

## Artists' Moving Image in Britain: From 1990 to Today Zilkha Auditorium

**Friday 6 November**

### **Mined and Mediated Bodies: Acting in Artists' Film, Maeve Connolly**

This paper examines the changing relationship between art practice, television and digital media in the British context, focusing specifically on shifting approaches to acting and affect. Artists such as Clio Barnard, Sam Taylor-Johnson and Gillian Wearing have examined and deployed actors and acting methods in diverse works, sometimes as part of an investigation of authenticity, celebrity and documentary realism, prompted by the rise of reality television. Some of these artists are especially interested in Method acting and the body as a store of emotional or sense memory. But this model of affect is supplemented, and perhaps countered, by newer theorisations of biomediated bodies (Patricia Clough, 2008), reality TV production (Vicki Mayer, 2011) and the digital uncanny (Melissa Gronlund, 2014), illuminating more recent explorations of affect in works by Ed Atkins, Phil Collins, Kate Cooper, Melanie Gilligan and Nathaniel Mellors.

### **Figure and Ground: En-gendering Formal Film, Lucy Reynolds**

The importance of the figurative image in artists' filmmaking has long been a source of controversy in British avant-garde and radical film circles. As Peter Wollen's 1976 article 'The Two Avant-gardes' contended, representation was at stake between those associated to the theoretical positions of Screen, who valued the film image for the potency of its political address; and those engaged in the materialist practices of the London Filmmakers' Co-op, who rejected narrative and the image for its part in asserting and supporting the normative values of mainstream cinema. My paper argues that these persistent fault-lines concerning formalist aesthetics and political agency were to find a resonant and unexpected point of convergence in some film practices of the 1990s. In the films of Sandra Lahire, Sarah Pucill and Jayne Parker a commitment to film's material properties reflects the legacy of their Structuralist forebears at the Co-op, and the modernist influences of their art school backgrounds. Yet, all three filmmakers also explicitly reference literary, musical and theoretical discourses in their films, drawing upon women pioneers in the field of culture, such as Sylvia Plath, Maya Deren and Katherina Wolpe, as their orientation. I will examine how Lahire, Pucill and Parker draw on the discourses of psychoanalysis and feminism, in concert with strategies of performance, sound and material surface, to en-gender and reimagine existing dichotomies of the formal experiment and the radical film. Can their theoretical and formal realignments also be traced in Ursula Mayer or Daria Martin's more recent examples of 'polyvocal' cinema?

### **Break-out Panel Discussions**

#### **1. Film and Video on TV**

### **Show Me the Money!... the changing economics of artists' moving image, Portland Green**

The presentation explores the recent shifts in relationships between public funders, public art institutions, the contemporary art market, private collectors and artists, alongside the changes in commercial film and entertainment distribution brought about by the growth of digital technology and the changes in contemporary art collecting facilitated by the 'networked turn' and asks how these economic changes influence the range of moving image practices that get seen. Discussed from the perspective of an experienced, producer, curator and consultant working in artists' moving image, the presentation underscores the contemporary opportunities and problematics in play in the production, exhibition, collection and distribution of artists' moving image today from an economic standpoint.

### **Wearing's World, Jonathan Patkowski**

The 1990s witnessed profound transformations in the British popular media landscape, as an increasingly-privatized television industry was inundated by low-cost confessional talk-shows, video diaries, and docu-soaps. During this period Gillian Wearing's videos and photography exposing the public and private lives of ordinary people attracted widespread attention. While critical readings of her practice have largely sidestepped its popular cultural dimensions, there is much evidence to suggest that she was deeply engaged with the emerging field of factual entertainment television programming. Harnessing the reality effects specific to this voyeuristic material, Wearing's work offers a prescient and critically-ambivalent reflection on the peculiar psycho-visual regime emerging in Thatcherite Britain: the undoing of the hierarchical distinction between factual and entertainment media, and the rise of an individuated and confessional subject, whose ordinary appearance and unscripted behavior became a key signifier of a new televisual realism.

