art house directors like Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Vittorio De Sica, and Jean-Luc Godard, occasionally snagging an interview. Chicago’s WGN began screening international art films late at night, including work by François Truffaut and Satyajit Ray. *Public Television: A Program for Action*, a 1967 report by the Carnegie Commission on Education Television (a “blue-ribbon” panel of prominent national business, educational, and cultural leaders” who solicited advice from cultural experts, government officials, ETV personnel, and commercial broadcasters²), advocated for arts programming. The report drew a line between a higher cultural purpose and mass culture, asserting that elite knowledge and culture ought to be available to all Americans.

As the call for public television dedicated to countering the “pernicious” effects of mass culture grew louder, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) debuted, carving out a mission of education and citizen training. This mission was often synonymous with middlebrow culture and a white, male, and educated audience. Early programs included shows like *Book Beat* (PBS, 1964–1980), which considered serious literature and nonfiction; *Civilisation: A Personal View by Kenneth Clark* (PBS, 1969), which highlighted the fine arts, science, history, and culture; and *The French Chef* (PBS, 1963–1973) with Julia Child.

A short-lived sea change was underway. *Public Broadcast Laboratory* (WNET/Thirteen, 1966–68), made by WNET, promoted a countercultural message tailored for the educated elite. In addition to its arts discussions, the program explicitly tackled racial issues and dipped into *cinéma vérité* techniques. But under the Nixon administration, some of these programs came under attack. While broadcasting “masterpiece” dramas like *The Forsyte Saga* (BBC, 1967) was acceptable, the Nixon administration’s Office of Telecommunications Policy was suspicious of New Left, black national, countercultural, or antiwar programming.³ Such programming often originated from New York’s National Education Television (WNET). As the national hub of the ETV system, WNET often received more flak than WGBH-Boston, WETA-Washington, KQED-San Francisco, and KCET-Los Angeles, which all had more freedom in programming.⁴ WNET’s board found *Public Broadcast Laboratory* to be too controversial and cancelled it in 1968.

The *Public Broadcast Laboratory* was replaced by the *Television Lab* (WNET/Thirteen, 1972–1984), which

was partially funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Producing local content that aired nationally if it was successful, the *Television Lab* alternated between almost purely experimental works like Ed Emshwiller’s *Scape-mates* (WNET/Thirteen; US, 1972) or Skip Sweeney’s *Illuminatin’ Sweeney* (WNET/Thirteen; US, 1975), which used video synthesizers to produce abstract images, and documentaries about social issues like health care and immigration policy, often made by Jon Alpert, Yoko Maruyama, and Keiko Tsuno. By creating aesthetically but not politically radical programming that was often focused on technological developments in television and video, the *Television Lab* was able to create an alternative mode of broadcasting. Their programs often borrowed rhetoric from Marshall McLuhan, Norbert Wiener, and Gene Youngblood, positioning television as powerful precisely because of its status as a mass communication medium. Its documentaries largely fell in between Bill Nichols’s categories of the expository and the observational, mixing work shot by lightweight cameras with unifying narration and a clear point of view. As a commercial station, WCVB had more leeway than WNET and its public television counterparts, but its programming borrowed from the educational models set forth by these public stations.

FROM MARIENBAD TO THE CO-OP: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN FILM CULTURE

While developments surrounding PBS and arts television set the stage for *Screening Room*, its pool of filmmakers also brought to bear a set of cinematic traditions on the program. While its selection of documentarians hewed closely to the art cinema of the 1950s and 1960s (Jean Rouch, a guest, had even inspired a number of Jean-Luc Godard’s camera tricks), *Screening Room* pulled many filmmakers from experimental film cooperatives and college campuses. Since the European *cine-cafés* in the 1920s, experimental filmmakers had always faced the burden of creating venues for their work. In the 1960s, a number of alternative screening venues emerged. Canyon Cinema began in filmmaker Bruce Baillie’s backyard in 1961; Ken Jacobs founded the Millennium Film Workshop in 1966; the Anthology Film Archives emerged in 1969, with its Invisible Cinema in 1970. The Anthology Film Archives Essential Cinema screening series generated a canon for the avant-garde; P. Adams Sitney’s 1974 *Visionary Film*, a scholarly overview of the avant-garde, solidified it.⁵ With screening venues primarily located in New York and San Francisco, film prints traveled from university to university but rarely made their way to a broader audience.

The Essential Cinema canon had its roots in not only the European avant-gardes of Surrealism and Dadaism, but also in the work of a number of American filmmakers from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. As described

by Sitney, early American experimental cinema relied on the tradition of the Romantic artist, for whom work was an expression of the personal. Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger, and Stan Brakhage, often considered the three key early figures of the American avant-garde, displayed this philosophy in divergent ways. Deren turned the camera on herself and her own dance background in films like *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (US, 1946) and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (US, 1943); Anger engaged the ritualistic imagery of Aleister Crowley in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (US, 1954) and his own queer sexuality in *Scorpio Rising* (US, 1964); and Brakhage used what he termed “closed-eye vision,” filming the birth of his first child in *Window Water Baby Moving* (US, 1962) and more “home” movies in *Anticipation of the Night* (US, 1958).

As structuralist and poststructuralist theories overtook the academy, experimental filmmaking underwent a sea change. While many makers of video art, including participants in WNET’s *Television Lab*, found something utopian in the process of filmmaking, a set of filmmakers were fixating on de-centering the subject and challenging the very processes of filmic identification.⁶ This trend in avant-garde filmmaking of the 1970s was, loosely and somewhat inaccurately, termed structural film (and later also identified as materialist film). Peter

1 “Gardner to Bring Culture to Mass.,” *The Harvard Crimson* (6 January, 1965), <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1965/1/6/gardner-to-bring-culture-to-mass/>

2 Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You?: How Public TV Failed the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 50.

3 See Ouellette, *Viewers Like You?*, p. 175–186.

4 Ouellette, *Viewers Like You?*, p. 179.

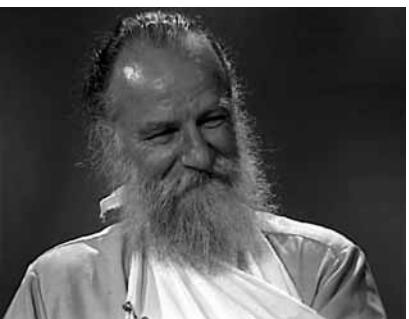
5 For more on the codification of the cinematic avant-garde, see P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Another important work in building an avant-garde canon was P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives* (New York: Anthology Film Archives 1975), which explains the criteria for Anthology’s essential cinema and features essays on key films in the collection.

6 See Peter Gidal, ed., *Structural Film Anthology* (London: British Film Institute, 1978) for insights from “structural” filmmakers on their own work. See David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) for an overview of the same period.



LEFT, FROM TOP Michael Snow, *Rameau's Nephew* (1974), frame enlargement. Michael Snow (right) and Robert Gardner.

RIGHT, FROM TOP Robert Gardner. Ed Emshwiller. Hollis Frampton (right) and Robert Gardner.



Wollen's landmark essay "The Two Avant-Gardes," written a mere two years after *Screening Room* first aired, articulated these shifts, delineating a loose Co-op movement from one comprised of European and more narratively-inclined¹ filmmakers such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, Hanoun, and Jansco. The Co-op films assert their politics through form, as a critic of the apparatus of cinema itself; the European auteurs assert their politics through narrative development. Wollen continues, "On the whole, the Co-op avant-garde, happy though it would no doubt be to find a mass audience, is reconciled to its minority status" while the European avant-garde had mixed feelings about the potential of a mass audience.

However, Wollen overlooks the Co-op avant-garde's link to the university. Instead, as Michael Zryd points out in his 2006 article "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," universities have been the primary buyers and renters of experimental

cinema since 1967, even as some avant-garde artists decry this relationship to the academy. The aesthetic politics of the avant-garde, which tended towards poststructural critiques of subjectivity and the filmic apparatus, went hand in hand with the theories of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In fact, experimental filmmakers themselves, who often took university positions, bolstered such theories in their own writing. This practice leads to canon formation, as teachers screen a relatively small set of films (like the aforementioned Anger, Brakhage, and Deren works) to give students a taste of the avant-garde, and to a closed audience for the avant-garde.

One exception to this practice is the already-discussed participation of television in screening and developing experimental film and video in the 1970s. In particular, *Screening Room* appears as a symptom of this pedagogical bent within the avant-garde and as a symbol of television's attempts to broadly educate and inform

the public. While the program replicated many of the dynamics of the classroom and, in fact, is hosted by a Harvard-affiliated filmmaker, the program's appearance on an ABC affiliate opened up the academic sphere to a wider audience than a small seminar on film history. Although geared toward students, the barrier to entry was no longer university enrollment but the possession of a television.

EXPERIMENTAL FILM ON SCREENING ROOM

Broadcast at 1:05 AM on Friday evenings, in a time slot otherwise given to *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1967-1968) or *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (Revue Studios/Universal TV, 1955-1965), *Screening Room* was a bare bones show that ran for approximately an hour and a half. Airing twenty-three weeks a year, Gardner explained that WCVB "was generous in providing the funds to bring the filmmaker and pay a handsome (at the time) fee for airing the films."⁷ The show's set was simple: on an orange-brown and very 1970s carpet rested two chairs and a coffee table. Atop the table was a giant ashtray to facilitate almost non-stop smoking. The show's template was set in the first episode, which was broadcasted in November 1972, and would stay in place throughout the program's approximately one hundred-episode run. Featuring John Whitney Sr., the resident filmmaker at the California Institute of Technology, Robert Gardner opened the first program by explaining that he would screen Whitney's work and follow up with questions. The film excerpts could never be longer than Gardner's interviews in order to qualify as educational programming by FCC standards. Gardner also made a striking statement, telling viewers "I think I can promise you all that your TV sets are not going to look like they ever have before." Whitney's films were predominately early experiments in computer animation set to music by composers like Terry Riley, and Gardner frequently questions how broadcasting them on television might affect the viewing experience.

When Gardner closes the program, he hopes he has not mutilated any of Whitney's images. Whitney asserts that he has merely changed viewers' aesthetic experience.

In addition to his focus on television, Gardner's desire to grant viewers an insight into the complexity of avant-garde experimentation comes through in Whitney's interview. After Gardner asks Whitney about his filmmaking process, Whitney explains that he worked in conjunction with computer programmers at the IBM laboratories, and his films are the results of their experiments. This tendency to discuss the filmmaking process extends to other directors, though often in a less technologically specific tenor. During Michael Snow's 1977 appearance, Gardner screens approximately forty minutes from 1974's epic *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (US), a four-

and-a-half hour dissection of sound-image relationships arranged in twenty-five discrete segments. After screening one fragment, Snow and Gardner dissect it for the audience. Snow talks at length about how audiences take sound-image synchronization for granted and about his desire to undermine this assumption. He mentions his experience as a free jazz musician, and how his investment in experimental music propelled him to make certain segments of the film about sound rather than dialogue. When we see a shot of two people urinating in a bucket (what Snow calls the cue for the audience to use the restrooms), their naked bodies covered by a black rectangle, Gardner and Snow discuss the intentions of the shot and how the network's censorship makes it seem even dirtier.

Snow's appearance begins to give us a sense of the three main strategies for discussing experimental films on *Screening Room*. These strategies are exemplified in Hollis Frampton's 1977 appearance. After a brief introduction by Gardner, the camera pans to Frampton, his wide eyes and wild hair giving him the appearance of an eccentric. After an overview of his schooling and early encounters with Ezra Pound, the program runs through some of Frampton's work. The first film screened is *Maxwell's Demon* (US, 1968), which was introduced by Frampton with a typically charming explanation of the titular scientific concept, using the metaphor of a pigpen. The film alternates between shots of a nearly naked man performing various exercises and shots of waves crashing on the shore, creating an uneasy rhythm. The sprocket holes — perforations on the side of a filmstrip that enable the projector to move the film from frame to frame — create the soundtrack. Frampton explains that the film was an attempt at "getting several concerns into a very tight intersection."

Later in the program we see *Lemon* (Frampton, US, 1969), a film that simply depicts a lemon as it is transformed by light and shadow. The film is silent, so Gardner and Frampton speak over it, discussing the experience of watching it; minimalism; the tradition of still life painting in the history of art; television's inability to present the proper scale for the image; the lemon's resemblance to a breast; and even the selection of the right lemon at the grocery store. Gardner even stops to assure the audience that the film is silent, and there is no problem with their television set.

Finally, Frampton presents *Critical Mass*, the stuttering film of a couple's fight. We only see a small fragment of the film, as it is thirty minutes long. Shortening the film reinforces *Screening Room's*

⁷ Robert Gardner, in email interview with the author.



Jonas Mekas and Robert Gardner.

of works by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Marie Menken as well as his own work, Mekas runs through different modes of the avant-garde like a college professor giving an introductory lecture. Gardner's rhetoric with Mekas, like in other interviews, invokes a sophisticated audience invested in aesthetics, politics, and the future of the avant-garde. But the willingness to speak over films and to break them into fragments also reinforces the desire to educate an already curious audience. After the experience of being bombarded by the strangeness of Snow's *Rameau's Nephew* or mystified by Deren's *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (US, 1945), Gardner's conversations help viewers understand the positions, theories, and methodical choices that motivated these bizarre works of art.

NIXON, THE BLUES, AND THE HAUKA: DOCUMENTARIES ON SCREENING ROOM

Unlike the interviews with experimental filmmakers, which focused on explanations of artistic choices and film theory, interviews with documentarians focused on explanation of context and methodology. Collagists, ethnographers, and practitioners of Direct Cinema and *cinéma vérité* all made appearances, bolstered by Robert Gardner's own personal insight into documentary praxis. With clearer educational value, a different kind of *Screening Room* emerged: one dedicated to the process of filmmaking and to the discussions that such films might spur.

In 1973, Ricky Leacock, Les Blank, and Emile de Antonio each had his own episode of *Screening Room*. Leacock, one of the founders of Direct Cinema, explained his own investment in documentary through his biography. Growing up in the Canary Islands, he was obsessed with the idea of presence and "being there." Leacock explains how the development of lightweight cameras that used magnetic tape to record synchronous sound enabled filmmakers to follow rapid action. His episode presented an overview of his work, from *Queen of the Apollo* (US, 1970) to unseen footage of Indira Ghandi. Les Blank discussed the poetics of documentary filmmaking, focusing on his studies of black musicians in rural America. Blank's program focuses primarily on his *The Blues Accordin' to Lightin' Hopkins* (US, 1969) a study of the famous musician, and on Blank's personal investment in music. Finally, Emile de Antonio discussed *Point of Order!* (US, 1964) and *Milhouse: A White Comedy* (US, 1971). De Antonio's political subject matter and reliance on archival television footage necessitate a discussion of process. *Point of Order!* depicted the 187-hour Army-McCarthy hearings, which de Antonio culled to 93 minutes. While de Antonio found McCarthy horrifying, he was also interested in critiquing the homophobia in Joseph Welch's questioning of McCarthy.

One of the last experimental filmmakers to appear on *Screening Room* was Jonas Mekas in 1981. A filmmaker, columnist for the *Village Voice*, and founder of Anthology Film Archives, Mekas's appearance serves as a history lesson of independent filmmaking and a call to arms for funding Anthology's film preservation program and screening space. Bringing along rare prints



FROM LEFT Emile de Antonio and Edmund Carpenter (right). Robert Gardner with Caroline Leaf and Mary Beams (left). Caroline Leaf, detail of a drawing by Caroline Leaf.

GREGOR SAMSA AND A PSYCHIC PARROT: ANIMATION ON SCREENING ROOM

In each of these three interviews, Gardner's desire to situate each filmmaker into a broader historical narrative emerges. Rather than simply discuss their work, Gardner draws out discussions on documentary philosophy and how it informs praxis. The interviews are never merely a career retrospective, but instead tend to focus on one or two major works with significant depth. When Alan Lomax stops by in 1975, his prior television and radio work are largely omitted in favor of discussing *The Global Jukebox*, a multimedia database that consists of dance footage from around the world. The former being an ethnographic filmmaker with different interests than Gardner, the subsequent discussion turns on Lomax's observations of dance rhythms, with Gardner asking questions on the politics of ethnographic cinema and observation.

Blank, de Antonio, Leacock, and Lomax only make up a small portion of documentarians that appeared on *Screening Room*. Smaller figures like John Marshall, who made short documentaries about police action; Robert Fulton, known for his aerial cinematography; Richard P. Rodgers, the eventual director of the Film Study Center who made documentaries on subjects as wide ranging as revolution in Nicaragua to a PBS portrait of William Carlos Williams; Johannes Manong, a black South African filmmaker who left the country to work in the film industry; and William Geddes, an anthropologist who shot footage in the Pacific Islands, all showed up to screen their work. The diversity of filmmakers, if viewed over the nine years of *Screening Room*'s existence, provides the audience with a sense of the evolution of the documentary and a wealth of information of other cultures.

Caroline Leaf and Mary Beams, who appear jointly in 1975, also focus on process. Leaf, who makes films using a lightbox, sand, and a camera, first draws a small owl in the sand. The show presents the process in split screen, allowing us to watch Leaf work and to see the outcome as she alters the owl to create the illusion of flight. She then screens *The Owl Who Married a Goose* (CA, 1974), an adaptation of an Eskimo folk tale that uses the same technique. The rudimentary demonstration highlights the complexity of the finished product, a fluid and playful tale of an owl that falls in love with a goose. Later in the program, Leaf shows clips from a work in progress that will become *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* (CA, 1977), an adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, that is by turns nightmarish and expressionistically beautiful. As with *The Owl Who Married a Goose*, the contrast

between the simple technique and the result emphasizes the painstaking nature of the work.

