

ONCURATING.org



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From the series *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives: kino, kunst, context now*, curated by Ian White, Berlin, March 2009. Richard Serra's *Hands at laboratory*. Photo: Axel Lambrette

CURATING FILM

INTRODUCTION

Siri Peyer

This latest edition of On-Curating.org presents seven interviews with curators who work primarily with the format of film and/or video. These interviews were all conducted in May 2009 during the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival.

In the past years, there has been an increasing presence of film and video works in art exhibitions. Where does it come from, this growing predilection for a medium which is not particularly easy to present in an art show setting? Film and video works require a darkened room and attention over a span of time which far exceeds the average duration of an exhibition visitor's stop in front of

an artwork. The sound track (where it exists) often clashes in a disturbing manner with the other works on view in the same room. The typical cinema arrangement, consisting of a dark room, a film, a projection, and the audience, is so closely associated with the act of watching a film that is virtually seems like a must, and, unsurprisingly, large, international art institutions are increasingly having their own cinemas built for the purpose of showing these works. The distinguished media theorist Christian Metz associates the space of the imagination, the space of projection, with the present economic order: "It has often rightly been claimed that cinema is a technique of the imagination. On the other hand, this technique is characteristic of a historical epoch (that of capitalism) and the state of a society, the so-called industrial society."¹ Scopophilia (pleasure in looking) and voyeurism are deeply inscribed in our society; in a cinema, the audience is placed at a voyeuristic distance and can unashamedly satisfy his curiosity. Passiveness, a play with identifications and a consumption-oriented attitude constitute the movie-watchers' position. Laura Mulvey moreover calls attention to the fact that the visual appetite is as much dominated by gender inequality as the system we live in.² Naturally, (experimental) films and the various art settings in which they are presented can and will violate the conventions of mainstream cinema from case to case.

The seven interviews address the question as to what constitutes and characterizes each respective style of curatorial work with the moving picture. How can the specific spatial situation in the cinema be conceived as a space which evokes meaning in a special way, and what is the nature of the narrative break brought about by showing films in exhibition galleries? What are the specific ideological structures which distinguish these spaces? Gridthiya Gawee Wong and David Teh curated the thematic series *Unreal Asia* at the 2009 Oberhausen Short Film Festival. They were confronted with the question as to how a geographical region which is home to a vast range of cultures and ways of

life can be represented within a festival; indeed, the biggest question was whether they were at all willing to adapt to this parameter. For the two curators, however, a festival can be thought of as a format for drawing attention to film-makers otherwise unknown to the international art milieu.

Alexander Howarth is the director of the Film Museum in Vienna founded in 1964 by Peter Kubelka and Peter Konlechner. This museum is an institution which, taking the idea of the 'invisible cinema' as its point of departure, places the focus on the showing of films. For the museum, the exhibition room is a cinema room whose architecture retreats into the background as far as possible, allowing the visitors to immerse themselves completely in the film. The viewers in their seats are assigned the role of 'passive' watchers.

The two English curators Mark Webber and Ian White are likewise concerned with showing films within the cinematic space. They conceive of the latter, however, as an exhibition space and a social space which permits a joint viewing experience. They show their film programmes in collaboration with art institutions. What is astonishing here is the fact that, in the experience of both Webber and White, their programmes are not understood as part and parcel of the art exhibitions, but regarded as examples of the efforts made by the art mediation department. The film medium is thus seen side by side, but not interlinked – in terms of content – with the exhibitions on view concurrently in the same institution.

Sheryl Mousley is responsible

1 Christian Metz, *Der imaginäre Signifikant, Psychoanalyse und Kino* (Münster, 2000), p13.

2 Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (London, 1975).

for film at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis. There an entire department is devoted to film, and operated independently of the exhibitions. Following a change of directors at the Center, endeavours are now being made there to establish dialogues and create synergies between the various departments, and coordinate their programmes with one another.

Since the autumn of 2008, Alice Koegel has been the curator of contemporary art at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. There film constitutes an integral part of the museum's holdings, and individual film works are accordingly also shown within the presentations of the collection. Koegel is also interested in how films and videos can be preserved for future generations – an urgent issue, particularly in view of the fact that, due to rapid technological advancements, many presentation techniques are already obsolete now.

Katerina Gregos was the curator of the fourth *Biennial of Moving Image* taking place in Mechelen, Belgium in 2009. This biennial brings together productions of artists who work with the moving picture and who, for the 2009 event, each created a new work for a specific location within the city. Twenty years after the unification of Europe, the various works revolve around how we as a European society conceive of and record history and pass it on to younger generations. All of the curators interviewed have a common awareness of the media-specific qualities of the moving image, and a critical examination of what is meant by a specific context, a concrete space for the viewing of films.



From the series *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives: kino, kunst, context now*, curated by Ian White, Berlin, March 2009. Richard Serra's *Hands at Laboratory*. Photo: Axel Lambrette

THE CINEMA AUDITORIUM

Interview with Ian White, by Siri Peyer (SP) and Wolf Schmelter (WS)

SP: You work as a curator and also as an artist, how do those two practices relate to one another in your work?

Sometimes they are very close to each other – sometimes they are almost interchangeable, but not all the time. Mainly I earn my living from working as a curator and as a writer and I teach as well. My artwork has always stood pretty much outside of any realistic [financial] economy – usually I have only a very small economy and often work collaboratively. My artwork is most often in the form of performance. And as such, sometimes it starts to cross over with curating film screenings. As a curator, I work mainly in the context of cinema. It is about showing artists' film and video

in the context of cinema, rather than in the context of an art gallery. It shares with performance this frame and emphasis on the event, and even if projecting a film is not immediately understood as a live event, to me sometimes it becomes very close to being a live event. That is for different reasons; sometimes it is because of the way in which the economy of exhibiting work in the cinema functions, by which I mean you might show a programme of videos by Martha Rosler; you would show this once and no one in London would show a programme of videos by Martha Rosler for another year. There is a lot of pressure on this one instant of it being created and manifested. There is a very immediate and sometimes urgent engagement within the audience because of this very practical thing. I think there are other ways that live performances, artists' film and experimental film, could be read as being similar. They have a very similar history; by which I mean a very recent history (something that is only been developed in the second half of the 20th century). So much of the broader project around both live art and experimental film is about mapping this history now. It is still something that is undecided in a way. There is something that is really quite unique about showing work in this context. The history is being constructed in a collective way. That it is part of this thing that we choose to do together and we think about 'together' in terms of 'we' being a projectionist, and me, and an audience. I read the cinema auditorium as both a discursive space and a social space, in which there is some kind of shared experience, the opposite of a modernist cinema. I do not read it as an authoritarian or even a pedagogic space.

A lot of my curatorial work also involves understanding the cinema auditorium as a very particular kind of exhibition space, which is why this unique event, in this architecturally defined fixed space, is able to function like an exhibition. My artistic practise and my curatorial practise can be very separate too, mainly when the curatorial work becomes more about constructing a historical programme. The level of my subjective involvement and the way in which I sometimes try to make that visible and turn that into part of the dynamic of a film screening can sometimes be very pronounced, like the screenings in Berlin [under the title, borrowed from the 1971 Rosa von Praunheim film *It's Not The Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But*



Top: Image from the series *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives: kino, kunst, context now*, curated by Ian White, Berlin, March 2009. Richard Serra's *Hands at laboratory*. Photo: Axel Lambrette. Bottom: Double projection at Kino Arsenal: (left) *untiled* (David Wojnarowicz project), Emily Roysdon, 2001-2008 / (right) *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives*, Rosa von Praunheim, WGer 1971. Berlin, March 2009. Photo: Emily Roysdon

The Situation In Which He Lives, Kino Arsenal and other venues, March 2009], which was an extreme version of this. They were highly constructed and 'wrong', in a way.