### **Leftovers: history, documentary and independent film and video on television in Britain in the 1990s, Colin Perry**

This presentation examines the importance of discourses of history in films and videos produced within the independent sector that flourished in the UK from the mid-1970s into the 1990s. During this period, British independent film and video increasingly engaged with the writings of feminist, Marxist and socialist historians. From *Song of the Shirt* (Susan Clayton and Jonathan Curling, 1979) to *Bright Eyes* (Stuart Marshall, 1984) and *A Bit of Scarlet* (Andrea Weiss, 1996) – artists and filmmakers explored 'peoples' histories', rituals of remembrance, and historical representations of gender, race, sexuality and class. Focusing on Marc Karlin's *Between Times* (1993), broadcast on Channel 4, this presentation discusses the significance of innovative works conceived for broadcast, and the centrality of an engagement with history as one of the independent sector's significant legacies to current moving image practices.

### **Works for television, Gary Thomas**

An overview of Arts Council of Great Britain's support of artists' moving image for broadcast in the 1990s, looking at public funding policy and strategies, their relationship to, and impact on, artists' practice and work; considering and questioning the respective (and sometimes contradictory) imperatives, aims, ambitions and achievements, of funder, broadcaster and artist.

## **2. Performing Identities**

### **Funny feminisms: the new breed of 'parafeminist' British video art practices, Laura Castagnini**

How does contemporary feminist British video art use humour to reference its particular political and aesthetic histories while reimagining new possibilities for moving image practice? In this presentation I argue that contemporary British feminist art can be characterised by an expanded 'parafeminist' form of video-installation that employs bodily humour, historical homage and spatial intervention. To do so, I analyse three recent case studies: Julie Verhoeven's absurdist video installation *Whiskers Between My Legs* (2014); Emma Hart's anxiety inducing presentation *Giving It All That* (2014) and Lucy Stein (with Shana Moulton)'s single-channel seaside historical homage, *Polventon* (2013). In these works, the time-based nature of video is employed to enact a range of comic effects, from toilet humour to self-deprecation and irony, while the female body remains consistently at the centre of the artists' concerns. Furthermore, video technology is utilised in strange ways: Verhoeven hides monitors amongst draped fabric and beneath toilet seats, Hart entices her viewers into a sculptural configuration of the female reproductive system and Stein uses retrograde editing techniques that parody moving image history.

### **Blackness in Action: Disrupting the Construction of "Black" Monstrosity in Visual Culture, Ayanna Dozier**

In her book *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (2014), Visual Culture theorist Alessandra Raengo asserts that identity representation in art "open(s) a chasm in the visual field that makes apparent that seeing is always seeing as." This "seeing as" viewing experience is part of the process that views black bodies in relation to their perceived blackness. It is the process of viewing black bodies only through previous artistic subhuman constructions of that body. In this presentation I examine Steve McQueen's 1993 video-performance installation *Bear* as an attempt to disrupt notions of fixed configurations of race and gender through its shifting performative gestures, via wrestling and dance. Gestures that, at times, are weighed with historiography of "monstrous" behavior applied to black individuals.

### **How Punk created a space for women and shaped a way of looking, Rachel Garfield**

Just as Punk created a space musically for bands such as the Slits and Poly Styrene to challenge 1970s norms of femininity through a transgressive, strident new female-ness, a number of experimental feminist film makers initiated a parallel, lens-based transgression to challenge patriarchal modes of film making. This talk will focus on Vivienne Dick and Ruth Novaczek, Jennet Thomas and Suzanne Treister. I do not aim to draw a narrative of a community or shared milieu but more of a schematic interplay. Examining the work of these film makers, I will trace a loose genealogy that offers to what I would term a ŒPunk audio visual aesthetic. I will argue that a vital aspect of our vibrant contemporary digital audio visual culture is to be traced back to the techniques and forms of these feminist pioneers.

### **The Stories That Multiply: A Short History of Performance Art with Mel Brimfield, Diana Smith**

The ephemeral nature of the 'live' act has prompted much debate about how we recall past works and how we write the histories of performance art. This is something Allan Kaprow contemplated back in the early 1960s, when he predicted that the fleeting events of the Happenings would be remembered "by the stories that multiply...rather than a documentary record to be judged." This presentation

asks: how do we 'do' the histories of performance art without bypassing the complexities and ambiguities of the 'live' act? It addresses this question through a discussion of British artist Mel Brimfield's fictional television 'documentary' *This is Performance Art* (2010-2011), which playfully constructs an alternative historiography of performance art. Through Brimfield's invented history Kaprow's predictions take form, multiplying in a narrative of second hand anecdotes, rumours and mythologies about performers and their performances.