Derek Lamb's second appearance is the apotheosis of Gardner's process-oriented conversations. Lamb uses most of the program to screen and discuss *The Psychic Parrot* (US, 1975), a short film with partial financing by the Boston Broadcasters and Robert Gardner. The film mixes live-action and animation to tell the satirical story of a parrot that predicts the end of the world. A couple, Henrietta and Fred, watch the parrot and the world descend into chaos on television. Henrietta remains glued to the tube while people riot, the government makes plans to send people to the moon, and manipulated images of on-the-street interviews appear onscreen. The film ends with the parrot retracting its prediction, the world breathing a sigh of relief. After screening the film, Lamb discusses storyboarding, casting, and even the technology used to warp the interview subjects. The film, which had been screened on WCVB prior to the *Screening Room* episode, exemplified the station's commitment to independent cinema and its willingness to satirize the role of television and mass culture in society. Gardner ends this particular episode — the last broadcast in 1975 — by telling viewers to write in if they wanted more programs, which would then be made. By 1981, *Screening Room* shuttered its doors when Metromedia, Inc. purchased WCVB for \$220 million, after over one hundred programs had been produced.

NETWORK LIMITATIONS: AN AVANT-GARDE FOR EVERYONE

Screening Room focused on cinema's past, building a canon of avant-garde cinema, documentary, and animation while emphasizing the importance of their makers. Rather than present difficult work with a take it or leave it attitude, Robert Gardner affected a plainspoken and commonsensical approach to cinematic extremes. WCVB's requirement of more discussion than screening, borrowing a format from talk shows, reinforced its network backing even as it programmed outré films. For WCVB and *Screening Room*, art cinema was not only worthy of academic analysis, but necessitated it. The program's guests bolstered this implicit argument, as many of them were linked to the academy and willing to discuss their films on theoretical, cultural, and practical levels. *Screening Room* operates as a model of how television helps to legitimate film as an art form: not just as a lowbrow contrast to cinema, but as a showcase for conversations about the cinematic form.

While a program like *Screening Room* is unlikely to ever appear on a network affiliate again, its afterlife has allowed it to reappear as an education source. In the 2000s, Studio7Arts re-mastered and released twenty-eight episodes of the program. In 2008, Gardner

received an Anthology Film Archives Preservation Award for the series. Marketed in particular to university libraries, *Screening Room* has now explicitly emerged as an educational document, and even features clips from films that are otherwise unavailable on home video. The program has become a research document and a reminder that, for a brief time in the 1970s, television and the arts had an area of overlap. A lingering question remains, however. When we dissect the avant-garde, do we defang its politics? Almost as illustrative as the filmmakers who appear on *Screening Room* are the absent figures: Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, and Carolee Schneemann, amongst others. By reifying the avant-garde, documentary, and animated films that can be safely discussed and dissected on television, *Screening Room* carves out an educational strand of cinema that ignores the transgressive sexuality on display in the work of Smith, Warhol, or Schneemann, and provides little context for the films to come from No Wave filmmakers or the Cinema of Transgression. As television aligns itself with the academy's pedagogical goals of explaining experimental and art cinema to a wider audience, it also necessitates a limitation of just what films can be shown and discussed, leaving the extreme examples to the underground cinematheques. Even with the late hours and the academic atmosphere, *Screening Room*'s role on a network affiliate hampered its ability to create a truly expansive view of art cinema, no matter the desire of its creators and filmmakers. Education, it seemed, could only accept so much radicalism.

Alison Wielgus is a Ph.D. candidate in Film Studies at the University of Iowa. Her dissertation, entitled *You Had to Have Been There: Experimental Film and Video, Sound, and Liveness in the New York Underground*, reconsiders the cinematic archive through sites of experimental exhibition.

JAMES TURRELL, DREAMS BEYOND CINEMA

ARA OSTERWEIL

Desolating any luminous conditions except those of functionality, 24/7 is part of an immense incapacitation of visual experience.

-Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and The Ends of Sleep*

Shot en plein air with a stationary camera, the earliest films of the aptly named Lumière brothers enthralled their audiences with an illuminated chunk of the world transformed through framing, magnification and reproduction. Of course, centuries before this well-worn myth of modernity, Plato's allegory of the cave—in which bound prisoners misinterpret shadows on the wall for reality—also pivots on an effect of light. Suggesting the illusory nature of representation, as well as the impossibility of a direct encounter with truth, Plato used the crowd's hostility towards enlightenment as a justification for autocratic rule. Centuries later, film theorists employed the same allegory to explain the dynamics of film spectatorship, comparing the audience's supposed inability to distinguish the real from representation to a form of imprisonment. Yet classical film theory's presumptions of duped, immobile spectators simply do not account for all of the moving, shaking, thinking, and talking that has happened in and around the cinema for over a hundred years. It certainly does not explain the "adventures of perception"¹ that have characterized experimental film or the light art with which I argue it is kindred.

So what, then, was cinema? And what might it be still? In an era in which cinema's ontology has been radically redefined by new forms of making and viewing moving images, cinephiles are prone to fret over the

extinction of our beloved medium. Yet rather than ring cinema's death toll, I prefer to imagine alternative potentials for its future. This essay meditates on what cinema in the expanded field might learn from the work of artist James Turrell. Dispensing with the temporal unit of the reel, as well as many other aspects of the cinematic apparatus, Turrell's perception chambers are nonetheless deeply cinematic in their captivation of perceivers through the framing of light and motion. This essay thinks Turrell's work through cinema as a way of investigating how the vitalizing forms of collectivity, shared temporality, and perceptual mutuality that the cinema provided for audiences over the last century might be extended and expanded in our present moment. It does so, in part, as a way of questioning whether particular concerns about, and obsessions with, medium specificity (by filmmakers, critics and academics) impede our understanding about what was, and what still might be, the redemptive potential of cinema.

In an era in which the exhibition of experimental film and video has largely shifted from the alternative theater to the museum installation, filmmakers have developed alternative strategies of engaging the "site specificity" of spectatorship.² Yet as Erika Balsom explains, the time-based medium of cinema struggles to relocate itself in an environment developed for the perception of still objects and artifacts. For museum-goers accustomed to perambulating through exhibitions in staccato patterns of motion and perception — walk, stop, look, move on — film and video projects demand "durational commitment[s]" not easily satisfied within the gallery environment.³ While filmmakers have developed ever more ambitious (and often problematic) ways of

negotiating the temporal and locative particularities of the museum, many films lose their resonance when situated in the distracted environment of the white cube.

As Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Balsom and others have noted, one troublesome response to the exhibition of cinema within what Krauss describes as the “late capitalist museum”⁴ is the creation of high-budget “technophilic extravaganzas”⁵ that use hypersaturation and “immersive spectacle” in ways that mirror the “spurious production”⁶ of experience by the commodity and entertainment industries of late capitalism. As I shall argue, Turrell’s work operates in meaningful opposition to this trend. Turrell’s non-film based, durational light art suggests alternative possibilities for temporal, kinesthetic, and perceptual engagement with illuminated phenomenon. Extending cinema beyond its typical reliance on fixed duration and materiality, Turrell orchestrates forms of participation that refuse the incessant activity and hypersaturation of late capitalism and its art forms.

EXPANDED CINEMA, OR CINEMA WITHOUT ORGANS

Let me clarify: James Turrell is not, and has never been, a filmmaker. Nonetheless, in his profound investigation into the embodied conditions of perception, movement, architecture, and spectatorship, I argue that Turrell’s oeuvre is kindred with, and parallel to, the project of experimental cinema. As in cinema, light is at the very core of Turrell’s project, and yet as he insists, his medium is perception itself. Whereas narrative cinema harnesses light to render the diegetic world transparent, Turrell focuses on the viewer’s phenomenological engagement with the beam of light that traditionally but not necessarily emanates from the projector. Turrell came to recognize how the light itself was more important aspect than the picture.

Turrell’s mobilization of light and projection beyond the limitations of the traditional cinematic apparatus places his work in dialogue with experimental film. Beginning in the nineteen sixties, the search for modes of expanded perception inaugurated innovations in multimedia projection that revolutionized how illuminated images were created and experienced. These expanded cinemas involved not only a re-conception of the typical ways of harnessing light but a concomitant quest for expansive forms of perception and rationality. While there are countless examples of expanded cinema from this period, one of my favorites is an unrealized impulse by filmmaker Barbara Rubin. In the mid-1960s, Rubin (*Christmas on Earth*, 1963) travelled around Europe canceling screenings of experimental films that her compatriot P. Adams Sitney had struggled to organize. Rather than enshrining avant-garde cinema in the hallowed halls of galleries and

universities, Rubin wanted to project these images on the sky itself. Her goal was not only to revolutionize the way these films were received, but to bring people together in enchanted forms of communion that broached the perceptual boundaries between the inside of the theater and the outside of the world. Shooting film without any cartridges in her camera, Rubin was one of the first experimental filmmakers to question whether even the most central material elements of the cinematic dispositif were necessary to the utopian project of cinema. Like Barbara Rubin, James Turrell mines what Frances Richard has described as the “tension between aperture and frame” to move towards experiences of perceptual boundlessness.⁷ Working beyond the boundaries of the cinematographic apparatus and yet within the cinematic investigation of the “phenomenology of spectatorship,”⁸ Turrell reinvents the relationship between the body, the built environment, and the natural world.

I recognize that my use of the term ‘cinematic’ to describe Turrell’s non-film based practice may be seen as an ahistorical, idealist conception of an endlessly flexible media that critics might well rally against. It is not intended as such. For over forty years, James Turrell has

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

1 Scott MacDonald, *Adventures of Perception: Cinema as Exploration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

2 For a history of this transformation, see Andrew V. Uroskie’s new book *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) and Erika Balsom’s *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

3 Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, p. 42.

4 Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” *October* 54 (Autumn 1990), p. 17.

5 Hal Foster, quoted in Yves-Alain Bois, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism*, Volume 2: 1945 to the Present (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), p. 676.

6 Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, p. 55.

7 Frances Richard, “James Turrell and the Nonvicarious Sublime,” in *On the Sublime: Mark Rothko, Yves Klein, James Turrell*, catalogue to the exhibition at Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, July 7–October 7, 2001 (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2001), p. 89.

POETRY AND REGGAE IN SÃO LUÍS



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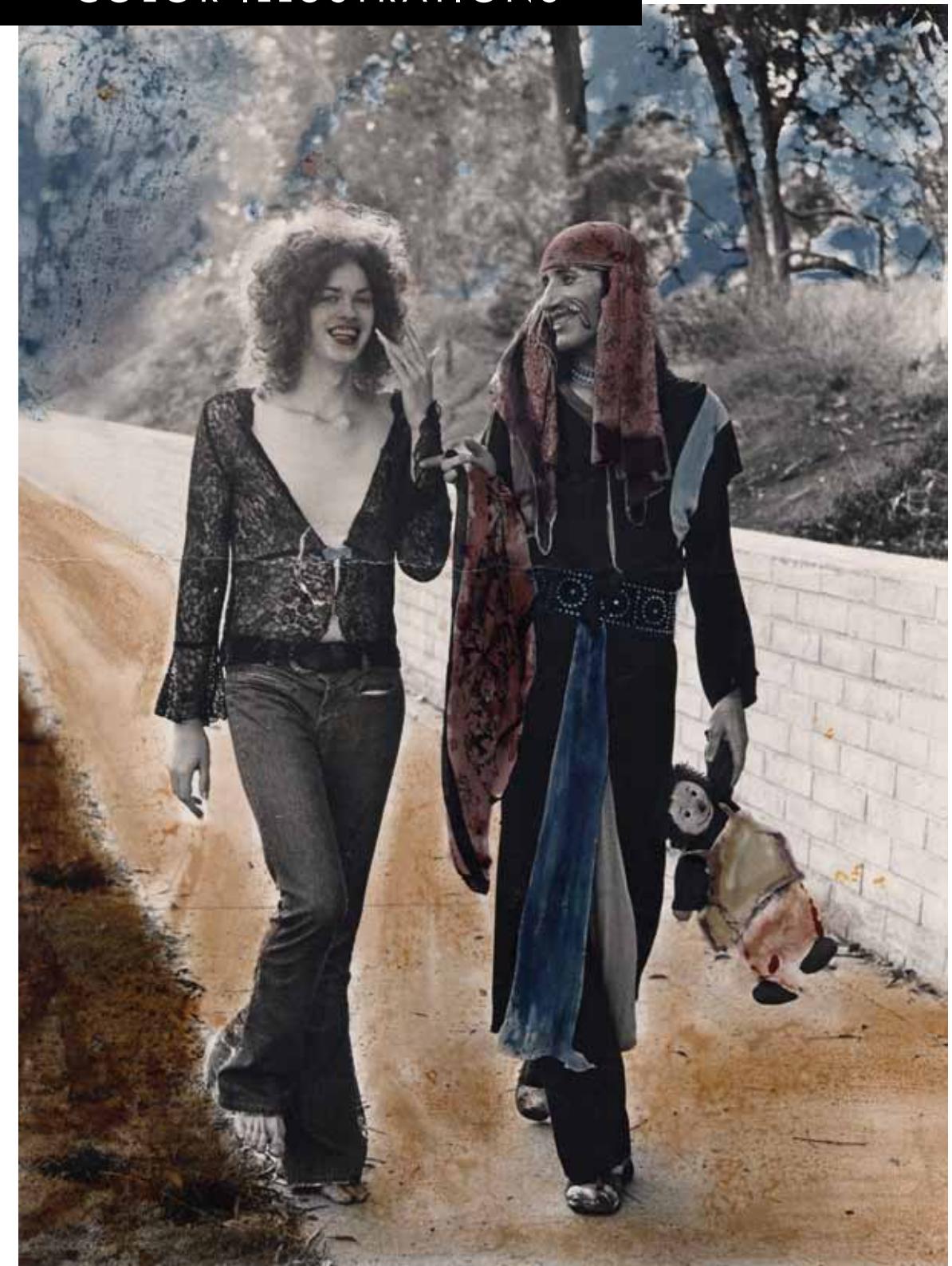
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Penelope Spheeris, *Hats Off to Hollywood* (1972), frame enlargement. Courtesy Ann Arbor Film Festival.

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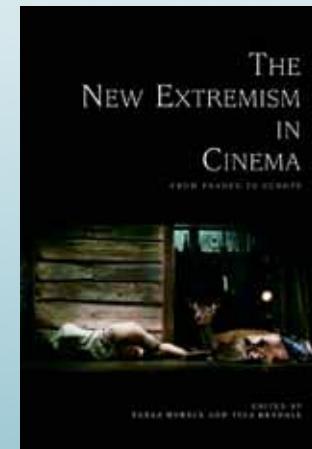
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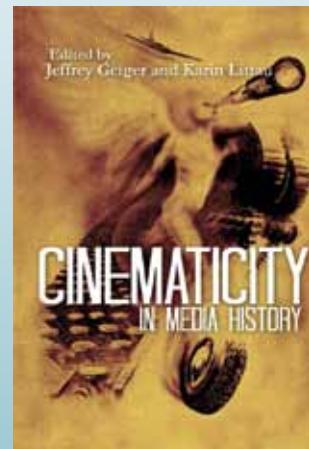
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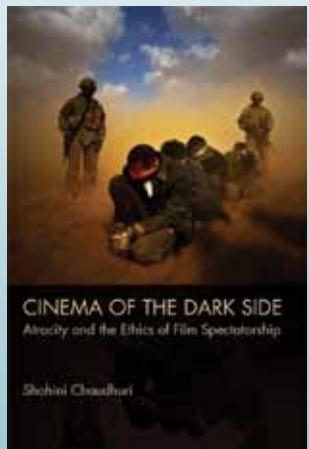
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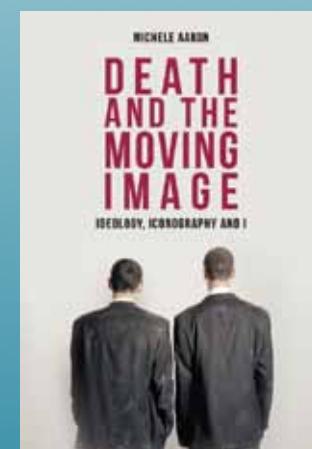
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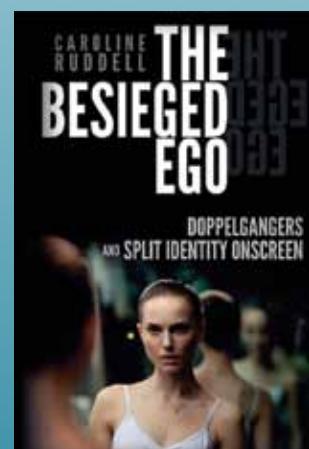
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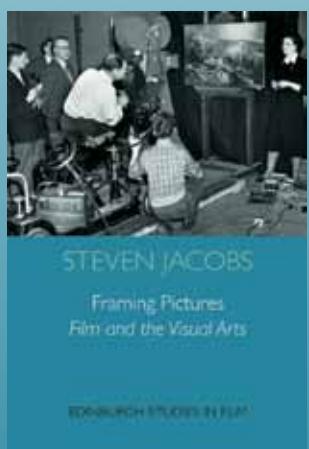
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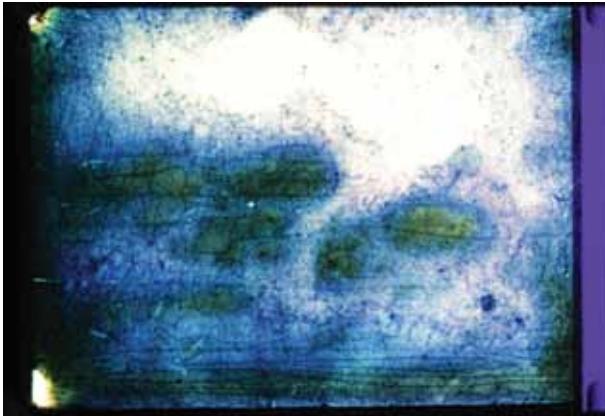
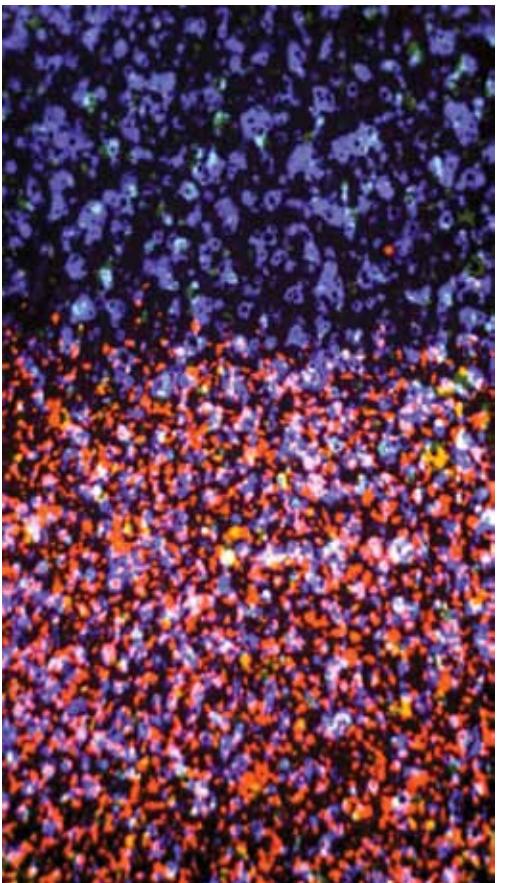


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SELF-SKILLING & HOME BREWING, p. 20

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Erotic Psyche (Bradley Eros & Aline Mare), *Pyrotechnics* (1985), frame enlargement. Courtesy Bradley Eros.