WS: You talk about the 'experimental' way of curating in the context of a cinema. Do you think the cinema architecture is fixed, or is it to question?

Well both. I mean, there are certain architectural things that are fixed. By cinema, I mean there is a screen and seating and there is a projection box, which is behind the audience. And it is a room that can be blacked out completely. So there are these physical things about this space, which are fixed. But I always think, the benefit of having these fixed things are the number of permutations that can start occurring, when you start playing around with what is actually possible. Because there are fixed parameters, it allows you to play around within them and confuse things or turn them upside down. It really depends on the facilities of that room. At Whitechapel, it is a very small simple situation. There is not a huge amount of room to really mess around with things, as there was let's say, at the Kino Arsenal in Berlin, which has a spectacular possibility for double projection and audio over headphones etc. You can start playing with all these things as material elements in the event of a screening.

A few years ago I organised a series of screenings at the Ciné Lumière in London. The room used to double as a traditional theatre space, where they showed mainly dance. They had quite a large stage in front of the screen and lights and blinds that could move up and down. Suddenly, there were several other material elements that could be manipulated in different ways; to read or to reveal or to challenge something about the work you were looking at on screen. The programme currently running at Whitechapel looks at one single work each season. That work is shown a number of times. And each time it is shown with something completely different. It tries to

bring out radically different ways of reading one piece of work. We have held live performances in the auditorium at Whitechapel but they are not so successful in the space. I suppose it is trying to be sensitive to the situation that you are in, making the viewer aware of the material circumstances of their looking. What I do is somehow affiliated to that. It is about an awareness of the space that you are in or allowing the space that you are in to articulate something about itself. It is about constructing a kind of present. And in a way the performance work that I have made, so far, is also really trying to do that. In different ways maybe, but it is very much about trying to construct this urgent present. It is not so much about the content of the performance work, but of the awareness that you are in space and time together.

WS: Do you also have screenings outside of the cinema space? For example, last year you showed a Richard Serra film in Berlin in a gay club.

That whole weekend series came out of a residency I made in Berlin last summer [2008]. During that time, I was trying to think about precisely this relationship between creative practise and curatorial practise, and where this line comes in. Often in my performance work it is as much about collecting together different elements as it is the presentation of these elements. I was trying to think about how we might separate the two or not and where they became confused. I organised a screening in a gay sex club of the films of Richard Serra – the ones that feature his own hands. On one hand it was an extremely self-referential camp gesture, trying to organise a screening there. But at the same time, it was a highly considered proposition. There was a serious side to the proposition, which was about the architecture of this sex club, the furniture which they have there and the general design. Richard Serra films have this thing in common with it, which is about the performance of masculinity. And it is something that you don't ordinarily read into the Richard Serra films, because you think they are minimal films and it is just a hand catching lead or doing something else. Then you start to look what kind of a hand is it you are looking at, and you are looking at a really manly hand. There is a sexual reading to that image I think. I am not claiming this as Serra's intention. I am claiming it as a way of reading something. That particular thing was also informed by an essay by the Danish artist Henrik Oleson, *Pre Post: Speaking Backwards*. It is in the book *Art After Conceptual Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann. He sort of sexualises conceptual art by representing text pieces in his essay, but then he reads them in a context of highly sexualised environments or activities. So suddenly, you reread conceptual art in this highly sexualised way. The screening was heavily influenced by this concept, and it was also influenced by the show at Kunstwerke of the Richard Serra films, where they were meant to be shown on film but for various reasons they could not (they were showing these films on video in a gallery). I wanted to repeat that showing but to show them properly on film. There were all sorts of different threads of my personal experience of Berlin that summer and other threads informed by contemporary art history and proposed readings at play in the event. It was meant to be ridiculous, but it was also meant to have integrity. The whole series took its title from the Rosa von Praunheim film: *It's Not The Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But The Situation In Which He Lives*. In terms of specifically thinking about the sex club, it was about making the space public in a very different way to how it is ordinarily made public. Ordinarily, women are not allowed in the space ever. Gay men go there to have sex and very often this is a particular kind of sex. There are always themes, so you wear leather one day or sportswear another day. It is about putting on a costume. The furniture is designed precisely for this, very generously. Part of that event was about inviting these people in, who would not ordinarily be in that space. We fixed paper screens to five different parts of the club, and we moved from one screen to the next. So we watched the films sequentially; it was not about an art installation at all. We watched the first film all together and then we moved all to the next screen and then watched the next film. It finished with a screening of *Colour Aid*, which is 25 minutes long. The frame is full of colour. It is just a red frame and then you see his fingers that come and drag the colour paper off to reveal the next colour. It is almost like a Pantone colour chart. It is a stunning film. I completely love it! So it finished with this. It was projected in a very small room with seats and stools so people could come and sit and look a little longer. It was trying to maintain a kind of seriousness about showing this work and a desire to show that work in this place. People were really happy to be in the space and we had a such nice time there.

SP: As the film curator for the Whitechapel in London, you work in a very specific environment. Your programmes are inside an art

institution and there they are showing inside a cinema room. How do you work with this room, and do you ever felt the urge to change something, for example to tear out the chairs?

I did try proposing this once at Whitechapel, but it turned out that the chairs are cemented into the floor. So it was impossible. For one particular project with two German artists, Thomas Steffl and Jens Kabisch, who were working with ideas in children's cinema. We have done things at Whitechapel, for example, a twelve hour long live broadcast from Copenhagen Free University, direct into the auditorium. Hardly anyone came to the auditorium to see it but it was very special, it was almost like a stylised Big Brother – Big Brother but structured in a much more self-reflexive way. We experimented with things like this. I think the Richard Serra screening in Berlin was not so much a desire to break out of the cinema. It was more a kind of reimagining that particular series [of screenings as a whole] and that line of inquiry.

In terms of the situation at Whitechapel, there is a very strict separation between the exhibitions department and what I do. Officially, I work with the Education Department. I have a job title; I am an Adjunct Film Curator. So I have a curatorial title, but the department with whom I work with and where I get the budget from is the Education Department. Often people think I have a lot more power in that institution than I actually do. I have never had anything to do with any film or video that has been shown in the gallery at all. Sometimes it is quite strange and it is made even more strange by the fact that they have been running a series called *Art in the Auditorium* and this is showing a single channel video made by an artist on a loop in the auditorium during the day time. But I am not allowed to suggest work for that either, because that is an exhibition. Whereas, what I do starts at seven o'clock, after *Art in the Auditorium* is over. It is a very abstract conceptual division. When you start to pick it apart, it becomes absurd.

SP: Have you had the same audience at your film programme at Whitechapel as you have had at the exhibitions?