### 3. Modernism and Historiography

#### **Moving Modernism: Iconophilia, Iconoclasm and Iconophobia, Inga Fraser**

Chris Marker's 1953 film *Les statues meurent aussi* investigates the 'death' of historic works of African and Oceanic art that have been abstracted from their original context of production and reception and placed in a museum: a narrative that pre-empted the fate of works produced in Marker's own time. Modernist critical theory, and modern art, relics found within the walls of a museum (as an institution co-extensive with the period of modernism) or within modernist architecture (also time-bound, having fallen short of its heroic and revolutionary ambition) have been a feature of a number of moving image works produced by British artists since 1990. By means of case-studies, this paper investigates the different motivations of artists who have engaged with an earlier artistic tradition, examining their interaction with narrative and history in the re-location of modernism in the moving image. Gerard Byrne's *1984 and Beyond* (2005-7) finds its setting in the modernist sculpture pavilion designed by Gerrit Rietveld in 1955. Elizabeth Price's *At the House of Mr. X* (2007) revises a scene of high-modernist connoisseurship in the context of commercialised desire and consumption. Graham Ellard and Stephen Johnstone's *Passagen* (1993) draws a parallel between cyberspace and the modern city of Walter Benjamin. From the iconoclasm suggested by Mark Leckey's *March of the Big White Barbarians* (2005) to the iconophilia of Elmgreen and Dragset's *Drama Queens* (2007) and the iconophobia of Jane and Louise Wilson's *Stasi City* (1997), this paper explores the legacy of modernism for contemporary moving image practice in Britain.

#### **Cross-Fertilizations between Moving Images and Historiography, Alessandra Ferrini**

Contemporary artists are increasingly involved in questioning the way history is written and narrated, actively contributing to historiographical discourse – a field that has been experiencing an epistemological crisis since the postmodern era. My presentation is based on two works from 2011: Zarina Bhimji's *Yellow Patch* – that focuses on the collapse of India's colonial past as reflected in decaying architecture, deserted landscapes and seascapes – and Uriel Orlov's *Holy Precursor* – that documents a house that was built out of the ruins of an Armenian monastery. Focusing on their use of narrative and the way their methodology responds to postmodern critique of historiography, I will attempt to uncover the potential – intrinsic to moving images – to 'look at' the past while eschewing tendencies of emplotment and the creation of linear, finite narratives that are unescapable when writing history.

### **Presentations and Panel Discussion**

**Experimental Narrative Films and the context of women's practices at the London Filmmakers' Co-op, Nina Danino**

I will be talking about the themes of inscription, materiality and embodiment which included the use of the voice as a material and medium in my experimental narrative films of the 1990s (but starting in the 80s) which I produced in the context of the London Filmmakers' Co-op. I will touch on my methods at this time in making 16mm film and the relationship of analogue to digital in creating fluid new forms of embodiment and expressivity. I will show an extract from *Stabat Mater* (1990) and from *Now I am yours* (1992).

### **Smadar Dreyfus**

What is at stake when using documentary recordings to dislocate and to restage a specific, local 'scene' into the context of distant exhibition spaces? In this presentation Dreyfus will examine how this question has a bearing on her development of three large-scale audiovisual installations: *Lifeguards* (2002-05), *Mother's Day* (2006-08) and *School* (2009-11). Dreyfus uses spatial documentary sound recordings to excavate scenes of everyday life for reverberations of a wider socio political context. Her installations consist of specific architectural enclosures, and are designed to immerse viewer-listeners in these quotidian soundscapes, implicating them in an affective process of translation and reconstruction.