Esther Ulrus, *Chrome* (2013), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

Robert Schaller, *To The Beach* (2014), frame enlargements, gum emulsion. Courtesy the artist.

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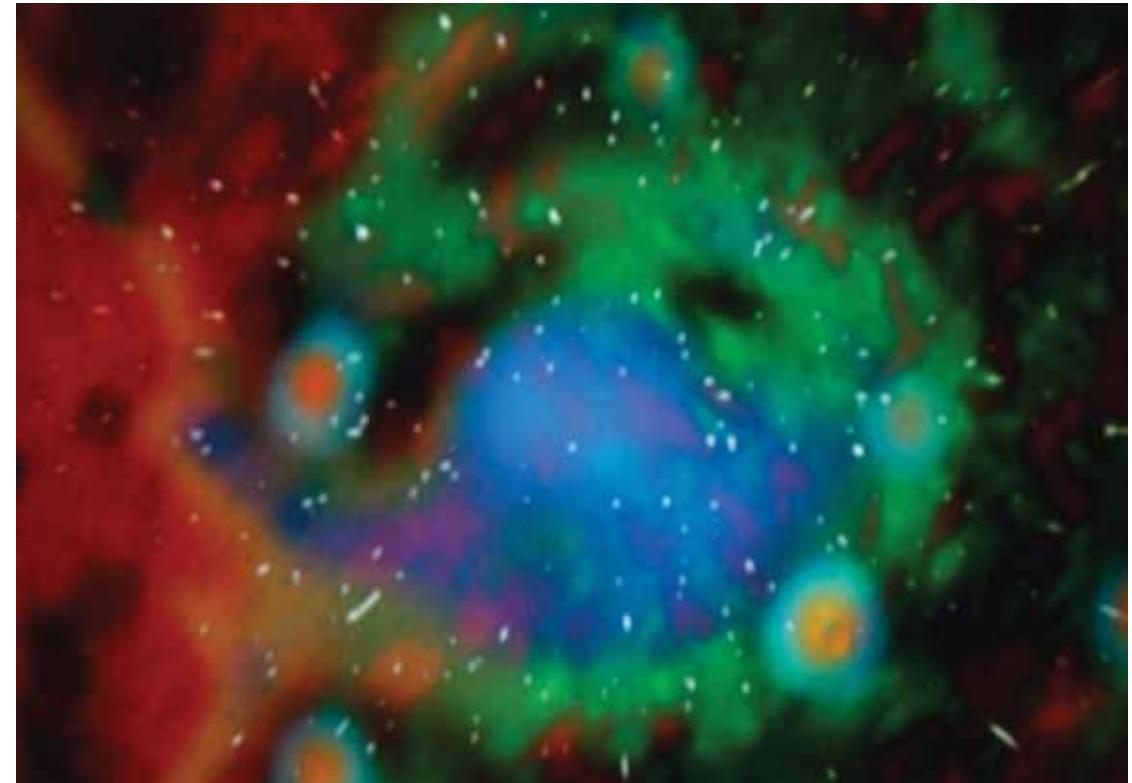
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Johanna Vaude, **TOP Exploration** (2006), **ABOVE Totality Remix** (2012), frame enlargements. Courtesy the artist.

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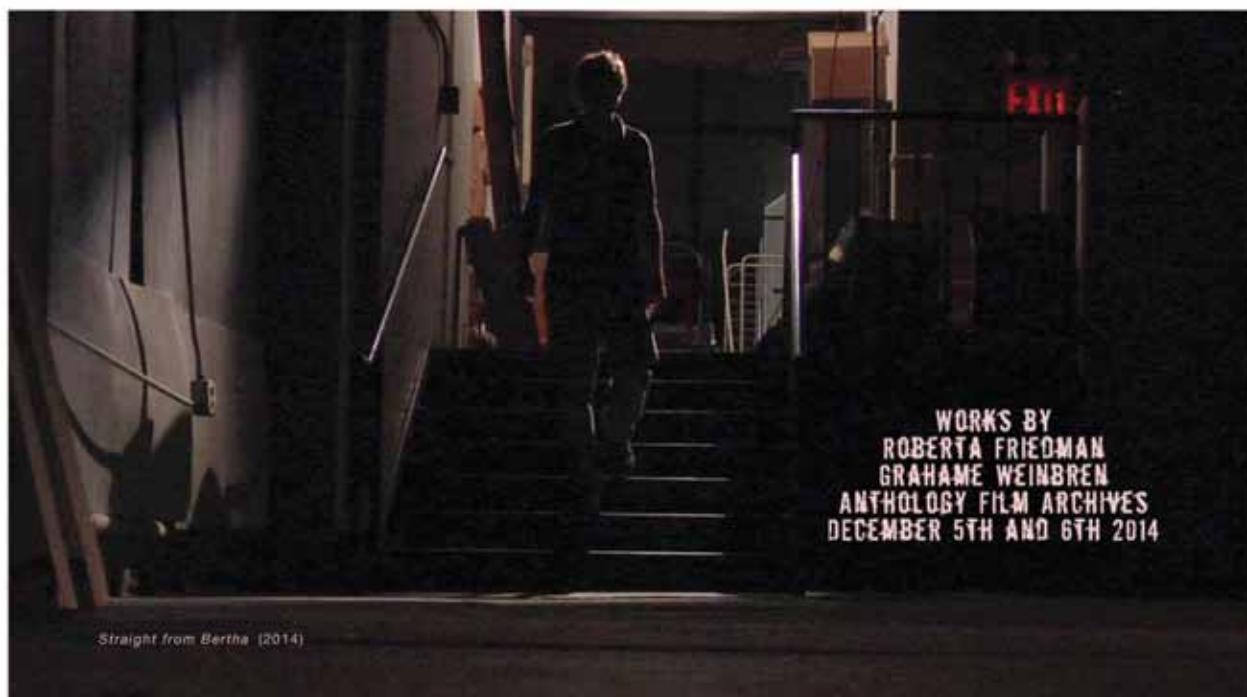


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THE ARTIST-RUN FILM LABS, p. 28

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Workspace, *space cell*, Seoul, Korea. Courtesy Jangwook Lee.

Real Film Camp, ANYEYE, The Northeast Institute, Beverly, Massachusetts, USA. Courtesy Ethan Berry.

Workspace, *Mire*, Cinéma Expérimental, Nantes, France. Courtesy Aurélie Percevault.

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matrix - late 14c., "uterus, womb," from Old French matrice "womb, uterus," from Latin matrix (genitive matricis) "pregnant animal," in Late Latin "womb," also "source, origin," from mater (genitive matris) "mother" (see mother (n.1)). Sense of "place or medium where something is developed" is first recorded 1550s; sense of "embedding or enclosing mass" first recorded 1640s. Logical sense of "array of possible combinations of truth-values" is attested from 1914. As a verb from 1951.



The Internet is made of pussies.

These pussies are porn. They constitute the most popular web content. These pussies are cats. Their images and videos are the second most popular web content. These pussies are users. Women. These pussies are creators. Beginning with Ada Lovelace and continuing into the future. These pussies are the structure and foundation of the Internet.

Pry open the orifice of the internet with a speculum and you will find the tunneling halls of a vagina. These tubes connect in an orgiastic flow of information.

Link to link, the internet is always touching herself. It is with pleasure that one site rubs another.

The internet is not a masculine domain.

Art is not a masculine domain.

Scopophilia is not a masculine domain.

Language is not a masculine domain.

When we surf the webbed sea of pussies, we refuse to fall into the void of language.

These pussies are not commodities. They speak in a polyvocal folkloric language.

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Biology is a sociotechnological structure.

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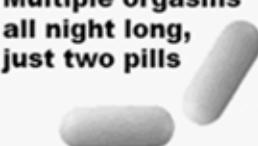
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created light-based sculptures and spaces that explicitly and implicitly refer to cinematic and televisual forms. As Richard has observed, Turrell's "installations acknowledge popular culture and industrial technology even as they evoke esoteric spirituality. [...] The glowing, virtual surfaces of his projection pieces and Sky Space works [...] may call to mind the purity of a transcendent void, but they might also read as oblique commentaries on film, television, and computer screens, those orphic sources of 'illumination' that lure contemporary consciousness into their insubstantial beams."⁹

SITUATING JAMES TURRELL

Turrell's experiments with light, perception, and architecture are part of a constellation of art practices in the postwar period that have paralleled and overlapped with kindred experiments by filmmakers. Turrell's work first emerged in the context of the Light and Space art of Southern California in the 1960s. Since his early participation in the Art and Technology program at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which paired artists with scientists and psychologists, the use of technology has been fundamental to Turrell's experiments with perception. Along with early collaborator Robert Irwin, Turrell took up residency at the Garrett Aerospace Corporation (1968-1971) in order to conduct research into perception conditioning, including the use of sensory deprivation, anechoic chambers, Ganzfelds and alpha waves. Yet while Turrell's early work is often contextualized in relation to other West Coast Light and Space artists, such as Irwin and Doug Wheeler, his work coincides with a wider generation of geographically dispersed artists who employed technology in the service of expanded perception. In the 1960s and 1970s, experimental filmmakers joined Turrell at the forefront of this bold inquiry into how technologies developed by corporations or through modern warfare might be used to serve more utopian goals.

Although West Coast Light and Space art is often distinguished from East Coast Minimalism of the same era, there are more parallels and convergences across geography and between media than have been adequately theorized. A desire to transform the conventional relationships between space, light, and perception informs much of the American art that emerged in the postwar period, on both coasts, in many media, and in countless spaces in between. Stan Brakhage's light-blasted cinema, Paul Sharits's and Tony Conrad's flicker films, Jordan Belson's cosmic light animations, Gordon Matta-Clark's aperture-like "building cuts," Yoko Ono's celestial themed "event scores," Nancy Holt's land art, Walter De Maria's "Lightning Field," and Ken Jacobs's Nervous Magic Lantern Projections are but a few examples of multimedia

work that speak to Turrell's own investigations of light, apertures, frames, architecture, and landscape.

Since the 1960s, Turrell's work has been in dialogue with both the myth and technology of cinema. As a result of collaborating with film industry lighting designer Leonard Pincus, Turrell's groundbreaking Afrum I was one of three Projection Pieces selected for the artist's pivotal one-man exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1967.¹⁰ Afrum consists of a rectangle of light projected in the architectural space of a corner so that from some distance it appears to be an illuminated solid cube floating off the floor. Aspiring towards the "thingness" of light, Turrell used projection to create the illusion of three-dimensional objecthood at a moment when anti-illusionism and the specificity of objects was being insisted upon by Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Sol LeWitt. In this context, it is no wonder that Rosalind Krauss critiqued Turrell's illusionistic Projection Pieces for contributing to the sensory reprogramming of the postmodern subject, who had lost his sense of self and reality in a world of endlessly signifying illusions.¹¹

Surveying his work, I have always found that Turrell's work is most profound – and paradoxically most cinematic – when he moves away from using projection as a form of illusion. Turrell created Afrum and his thirty-five other Projection Pieces in his studio in the defunct Mendota Hotel in the Ocean Park neighborhood of Santa Monica, where he had moved in 1966. His most groundbreaking work of the period was site specific, and involved his "radical fenestration" of the building itself.¹² Moving beyond the binary opposition between illusion and objecthood, Turrell transformed the hotel into the medium for his experiments with light. Painting all of the windows black except for small scratches that allowed tiny shards of light to cut through the space, Turrell created the Mendota Stoppages (1966), a symphonic orchestration of the flickering of light. Using the building so that it could function simultaneously as camera, projector, and theater, Turrell pioneered "the inside/ outside (light) + time equation," which, according to Frances Richard, remains Turrell's "fundamental creative theorem."¹³ In the creation of a camera obscura that transformed illuminated traces from the outside world into perceptual phenomenon within, Turrell merged the most basic components of Los Angeles living – "driving, movies, the civic grid and the reflection of Pacific-inflected light" – in order to commute the architecture of everyday life into cinema.¹⁴

Throughout his career, Turrell's experiments with perception have continued to refer to cinematic and televisual forms even as they often invert and surpass their effects. Turrell's Magnatron series may be the

artist's most explicit allusion to popular culture. Taking the form of a small aperture cut into the wall in the shape and dimension of a mid-century television screen with two chairs set at an optimal distance for viewing, Turrell's 2001 piece Bullwinkle recreates the ambient light and white noise that served as visual and acoustic backdrop in millions of American homes since the 1950s. Inside the aperture, in a recessed space that is supposed to remain invisible to viewers, a television placed below the opening plays the Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoon. Turrell liberates the light emitted from the television apparatus from its imprisonment in narrative form, while simultaneously highlighting the ways in which televisions magnetize viewers' attention in the vacuum of mindless entertainment. Like many experimental filmmakers who work with found footage, Turrell alters the conditions of spectatorship by transmuting his source material.

While the Magnatrons reference the small format common to home viewing between the 1950s and the 1980s, Turrell's most important interventions in the expanded history of moving images reference the large scale screens of the movie palace and the immersive environments of the panorama. Turrell's Aperture works (also called Space Divisions) consist of large, light-emitting apertures cut in the wall whose horizontal, rectangular dimensions resemble the aspect ratios of standard or wide screen formats, as well as the multiple screen projections ubiquitous in the contemporary art world. Yet unlike the projection screens they echo, which imaginarily signify three dimensionality, the apparent flatness of these screens dissolve as the viewers recognize them as architectural portals that open up to immeasurable light-filled spaces. Of course, as in the *mise-en-abîme* of cinema, the perception of endless depth is illusory: the illuminated space only appears to extend infinitely. Yet rather than placing objects or textual references in abyssal relation to each other, Turrell situates the bodies of viewers themselves 'in abyss' in order to expand their perception beyond the conventional frames offered by cinema and architecture. Transfixed by the wide-screen shaped aperture of *St. Elmo's Breath* (1992) as the changes of light created endless variations of perception, I couldn't help but wonder how I had suddenly developed so much patience to sit and watch this luminous absence. Was it the absence of the object or the 'image' that made this experience so different from watching moving image art in a museum? The most frequent method of showing films within the gallery space often leaves a cinephile and film scholar like myself with the distressing feeling of having missed everything. Here, there is neither an "imperative" to be mobile nor a "thing" to miss.¹⁵ Time is voluntary, the experience of duration non-coercive: the longer one sits, the longer one is enchanted. Whereas wide-screen

technology and fixed viewing times historically attempted to redeem the cinema from its devastating competition with television through the pleasurable disciplining of the spectator, the Aperture works redeem the act of viewing from coercion.

Moving far beyond the kitsch effects of 3-D cinema or the endless referentiality of postmodern visual culture, Turrell's immersive environments use light to transform the depth perception of viewers in ways that re-sensitize us to the wondrous, unknowable nature of the phenomenal world. Recalling the nineteenth century panoramas which were one of the many precursors to early cinema, Turrell's Ganzfelds immerse the spectator in rooms of gradually shifting, brilliant light. Through the "controlled use of light, coved corners and an inclined floor," the Ganzfelds artificially create "the phenomenon of the total loss of depth perception."¹⁶ In the Ganzfelds, viewers are

⁸ In her attempt to define what might constitute cinema's "medium specificity" in our era of digital technology and radical changes in exhibition practices, Balsom argues for a medium that is irreducibly multifaceted. "It encompasses single-channel works alongside multiscreen projection, film as well as video, looped exhibition and scheduled screening times, an interest in the virtuality of a represented world or in the phenomenology of spectatorship, an espousal or rejection of narrative, and works made expressly for a gallery context and those made for traditional cinematic exhibition but now transported into the white cube." Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, p. 12.

⁹ Richard, "James Turrell and the Nonvicarious Sublime," pp. 93-4.

¹⁰ Richard, "James Turrell and the Nonvicarious Sublime," p. 97.

¹¹ Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," p. 12.

¹² Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space*, p. 115.

¹³ Richard, "James Turrell and the Nonvicarious Sublime," p. 95.