Maybe. It's hard to say. I mean, the film programme functions like a cinema. So you have to buy a ticket and it starts at a certain time and then we show the programme only once. It has all the trappings of the cinema. And obviously, the gallery functions in the opposite way. You walk in whenever you like, and most of the time it is free. It is a very different concept for the audience. You don't necessarily have such an immediate relationship to an audience in the art gallery. Whereas in the context of the auditorium, you watch something together, and there is often a structured conversation, or an informal conversation occurs. I suppose, in London at the moment, there are incredibly significant audiences for these works. People really come to see artists' film and video, historical and contemporary. It means there is almost an ongoing conversation with a certain group of people, and then others come in to these situations to see one thing a year. This more immediate relationship to the audience is quite interesting, and that is what I prefer.

SP: You did the theme programme for Oberhausen 2007 called 'Kinomuseum'. How does a film festival work, is it like a big exhibition?

Festivals can work in all sorts of different ways. With *Kinomuseum*, which was the big project I made here in 2007, it was precisely that, to re-imagine the auditorium as a particular kind of museum, and to think about what the terms are of this very particular museum; and how this space might function, what the idiosyncrasies are, and what the impossibilities are, where the limit are of this idea. It was in two parts. The first half was about showing artists' work, which literally either featured the museum, figured the museum, or was set inside a museum, or was addressing the musical in general or in abstract. Part of the research I was doing was looking at the early film collections of the Natural History Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (Which were really the first art institutions to have significant collections of films with educational material and to use it in this very pedagogical civilising way.) At the beginning of the 20th Century, museums like these two, were exploiting the fact that film was reproducible. So you could tour [these films] much easier than you could tour unique objects. In a way, film programmes crossing America were extensions of the museums and what the museums stood for. So it had this pedagogical civilising effect. Some of these films are quite extraordinary. There was a film of the school's unit of the Natural History Museum and how that functioned, and a long film from the Metropolitan Museum, just cataloguing the American Wing, and its interiors. But suddenly, within this very rigid format, there were strange idiosyncrasies and intertitles that did

not quite match the picture. So at the same time that it was constructing its authority – if you really thought about what it meant to watch a black and white film with an intertitle that told you that the curtains were yellow – the authority of the film has to unravel. How do we know the curtains were yellow? It is a black and white film. That was a really mind-blowing moment, because [located] there is the authority of the institution. That is another thing that really interests me across the performance work and the curatorial work, this investigation of making authority visible in different ways. So that was the first half of *Kinomuseum*.

For the second half, I invited five guest curators. Some of whom were artists or writers and other curators, and each of them were asked to imagine they had control of one room of a museum of their choice. They could furnish this museum with anything they liked. It might be an ornithological museum and they could do a film programme of birds. It became much more abstract than that. Mary Kelly, for example, was trying to think about the way cinema forces you to sit still. She planned a series of screenings that happened in different auditoria in the main cinema. You watched one film in one auditorium and then you had to leave and choose whether you watch one in there or one in another. You became a mobile audience. It was a really problematic and difficult thing to do. The architecture of this space is not made for free flowing audiences. It was like discovering a limit. It was a difficult experience but quite an enlightening one as well.

Mark Leckey held the lecture, *Cinema in the Round*. The piece was his Turner Prize exhibition. It was very much a moment for him to figure himself as a museum curator and to work out what his interest in this relationship between image and object and mass and weight and sort of two dimensional image was in the context of cinema. So guest curators had really very different responses to my proposition. In a way that project was almost like a full stop; a summation of a lot of work that I have been doing, leading up to that point. I think since then, it has been exploratory again and maybe more focused around an exploration of the event in general, and more exploiting this idea and trying to work out what is the nature of this event. That is the thing I am in the middle of now.

Ian White thank you for the interview!

Ian White is Adjunct Film Curator for Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, an independent curator, writer and artist.

THE MOVING IMAGE

Interview with Katerina Gregos, by Siri Peyer

Can you tell me something about your background?

I'm originally from Athens, Greece, but moved to London to study Art History at the Courtauld Institute of Art (University of London), European Literary and Historical Studies at King's College, and Museum Management at City University, London. I lived and worked in London for some years and eventually moved back to Greece to become the founding director of the Deste Foundation, Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens a position I held for five years. After that I worked for a short period as an independent curator organising shows in a variety of contemporary art centres and in Europe. During this time I also curated two large international shows, the *ev+a* biennial edition in Limerick, Ireland (2006) and *Leaps of Faith : An International Arts Project for the Green Line and the city of Nicosia*, Cyprus, 2005 (the first exhibition of its kind to take place on both sides of the divided city of the capital of Cyprus). At the beginning of 2006 I was appointed artistic director of Argos – Centre for Art & Media in where I stayed for two years. Immediately after that I was appointed curator of Contour, the 4th edition of the Biennial of Moving Image, in Mechelen, Belgium. I am a curator of contemporary art rather than a film curator *per se*, but – without disavowing other art forms – seem to have increasingly gravitated towards lens based practices and moving image over the last couple of years, as I find that some of the most interesting work that is being made nowadays is being produced in these media.



Matthew Buckingham, Caterina de Hemessen is Twenty Years Old 2009, Co-produced by Contour Mechelen vzw, Belgium, Courtesy Murray Guy, New York, Photo: Kristof Vrancken
Maryam Jafri, Staged Archive (2008), Single channel digital video (DVCPPro 50), colour, sound, 9', Courtesy the artist.
 Photo: Kristof Vrancken

You are the curator for 'Contour 09,' the 4th Biennial of Moving Image in Mechelen in Belgium, tell me something about the institution of Contour and it's relation to the city of Mechelen?

Mechelen is a very important historical Flemish city, situated half way between Brussels and Antwerp. Founded in the early Middle Ages, it used to be an important capital in the first half of the 16th century under Margaret of Austria's reign; it is still the religious capital of Belgium, the seat of the Catholic Church and residence of

the Archbishop. Before I started working for the Contour, I didn't know much about Mechelen, so I was quite surprised and intrigued when I first began to work there. History is still very omnipresent. The historic city centre is still very well preserved and boasts a remarkable number of unusual, spectacular spaces, some of which are being used for the Biennial such as Scheppers Instituut, a beautiful Art Nouveau school from 1902, the Pastoraal Centrum a 16th century former seminary, Schepenhuis, a Gothic building which was formerly the meeting

place of the Great Council, the highest court in the Netherlands, The Oak Room, a preserved Art Deco meeting room in the Technical Institute of Mechelen, and many others. Taking into account the challenge of installing works in moving image, and wanting to avoid the dreary trap of the black box or white wall, I opted for spaces which both have a certain relationship or synergy with the works on view and create a very particular spatial scenario and experience. There is thus – in most cases – a direct relationship and dialogue between the content of works and the 'character' of each venue. Installing as well as viewing video or film installation also involves a consideration of specific spatial parameters and should also take into account architecture and space.

Contour itself is a not-for-profit organization for video art and artists who work with the moving image, funded by the Flemish Ministry of Culture. Contour organizes exhibitions, screenings, events and projects for a large audience, with a strong link between the contemporary moving image and the architectural patrimony of the historic city of Mechelen creating a platform for curators and artists working in the field of the moving image. Contour also develops partnerships and co-productions with a number of institutions internationally. The highlight and perhaps the main focus of Contour is the Biennial for moving. With every new biennial, a new curator, exhibition architect and designer are invited to express their vision on the subject. The tour passes through several architectural locations with a strong emphasis on the interaction between the location and the works of art on display.

Tell me something more about the Biennial which is currently on view?