### **Lindsey Seers**

Emerging from a tradition of structuralism in film-making I have become increasingly aware of the difference in parameters that the digital creates. It is obvious to state that the boundaries have become de-materialised and the aesthetics and effects of film can be generated through synthetic representations by digital systems. Beyond the subtle quality of light, which is physically exposed onto film, the digital can mimic any other quality of this disappearing medium. What the digital presents us with is a possibility of a meta-form, whereby parameters can be conceptually imposed but are not physically implicit. This system is partly created by a robot, a computational mind, whose answers and solutions are processed through differing circuits, depending on how the problem is posed. The robots response is often unpredictable and the synthetic answer is non human. The machine/camera/edit has taken on a new kind of consciousness in itself, which the maker has to decrypt, interpret and find ways around the preset. This process of interpretation creates a shift in consciousness in the operator towards this 'thing' that also has a subtle agency. How do we communicate and react to this 'mind game' as a maker and how is it evident in the output to the viewer? The difference seems to have completely shifted from materiality to temporality at almost every level.

### **Saturday 7 November**

#### **Problems of Scale: Historicizing Recent Moving Image Practice in Britain, T.J.**

##### **Demos**

This presentation will explore the periodization and national contextualization of contemporary moving-image art in Britain. Focusing in part on diasporic Black British cultural production attentive to postcolonial experience in the 1980s, it will argue for a wider genealogy of practice than that proposed by the conference. The presentation will also consider how rifts in the national narrative were long the focus of such practices (such as those of Isaac Julien, Black Audio Film Collective, and Mona Hatoum), which emphasized the territories of race, class, gender, and sexuality as sites of conflict and contradiction that rupture the national category, making the proposal to read such work according to a national frame as demanding

particular sensitivity and complexity. If the national geography was once too large and potentially homogenizing as a contextualizing methodology for reading moving-image practice, in recent years it has emerged, conversely, as too small, particularly in relation to the geological turn in recent cultural production investigating ecological matters of concern at the global level measured by expansive non-human histories (such as those of The Otolith Group and the work of John Akomfrah). In other words, according to this double modeling of moving-image practices in Britain, we face a problem of scale—both of periodization and geographical contextualization—which in fact has been made into a problem of aesthetics for many of these practices under consideration. This too will be explored, as well as what conclusions we can draw, showing how the national frame-as-organizing logic for artistic discourse and practice, especially in Britain, remains far from an unproblematic proposal.

### **Archives and Anachronisms in Queer Artists' Moving Image, James Boaden**

This paper examines two works that chronologically bracket the conference: Issac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989) and Patrick Staff's *The Foundation* (2015). Both films consider the complex identification and disidentification with queer histories as they are mediated through archives. Recent queer theory has understood the present moment as marked by an archival impulse and a new consciousness of a 'queer temporality', ideas reflected by much recent international moving image practice. Looking at Julien and Staff's work together offers an opportunity to see how strategies for dealing with the queer past have changed across the time span covered by this conference. Both films were made between the USA and the UK, questioning their status as 'British' art. Together they propose new ways of thinking about the shifting place of the AIDS crisis in debates around queer 'generations'.

### **On Sonia Khurana, Shanay Jhaveri**

The Indian artist Sonia Khurana (b. 1968) graduated from the Royal College of Art, London in 1999. At her degree show, she presented a 2-minute, black and white video work *Bird*. In the short piece, the artist is seen naked, standing on a pedestal, from which she proceeds to perch, flap her hands like wings, and attempts to fly, in the process falling down, but continues to get up and try again and again. *Bird* has been hailed by Indian art historians as "an iconic feminist work" that is full of "bravado...addressing conservatism, fear and prudishness". Though Khurana was an international student receiving pedagogical instruction in Britain, she insisted that the work be first screened in Delhi, India, even though it was filmed in London. Of course the tutelage she received in London informed the making of the work, but *Bird* seemed keenly informed by her experience of being a woman in an Indian context, hence the decision and interest to see how it translated back for an Indian audience. However, *Bird* can also be seen as referencing Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, the abject paintings of Jenny Saville or even the bird sculptures of Constantin Brancusi. So where do we locate *Bird*? Assured a place in Indian art history, can the work be included as part of a history of artists moving image work in Britain? Can it simultaneously be a part of Indian and British history of moving image? My paper will seek not to argue for an inclusive or exclusive position with regard to *Bird*'s historical status, but broaden the discursive terrain in which and how it can be regarded, while also taking into full consideration the complex negotiations Khurana was arbitrating as an artist in transit.