¹⁴ Richard, "James Turrell and the Nonvicarious Sublime," p. 96.

¹⁵ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, p. 56.

¹⁶ Definition from James Turrell's official website: <<http://jamesturrell.com/artworks/by-type/-type-ganzfields>>. Accessed August 30, 2014.

invited to enter the seemingly infinite illuminated spaces that remained beyond the architectural threshold in the Aperture works. In *Breathing Light* (2013), a Ganzfeld created for the 2013 retrospective of Turrell's work at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, viewers queued up and waited to ascend a small staircase through which they entered a glowing architectural aperture. My partner and I waited and watched as others crossed the threshold and became corporeally reoriented. What could they possibly be experiencing in that lambent space that could so defamiliarize their movements and gestures? As Buster Keaton slips through the screen in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), we too entered. Moving around as we explored the effects of changing light and color in the cornerless space, I felt unmoored by luminosity. Where did this space end, and how had I never experienced vision so intensely? Bathed in bluish violet light, my partner and I were electrified by the sudden appearance of each other's flesh in black and white. Seeing David as he would appear in an old movie without the mediation of lens, screen, or digital manipulation, I was mesmerized by details of his face that I had grown habituated to not seeing. Knowing but not seeing how my face had also been transformed, I experienced the wonder of perceptual mutuality. When was the last time we had gazed at each other with such rapt attention? How was it possible, after all of these years together, to see each other anew? Looking back through the threshold into the antechamber, we noticed how the once white walls had been transformed green by the orange light inside. Having been taught as a child that color is only an effect of light, I finally understood how deeply perception depends upon the relation between our physiological bodies and the environment.

In *24/7*, Jonathan Crary describes the contemporary world as a "disenchanted one" in which "the homogeneity of the present is an effect of the fraudulent brightness that presumes to extend everywhere and to preempt any mystery or unknowability."¹⁷ Though artificially constructed, the luminosity of Turrell's Ganzfeld "defies the purposes of disenchantment" by working against the profound estrangement that characterizes much of our contemporary relation to technology.¹⁸ There is no way to experience this without being present, but this is just a part what poet Frances Richard means by her term the "nonvicarious sublime." Through its intensification of experience, the Ganzfeld makes us aware of the immense perceiving capacity of our bodies, and thereby restores the sense of mystery that constitutes an enchanted world. Inhabiting Turrell's seemingly infinite, radiant space not only transformed our perception of depth, but also yielded a feeling of limitlessness that can only be described as "oceanic." In this seemingly spatially unbounded environment, we experience what Kaja Silverman has

so beautifully described as "the unfathomable totality of which we are a part."¹⁹

MEETING

In the past year, there have been three major American retrospectives of Turrell's work: at the LACMA, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. Yet rather than attempt to digest the enormous body of work exhibited at these diverse locations, I will focus the rest of this essay on an experiential engagement with the Turrell piece that I have come to know best: *Meeting*. Conceived in 1978 but not completed until 1986, *Meeting* is a site-specific installation located at the old schoolhouse in Long Island City, Queens that houses the contemporary art museum PS1. This is the Turrell of my familiar. Located on the third floor of the museum, *Meeting* is comprised of a square room with a rectangular opening cut directly into the ceiling that exposes the sky. *Meeting*, the second Skyspace created by Turrell, invites visitors to experience the changing hues of the sky as dusk approaches.

Accidentally discovering *Meeting* for the first time well over a decade ago, I had a slight sense of trepidation as I entered the room. Had I misunderstood the sign? Was I trespassing? Set unremarkably amidst the museum's administrative offices, *Meeting* catches its viewers unprepared. Upon entering, one physically detects the difference in the atmosphere before one sees or understands its source. For even before the mind can process the room's architectural distinctions, the body registers a different quality of air and temperature. A slight chill, an oddly engulfing sense of hollowness. Not realizing that an artery of the building has been slit, one nonetheless senses the free flow of air. Scanning the room to find what I am 'supposed' to look at, I see a few people assembled on and around the room's benches as if in a trance. Many are looking up, so I do as well. Amazingly, I still don't connect what I see to what I feel. A blue screen in the ceiling seems yet another clever innovation in moving image installation. After a while, a wide-winged bird soars overhead and then vanishes beyond the frame. Startled by its quick appearance, I put it together. Creating a space for people to become collectively enchanted by a new perception of the ordinary world, *Meeting* transforms the sky itself into cinema. Barbara Rubin would be pleased.

Over the years, I return, again and again. With its endlessly changing palette, *Meeting* is the exquisite color field painting for which I have been searching my entire life, a celestial stain that bleeds out its pigment every night. Even as a painter, I struggle to describe the sensations that emerge over the course of a single afternoon's viewing. Are there more words for blue or more blues for wonder? As the light deepens, one's eyes open wider to drink it. I am

a camera and the apertures of my consciousness expand. Clouds drift and meander, or gather and march. On any given day, an infinity of atmospheric variation and, simultaneously, nothing of particular note. Rather than preparing oneself to absorb the endless flow of spectacle, one re-attunes one's body to the unfolding temporality of natural light. But why catalogue the sky's 'special effects' when one might just experience them?

Inviting an audience to experience illuminated moving images and their effects on our bodies, *Meeting* is profoundly cinematic. Although it was made at the dawn of an era of the proliferation of screens in the museum, *Meeting* lacks any screen. Reformulating the relation between the body and the built environment, *Meeting* creates a meditative space for viewers to experience the ordinary majesty of celestial phenomena. Going far beyond experimental filmmaker Jordan Belson's abstract animations, Turrell's *Meeting* is a truly cosmic cinema.

Like the Lumière's early *actualité* films, *Meeting* re-frames the ordinary world and thus restores it to perceptibility. Yet surprisingly, *Meeting* is cinematic only by dispensing with many of the elements that traditionally comprise cinema's technological apparatus: No birds have been sent from central casting to fly at the perfect moment of periwinkle; no cameras, film, or projectors are employed in its construction. Unlike the Ganzfelds, which enhance perception by saturating the viewer in unnatural light, *Meeting* involves a desaturation and stripping away. In contrast to what Krauss critiqued as a "hyperspace," this simple chamber refuses to house any illusions that might contribute to what Frederic Jameson theorized as "the hysterical sublime."²⁰ In its simplicity of construction and modest mode of address, *Meeting* is an antidote to that hysteria and the fragmented and technologized subjects that it helps to generate.

Of course, this is not to say that there is no apparatus. Recall that early films weren't considered cinema until they got out of the box (kinetoscope) and into a space that could sustain collective viewing. Whereas the radical shifts in cinema's architectures of exhibition that have occurred over the last two decades often produce dissatisfying engagements with moving image artworks, Turrell's meticulous attention to the architecture of perception is in large part how he creates such wondrous effects. However dematerialized light may be, our perception of it is nonetheless abetted and altered by material forms. Turrell knows and doesn't try to deny the fact that what we perceive depends upon, and changes, based upon how we perceive it. Certain simple architectural elements of what we used to call the cinema deliberately shape the relationship between perception and space: after moving through a threshold denoting the theater from the rest of the building, one encounters

seats, a frame, and house lighting. Built-in plywood benches lining the periphery of the room invite viewers not to pass through but rather to dwell. Artificial lights installed at the top of the room produce an orange glow that intensifies the deepening indigo of the penumbral sky. Belying the piece's significant hardware, including a gliding door on the roof that seals the room during closing hours and inclement weather, the beveled edge of the aperture makes it appear as if the plaster that frames our view is no thicker than a slice of paper.

Yet even with these interventions, *Meeting* fulfills André Bazin's oft-maligned dream: here, the image has truly become the object.²¹ This is not a representation of celestial illumination, but rather the sky itself. Such an encounter with the real is bound to bewilder. *Meeting* inverts Plato's allegory of the cave. Rather than misperceiving projections for reality, I misperceive reality for a projection. So accustomed am I to illusion.

BEING IN TIME

Temporarily removed from the rush of contemporary life, our experience of time changes. One rests without waiting. Even I, incorrigible jitterbug, become moth. I want nothing so much as to stay, to linger by the light. Unlike the bad habits I have developed watching moving image installation, here I do not wait with baited breath for the unknown to happen so that I can consume it and be on my way. After all, what happens is easily anticipated: eventually, it gets dark. Duration, so often wielded as a weapon in contemporary art, intensifies and prolongs the experience but it does not determine it. Unlike the

¹⁷ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso: 2013), p. 19.

¹⁸ Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity--Walter DeMaria, Diller + Scofidio, James Turrell, Andy Goldsworthy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 94. Here, Kofsky is not referring specifically to the Ganzfelds, but to Turrell's larger practice.

¹⁹ Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 28.

²⁰ Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," p. 12. Quoting Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1990), p. 34.

²¹ André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema? Volume One*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 9-16.

continuously looping video in the gallery space, there is a start and end time to the artwork that varies based upon seasonal changes and the weather: Meeting does not open until late afternoon and closes after dusk. While Turrell intends for viewers to experience the entire transformation of the sky as day turns to night, one is welcome but not obliged to stay this long. Yet even when one fails to experience Turrell's ideal conditions of viewing, one's perception of time is nonetheless transformed by the workaday contingencies of this makeshift temple in the metropolis.

Jonathan Crary has recently theorized the "24/7" world of twenty-first century capitalism as being defined by a principle of nonstop activity that is equally indifferent to the daily rotation of the planet and the fragility of human life. In an environment that disavows its relation to the natural rhythms of life, human beings are re-regulated to adjust their internal, organic clocks to the "uninterrupted operation of markets [and] information networks."²² While a "24/7" environment has the semblance of a social world," Crary argues that it actually suspends living by making it conform to machinic modes of production. Moving beyond the clock time of the industrial age, the 24/7 world "undermines [the] distinctions between day and night, between light and dark, and between action and repose."²³ In a late capitalist world hostile to unproductivity, even periods of rest have come under siege.

Offering a place of repose and regeneration in which perceivers become re-aligned with the "daily rotation of the planet" and re-sensitized to the "embeddedness" of even the most urban lives in the natural alternations between light and darkness, Meeting defies the "static redundancy" of time that characterizes late capitalism.²⁴ Turrell is not the only artist – filmmaker or otherwise – to be concerned with marking time. Made in 1964, Andy Warhol's notorious film *Empire* is an 8 hour and five minute silent film of New York City's Empire State Building, shot with an immobile camera from "around sunset to the very dead of night."²⁵ An epic exercise in duration, as well as a marvelously meditative experience for those who actually experience the film in its entirety, *Empire* is, like Meeting, an exploration of what happens to our perception of light-mediated-by-architecture as it changes over time. As in Wallace Stevens's poem "Anecdote of the Jar," in these works an aspect of the built environment – a skyscraper, a window – function as the control through which the wilderness of the darkening surround is framed and becomes perceptible.²⁶ More recently, Christian Marclay's astonishing 24-hour epic *The Clock* (2010) meticulously arranges scenes from movies and television that explicitly reference the passage of clock time so that the film installation progresses in "real time"

over the course of an entire day and night. Encouraging viewers to remain vigilant for a full twenty-four hours in order to perceive the ceaseless mechanized wonders of keeping time in a new spectacular form, Marclay's work embodies the 24/7 ethic of the world in which we live.

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

James Turrell's Meeting is a departure from that world, and a welcome reminder of our relation to the organic time of the cosmos. Rejecting the incessant activity demanded by late capitalism, Meeting remakes the museum into a "site of sanctuary from the determinations of the market" and the mechanized temporality that it insists upon.²⁷ By inviting viewers to sit for an extended time and attune themselves to our movement in the solar system, Meeting refuses the imperative to be mobile that Balsom and Crary critique. As in the Buddhist meditational practice of sitting, unrushed occupation of the gallery space allows participants to refocus on rhythms of the body and the analogous inhalation of breath and absorption of light (thematized in the Ganzfeld's title Breathing Light). As in much of Turrell's work, the light in Meeting cleanses. One discovers that it is possible to perceive the world anew simply by slowing down and experiencing it.

Turrell has observed that by framing the sky, Meeting brings it down to us: "A lot of times, we look at the sky, thinking it would be far away," he writes, "but I make these spaces [...] which bring the sky right down on the top of the space where you're in, so it's no longer far away, you're in close contact with it." But, in spite of Turrell's suggestions to the contrary, the perception of unrealizable distance and magnitude is essential to Meeting's impact. The sky might be right above us, but even with the aerospace technology that Turrell often uses, it cannot be mastered or archived. The world exceeds us, and yet we are part of it. The perception of aura in Turrell's most modest works does not depend upon the mystification of the audience but upon the cultivation of our own capacity for perception beyond the limiting patterns of the socio-cultural environment.

Critics have made much of Turrell's Quaker upbringing, and in Meeting the title foregrounds the relationship between spirituality, perception, and communality. While Turrell has constructed a Skyspace that serves as a Quaker Meeting House (the Live Oak Friends Meeting House in Houston, Texas), PS1's more secular Meeting encourages a different way of being together. While not everybody observes the silence that may or not may be intended, some variety of religious experience happens when we are together in that room. While I would like to claim that nobody ever checks their phones when they are in there, it is simply not true.

Regardless, a strange calm settles. From the moment one enters, one is engulfed by a sense of collective extrospection. A sense of being together emerges in spite of our tendency towards distraction, and it slowly re-integrates us. Mind you, I am not trying to claim that Meeting dissolves our cynicism or returns us to the kind of innocent state of perception that Stan Brakhage fantasized about in *Metaphors on Vision*.²⁸ After all, this would be the most escapist contrivance of all. By providing world enough and time to become conscious of our embodied kinship with the "flesh of the world," Meeting catalyzes a different relation to being.²⁹

In Christopher Isherwood's 1952 novel *The World in the Evening*, the narrator is a lapsed Quaker who is deeply cynical about the presumptions of his former religion. In spite of his reluctance, he is compelled to visit a spiritual Meeting with his aunt, and, to his surprise, finds himself deeply moved by the experience. Isherwood's gorgeous description of this character's re-awakening vividly reminds me of my own experience of Turrell's work: "[...] the silence, in its odd way, was coming to life. Was steadily filling up the bare white room, like water rising in a tank. Every one of us contributed to it, simply by being present. Togetherness grew and tightly enclosed us, until it seemed that we must all be breathing in unison and keeping time with our heartbeats. It was massively alive and, somehow, unimaginably ancient, like the togetherness of Man in the primeval caves..."³⁰

In the twentieth century, the cinema often functioned as a variety of religious experience for a secular audience that nonetheless needed the spiritual balm of enchanted collectivity. In our digital era, in which the collective viewing of cinema has been eroded by the profusion of personal viewing devices and the re-placing of cinema's architectures of exhibition, the communal basis of cinema continues to lose ground. I do not mourn the great temples of the silver screen as much as I mourn their function as conduits of togetherness. Whatever blessings our virtual networks have brought us, they have ravaged the non-virtual sense of collectivity that was so sustaining at the movies and elsewhere. While we certainly don't need cinema to appreciate the magnificent work of James Turrell, perhaps cinema might learn something valuable from Turrell's re-imagination of a perceiving public. For although cinema always relied upon technology, its magic was never in the can.

²² Crary, 24/7, p. 8, p. 9. Crary quotes Teresa Brennan's term "bioderegulation" from *Globalization and Its Terrors: Daily Life in the West* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 19–22.

²³ Crary, 24/7, p. 9, p. 17.

²⁴ Crary, 24/7, p. 14, p. 11, pp. 8–9.

²⁵ J.J. Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 30.

²⁶ Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar," *Harmonium* (New York: Knopf, 1923).

²⁷ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, p. 31.

²⁸ Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision," *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Film-Making* by Stan Brakhage (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 2001). In the opening to "Metaphors on Vision," Brakhage famously asks us to: "Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green'? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color. Imagine a world before the 'beginning was the word.'" Brakhage, *Essential Brakhage*, p. 12.

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 139.

³⁰ Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 42.

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Morgan Fisher, () (2003), frame enlargements. All images courtesy the artist.

() SERIAL CHANCE: INSERTS AND INTRUDERS

JOANA PIMENTA

(It's two thirty. A torch cuts through a steel door. Two thirty-one. A circle is drawn. A hand counts money. A knife is thrown. A door is forced open. A rope is thrown. A gun is pointed at the camera, and then retreated.)

Through the opening and the closing of a parenthesis passes the film. Twenty years after *Standard Gauge* (1984), and amidst a period spent working mainly in painting and sculpture, Morgan Fisher returned to the medium whose process of production he has persistently framed and documented: film. With () (2003) he opened an aside, a suspension, to be occupied by the latent objects and gestures of cinema.

() is an assemblage of insert shots appropriated from found or collected footage. An insert shot is conventionally an informational shot, often a close up of an object, or a detail in the landscape. Inserts are instrumental to assuring continuity in narrative film. They normally convey, in detail, information that is central to the narrative, directing our attention by pointing, naming, calling, counting. They are used to repair breaks or facilitate the transition between cuts and different scales of shot.¹ But inserts are also intruders. Often improvised, not included in the

original script, or filmed by someone other than the cinematographer, they create a moment of pause or punctuation – an interruption of narrative and visual progression that lingers for an instant before being reassembled as a transition.²

¹ Frequently the insert is used to allow the editor to create flawless transitions, for instance to break with the 180 degree rule, or move between radically different scales of shots.

² Fisher writes that this relation between center and periphery that the space of the insert seems to occupy was at the origin of (). His fascination with inserts had for him to do with the way in which they function both a crucial shot in the syntax of narrative films, while being utterly marginal. Morgan Fisher, "The Seventh Annual Views from the Avant-Garde: () by Morgan Fisher," *Film Comment* (2003).