Entitled *Hidden in Remembrance is the Silent Memory of Our Future*, the biennial includes 18 international artists working with film, video and lens based media, many of whom have produced new work for the Biennial. *Contour 09* comes at a timely moment to consider recent history, as it takes place twenty years after a key date in twentieth century history, 1989. The European map has changed considerably since then, as have the geopolitical situation, cultural values and traditional notions of identity; post-1989 euphoria has now evaporated. The necessity to negotiate the present, through an understanding of the past is becoming more

entrenched in historical theory, overthrowing ideas about the 'end of history' and the dominant culture of 'presentism'. Mechelen, itself a city steeped in history, seems the perfect place to engage such questions.

Contour 09 revolves around questions of historical representation and historiography, explores how historical narratives are constructed, and engages in a process of historical re-evaluation demonstrating the increased importance of historical context in a large segment of contemporary art practice. The biennial is not be governed by an overbearing curatorial concept which instrumentalizes artistic practice under one rubric, but allows room for artists to present multiple perspectives on the chosen theme – whether social, political, cultural or personal – perspectives that will shed light on the 'jigsaw that is history', as the historian E. H. Carr famously called his discipline. Thus the biennial is not an exhibition about a specific historical period or subject, but rather a series of reflections on different aspects of the historical and historiographic, relating to our modern past. Likewise, the exhibition is not constructed as a linear narrative but consists of autonomous chapters or short stories, which may or may not connect to one another.

The artists participating in the biennial take recourse in the past to re-frame the present and to demonstrate the complex and often persisting entanglements between past, present and future. They highlight how the residue of history affects our perception of the present as well as our imaginings of the future. Employing a variety of narrative strategies, they reflect on memory and the passage of time, often creating distinct 'chronotopes' of their own. Their work foregrounds practices of retrieval, researching, referencing, recycling and finally interpreting historical material anew, often to dismantle the authority of dominant historical narratives, or to bring to the fore front repressed or peripheral ones.

How does one deal with the spectre of history and the ghosts of the past? How is history written and by whom? Whose history is it? *Contour 09* advocates the importance of history in our age of forgetting. To quote Eric Hobsbawm, one of the greatest historians of our time, "History alone provides orientation and anyone who faces the future without it is not only blind but dangerous,

especially in the era of high technology". In any case, an understanding of history – or histories, as is perhaps more correct a term – is paramount as it entails an understanding of social and cultural being. Thus, in a nutshell, the exhibition advocates the importance of history in the public as well as private realism, and revolves around questions of historical representation and historiography. It explores how historical narratives are constructed, highlights the complex and often persisting entanglements between past, present and future, and aims to demonstrate how the residue of history affects our perception of the present as well as our visions of the future.

Does the video-biennial have fixed venues?

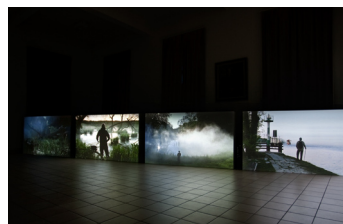
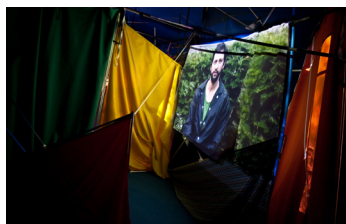
As I mentioned above, each curator has the freedom to choose the venues he or she wants to work with, so there are no fixed venues. What was very important for me from the very beginning was not to use empty or disused buildings as venues for the biennial, whether old churches or institutional spaces like abandoned hospitals, something that had been done in the past. I didn't want the artworks to come in and temporarily fill in a gaping void. So I opted for spaces that already have a use, where there is a flow of people, spaces that have a life. Together with the artists and the exhibition architects, Lhoas & Lhoas, we worked towards securing the highest standards of presentation for film and video, which is so often compromised in large exhibitions.

What was first the venues or the works of the artists?

The works of the artist always come first. In discussion with the artists we started looking for the venues, which create an interesting and meaningful dialogue with the works, a complementary conceptual and spatial relationship. Many new works were also commissioned for the Biennial.

Video or film-works mostly have a beginning and an end, it takes time to look at them how do you deal with this motion of time, that the public will not just walk past them?

This is something one needs to consider carefully, given the time-based nature of the medium. That's why the exhibition is limited to only 18 artists, and most of the works are no longer than 20', though there are some longer ones. Nevertheless, its up to the viewer to decide how much time he or she wants to



Top: Vincent Meessen, *Vita Nova* (2009), Co-produced by Contour Mechelen vzw, Belgium, With the support of the Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF), Produced by Normal, Brussels, Courtesy Normal, Brussels. Photo: Kristof Vrancken

Bottom Left: Yorgos Sapountzis, *Charleroi. In memory of wealth, celebration and religion* (2009), Co-produced by Contour Mechelen vzw, Belgium, With the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin and Loraini Alimantiri/Gazonrouge, Athens. Photo: Kristof Vrancken

Bottom right: Julian Rosefeldt, *The Ship of Fools* (2007), Courtesy the artist and Arndt & Partner, Berlin/Zurich. Photo: Kristof Vrancken

invest, it's not up to us to dictate how one will navigate the show. However, it was important for us that the exhibition can be viewed in a whole day, and that is indeed possible. The fact that the exhibition is dispersed in various venues, within walking distance of one another also allows the audience to take a 'breather' in between works, and avoid the feeling of being trapped in a dark space all day.

What is the theme of the 'Contour 09' Biennale?

I answered this above but here are some additional criteria about the artists I selected: The exhibition showcases a variety of practices but focuses more on work that features complex, layered narratives and rich, memorable visual languages, which are often consciously cinematic, as well as practices

that are obviously hand crafted and labour-intensive. Lastly, the exhibition aims to argue for the deceleration of perception by including works that need to be viewed from beginning to end, works that are more gradually immersive, unfolding over time. Many artists augment their film and video installations with other visual material. The exhibition presents recent as well as newly commissioned work by the participating artists.

Are you planning any parallel events, like a symposium or talks, film screenings?

Yes, there will be some selected events, which relate to the theme of the Biennial. One was an exhibition at the Beurschouwburg in Brussels, which took place in September as part of the European Media Event. It was entitled *Past Imperfect* and included artists in the biennial

such as T.J. Wilcox, Lene Berg and Yorgos Sapountzis, but also other artists who are exploring issues of historiography. On the 16th October we have invited the Finnish artist Mika Taanila to show two of his seminal films *The future is not what it used to be* (2002) and *Futuro: A New Stance for Tomorrow* (1998). This event has also been planned in collaboration with the Beursschouwburg in Brussels, where it will also take place. Taanila's films deal with the issues of urban artificial surroundings and futuristic utopias of contemporary science, so his work is perfectly complementary to the biennial and its preoccupation with the complex entanglements between past present and future. Lastly, on the closing day of the biennial, October 18, we will present the European Premiere of Sami van Ingen's *Just One Kiss: The Fall of Ned Kelly*

UNREAL ASIA

Interview with Gridthiya Gaweewong (GG) and David Teh (DT),
by Siri Peyer (SP)



Where is Where? (2008)
HD installation for 6 projections with sound
Written and directed by Eija-Liisa Ahtila
Photographed by Marja-Leena Hukkanen
Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris
© 2008 Crystal Eye – Kristallisilmä Oy
Photo: Kristof Vrancken

(2009) at the Cultural Centre in Mechelen. This work is an interpretation of the first ever full length feature film from 1906 *Ned Kelly And His Gang* (Dir. John and Nevin Tait, 1906) a milestone in the history of cinema - and a film that has since been nearly completely lost. *Just One Kiss* is based on the surviving synopsis story line and appropriated found footage, with live sound track.