### **Panel Discussion: Exhibition Histories and Curatorial Practice**

### **Steven Cairns**

The late-1990s and early-2000 marks a significant change in the ways artists work with the moving image. Technical advances aided the mixing of sound and video on the same home editing equipment, aligning the video edit to a process akin to mixing music, propelling a collage-like technique and reediting of existing footage. This presentation will discuss the significance of technological advances in video and sound editing, as well as British youth culture's influence in Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* and Payne and Relph's *The Essential Selection* and *Mixtape*.

### **Contemporary Screen-based Curatorial Practice, Michael Mazière**

Ambika P3 is an experimental research space for international contemporary art and architecture whose recent and upcoming moving image exhibitions include Anthony McCall (2011), David Hall (2012), Ilya & Emilia Kabakov (2013), Victor Burgin (2013), Elizabeth Ogilvie (2014), Martina Amati (2015), Chantal Akerman (2015) and Shezad Dawood (2016). The Ambika P3 project is situated among screen-based curatorial practices and is concerned with exploring issues of sculpture, cinema, architecture and projection. This paper will address the important work of contemporary film and video artists as a form of problematic intervention in the field of the visual arts and further reinstated its resistance to delivering artefacts within a commercial or institutional context.

### **BOOM: the British Underground Cinema Resurgence 1990-2015, Duncan Reekie**

This presentation maps the (re)emergence of the British underground in the early nineties and track its progress into the contemporary scene. Over the last two decades there has been an increasing academic interest in the cinema as an environment for live art. Yet, despite this interest, the most dynamic agency in this practice has been consistently disregarded by most art-historians and institutions. From the early nineties a new British underground cinema movement emerged from the activities of a cluster of popular unfunded experimental cinema collectives, underground venues and radical protest video groups, including the Kino Klub, Exploding Cinema, Undercurrents, the Horse Hospital and Omsk. Staging events in squats, pubs and clubs, this underground transformed the cinema space into an expanded cabaret of projection and interactive performance. It screened the work of hundreds of film/video artists who would otherwise have remained unseen, it fostered a loyal new popular audience for experimental cinema and it became crucible for new forms of live cinema art. Moreover, it is this underground culture that initiated the contemporary flowering of live cinema events, pop-up cinemas and local free film festivals.

### **Assembly: A Survey of Artist Film and Video Made in Britain 2008-2013, Andrew Vallance**

*Assembly* (which I co-curated with Simon Payne and Tate Film) was a 23-part programme at Tate Britain. It included 94 artists, who were chosen by 34 national and international nominators. It consisted of single-screen work made in Britain and was proposed as an opportunity to consider what was being 'produced here and now, throwing into relief and celebrating differences across various artists' practices in the medium.'

It was the first survey, of this ambition and scale, to be presented for over a decade, and sought to be inclusive, screening Turner Prize winners as well as lesser-known artists. Structured across 13 weeks, with weekly themes indicating an area of

practice, *Assembly* endeavoured to prompt discussion around what might constitute contemporary practice.

My presentation examines a number of issues that arose during and after the project:

Why produce a cinema bound survey of contemporary work? How did Assembly's particular form develop? Assembly was tasked with reflecting the current scene and this presentation seeks to assess how this was approached and made manifest, and what this may reveal about the present moment.

## **Presentations and Panel Discussion**

### **Optical Water Syndrome, Kodwo Eshun: The Otolith Group**

The screens that permanently surround us may appear as animated mirrors that always reflect the needs and desires of their users. But what is it we are touching when we use these devices? Who is touching what? To imagine what the world looks like behind the surface of these screens is to embark upon a process of disidentification that reverses the perspective of perception. Drawing upon new work by The Otolith Group, Kodwo Eshun speculates upon what our devices see and touch when they touch and look at us.

### **Ed Halter**

A presentation on curating film and video in a variety of contexts, including my work at Light Industry, previous programming for film festivals, and exhibitions for MoMA PS1's Greater New York, the 2012 Whitney Biennial, the Walker Art Center and elsewhere. Topics will include: how film programming can address the needs of film and art histories and the contemporary moment; the particularities of cinema programming now; how a space for cinema is also a social space; and the relationship between curating and criticism.