In *()*, Fisher composes the inserts into a geometry, which continuously creates and breaks its own rules. The rapid rhythm with which the inserts follow each other, their momentary exposure to projection, remains as enigmatic as the objects and gestures they reveal. Cards left on the table, letters put into pockets, buttons pushed and pressed, records played, and guns shot, succeed one another in a metered composition. If the film slows down momentarily to allow time for dialogue or a movement to finish its course, another shot quickly cuts through the space of the frame, severing all order. Their assemblage estranges any sense of logical succession — these are chance encounters taking place within the space, enclosed by the parentheses of the film.

Inserts are above all instrumental. They have a job to do, and they do it. They do little, if anything, else. Sometimes inserts are remarkably beautiful, but this beauty is usually hard to see because the only thing that registers is the news, the expository information, that the insert conveys. ... I wanted to free the inserts from their stories, I wanted them to have as much autonomy as they could. I thought that discontinuity, cutting from one film to another, was the best way to do this. It is narrative that creates the need for an insert, assigns an insert to its place and keeps it there. The less the sense of narrative, the greater the freedom each insert would have.³

Cinema exploits a panoply of objects (cameras, projectors, editing equipment) which it strives to render invisible, that simultaneously enable and are excluded from representation. In *()*, Fisher works as a collector or archivist of their residues, lifting objects from their function as narrative props to create a situation where they exist as materials, where things are in circulation and permanently change hands. The film begins with a series of hands grabbing and activating objects: guns, buttons, padlocks, cards. Tactility is recurrent throughout the piece and the hand is presented as that which introduces, points towards, or exhibits materials. *()* gives a central site as much to objects as to their movement of transference — the transference of objects between hands, and transference of things between films. It interposes a series of performing gestures that aim at taking a hold of things which seem to have a life of their own.⁴

This process of transfer *()* performs is also a process of reversal, as in a contact print. Fisher has exhibited *()*

alongside *Aspect Ratio Pieces* (2004), a series of mirrors scaled to and labeled to reflect the different image aspect ratios in film. When these mirrored surfaces are displayed in a gallery space, they not only cast back each other and the light in the room, but also the spectator standing in front of them. They create a game of simultaneous framing and reflection, object refraction and subjective projection, which mobilizes a reversal of positions. *()* displays a performance akin to these mirrored screens. Its first movement of transference reverses the status and position of these objects, sets them in motion from the periphery to the center of film. In geometry and algebra, parentheses group things together and give priority, functioning as a visual reminder of what will be collectively addressed. In the space that *()* brackets, where the dormant, lingering inserts of narrative cinema come to make a film of their own, what was once suspended and set aside is now at the core. The objects found for *()* do not originally have the status of cinematographic memorabilia; they are normally seen in passing, used as information that aides the construction of a narrative and is then discarded. Transferred to the space of these brackets they are devoid of their nature as props, and their operation becomes an assertion of their materiality, their activation as things.

The title of the film, the curved lines of the opening and closing of a space, derived from Fisher's fascination with learning that the Greek root of the word actually means the act of inserting.⁵ The parenthesis of *()* recall another circular space that is inherent to the machines and materials of cinema. Invented in 1896, the Latham Loop introduced a mechanical opening and closing of a parenthesis for recording and projecting. With the intended aim of protecting the film-strip from excessive tension and vibration, counteracting the negative effects of intermittency, it created a semi-circular space in the threading path of both machines.⁶ This latent invention inscribed a curved line through the vertical space of film in its double encounter with light: it created slack, a space of yielding between prediction and deferral, exposing to one another the frames immediately waiting to be seen and those which have already passed through. Projector and camera each are given a semi-circular space, and film turns within their loops.

Fisher, who spent many years as a technician in Hollywood, has continuously paid attention to the mechanical processes and materials of cinema. His works often mobilized iterative serial structures that exposed the mechanics of film as an object and a material, while reversing its formal and narrative



Morgan Fisher, *Aspect Ratio Pieces* (2004), installation view.

3 Fisher, “*()*,” *Film Comment* (2003).

4 I have often debated if it is not indeed in these operating hands that resides the key to the rule of the film, since regularly after a series of sequential shots of hands operating things we are shown an object on its own. However, as any rule in *()*, if it exists it is there to be broken, and I am constantly reminded of Fisher's admonition that this might not be a mystery worth solving.

5 “By chance, I learned that the root of ‘parenthesis’ is a Greek word that means the act of inserting. And so I was given the title of the film.” Fisher, “*()*,” *Film Comment* (2003).

6 “The reason these parts and their arrangement and method of operation are such important and valuable features of the invention is because their action is necessarily exceedingly rapid, and if the intermittently-feeding mechanism were heavy, so as to have much inertia, or if any considerable portion of the film or either of the reels which support it were stopped and started at each transition from picture to picture there would be such strain brought to bear on the sprocket-holes in the film as would speedily tear it adjacent to such holes, thus ruining it...” U.S. Patent for Projecting-Kinetoscope, filed 1896, patented 1902.



Morgan Fisher, *Aspect Ratio Pieces* (2004), installation view.

and formal conventions to reorder them, creating a film that could start and re-start at any point. The act of tracking where the film is initially — or at any moment — located, becomes the performance the film exhibits. Each moment of the documentation of its production leads not to its reverse shot or to the proof of its point of origin, but to a new angle, and with it a new film.⁷

Early in *The Director and his Actor . . .*, a beam of projected light cuts through the screen, directed at the audience, or perhaps at the projector standing behind it. It is as if the entire film could be condensed to this sudden interruption: two projectors facing each other, the space of making and viewing playfully brought together at the surface of the screen. *Production Stills*, released two years later (1970), mobilizes a systematic logic that is resonant of this open-ended seriality, where the order of symmetry is exposed to a constantly unfinished performance. A production still, another marginal element of film production, normally used as publicity or documentation device, becomes here the main subject. Fisher assembled a professional production crew and professional film

equipment, including a studio-size Mitchell camera, in a sound stage at UCLA. Rather than mobilizing these resources to the production of a "film," he had a photographer take Polaroid stills of the production system, and pinned them sequentially onto a white wall recorded by the camera. Fisher claims he wanted to question the idea of authorship by presenting a film as his own while at the same time giving up control of every single aspect of how the frame looked.⁸ Using a single 400 foot roll of film, Fisher conceived "literally a spatially and temporally continuous shot, within which a series of disjunctive visual events is presented."⁹ Black and white still images are re-photographed by a color film camera; the temporally and spatial continuous film image is interrupted by the noncontiguous stills; the instantaneity of the Polaroids counteracted by the complex development required by film stock; and the pristine sound produced by professional recording machines brings to the forefront what is usually excluded, the sound of the film's own making. The tautological immobility that could arise from the endless self-referentiality present in his work, of making

a film that is controlled by a system where film films film, is disrupted through the heightening of film as a generative idea that may always extend beyond this particular concrete realization.¹⁰ In *Production Stills*, the film studio and its specific processes reflect a score or a set of instructions that can be realized multiple times. There is not one standard definition of film, or a definition of film be based on materials. Instead, we confront a network of different techniques that foreground different forms of production and viewing, which are constantly shifting in articulation and interference, making it impossible to pin down "film" or "the film" to a specific moment, process or material. Instead of proposing a particular definition for the process of artistic production, Fisher presents an idea of cinema as an open system for "documenting works that have never been made as films as such" but which, in that movement, become the films themselves, opened to sampling, remaking, processing.¹¹

Fisher writes that he has often been interested in rules, influenced by the seriality of Sol LeWitt, an artist who often rendered visible the serial principle driving the process of production of a work, often including its instructions as part of the piece itself.¹²

Sol LeWitt is one of my favorite artists. A rule may be arbitrary, but it has enormous power: it provides a reason for the work to be as it is. The rule can be stated, and its being statable locates the origin of the work outside the artist. The artist didn't make the work, the rule did. The rule produced the work from which we understand the rule that produced the work. This reciprocity between rule and result leaves the artist out. ... A rule, if arbitrary at the outset, produces the effect of the inevitable.¹³

LeWitt was interested in asserting the process of production of a work, mobilizing its inherent possibility of multiplication. Similarly, in both *The Director and His Actor . . .* and *Production Stills*, Fisher engages the state-ability of the ruling principle as driving, but never closing off, the film. However, with *O*, he aimed at mobilizing a method of automatic composition, a rule that could place the work at a distance from the subjectivity of the filmmaker and invite the intrusion of the unpredictable.¹⁴ In order to do so, it seemed necessary to renders its rules opaque. Fisher claims to have wanted to release the inserts from their context, to assemble them together without producing a specific meaning or enacting a trope. To that end, he sought a principle for the combination of different shots that

⁷ Fisher is aware that playing with narrative and linguistic conventions that are essential to studio production may subvert them, revert the logics of their conventions, but never fully escapes them. Their serial, repetitive logic is mirrored in the endless iteration of the film's own operation: "... the film saves up all the reverse angles and gives them to you at the end. You do finally get the information, but drastically postponed from the moment when by convention you would receive it. So the film disobeys the law of the reverse angle, but in so doing it conforms to another conventional device of narrative construction, that of suspense: you are caused to want information, the information is withheld from you as you wonder how and when it will be given to you, then you're told, and it's over. So *The Director...* acknowledges one part of the conventions of narrative even while it works against another part." Scott MacDonald and Morgan Fisher, "Morgan Fisher: An Interview," *Film Quarterly* vol. 40, no. 3 (Spring 1987), pp. 24-33.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thom Andersen raises this question in relation to *Production Stills*, asking if the filmic apparatus can be represented in cinema only insofar as it is the only thing represented, otherwise becoming another object of representation, "film" within "a film." Andersen questions if tautology might be the only way to attain a rigorous rule; if it is by creating a closed system for cinema, which includes within itself its own process of deduction, that cinema can represent film in its serial process, transform it from a motif into a material, exhibit it as an object and a process. "But *Production Stills* also suggests, more tentatively, that the filmic apparatus can be represented in cinema only insofar as nothing outside of this apparatus is represented. Otherwise, it becomes just another object of representation. The film itself is not just a subject of the film, it is the only subject of the film, and the only possible subject of the film. The film does not simply refer to itself, it must refer to itself. It would seem then that the project of baring the apparatus can only attain rigor through tautology. The cinema becomes a closed system, and the film is composed by a process of deduction that takes place entirely within this system. Is the result a kind of cinematic solipsism? Does this evidently materialist and literalist practice of filmmaking lead to a radical idealism?" Thom Andersen, "Pebbles left on the Beach: the Films of Morgan Fisher," *Cinema Scope*, issue 38 (Spring 2009), pp. 37-43.

¹¹ Fisher remarks that "Every film is embedded, or interwoven with, the same material form. ... every film can become a part of any other film in a way that is utterly direct." MacDonald and Fisher, "Interview," *Film Quarterly* vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 24-33.



Morgan Fisher, *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm* (2009), frame enlargement.

would allow the production of cuts which refused their power of significance rendering the inserts „, which were arbitrary or entropic rather than symbolic or meaningful.¹⁵ To produce this de-localization, Fisher treated the combination of images as accidental, a series of turns or detours, which fail to congeal into a delimited, traceable map. The images in () are already *a priori* lifted or appropriated from somewhere else in the world, a spatio-temporal location that is foreign to the filmmaker. The rule for their sequencing does not give them back to a site, allude to the original, or provide a new sense of purpose. Rather, they are involved in an undecipherable structure in which images intrude and collide. Fisher claims that it is not necessary for the viewer to know what the rule is, and refuses to set us onto the detective game of looking for clues that would re-produce narrative meaning out of a new assemblage. Rather the reverse is at stake: it is important for the film that the rule remains unknowable, that it does not dictate the meaning of the succession of the shots.

At each cut I intended only discontinuity, cutting from one film to another, but beyond that nothing more. Indeed, beyond that simple device I could not intend any specific meaning, because whatever happens at each cut is the consequence of whatever two shots the rule put together, and the rule does not know what is in the shots. So what

happens specifically at each cut is a matter of chance.¹⁶

The other movement of transfer in () thus reflects its reversible geometrical order. The rules of its game are endlessly remade, since any regulating pattern that begins to be perceived is rapidly broken. The opaque rules of the piece involve the spectator in a game in which objects are activated, gathered, preserved and recombined. Each shot is deprived from its original function and thrown into the relational space of a gambling circulation, where narrative meaning and visual progression keep changing place, always happening elsewhere. Inserts are given the space of a film to display the underlying things that linger in the peripheral space, between the machines of capturing and those of projecting, but presented as instants that are given and taken away with the throw of a dice. The graphical model of () might find a resonance board, or a geometrical reflective surface, like in Robert Smithson's 1966 "Predictable Model for Unpredictable Project." Smithson laid in a square plane the numbers 1 to 18, both vertically and horizontally. The horizontal lines all read the same number (first line is only 18s, second line 17s), while vertically they present a descending countdown (18, 17, 16, ...). () operates as if it traced two curved lines at random across such a geometry, where chance and control collide. Shots become pieces to be serially combined and open to recombination.

A structuring rule is an order, like the numerals in a series, but one that releases the inserts their freedom to function as information, while also exposing them to entropy.

In 1919, Marcel Duchamp, as a wedding present to his sister Suzanne, instructed her to subject a geometry book to the elements. The book was to be suspended with strings in Suzanne's balcony, opened with the front facing the street, and hung by the corners.¹⁷ Thus exposed, the Euclidean space the book represented would be confronting "the facts of life." "The wind had to go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages... It amused me to bring the idea of happy and unhappy into readymades, and then the rain, the wind, the pages flying, it was an amusing idea."¹⁸ The impossibility of predicting the weather, or how the elements would affect the book, would introduce chaos and chance into the strict literal geometry of the object. Fisher has commented on the influence Duchamp has had on his work, and calls his film *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm* an "hommage to Duchamp," with its circular structure mirroring the rotating lines of the rotoscope.¹⁹ In its movements of transfer, () creates a rule and then exposes it to the elements, never becoming arrested or fixed. The solipsism of a tautological series in which film keeps referring back to itself is interrupted by a form of systematic iteration where things are out of place, pointing elsewhere, as inserts or intruders. Every time the dice are thrown — perhaps in a *coup d'oeil* to that other master of the parenthetical, Mallarmé — we are reminded to reset narrative expectations, to expose the order to the elements, to look in these entropic materials for a latent history of the objects of cinema. The circular space sited by () is that of film as a process, a site of transfer and reversal, which unfolds in a loop.

Joana Pimenta (b. 1986, Lisbon) works in film and video installation. Her work has been recently presented at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Fundacion Botin, Galeria da Boavista, and The Pipe Factory in Glasgow. Her short film *The Figures Carved into the Knife by the Sap of the Banana Trees* received the Pixelbunker Award for Best Short Film in the National Competition at Indielisboa '14, where it had its Portuguese premiere. She is a Teaching Fellow and PhD candidate in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University, a fellow at the Film Study Center, and is pursuing her MFA in Film/Video at the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College. She lives and works in Lisbon and Brooklyn, NY.

12 In July 1970, both *The Director and his Actor...* and *Production Stills* were included in *Information*, the exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York which claimed to be the first exhibition of Conceptual Art by a major American museum.

13 Fisher, "()", *Film Comment* (2003).

14 In his article on "The Serial Attitude," Mel Bochner has defined the serial art as the 1960s as a method wherein "the derivation of the terms or interior divisions of the work is by means of a numeral or otherwise systematically predetermined process." Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6 (December 1967). Examples of these numeral process ranged from arithmetic progression, where the numerals progress in order through addition of a constant, to rotation, where they were subject to numerous mathematical turns. Judd's method of "one thing after another" proceeded through rigorous compositions that functioned through the iteration of elements; Johns directly addressed seriality most notoriously through his number paintings; while LeWitt's seriality often made explicit an visible the rules for its production. A detailed discussion of serial art is undertaken by Scott Rothkopf in *Mel Bochner Photographs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2002).

15 Fisher, "()", *Film Comment* (2003).

16 Fisher, "()", *Film Comment* (2003).

17 The piece was titled "Readymade Mallheureux," or the unhappy readymade, (1919) and a photograph later included in one of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*.

18 Marcel Duchamp, in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1987), p. 61.

19 Morgan Fisher, "The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm," *Morgan Fisher: Writings*, (Cologne: Walther König, 2013).

SINGLE-TAKES AND GREAT COMPLEXITIES:



**A CONVERSATION WITH MORGAN FISHER
BY ENRICO CAMPORESI & RINALDO CENSI**



American artist and filmmaker Morgan Fisher (b. 1942, Washington, D.C.) is critically acclaimed for his unique avant-garde films, which investigate the definition of film itself. He has had one-person exhibitions at the Tate Modern (London), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), and Austrian Filmmuseum (Vienna), among others. He recently exhibited paintings at Bortolami Gallery in New York ("Interior Color Beauty") and at China Art Objects Galleries in Los Angeles ("Exterior and Interior Color Beauty"). Fisher is an extremely rigorous and cultivated artist, as his background in art history suggests, and he has conducted through his filmic work an in-depth analysis of the cinematographic apparatus. In this interview he discusses a wide range of topics, covering not only his personal path and work but as well as film criticism and theory, abstraction and structural film, and exploitation genre films. This interview took place in Milan, on April 1, 2012, the day after a screening of a selection of his films at O' gallery organized by *Atelier Impopulaire*, the curatorial platform run by Pia Bolognesi and Giulio Bursi.

[The recorder is activated as we discuss film criticism]

MORGAN FISHER ... People took Pauline Kael very seriously... I was not a regular reader of *The New Yorker*, but if a copy came into my hands I would look at it. She was a huge fan of Brian De Palma, which I could never understand. And recently there have been books about her, there's been a biography, and also a collection of her essays. After she died, *Artforum* invited a number of people to reminisce about her and how important she was, in what amounted to a series of eulogies. Everyone just fell in line and did what they were supposed to do and said nice things about her, except for one person, and that was Annette Michelson.² On the contrary, Michelson mentioned by name the person who did what she thought Pauline Kael should have been doing,

¹ See Brian Kellow, *Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark* (New York: Viking, 2011) and Pauline Kael, *The Age of Movies: Selected Writings*, ed. Sanford Schwartz (New York: Library of America, 2011).