I have talked to a lot of film-curators here in Oberhausen. I have often heard the opinion, that film needs the cinema-space to be showed in an appropriate way. They understand the cinema-space as an exhibition-space. What do you think this means? That taking film and video out of the cinema corrupts the works?

I don't agree with sweeping statements like that. Each film / video work is a special case and needs special consideration depending on the medium, format, content. Some works are better viewed in a cinema, others in specially configured exhibition spaces, in a museum or gallery. Nowadays most artists don't work with the cinema in mind, they work with the exhibition space, though they may on occasion show in the cinema.

The problem is that there still is today a lack of care and

thought in the proper installation of film and video. Too often it is pushed into a black box or projected on a white wall, without considering the notion of spatiality and architecture, which is an integral part of viewing video installations in particular. One needs to start with the wishes and intentions of the artist. On the other hand, there also still seems to be a divide between the art world, and the festival world - not sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences. The contemporary art world still has a lot of work to do in facilitating better presentations of moving image art, and in defining certain criteria in relation to what actually constitutes a quality film or video. Too often totally amateurish or trivial works are included in shows, perhaps because there is not enough knowledge of film and video history.

Thank you very much for this Interview.

Katerina Gregos is curator of *Contour*, the 4th edition of the *Biennial of Moving Image*, in Mechelen, Belgium. She authored numerous artist's catalogues, and is a regular contributor to international art periodicals. She has lectured and participated in conferences, biennials, and art fairs internationally.

SP: You both worked together at the film festival in Bangkok. Gridthiya, you are the founder of it and David you worked with Gridthiya on the latest edition. Maybe you could tell me something more about it.

GG: Actually, this project started in 1996 as part of the programme of our alternative space Project 304, which is an artist run space. The Festival is called *Bangkok Experimental Film Festival*, and I think we were the first to start the 'film festival culture' in Thailand (because before nothing else like it existed). We started out as the Bangkok International Art Film Festival with Apichatpong Weerasethakul, who is one of the most important independent art film makers in Thailand now. At the beginning, the festival was very small. There were no experimental film culture or screenings in the country. We just wanted to introduce alternative film screenings or alternative visual experience for a local audience. It is currently in the fifth edition. The first two festivals had a very open structure, we wanted to introduce the festival to the people. We held 'open calls' and created a selection by ourselves. We were a very small team; we sat together and selected the films. For the third edition, I invited ten curators from different countries, including Croatia, Japan, China. I asked them to send a programme for us, and we received a compilation from each of them. The fourth edition was held during the ongoing political crises in Thailand. We had demonstrations where people were really discussing democracy. It was the first time in a generation, that the Thai people had a sense of political awareness. We used that kind of situation as a starting point, and you can see this reflected in our curating. The fourth edition was called *Bangkok Democracy*. The festival was not really thematic, it was more the process that reflected the idea of 'Democracy', and this meant that we showed everything. We showed ten programmes on video monitors in the park. People choose whatever they wanted to see. For the fifth edition of the festival, I invited David to curate a show.

DT: My background is not in film at all. I think it is worth noting as well, in the context of that history just rehearsed, that barriers between film, or cinema, and other visual arts do exist but are very permeable in that part of the world. This is maybe something that distinguishes it very seriously from the discourse of curating the moving image in Europe and North America. In fact, those boundaries are seldom raised at all in South East Asia. A lot of people are very keen to have them broken. I actually attended the fourth festival in the park, and one of the things that stood out to me was this promiscuity of different approaches to the moving image: Media art, video art, commercial animation, art film. Some of it imported, and some of it local. There was a huge amount of 'Do-it-yourself' digital video work. Some were intended for youtube-style distribution, some were intended for passing a DVD around friends, and some headed for festivals overseas. It all just seemed to be so comfortable in a big jumble. I do not want to fetishize this idea of a tropicalised environment, but there is something in that. You can get away with a certain disorder in a city like Bangkok and it sort of works. That was the first edition that I saw. That was quite soon after I arrived in Thailand, and they invited me to curate the fifth edition of the festival, which we did once again from an open call. Then, we tried to make sense of what we had. There were around four hundred works.

GG: From the open call for the first festival, we received only fifteen films. Then the next time we received one hundred films and so on.

DT: We had four venues: one was a shopping mall, one was a cultural centre, which was the cinémathèque at the Alliance Française in Bangkok, the third was a contemporary gallery space, and lastly we had an event at the Jim Thompson library, which was a smaller screening. We also had a guerrilla channel in public spaces, which was a projector mounted to a bicycle, held in China Town, in collaboration with a local artist. The main venue was definitely the programme in the shopping mall, that we were able to use freely - a megaplex in a shopping mall. Normally, they show a very limited range of commercial films, very bad films, and that really is the context in which cinema lives in Thailand today. The other end, the China Town thing on the bicycle, is a very important point for curating the moving image in a region like South East Asia.

The cinema did not arrive in the form that is currently consumed. It arrived as a mobile form for a huge majority of the population and in fact, it still is a mobile form for a significant portion of the population. If you add the mobile and pirated together, then the informal architecture of cinema is still alive, and in some places it dominates. I was quite self-conscious about using the megaplex space, but at the same time we were trying to bring some of the programme through in more peripheral spaces, that were decentred and organically connected to a community; which is impossible at the mall.

SP: David when you moved to Thailand, did you think that as a curator you could do other things than in Sydney where you are originally from?

DT: I could not do much more. That is actually the honest answer. I do not consider myself as a curator and I certainly did not then. I have done more of it since. What I have done in the context of those artist run initiatives in Sydney was a little bit of curatorship but a huge amount of it was organisational work. I only really curated two video shows in those years. I guess, when I moved to Thailand, I was moving there to get away from an academic life for a while. I had to think long and hard about what I could actually offer. I met all of the artists in the art scene in Bangkok and everyone was very friendly and very interesting. But as a critical theorist, I had very little to offer them, particularly not speaking Thai properly and not reading the Thai language. Even if you do read the Thai language, it is very difficult for a critical theorist to become involved in Thai art. So I just started to do one of the things I could do, curating, as I had some recent experience putting shows together.

SP: You two curated the programme 'Unreal Asia' together, which is currently showing in Oberhausen. How did you approach this task of coming here to Germany and having to represent South East Asia?

GG: In 2005, I co-curated one exhibition with my Singaporean friend in Berlin, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt about South East Asia. The central theme was concerned with redefining South East Asia, which is very problematic for us. When you are asked as Asian People to do something in other countries, it is always very tough to represent yourself in another context. The major issue we wanted to avoid, was to present something exotic. A very important discussion resulted from that show, which was called *Politics of Fun*. We focused on a younger generation and we showed a lot of video works. It is very difficult to present South East Asia in a singular way; there has never been a 'singular' South East Asia before.

Afterwards, I was approached by Lars Henrik Gass (Festival Director of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen), he was interested in having a big programme about South East Asia. I came last year to Oberhausen to see the context of the festival. I said that this is too much, I need David Teh to co-curate. The nice thing about working with David, is that he is both an insider and an outsider in South East Asia. For me, it is a very interesting balance when sometimes we see things totally different, and it is good for me when we see work from Thailand, because I do not really have this distance. So I think working together with David is a very nice combination. The idea of *Unreal Asia*, came from our discussion about the most urgent or interesting issues that appear in this context.