² See *Artforum* 7 (March 2002), pp. 122-129. The issue featured a special on Kael entitled *Prose and Cons*, including texts by Greil Marcus, Gary Indiana, Paul Schrader, Craig Seligman, Annette Michelson and Geoffrey O'Brien.

OPPOSITE Thom Andersen and Malcolm Brodwick, — — —, aka *Short Line, Long Line*, aka *The Rock 'n Roll Film* (1967), frame enlargements. All images courtesy Morgan Fisher.

namely being serious about popular films in a more or less popular journal, and that was Manny Farber.

Can I go on more about Pauline Kael? There was a film, I forgot the title, it came out many years ago, and it was about two friends: one's an artist and he gets all the girls and the other guy is a friend who doesn't get the girls.³ That's the situation. And I happened to know someone who was an assistant editor on this film. When you finish the rough cut of a feature you invite people who don't know the material to look at it, because they have a fresh eye and can see things you hadn't, and I was one of these people because I knew the assistant editor and also because I had some experience with editing. There was a sex scene where there was the artist guy and a woman, and she was lit in a very unflattering way, but there was nothing to cut to, because the director didn't shoot what's called coverage. That means that you have at least one other angle that you can use. So they had to use this unflattering shot because they had no coverage. Then I read that Pauline Kael criticized the editors for not protecting this woman, as if she somehow knew that they had an alternative, but I knew they didn't. She was pretending that she had somehow been intimately involved with the production, that she somehow had access to the film in a way that the ordinary people who see the film did not. That's an example. But another example is in her review of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.⁴ There is a scene where someone, maybe Harrison Ford, is rolling down a track in an old mine inside a mountain and I think there's cutting back and forth between him and someone on another track, and she said something like: "You can imagine the editors cackling with delight as they cut this sequence." It's not the same as her pretending to know that the editors could have protected the actress but failed to, but it's similar in that she's reminding you that she knows there is this thing called post-production, where the film gets put together, as if you don't. I mean, I don't know if the editors were cackling or not, they were just doing their job! But people took her seriously! I know this is really unkind of me ...

Now, about Brian De Palma, he made a film called *Blow Out* (1981), and of course it's a remake of *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), in the same way he also made a remake of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), right?⁵ This is technical but I think it's also very important ... In *Blow Out*, the whole thing is based on a tape recording the hero made and a succession of stills from a movie that someone else made. He syncs them up, and what is revealed is that the blowout was caused by a gunshot, is that correct?

RINALDO CENSI From a series of stills, I think. At first he makes a film out of stills and then there's somebody else who gives him the 16mm film, so for the second time he works with a better material.

MF There is a hidden assumption in this, that the camera is running at 24 frames per second and so is in sync with the sound, and the chances of that happening are zero. So the premise of the movie falsifies a technical fact of production. I found this maddening. And there were other aspects of this scene and its aftermath that I found annoying, but I can't recall the details.

I am a total *literalist* about things like this as I think you may know from my films. I have respect for sync sound, I have respect for the relation that is created in production but you've got to have special equipment, it's not just a question of turning on any old movie camera ... and De Palma didn't care and of course the audience ... I mean only people who know production understand that this is a falsification and they might get indignant or not—probably not—but audiences don't care because he gives them a movie that produces satisfaction.

ENRICO CAMPORESI When did you get into film production?

RC Was it the end of the Sixties?

MF Well, it depends on how strictly we interpret this question of film production, because I had a movie camera when I was a kid, and I made these truly boring home movies. But I'll say one thing: I tended not to move the camera, for whatever it's worth: for the first roll I ever shot I did not move the camera. I made one fiction film with my little Brownie camera—it wasn't even a Super 8 camera, it was a plain 8mm camera—⁶ and it was called *Tarzan and the Gorillas*. It was a melodrama, and I don't know if I still have it but I think I can say this without sounding as if I'm boasting, that I seemed to have an understanding of what it took to actually lay out shots so that they would cut. In fact I cut in the camera, and I shot in sequence, so that what came out of the camera was the finished film. There were some nice pans following the action, and people entering from out of frame, and things like that. I don't know what happened to it but that was the one fiction film I've completed.

Years later I went to college. I studied art history at Harvard⁷ because I liked looking at paintings—but I had a really hard time writing about them. I was also doing some artwork at the time, like *bad* paintings, *bad*

work on paper, but I also made another fiction film, in 8mm, which is unfinished and is lost. Even if I had finished it, the first film was better. This second film was shot in black-and-white, on a beautiful stock made by German company called Perutz.

EC It's the same brand that Jack Smith used for some parts of *Flaming Creatures* (1963), I think.⁸

MF Really? Well, it's a beautiful black-and-white, a really beautiful film stock, it looked fabulous.

Then I went to film school, at the University of Southern California and it was an unhappy experience because the teachers were, I thought, scandalously bad, with the exception of the guy who taught cinematography. Basically it was a glorified trade school, or a kind of technical school. I started in autumn 1964, and that's why I went to California.⁹ There weren't many film programs at the time, perhaps three: UCLA, USC and, I think, NYU.

I didn't have respect for my teachers and I made a mistake of letting one of them know it, which did not make him happy. This was a man who was writing a book, and he had this unbelievably unsophisticated attitude about film. I'll give an example of his pedagogy: a moving point generates a line; a moving line generates a plane; a moving plane generates a volume. That's it. It didn't matter what the image was, it reduced the image to a kind of diagram, as if the diagram were somehow the substance of the image. He thought of himself as an intellectual and I think he was compiling a manuscript that he intended to publish.

Anyway, the Department of Cinema at USC was entirely aimed at getting people into the industry. When you directed your advanced projects the production was based on the Hollywood model. You were the writer, but the editor was assigned to you, so you couldn't even edit the film you directed! You shot the first film without sound but you were expected to add it in post-production, and you were expected to shoot the second film in sync sound, which of course was an anticipation of the fact that you will be in the industry, where sync was the norm.

That department was founded by Slavko Vorkapich. He had done films that in principle were not different from music videos. He would start with an existing piece of music, and then he would shoot and cut material to accord with it. For example, there's a piece by Mendelssohn, I think it's *Fingal's Cave* something. The shots are waves breaking on the rocks, and the shots are chosen and cut to produce an accord between the patterns and movements of the water and

the music.¹⁰ So, since this was the man who founded the department, cutting was privileged—and sync too.

I wasn't very happy there but that's where I met Thom Andersen. That relationship has been enormously important for me. Thom has helped me with my films and I have helped him with his films. He finished

3 *Heartbreakers* (Bobby Roth, 1984).

4 *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Steven Spielberg, 1984) was written by Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz, together with George Lucas. Huyck and Katz directed ten years before the independent horror *Messiah of Evil* (1974) for which Morgan Fisher was initially the editor and in which he also appears as an assistant in an art gallery (this story is also notably told by Fisher himself in his film *Standard Gauge*, 1984). See also Kael, "The Current Cinema: A Breeze, a Bawd, a Bounty," *The New Yorker*, June 11, 1984, p. 100.

5 *Obsession* (Brian De Palma, 1976).

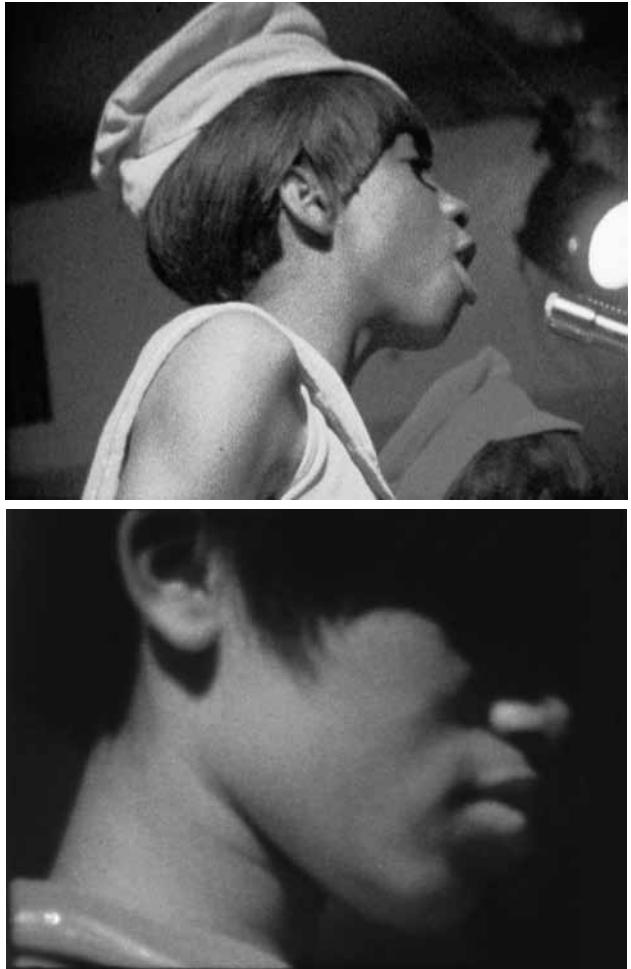
6 The kind of film for this camera is called regular 8mm or double 8mm. It is 16mm wide but is perforated for 8mm frames. The roll of film goes through the camera twice. The first time one half of the width is exposed, then the take-up spool becomes the feed spool, and the roll is run through the camera a second time, exposing the other half of the width. After development the film is slit down the middle, creating two pieces of film each 8mm wide, and the half that was exposed second is spliced to the tail of the first.

7 Fisher completed his courses for a B.A. in Fine Arts from Harvard in 1964.

8 "*Flaming Creatures* was shot on a variety of black-and-white reversal film stocks, including such exotic brands as Agfa-Ferrania and Dupont, stolen from the outdated film bin at Camera Barn. (According to [Tony] Conrad, Smith made particular use of Perutz Tropical film—a specialized German-made film designed for shooting at high temperatures—because, thanks to its counter location, it was the easiest to shoplift.)" Jim Hoberman, *On Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc* (New York: Granary Books, 2001), p. 27.

9 Fisher was enrolled in the University of Southern California Department of Cinema M.A. Program in 1964-1965.

10 The film is *Moods of the Sea* (Slavko Vorkapich; John Hoffmann, 1942) and it features The Hebrides overture (also known as *Fingal's Cave*) by Felix Mendelssohn.



Thom Andersen and Malcolm Brodwick,
— — —, aka *Short Line, Long Line*, aka *The Rock 'n Roll Film* (1967), frame enlargements.

USC and went to UCLA to do his graduate work, and I went to UCLA too, because USC was so dreadful, but I didn't get very far. I started to shoot a film that owed a lot to Susan Sontag's essay on Bresson, which I think is a great essay.¹¹ It was published in *Seventh Art*, a magazine that has since disappeared. What was important to me about the essay was the idea of giving things away ahead of time. But at the same time I very much liked the films of Budd Boetticher.

RC Well, Bresson and Boetticher are not that far!

MF I really admired *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* (Budd Boetticher, 1960), and what I wanted to do was—don't laugh—a film that was a gangster film but as if Robert Bresson had made it.

RC I think that when I saw *Ride Lonesome* (1959) by Boetticher, I found that there was something really close to Bresson!

MF I can't say that I was that sophisticated, I just thought of both as models, directors I admired, so ... why not combine them?

RC We had the same feeling!

MF Oh, I'm so glad to hear this! Now, I am digressing, but not really. The University of Southern California was quite close to downtown Los Angeles and at the time it was like 42nd Street in New York, there were all these old movie theaters. They played American genre film from the Fifties, and it was really cheap. You could see a triple feature for 50 cents. And then there was this other street, a few blocks over that was more like a skid row, with two theaters, and there you could see a triple bill for a quarter. In those theaters people were coming in just to get out of the rain, but they were screening great genre films from the Fifties. When I was in college I didn't think about these films. Most new Hollywood films then were pretty bad, so I was looking mostly at

foreign films. But when I was a child I loved John Ford, I mean I loved his films but I realized afterwards that those movies I liked were made by Ford. When I was a child I saw *The Quiet Man* (1952), *The Long Gray Line* (1955), and *The Wings of Eagles* (1957), and I thought they were fantastic, then it turns out that they were made by one of the great directors—period. I loved Aldrich too. I saw *Vera Cruz* (1954) when it came out, which I think is a great film, and I saw films by Raoul Walsh, *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1951) and *Distant Drums* (1951). And I saw *The Naked Spur* (1953) directed by Anthony Mann. But when I was older I didn't appreciate genre films. So I started going to these films in Los Angeles. There was more Aldrich, *Apache* (1954) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), oh and Fuller! I had never seen a Sam Fuller film until I was in Los Angeles: I saw *Underworld U.S.A.* (1961), *China Gate* (1957), *House of Bamboo* (1955), *The Naked Kiss* (1964) when it came out, and so on. It was actually Thom Andersen who introduced me to this world. He also introduced me to *Film Culture* magazine.

There was also a lot of Boetticher at these downtown theaters, like *Ride Lonesome*, *Seven Men from Now* (1956), *The Tall T* (1957)—and they're just fabulous films. *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* especially had a huge impact on me, so that was the origin for this film that I was starting to shoot at UCLA, but there were problems with the script and I didn't finish it. Then I got kicked out of school for refusing to pay the non-resident tuition. That was the end of my education, so the Boetticher-Bresson film is just a few snippets in a can somewhere.

To go back to Susan Sontag, there was not only the essay on Bresson that I appreciated but also *Notes on 'Camp'*, which was later included in *Against Interpretation*.¹² Also her early essay on Godard is really good, it helped me understand why I liked Godard so much.¹³ When I was in college I have been a kind of art-house snob, which was just stupid. So when I got to Los Angeles, I met Thom and he opened my eyes to many things, like the world of genre filmmaking, which has enormous appeal for me, and Thom was also the one who taught me to like Warhol, about whom I had been very skeptical. I owe him a lot!

RC And Thom Andersen wrote a beautiful text on Warhol.

MF He wrote that soon after I met him. We had gone together to see *Camp* (1965), the film he wrote about. He was an undergraduate, he was probably twenty-one, twenty-two years old. It's one of the best essays on

Warhol, it's short but very suggestive and it anticipates so very much!¹⁴ There's a wonderful sentence at the end, where he's talking about how the long take in *Camp* embodies an alternative to montage: "the camera just doesn't turn away." The final sentence is wonderful, it goes like this: "The indivisible other side of objectivity is faith." Warhol had faith that his actors' personalities would stand up to the merciless objectivity of a continuous take.

When I got kicked out of UCLA I stayed in Los Angeles for six months and then I went back to Cambridge. A couple of years passed and that's when I started making my own films, in 16mm. Those were the first films I finished, radically different from what film school tried to teach me or would have taught me if I had been receptive to it.

Thom shot a film called *Melting* in 1965 when we were still at USC. It was a 200-foot shot, so it was 5 and a half minutes long: it's a close-up of an ice-cream sundae in a dish. It was shot at 4 frames per second, so you see the action of melting that took half an hour condensed and accelerated into 5 and a half minutes in one single shot. If you know the show that Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss curated in Paris, in one of the essays in the catalogue there is this fabulous quote by Yve-Alain: "Melting is the entropic activity *par excellence*".¹⁵ Thom had discovered the power of melting in 1965.

This film is distributed by the Film-makers' Coop and in the catalogue there is this very suggestive note by Thom in which he talks precisely about entropy, I don't remember if he uses the word, but he says that what

¹¹ Susan Sontag, "Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson," *Seventh Art* 2.3 (Summer 1964), pp. 2-7, 23-25.

¹² Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Partisan Review* 31 (Fall 1964), pp. 515-530.

¹³ Susan Sontag, "Godard," *Partisan Review* (June 1968), pp. 290-314.

¹⁴ See Thom Andersen, "Film: Camp, Andy Warhol," *Artforum* 4 (Summer 1966), p. 58.

¹⁵ See Yve-Alain Bois, "Entropy," in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone, 1997), pp. 73-78.

the track is a matter of chance. It's about rock 'n' roll culture in Los Angeles at the time. The title of the film is actually a long line and a short line: — — [Short Line Long Line] (1967), and my film () [Parentheses] (2003) pays a sort of tribute to Thom's film its graphic title.

Thom's film was at the New York Film-makers' Coop for years and years, it was a beautiful Kodachrome print and it never rented. *Melting* rented all the time and the print is now really beaten up. Now, I'm happy to say that I am somewhat responsible for making — — better known. My film () was shown at the New York Film Festival in 2004 and I wanted to show Thom's film before mine, in order make it more visible and also to acknowledge that it was important for (). So they screened Thom's film before mine, and it was a huge success, and everyone started renting it like crazy! And everybody said: "Wow, the print is really in a good shape," but that's because for years no one rented it! People loved it, and it's a wonderful film.

EC I was thinking about the first film you screened yesterday, *Documentary Footage* (1968), did you make it while in Los Angeles?

MF I made it in Cambridge. When I was in California the first time I didn't make any films. I mean, I had made a student film in USC, an exercise, which I don't consider part of my work and I didn't finish the Bresson-Boetticher film. There were three 8mm films that I made for fun when I was at USC but they're lost.

¹⁶ See François Truffaut, "Journal of *Fahrenheit 451*", *Cahiers du Cinéma* in English 5 (November 1966), pp. 10-22; 6 (December 1966), pp. 10-23; 7 (January 1967), pp. 8-19.

¹⁷ Thom Andersen, "Pebbles Left on the Beach," *Cinema Scope* 38 (Spring 2009), in *Morgan Fisher. Two Exhibitions*, eds. Sabine Folie and Susanne Titz (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011), pp. 195-205.

¹⁸ Jean-Louis Baudry, "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," *Cinéthique* 7/8 (1970). The essay was first translated in an abridged version by Alan Williams in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1974-1975) under the title "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." A revised and unabridged translation also by Williams was published in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Phil Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286-298.

Documentary Footage was one of the first grown-up films I made.

EC Where did you screen it first? How did you start screening your films?

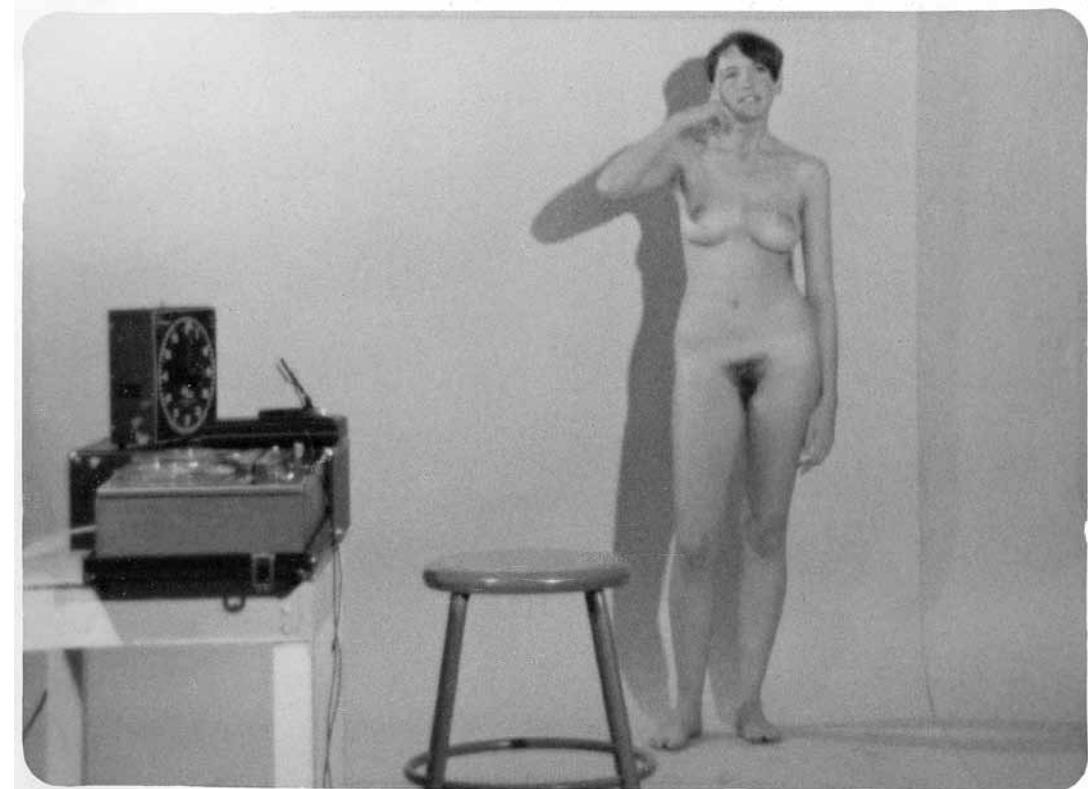
MF At the time, the way you entered the world of experimental filmmaking was by submitting your films to festivals, but my films kept being rejected. It was a question of finding the right festival. I forgot where this film was first shown but it was brought to the attention of the people who were doing the selection for Oberhausen, so the film was shown there in 1969 or maybe 1970. I thought, well, this can only lead to bigger and better things at Oberhausen, but it didn't. They didn't accept a film I made a few years later.

The woman in the film died three or four years ago. When I shot the film she was twenty years old. She was an amazing personality, and that was the only film I've ever cast, because I needed someone who could make the film what it is. I used to be defensive about this film, because of the reactions from feminists. Also, last year, I screened it in Harvard and there was a woman teacher there who gave me a really hard time. I tried to argue with her, I said, repeating something I had written before: "Look, this film is a machine for generating privileged moments." I think Truffaut invented this expression to describe how there are moments in film that escape the conscious control of the people who are making the film—writer, director, actors, and so on—so that you see some truth that is not a part of the program, so to speak, of the film.¹⁶ I don't think she was convinced by my argument! I think that my films in general are about renouncing the privileges of directing—I think this is very clear in *Documentary Footage*. She does things and says things that are beyond the power of anyone but her to invent, and it's her performance that makes the film.

EC Did you get in touch with others filmmakers after showing your films in New York or did you already know somebody?

MF I forget how I met people but I eventually met them: Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Peter Kubelka, Ernie Gehr, Barry Gerson, and Paul Sharits ... Paul stayed at my house. Peter was also a guest at my house. People would tour with their films, so that's how I met everyone.

I also had a screening at Anthology Film Archives when it was in Wooster Street before this total transformation of SoHo, and I think that's the only



Morgan Fisher, *Documentary Footage* (1968), frame enlargement.

time my films have been ever shown at Anthology. After all, I'm not in the Essential Cinema.

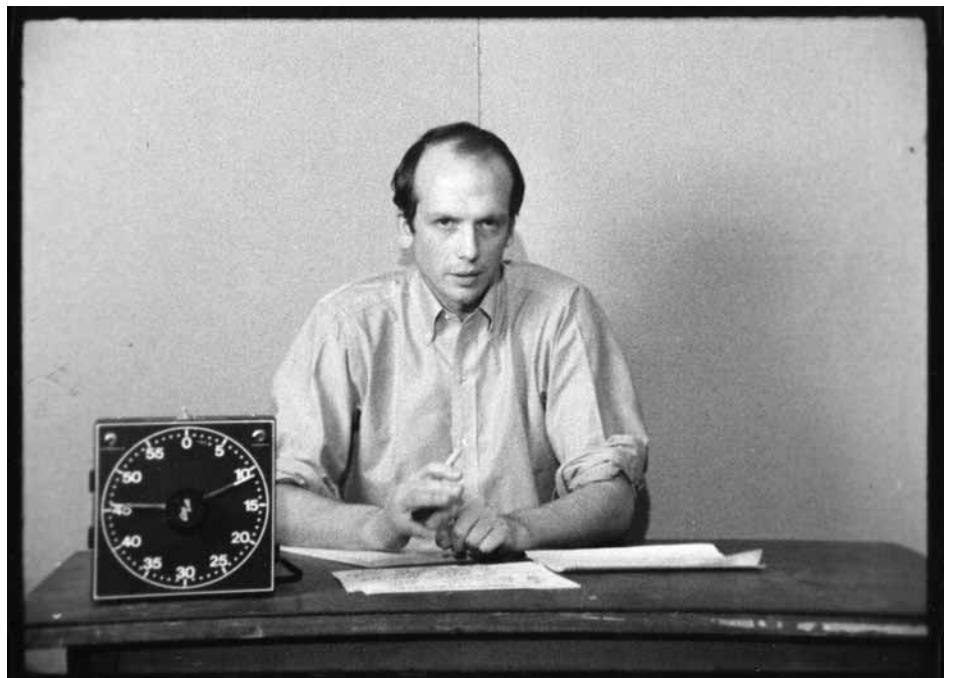
EC How come you were excluded from this group?

MF I think it's for two reasons. First: I didn't live in New York. More importantly, I didn't repudiate the commercial motion picture industry. My films were in a relation to it, even though they are critical of it. They acknowledge that the industry is there. What's the point of pretending that it's not? At the time I started, what was privileged in the experimental film world was a certain model of production, shooting silent, often hand-held. All these people had Bolex cameras, and the kind of films that you shot with a Bolex consisted of relatively short shots without sync sound. As we know, later that changed. In 1994 I wrote an essay about my bemusement at not being included in this group, which is going to be published in a book of my writings. I have a show at the Generali Foundation in Vienna right now, and they published a catalog with three essays in it. One is by Thom Andersen about

my films. It was published in *Cinema Scope*, but it was originally commissioned for a catalogue that was supposed to come out a long time ago, but did not.¹⁷ In his text, Thom talks about my work in relation to Baudry's essay on the cinematographic apparatus.¹⁸ So, as a companion to this catalog, a book of my writings is going to be published, which is a little embarrassing because I don't think of myself as a writer, but in fact I've written. It will include this essay I wrote in 1994 about my relation to the New York school, which really means my relation with Anthology, which means my relation to Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney. I have never understood why Sitney's version of the history of American avant-garde film remains uncontested.

RC Well, Jack Smith used to call Mekas "The Great Lobster."

MF Yes, he also called him "Uncle Fishhook." But at the same time, even if he complained about Mekas, Jack Smith is recognized by Sitney and Mekas as one of the major figures in experimental film. He's in the



Morgan Fisher, TOP *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973), BOTTOM *Phi Phenomenon* (1968), frame enlargements.

Anthology canon, for sure, and I'm not. The essay I wrote about my relation to Anthology is called *Missing the Boat*.¹⁹

EC The problem was maybe that your work didn't fit the definition of "Structural Film" because you show the whole technique of filmmaking and for Sitney the term "structural" was related to basic elements in film.²⁰

MF Yes, for example, *The Flicker* (Tony Conrad, 1966). I think you're right, they don't show the apparatus.

RC Except maybe Paul Sharits.

MF Right. I think I share something with at least one work of Paul Sharits. What's the title of his film where the perfs actually make the soundtrack? Is that *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* (1968)?

RC No, I think it's *Ray Gun Virus* (1966).

MF We could take that as an allusion to the apparatus of filmmaking. Someone noticed an affinity between me and another film by Sharits. There was this nice German guy named Alf Bold, he was a guest programmer at the Collective for Living Cinema in New York and he presented the first screening of *Standard Gauge* in 1985. He liked the film a lot and he remarked on the resemblance between *Tails* (Paul Sharits, 1976) and *Standard Gauge*.

EC But besides making visible the apparatus, there's also a link between "Structural Film" and abstraction—meaning the absence of factual references such as objects, figures, and so on. It's a matter of "purity," I'd say, some kind of modernist thinking.

MF This is helpful, but on the other hand there are objects and figures in Frampton, Snow, Landow, and so on. I simply don't understand how Sitney draws the line. But speaking of abstraction, and it took me a long time to understand this, I would make the claim that even though my films are representational, their ambition is abstraction. It's what I'm going to talk about tomorrow.²¹ For example *Production Stills* (1970) is entirely self-referential, it's about nothing outside of itself—so it's a definition of abstraction, even though the film is representational. In 2000 I wrote a letter to John G. Hanhardt, who at time was the curator for film and video at the Whitney [Museum of American Art], in which I described thinking about abstraction in this way.²² But it took my interest in abstraction in painting to help me think how some of the films could be abstract. In any event, I think of self-description as a form of modernism.

RC We wanted to ask you something about time in your films.

EC We had the impression that there are different layers of temporality in your film. On one side, we have the single take; on the other we have instruments that "tell" somehow the time—like the clock in *Picture and Sound Rushes*. Then for instance in *Standard Gauge* we have the time of the story that you are telling—dealing with memory and autobiography—but you are also dealing with the film-object, which has its own history—technological, industrial, and so on. And you have the story told in the films. That's why I was struck by your appreciation of the single take, being against editing. The thing is: the single take is not as simple as it may seem!

MF Thank you so much for your observation. It's as you say. I am convinced that the single take is capable of great complexity, but I've never thought about it in the way that you're talking about it, although in *Standard Gauge* when I'm talking about the last shot in *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) I'm discussing the way in which in effect it consists of two different shots.²³ I don't know if that's the case of what you call layers

¹⁹ Morgan Fisher, "Missing the Boat", in *Scratching the Belly of the Beast: Cutting-Edge Media in Los Angeles 1922-1994*, ed. Holly Willis (Los Angeles: Filmforum, 1994); later revised in Fisher, *Writings*, eds. Folie and Titz (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012), pp. 79-84.

²⁰ Paul Adams Sitney, "Structural Film," *Film Culture* 47 (1969), pp. 1-9.

²¹ The following day Fisher gave a lecture at Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione in Milan, entitled "Abstraction in Film."

²² The letter (unpublished) is dated September 28, 2000 and was revised for the publication in the anthology of writings by the artist. See Fisher, "Abstraction," in *Writings*, pp. 85-86.

²³ He is referring to one moment in *Standard Gauge*, in which the last shot of *Detour* is discussed. The artist also wrote a piece on the same sequence that was first published as "An Afterward on the Last Shot in *Detour*" in *Los Angeles: Eine Stadt im Film: A City in Film*, eds. Astrid Ofner and Claudia Sieben (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2008). A later version can be found in *Cinema Scope* 38 (Spring 2009) with the title "The Last Shot in *Detour* and Some Earlier Moments," and an even more recent version is available in Fisher, *Writings*, pp. 210-223.

of temporality, but it's certainly a case of disjunction within a temporal continuity.

I cannot say that I consciously thought about the things that you're talking about when I was planning the films. In other words it's the film itself—how the film is constructed—that produces this, without my having thought about it. It's not as if I said to myself, "I want to produce these complications." In the case of *Production Stills* it's simplicity itself: I gave the Polaroid camera to Thom [Andersen] and the cinematographer turned the camera on and the film shows the pictures that Thom took while on the soundtrack we hear the process of his taking them. The fact that what you see in the Polaroids is something that already happened and that what you hear is something that you don't see yet is what the film gave me. You can think of the film as a *diagram*, and a really simple one: these disjunctions within a continuous take are what the diagram produces.

EC Do you know the films by Jean Comandon? He was a scientific filmmaker and maybe the inventor of time lapse. For instance in his films you would have the growth of a plant and a clock included in the scene, to see how the time passes.²⁴ This presence reminded me of the clock—or countdown—in your films.

MF Thank you, but I don't know his work. But could I go back to *Standard Gauge*? It's simpler than *Production Stills*: I showed these pieces of film and commented on them. The relation between what you see and what you hear is more direct but there are still moments where you don't get the explanation that you expect, so there's a little of the disjunction that's in *Production Stills*. It's just a consequence of how the film is constructed. But in that film I did want to bring attention to the complexity that a long take can have. It's as you say. That's why I talked about the scene in *Detour* and included the piece from *Under Capricorn* (A. Hitchcock, 1949).

Since you mentioned the clock, I made a film of a clock!²⁵ It's an old-fashioned classroom clock and I removed the second hand so that there was no grossly visible movement—even if there are marks between the numbers that let you trace the movement of the minute hand—and the film lasts eleven minutes. When I made it people found it intolerable, and I frankly don't understand. I mean, it only lasts eleven minutes, what else could you be doing that's better? [laughs] There is also a title in the beginning that tells you what's going to happen, that it's a shot of a clock that lasts eleven minutes.

Another way to think about time in my films is that in various ways they make you aware of time. I hope that's not too obvious to mention, but of course in a conventional narrative film I would say time is what they do their best to make you forget. Obviously they take place in time, and there's time within the story but we're not made aware of time as such, I would say, meaning the time in which we live. Maybe it's an exaggeration to say this but in the same way that my films bring out the apparatus that films are designed to make you forget, they also bring out the time outside of the film, the time we inhabit with our bodies. On this topic, Thom Andersen has written a wonderful note on Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010).²⁶ Anyway I made my own clock film the same year as *Documentary Footage* and to me it was a film that *demanded* to be made, like: "Someone has to do this."

I wrote about this film, as I have written texts on most of my work, and they will be published in the book of my writings. I also wrote a note on Carl Andre's relation to film. My claim is that Carl Andre's mature work comes from film. The story behind this text is that there was a guy in Berlin [Andreas van Dühren] who wanted to start a magazine called *TEXT* and he asked me to write something for the first issue. I kept putting it off because I didn't know what to write about. He finally said he wanted me to write about Carl Andre. So I wrote about how the model in Andre's mature work, one identical thing after another, is exactly what film frames are—at least 16mm film frames, where there is almost no frame line. I claim this model came to Andre through his acquaintance with Hollis Frampton. That's what the essay is about—there are no footnotes and I didn't bother to talk to Carl Andre about it. I just made this claim, although there's a lot of explanation.²⁷

EC That says a lot about your work too. Think of *Standard Gauge*: we have 35mm prints and this material has somehow a rhythm of its own because of the sprocket holes, of the frames...

RC It's the idea that film is both *image* and *material*.

MF Absolutely. Years ago I read an anecdote about a film class where the students had seen a film by Paul Sharits, maybe *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968), that had frames of different pure colors and some images—and afterwards they wanted to look at the actual strip of film. At that time I didn't understand why the anecdote interested me that much but now I do, and it has to do precisely with the wish to understand the relation

between the shadows that we see and the object that produces these shadows. But with film you get one or the other, although I would like to think that some of my films, for example *Standard Gauge* and maybe *Cue Rolls* (1974), try to bring them together.

RC That's exactly what this kind of film makes you aware about: film is a material too. And as such, it can be damaged.

MF This is the case of some of Paul Sharits's films for sure, like *S:TREAM: S:S:ECTION: S:ECTION:S:S:ECTIONED* (1968–1971).

RC Yes, but also your films! I mean, it's the same idea that we were discussing before about temporality. This is what commercial cinema makes you forget. With your films you're conscious of what you see. It's the same also in () because some of the excerpts are scratched.

MF Yes, absolutely. In () you see that the different pieces of film come from different places in time. In a narrative film the material of the film comes from the same place in time, the same moment of production, even if there are flashbacks or flash-forwards. But in () the fact that the pieces come from different places in time is clear because, as you say, some of them are scratched or faded. The quality of the emulsion is different too. Even in black-and-white, there are different kinds of emulsion or conditions of lighting. So there are these different origins that are presented in a single film, which we think of as having only one origin.

EC About *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973), you mentioned that you were influenced by Peter Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* (1958–1960), because of the four "basic" elements—black film leader-transparent film leader; void soundtrack-fully saturated soundtrack—and the idea of combining them.