DT: This sort of discourse that happens around those events has a very different theme. I was both mindful, and of course apprehensive about doing this. We have actually curated the programme in a very 'South East Asian' way. Meaning, for example, not to deadline. I don't think it pays to generalise about the sort of urban geographies or even about the environments of these places. We have received work from Semi-alpine Assam in North-Eastern India, and we have received work from the other extreme, Timor. We also received work from Australia, from China and so on. South East Asia does not exist and it never did. Part of any such survey ought to be a deconstruction of that. The violence of this concept is still palpable. Allowing that map to be pulled apart again, is a fairly important part of the job. When I think about the importance of context, it is really about a way of working; it is an oral culture in South East Asia. It is still a fundamentally oral culture. Things work very differently, and much slower by correspondence. People work face to face. You eat and you talk, and that is how things get done and that is how we worked. When we were able to have research trips, our ideas unfolded. The idea of preparing remotely a kind of coherent picture of this region, to then appear in what is a very directed functionalised screening environment, I think is misguided. I do not think you can do that. To some extent, we know the way we think about the content, is going to give a taste of another way of thinking and working. We have to

be content with what it is. We are not going to transform the festival structure. When you mention institutional structures as media, we become content in that exchange. I do not think we had the purchase on it.

GG: No, but actually we were trying to negotiate with the institution. We wanted to change some structures. But it did not work.

DT: There were many different ways of communicating, and very different ways of interpreting the expectations. In the end, it was a very productive tension.

GG: I am the one who was here in Oberhausen before, and I was here only for one festival. But David has never been here before. So David asked me how the festival in Oberhausen is, and I told him that the audience here will love this kind of stuff. They can sit through a thirty minute film without thinking that it's too long. I had to convince him. At the beginning, I was talking to Lars about the audience here. I noticed the connection between the film festival and the local audience. Because when you talk about South East Asian cultures, everything happens on the streets. So we were trying to bring some of this ambience to the city, to bring people into the festival, but it did not happen. It was because of the budget, and because of the administration. But we tried until the end.

DT: We started with this philosophical idea which is – in an academic discourse – not a new idea at all, that a very different set of factors furnish the reality of life in that part of the world: That there are not really rational principles, scientific thinking, doubt, those sorts of processes. Instead, comparatively irrational principles tend to drive behaviour. And this can be read also in the social structure, in the way institutions are ordered. We started with this question: What if 'realism' had no real counterpart in a South East Asian headspace? What would such a thing be built on if not on those rationalist principles? The idea really unravelled over the course of putting together the show, which I am not at all uncomfortable about. It was not a bad starting point. Where it led us, was to the flipside of a lot of themes that are really very prominent already in collections of art and film from this region. The obvious one is migration, which is of course, a huge text that is tennised about left, right and centre in museums, in film discourse and so on. But then what facet of that story might be missing? One facet is the idea that when people go, half of the story is left behind. Or how do we think about internal migration? It might be geographical within a city, within neighbourhoods, or within a country. And try to think about some of the less explored territories within that. On the whole *State Fictions* theme, which began the programme, that again is very obvious subject matter; the state and its struggles, still form a very significant text in peoples everyday life and still dominate the history of that region. And so we were looking at how the explosion in digital video might undermine some of those official stories with a more organic storytelling; a more direct reflection of grass roots existence. There is a programme on geography called *Uncanny Geographies*. Again, we have seen a lot of these sorts of things; the rapid transformation of urban spaces in Asia and the spaces of poverty it has caused. This is an aestheticised genre in the museums and festivals around the world. So again we were trying to look at that without entering it as a kind of realism or even a hyperrealism. What if we could undermine all of those cognate terms of the real? Then, for example, how would we interpret the maze of the slums in Jakarta? Of course there is an order there that is formed in different ways. So that is how we began. I don't think there is anything revolutionary about the themes of the programme. It really is a survey like that.

GG: For me this programme is very important for the South East Asian film context, because I don't think there is anybody who has done this kind of big programme before. Other film festivals that focus on South East Asia, focus mostly on feature films and its filmmakers. But in our programme, the filmmakers come mostly from visual art.

DT: I was unsure about the context in this respect. But sitting through the first few sessions, it immediately became clear to me that it was a very good decision. I could tell that a lot of the individuals who attend this festival and who are very familiar with the network of film distribution, have not heard of a lot of these filmmakers, and will sit and stay. I think we really brought something that they would not have had otherwise. It might have been created for a gallery context, and some work is not designed for film festivals.

GG: We had to force a lot of filmmakers to change their work in order to show it here. Like Dinh Q. Lê's work which started out as a six-channel video, which he then made a three-channel, and which we in turn asked him to change to one screen. We really wanted to show his work in this context.

DT: The Australian artist, Alex Kershaw, has never shown his work on a single channel before. This is the first single-channel film he has ever made. I mean, you can use the institutional event if you like as a sort of impetus for challenging peoples practices. That is one of the positives of the process. I think it is really important that individuals who are not plugged in to the film festivals and film funding networks, can penetrate this audience. Because this audience is not restricted to those networks. This audience is a more catholic collection of art professionals, and people making video in South East Asia cannot access these networks. There is a certain political scope to what we are doing. It might be more an economic question, but there is a question of access that needs to be answered. We were mindful of that, in approaching our selection as well.

GG: We received about five hundred films, and we selected only seventy for this programme in Oberhausen. We would have liked to have shown more.

DT: That was too much for some. There are ten programmes and they are all over length. We were actually delivering a lot more then we were contracted to do. In the first instance, we were really surprised by the attitude. I am not blaming it, it is our fault as much as anyone's.

GG: I am thinking of my audience and that they get the chance to see it.

DT: It is a question of structure as well. There is a certain respectful distance from the object that is not really observed where we are working. So for example, people coming in and out of a session, is not really a positive thing for the organisers of an event such as this. Whereas for me, it is completely meaningless whether people come in and out, and that it is not just the gallery background. It is also the very relationship, that is set up between a viewer and the artwork and in Asia, generally speaking, you can say that the demands of the audience are fused. There is no sort of accepted protocol for a lot of these things, even at a film festival, which is a very predictable form. You can come and find that in fact, there is a big gap, because one of the films is missing, so there is a pause or some people start to leave and others come in. It is a much more fluid environment to work in, I realised this, and it was made very clear that an excess of material was not accepted. I just find it really strange because it is hard for me not to interpret that, as what it would mean in a South East Asian context; which is, you are rejecting my generosity. This kind of obligatory exchange, is still par for the course there. Here of course, it is contractual, it is more ordered.

GG: The work between David and I is very casual. I just invited him. We don't have a contract, and it is still going on this way.

Gridthiya and David Thank you for the interview.

Gridthiya Gaweewong is an independent curator and cofounder of Project 304 in Bangkok.

David Teh is a Bangkok-based critic and curator and works at the National University of Singapore.

OBSESSED WITH CINEMA

Interview with Mark Webber, by Siri Peyer (SP) and Wolf Schmelter (WS)

SP: Can you tell us something about the beginning of your curatorial practice?

I became aware that there were other forms of cinema when I was a teenager obsessed with music. I very quickly discovered the Velvet Underground and became obsessed with them, Andy Warhol and the Factory, and I began to read all those books about the exciting people who would be around the Factory : Jack Smith, Jonas Mekas, Piero Heliczer and so on. I lived in a small town in the north of England and there were no experimental film screenings. When I was a little older, I would start coming to London to go to concerts. At my friend's house, where I would stay, on the back of the bathroom door, they had the calendar posters for the Scala cinema, which

was active in the 80's and 90's. It was kind of a hangover from the midnight movies circuit and what people might now call 'cult films'. They would show things like John Water's triple bills, but they would also show the Paul Morrissey / Warhol films. So I went there one time and I saw either *The Magic Lantern Cycle* by Kenneth Anger or a double bill of *Flaming Creatures* and *Blonde Cobra*. It was a big old cinema with maybe six hundred seats, a balcony, a huge screen, and pretty bad prints. It was just fantastic! It was just really difficult to see things in those days and I wasn't living in London at the time. Not long after that there was a TV show on Channel 4, which was trying to do more cultural television programming then, called *Midnight Underground*. The films of the first season were chosen by David Curtis and Simon Field, who'd both long been active in avant-garde film in England. The first series showed things like *Little Stabs at Happiness*, *Pull My Daisy*, *Meshe of the Afternoon ...* a lot of classics and a few contemporary works. Fast-forward a few years: I moved to London and started to go to more screenings and it was just depressing. I would go to the ICA to see a programme and there would be six people in the audience; the person that organised it, myself and four random people. The London Film-Makers' Co-op was still around then and I would sometimes go there but there were never many other people. This was 1988/89 when I was 18 years old. The Co-op would also do a programme once a month at the National Film Theatre, the BFI, and again there would be ten or fifteen people. I was hungry to see things, so I would go and see stuff all the time. I soon discovered that it seemed that whenever I would go and see contemporary film or video at that time, that it was pretty terrible, but when I would go and see historical work, I was always more excited by them. So I decided, that I would just ignore what was going on now and just focus on discovering the history.

Later, I started organising screenings. I was in this pop group called Pulp and we were quite successful, and the Barbican – which is an arts centre with a cinema, gallery, and concert halls for classical music – were having a year of American culture. I somehow got involved because I knew the composer La Monte Young and they wanted to do something with him. So I was talking to the music promoter there and he showed me the programme for this whole year of programming, and there were just no films, apart from maybe a David Lynch film, so I suggested that I could do a film season. They probably thought: "This is fantastic, you're in Pulp, hundreds and thousands of people will come and we'll get lots of publicity!" So I got this chance, they gave me free reign and it was my first chance to go out and discover things. When you start to curate film and video programmes you often show a lot of things you have not seen, because you want to see them. This was a season of sixteen programmes called *Underground America* at the end of 1998. There'd not been this kind of survey in London for a long time and there was a lot of films people hadn't seen for years or never had the chance to see. If I say so myself, it was quite fantastic! We did half the programmes at the Barbican and half at the Lux Centre. And that is, kind of, how I got started.

I would go to the Film-Makers' Co-op at the Lux for days on end, just watching films from the collection – mostly the older films and just getting to know stuff and wondering why people didn't go see them when they were showing. Maybe they were not being shown the right way or it could somehow be done differently. So I started to do it myself and people liked it. Parallel to this, some friends and I started a club at the ICA called *Little Stabs at Happiness*, after the Ken Jacobs film. This started October 1997 and it ran once a month for three years. One of the reasons we started it was because there was nowhere we liked to go out – there was nothing interesting or exciting for us, so we thought we'd make our own club. The evening was divided into three parts: at the beginning we would play contemporary and modern classical avant-garde music at a low volume so people could talk to each other. Between records there would be three experimental avant-garde films, and then there would be a feature film on 16mm. At the end of the night, there would be a disco. Lots of kids would come along to the disco but they would have to watch films before that, and this was a really great way to build an audience because they would never face these films if they did not see them that way. Many people discovered this kind of film through coming to that club, like George Clark, who is a writer and worked for Independent Cinema Office in London and has been involved with Lux, and William Fowler, who is now the artists' film curator for the National Film and Television Archive at the BFI. Though these events, we started to build up an audience.

WS: I went to the *Fluxfilms* screening you curated at the Rio Cinema in London. Can you tell me something more about this format of showing films?

The Rio is another great old cinema. A really nice Art Deco building, a big old cinema with four hundred seats and a balcony, and it's in Dalston in the east, what has now become a bit of an artistic area of London. I always knew the cinema but I'd never organised anything there. Sometime the year before, Jonas Mekas has intimated that he wanted to show the Fluxus films and I wasn't that interested at first because around that time in the 90's, when I first started to go and see things, it seemed like the Fluxus film reel was showing really a lot. It was one of the few things that was around then so I thought everybody has seen this and if I show it, not many people are going to come. I mentioned this to my friend Anne-Sophie Dinant, who works at the South London Gallery, because it somehow related to an exhibition they were having at the gallery, and she wanted to take on the event. Because I wasn't too sure if people would come and see the films, I was keen to make it more of an event. The cinema wanted to do it but they offered us either Thursday evening at 6pm or Friday at 11 after the last show, because it is a commercial cinema and they have to show the latest releases. It was also the same weekend as the Frieze Art Fair, so we were slightly nervous about doing an event that would go against that because Frieze is a huge machine that millions of people go to. So we just decided to go for it on the Friday night and make it something more than a film screening, and we promoted it like a party. In the spirit of Fluxus it seemed like the obvious thing to do was to have some Fluxus performances, and we already knew that Jonas would come and introduce it.

It just so happened that related to Frieze, the Serpentine Gallery were doing this event called *The Manifesto Marathon*, which involved inviting any famous artist that Hans Ulrich Obrist could think of to come and present a 'manifesto'. Fortunately through Jonas, they invited Ben Vautier. He was also in town and was able to do something for us though we had no idea what that might be. Even when we had dinner with him before, we didn't really know. It seemed obvious that a good way to start would be the Nam June Paik, *Solo for Violin* and that was just so fantastic. The whole evening quite reminiscent of this cinema the Scala where I had a lot of my early cinema experiences. It was a similar kind of building and on Saturdays the Scala would do all-night screenings that had a similarly active audience, none

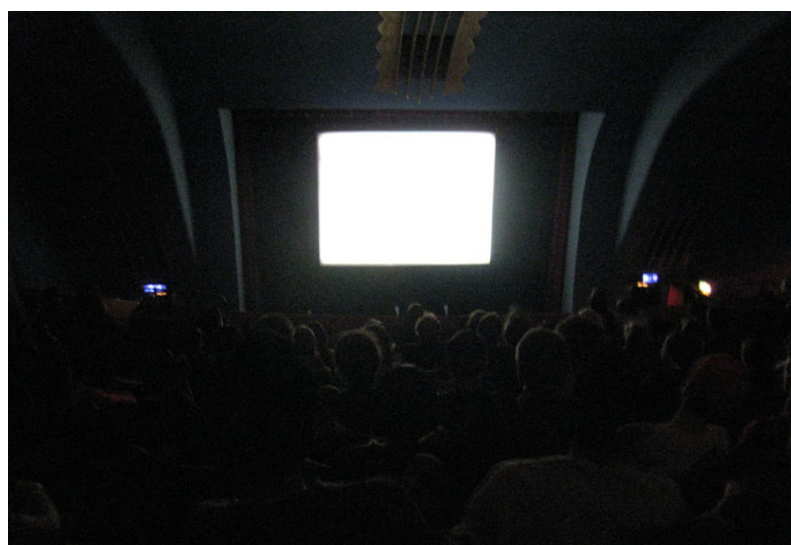
of this reverence we're now so used to. So we organised all these performances, like giving out paper airplanes and passing a block of ice around the audience to the sound of a fire burning. The last piece was by Ben Vautier, *Audience Piece Number 8*, which involved taking groups of the audiences to see a performance at a secret place, so we took them down to the basement of the cinema through these dark, abandoned rooms and corridors and then out through a side exit onto the street. And that was the end of the evening, we just left them there in street! It's not very often that I do an event like this, but it was a success beyond our wildest dreams. We could have filled the cinema twice, it was sold out the week before, it was crazy!