MF Did I use the word influence?

EC No, I don't think so.

MF I have a special reason for asking about this question of influence. Yve-Alain Bois, to whom I owe so much, has said that influence is a wrong idea, because the origin of the word implies passivity. His point is that people who make work make choices. I mean, if you're influenced that means you're influenced by everything you've ever been exposed to, but that's

not what happens. Instead you're making choices out of the entire range of your experiences. There are things that are important to you that are reflected in your work—it's a matter of choice, conscious or not.

Anyway, I saw Peter Kubelka's films in Cambridge in the late Sixties at about the time I started making my work. He showed all his films up to *Unsere Afrikareise* [*Our Journey to Africa*] (1961–1966), and I thought they were great. I also wanted to write about them, but I didn't know how to do it. We became friends. I went to talk to him at the time, and I'm not usually the kind of guy that goes up to someone and says, "Oh, your work is great," but I did because I thought they were terrific films, although my own films are totally different. Peter is committed to abstraction and to non-synchronous shooting. As you know he thinks sync sound is pointless because the sounds duplicate what you see in the image so they're redundant. But as you know I'm committed to sync or at least to its appearance. I'll put a footnote here: *Standard Gauge* was not shot sync, so it's impure in a way. It was done to playback, so it looks like sync but it's not. Now, *Cue Rolls* was shot sync, even though it didn't have to be. Here's the camera, here's the synchronizer and I was delivering the narration from off-screen—and you can tell it's sync, I think, because I start to hurry since I'm afraid we'll run out of time, then I slow down when I realize we won't, and there are mistakes in my delivery, and in the background you can also hear the hum of the motor that's pulling the film through the synchronizer and toward the end you can hear the clanking of the spools and the clanking accelerates as there's less film on them.

I admired Peter Kubelka's films for their rigor, and they're enormously powerful, but then at the same time

²⁴ See on this topic Philippe-Alain Michaud, "Cinéma, Rêve, Esquisse," *Sketches. Histoire de l'Art, Cinéma* (Paris: Kargo & L'Eclat, 2006), pp. 229–245.

²⁵ *Phi Phenomenon* (1968).

²⁶ Thom Andersen, "Random Notes on a Projection of *The Clock* by Christian Marclay at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 4:32 pm, July 28, 2011–5:02 pm, July 29, 2011," *Cinema Scope* 48 (Fall 2011), pp. 11–17.

²⁷ See Morgan Fisher, "Carl Andre und der Film," *TEXT* (October 2005). Available in English at <<http://www.text-revue.net/revue/heft-1/carl-andre-und-der-film/text>> and later revised in Fisher, *Writings*, pp. 202–209.

what you do about it? I mean, you have to find a way to respond. And one of the ways to think about *Picture and Sound Rushes* is that it's Peter Kubelka on one hand and Sol LeWitt on the other! [laughs] Peter made *Arnulf Rainer* according to a score that to my memory is based on a visually-pleasing array, and the combinatorial relations are far more complex than the rudimentary pattern of combinations in *Picture and Sound Rushes*, whose model is Sol LeWitt, who was hugely important for me. If you start with these four elements and you lay down simple rules for how to combine them, all the ways to combine them—and there aren't that many—you soon reach exhaustiveness, and, when you reach it, the plan for the work, or the score, is complete.

Peter Kubelka saw *Picture and Sound Rushes* when I showed it at the festival organized by David Curtis and Simon Field in London in 1973 [A Festival of Independent Avant-Garde Film], and he told me he liked it. That meant the world to me, that Peter Kubelka could like a film that says that sync sound is the primary case.

RC Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet are really close to this idea of sync.

MF Absolutely! I love their work. There's this total commitment to original production and maintaining its presence in the finished film. I think that's what gives their works much of their power. There's this moment in *History Lessons* [*Geschichtsunterricht*] (1972) when you hear a motor scooter in the background and then there's a cut within the scene and at the cut the noise goes away. So the cut is a continuity cut within the scene as we see it but then on the track there is this radical discontinuity.

RC Jean-Marie says that his commitment to original sound comes from Jean Renoir.

MF Really? I know that he has talked about Jean Grémillon too, and how sound in Grémillon's work was recorded on optical film, so you hear the flow of the sound-recording medium that the passage of time implies. The material origin of the sound is present in what you hear, this is a powerful idea! Does Straub talk about Renoir's *Toni* (1934)?

RC Not only, I think he quotes this sentence by Renoir, which goes like "you cannot fake sound." And he says also that you cannot cut arbitrarily when you work with sync sound, you have to respect the material.

MF There's this exchange between Pasolini and Straub, where Pasolini said something like "I am an artist, so I can do whatever I want." And Straub said, to paraphrase: "Because you're an artist, no, *you cannot* do whatever you want." There are things you have to accept that come from production. All Pasolini's [films] are dubbed, right? No, there's this documentary about sex [*Comizi d'Amore* (*Love Meetings*) (1965)] that's sync!

EC I think most of it is sync, but in an early stage of production he wanted to dub all the people interviewed.

RC He thought of it as *poetry*!

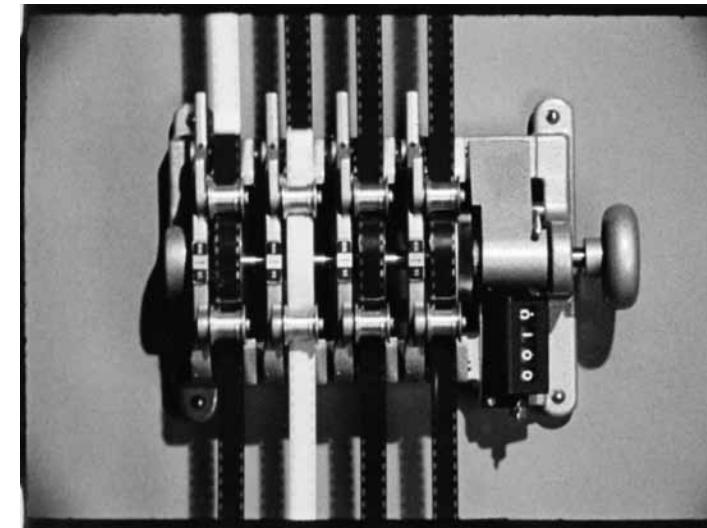
EC In the first draft of the project, when it was not yet entitled *Comizi d'Amore*, there is a very clear paragraph about this idea.²⁸

RC Could you tell us something about your work with Roger Corman?

MF I didn't really work with Corman. I was the second editor on a film his company produced. But, first of all, I knew who Corman was. I had seen *The Wild Angels* when it came out in the summer of 1966. When I was in college I saw *House of Usher* (1960). It's embarrassing to admit, but I went in a spirit of condescension. Big mistake—the film made a strong impression on me. I remember the title sequence, flowing paint.

When I was back in Los Angeles and looking for a job, a friend knew about this job on a film called *The Student Nurses* (1970). And they were looking for a second editor, someone who would do the easy scenes, and so I was interviewed, but not by Corman—he was the executive producer. His method was to give younger people a lot of freedom. The producer was Charles Swartz, who was the husband of the director, Stephanie Rothman. Even though there was a writer, the story was Charles's and Stephanie's or might even have been Roger Corman's, I don't really know. The structure was really simple: there are four nurses and each nurse has a story and you just cut from one to the next. My joke was it's *Intolerance*, except that, instead of being organized thematically, each nurse has a story! [laughs] There's one who has an affair with a hippy motorcycle and gets pregnant, one who has an affair with a Chicano militant, another whose terminally-ill patient falls in love with her...

So, Charles and Stephanie gave the story to a writer in order to have a script, which was necessary to plan the production, but the script most of the time in Corman's way of doing things was just a formality,



TOP Morgan Fisher *Cue Rolls* (1974), frame enlargement.

BOTTOM Thom Andersen and Malcolm Brodwick, — — —, aka *Short Line, Long Line*, aka *The Rock 'n Roll Film* (1967), frame enlargement.

because the whole thing had already been determined by other people. When we screened the cuts Roger Corman was there but I was too shy—I admired him and I didn't dare to speak to him. But Charles and Stephanie told Corman that I was an admirer of his and so he knew that the second editor of *The Student Nurses* was someone who knew his work and admired it.

Stephanie did not have a sense of humor, she took herself very seriously and so I had a hard time taking her seriously. That was a difficult working relationship. *The Student Nurses* was the beginning of a series of nurse movies. There was *Private Duty Nurses* (George Armitage, 1971), for instance. Stephanie and Charles didn't invite me to work on their other productions. They made *The Velvet Vampire* (1971), *Terminal Island*

(1973), *Group Marriage* (1973), but I don't think they made any of the other nurse movies. I remember one line from the radio advertising for *Private Duty Nurses*: "When she takes your temperature, it goes straight up!" [laughs]

They were successful films anyway, and as you know Corman liked to give young people their chance. Coppola, Joe Dante, John Sayles, Jonathan Demme, they all started with Corman. Stephanie was bitter because she didn't have the chance to work with the big studios after her films for Corman, but the funny

²⁸ See Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Cento paia di buoi," in *Per il cinema 1* (Milano: Meridiani Mondadori, 2001).

thing is that she was retrospectively rediscovered as a feminist filmmaker, since she made films with strong female characters. She also had a retrospective at the Viennale a couple of years ago.

The Student Nurses is not a very good film but apparently is the best of Corman's nurse movies. In one of the very first scenes, one of the nurses comes into a patient's room and behind the door there's this psychiatric patient who jumps on her and tries to rape her. Then there's a close-up of this woman's crotch, with her skirt pulled up, and she's wearing white pantyhose. We were cutting the scenes and Stephanie said of this close-up: "Play this shot for as long as you can." So, I don't know, does that make her a feminist film-maker?

EC Since we're talking about editing, let's go back now to your own production. About (), can you say something more about the way you made it? You mentioned the importance of the work and method of Raymond Roussel. How did you translate a language-based method into images?

MF One example could be that you begin with naming some aspect of a shot, for example its subject, and then you devise a way to use those words to organize the shots. There are lots of ways to organize the words, for example in alphabetical order. That's about as simple as possible, but of course there can be other ways to organize the words and also other things to choose in relation to the shots than can be organized in other ways. But in any case what was important for me in Roussel was a *rule*. The first work by Roussel that was translated into English in its entirety was *Impressions of Africa*. The translation was published in 1967.²⁹ It was Thom [Andersen] who brought this book to my attention; I read it and I was absolutely blown away, I just thought it was astounding. For me the power of Roussel is that it's beyond literary imagination. So the question is: where does this come from? How could anyone dream this up? What made it possible was that he wasn't thinking in literary terms. He didn't imagine it, he didn't dream it up. He was relying on a mechanical rule to give him the material, and the rule liberated him from being confined within literary conventions. He had to fill in a little bit because the mechanical origin of the rule doesn't account for everything, he had to fill in the spaces between but still it was a beginning. For me the question was: let's find a rule that will put these shots in an order. It was very simple, and the

rule put every shot in its place. I didn't have to invent anything to fill things out. But that's not editing, it's something else. I've called it construction. The rule I used certainly was not Roussel's rule, but there was a rule and like a rule in Roussel it's hidden. That's very important, because in my other films there are rules but they are visible. The clearest example is *Picture and Sound Rushes*. Although in a funny way, it's also hard to see it because even though I'm explaining the rule, how the film enacts the rule interrupts my explanation. You can also think of *Production Stills* as following a rule, although it allows Thom to improvise.

RC I was thinking about the footage you collect. Is () issued from this footage?

MF It's a little different. *Standard Gauge* began with material that I already had and I had, I have to admit it, a fetishistic relation to 35mm. I mean, look at this [holds a piece of 35mm film], it just tells you to pick it up and look at it. If it's not a fetishistic relation, it's at least a relation of fascination. I was fascinated by 35mm and not by 16mm, because it's so easy to see the image, while in 16mm it's too small. It's a powerful thing, it's this substantial material: there are the images, there is the regular succession of frames, of sprocket holes, they're basically iterations of each other. I had this big collection of pieces of 35mm, because I could not resist picking them up, and the question was: what to do about them? It finally occurred to me just to show them and talk about them! So the material came first, and then the question of what to do with it. *Standard Gauge* was an exorcism of my fascination with 35mm.

() was different because I didn't have the material. I wanted to make a movie of inserts, but I wanted to make it in 16mm, so it was a question of finding narrative features film in 16mm. It used to be a very common thing: when a film was released in 35mm, they also made what are called reduction prints in 16mm to show in prisons and in the military, or for film societies. I found the prints on eBay. So then it was a question of looking for what I already knew I wanted to collect. With *Standard Gauge* I was gathering things but then I needed to decide what to show.

In () many of the shots are what you would expect: hands, watches, guns, and so on. But it was very important for me that there were scenes that showed chance, such a roulette wheel, dice, and so on, because that's the relation between the shots.

RC It's really strange, because you talk about chance in constructing the film, but it gives the impression of a strong narrative rhythm!

MF It's just chance! You see, if you know the films of Michael Snow there is rising action, for instance in *La Région Centrale* (1971) and ←→ [Back and Forth] (1969). There's an intensification, as in Aristotelean dramaturgy: there's a climax. In my films I want one thing after another, equal emphasis instead of intensification. In *Cue Rolls* for sure there is no rising action. For me that's the model. You didn't say that there's rising action in () but you suggested it. So, if it's there I didn't do it! It's chance, I promise. I just wanted it to be one thing after another, like the stills in *Production Stills*. The thing is that since () is made of shots that follow one another, you can't help understanding the order as being intentional. If there's rising action in () it's not intentional, don't blame me! [laughs]

29 *Impressions of Africa*, translated by Rayner Heppenstall and Lindy Foord, was published by Calder & Boyars in 1966 and by the University of California Press in 1967. The first French edition was published in 1910.

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IN MEMORIAM



HARUN FAROCKI

(1944 - 2014)

I borrowed this poem from Alice Walker who wrote it for another long-lived, prodigiously productive human being, who had just died:

*I am not sad, Harun Farocki.
Though there may be tears. You have won the race.
I am cheering.*

There is much to say and others have written well about his work. I didn't know him that well... we met maybe 5 or 6 times, here and there... but significantly.

I got lucky on November 7, 1991. Someone tipped me off – go to the Anthology that evening to see some works by a “very good” German filmmaker, Harun Farocki. I did. The first film was his 1969 *Nicht löschares Feuer... Inextinguishable Fire*. *Fire* used just 25 minutes to demonstrate exactly how Dow Chemical had produced a better, *inextinguishable*, napalm for the war in Vietnam (he had learned this by studying Dow's Annual Report) and to argue that when napalm is already burning, it's too late to extinguish it, to stop the war. He said that napalm has to be fought where it is produced – in factories.

His demonstrations and arguments were accomplished without battle footage and without a visit to the Dow plant in Midland, Michigan. Instead Farocki had made models of things... always weak models: for villagers on fire – dead lab rats aflame; for Dow's labs – high school chemistry classrooms, where we meet Dow's chemists and engineers – played by German friends, playing Americans... stand-ins with affectless speech, thus not really embodied beings. Who can forget film's ending – a performed riddle: the same actor, each time at a washroom sink, introduces himself as a worker, then a student, then an engineer. A vacuum cleaner in one hand and a machine gun in the other, the engineer speaks to camera, “I'm an

engineer and I work for an electrical corporation. The workers think we're making vacuum cleaners. The students think we're making machine guns for the Portuguese. This vacuum cleaner can be a valuable weapon. A machine gun can be a useful household appliance. What we manufacture... that depends on the workers, students and engineers.”

I was astonished... the generosity of the film's gesture, the logical analysis of how to stop a war, finally, the economy of means... all without exploiting the horror-shows of war, without terror... without the naked Vietnamese child on fire, running down the road. Here was a catalog of brilliant techniques for making useful political film and a way out of endless fundraising. (It cost about \$5,000.) I wanted to see it again, to learn its techniques. I wanted to circulate it – I wanted everyone to see it – filmmakers at the least. But I did not want to become the distributor of a 22 year old, black and white German film about a U.S. war that had ended long ago.

I've told this story before. That evening I invited Farocki for breakfast the next day. He came. I asked him for the right to use his film as part of one of mine. He agreed and signed piece of paper to that effect. I gave him a dollar.

It took a few years to find the funding (each panel quibbled, “why copy a film that already exists?”) but finally I made a full replica of Farocki's *Fire*, in color and in English, with Americans playing Americans. I added an epilog to explain what I thought we could learn from Harun's film. I called my film *What Farocki Taught* because by the time it was finished, I had seen more important films by Harun (*Images of the World and the Inscription of War, How to Live in the Federal Republic of Germany, Videograms of a Revolution.*) I thought if others hadn't seen these yet but liked *What Farocki Taught*, they would seek out these others.

Later I found out that Farocki had become anxious about what I was doing... about how he would look. He thought his *Fire* was an angry film. It was. His later work was a lot cooler. He helped me anyway, answering 100's of questions: how to kill the flies and the grasshoppers and how to wilt the plants, on camera; could he lend me 14 newsreel shots from his film? No, they were lost. Had he dubbed the actors lines – badly – on purpose? Yes. And, in 1998, when German TV wanted to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the revolutionary activities of 1968, and wanted to broadcast *Fire*, he suggested they also show *What Farocki Taught*, and they did.

Back in the 90s, I used to walk around saying Farocki was the most important non-fiction filmmaker in the world. It's probably still true but there are some recent contenders – Rithy Panh, Panahi, the Romanians. Still none has given us as many film lessons as Farocki. He is the filmmaker of “what we see”; how seeing is formulated, and what we miss when we look. So much has come from that. There's no way to say it in 800 words... what Farocki taught, that is.

JILL GODMILOW

Portrait Harun Farocki, © Markus J. Feger 2009,
photographer. Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York.