SP: *For me, it seems like watching films is very much a social experience in your understanding, am I right in saying that?*

I am one of the least sociable people. I don't really like speaking to people. So to sit together in a room and not speak to lots of people is fantastic for me, but the films are nothing if people don't see them. It seems to me that there are lot of curators that do things so that they can say that they've done it, to be associated with an artist or an institution. They don't actually care about the event, how it happens, how the work is projected and if people see it. I'm not one of those people. It became like a mission for me, from going to these early screenings and being so excited about the films and other people not knowing about them; it made me want to make people pay attention. And the other side of that is that a lot of things I organised have been in art institutions. An important part of it was to get the work attention in that kind of context that it wasn't getting anymore in the film context.

SP: *How are your experiences in working with institutions? Is there an attempt to present the film screenings in relation with the ongoing gallery programmes?*

It depends, it's different every time. What was important was to make the case that a film screening is an exhibition in itself. It doesn't have to be related to an exhibition. The problem in England was always that the Film Department of an institution was only part of the Education Department. This has only recently changed with Tate, two or three years ago. It's now moved more into the curatorial department. It is amazing how



Ben Vautier at Flux Party.
Flux Party view from balcony.
Photos: Mark Webber

the whole scene it has changed even in the short time while I've been active.

WS: *Do you think that the cinema in Tate Modern, for example, is a place where the film and art scenes meet?*

There are two parts to that question: one is that it is not a cinema. I think that the architects, the famous Swiss architects, have probably never been to the cinema or had just forgotten that this was going to be one of the uses when they designed the room. It's a very problematic room: it's bright red and has a reflective glass wall on one side, it's got a very small screen and the projection booth is not well equipped. It is more a room they can hire out to companies for conferences and things like that, that was maybe a priority when it was designed. And in a way, that's understandable because at that time when it was being designed, Tate was not really doing film screenings.

A lot of people who go to film screenings at Tate would not go to see the same film somewhere else. A portion of that audience is the art world because Stuart Comer, the film curator at Tate, is very good at bringing people in to see things. They also always get well-attended screenings because they have a huge amount of tourists that pass through the building, so it's sort of a place where these two worlds come together, for better or for worse.

In 1999, Chrissie Iles invited me to do a large season with her at the Whitney Museum in New York, it was not long after she started there, and the rest of the museum didn't show any interest in this film programme. That's probably changed now because Chrissie is really advanced in the institution. We did a three month long programme, almost with different programmes every day, ridiculously ambitious with more than a hundred individual programmes. I don't know if

anyone from the museum came to anything, and they didn't really promote it, they didn't really understand what we were doing. We even had a meeting with their press department where Chissie had to explain how film is different from videotape ... and this is within the Whitney that has had film activities since 1970. The one thing that I really regret is that there's still nowhere that does regular programming every week or every fortnight. It's something that I tried many times to establish in every institution in London, and they're just not interested. They still have that historical view that these films are boring, that no one is interested, it's too expensive ... which it is, I can appreciate that ... You would think that one programme a week in an institution like the BFI, where they have three screens open seven days a week, wouldn't hurt them, but they just won't do it. This also relates to my ideas about building an audience, by having consistency and developing an audience, by showing different kinds of things in a serious way over an extended period.

Thank you for the interview.

Mark Webber is an independent curator of artists' film and video who has been responsible for screenings and events at institutions including Tate Modern, National Film Theatre, ICA and Barbican Centre (London), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) and many international museums, art centres and festivals. He is a programme advisor to the London Film Festival and is currently working on several publications.

FORMS ARE CHANGING

**Interview with Sheryl Mousley,
by Siri Peyer**

Can you tell me something about your background? You studied film history?

I work at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and I am actually from Minnesota originally. I took a roundabout path to film curating. I didn't start in Film, but in Sociology and Cultural studies. I started a film education program in a media arts center, which grew into a full-fledged academic program.

Afterwards I started making my own experimental films. At the same time I started working on big feature films. I worked on *Purple Rain*, which was Prince's first film. I then moved to France. I lived in Paris for many years and started making my own films again, and theoretical and critical study. When I came back to the United States and did graduate work at the University of Minnesota in film studies. I then made my way to curatorial practice. So it was a long road to come to where I am today.

How did that change from making films to showing film happen?

I think that making films is very hard in many ways. I respect the people who do it and I felt that I didn't necessarily want to put so much of my life into that part of production.

Do you have a special urge to show certain kinds of films? Do you think some films are never shown and need to?

I come from an era, both in studying film and making film, that was the age of the Structuralism, Experimentation, the Avant-garde. I was at school in the 1980's and earlier. The educational program I started was shaped by the artists of that era; Ken Jacobs, Kenneth Anger, Bruce Connor and Stan Brakhage. I see that this history has not been fully explored, and there is a new generation interested in seeing this work, so I have an interest in continuing to show it. Because I'm given an open space to do a wide range of things, I do a many different programs. Longstanding series allows for a full retrospective of films by the most influential and innovative filmmakers of our times. Recently, I showed Béla Tarr from Hungary for example, or the early works of Miloš Forman from his days in the Czech Republic. About five years ago I did a retrospective of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, who came to the Walker to talk in depth about this work.

How does the Walker Art center work, does it have a film collection, does it have its own cinema? How is the film program connected to the other programs going on? How do you work together with the other curators?

This is such an important question, because it is changing so rapidly right now. The Walker Art Center does have a room that is a dedicated cinema space. It seats about three hundred fifty people. It is a beautiful projection room. It is a place where you come and you buy a ticket, you go in and sit down and watch a film in a more traditional sense.

We have a small cinema space, which has about eighty seats and that is the place where artist cinema is shown all day long during the regular gallery hours. Video monitors are placed in an open area where we show works from our collection. Our collection is small; it is about nine hundred titles. In the galleries, which is the largest part of the Walker, is for contemporary art, and many of these artists are working with moving images. I have been at the Walker for eleven years. In the beginning the film department was in the mostly in the cinema, and then we expanded our building with a beautiful addition designed by the Swiss architects Herzog and deMeuron. Now we have two screening spaces and video monitors in public spaces. This parallels interdisciplinary work by artists; many are expanding their practice to work in multiple disciplines at the same time. At Walker we have a 'curatorial think tank'. All of the departments come together to talk about ideas. So when I get back from Oberhausen, I will meet with my curatorial staff from other the departments and talk about what happen here these past few days, what people were talking about, what are the concerns of artists and curators. And my colleagues who will be going to the Venice Biennale talk across boundaries. This way of working is new for us.

Other curators, like Ian White working for the Whitechapel in London, have quite a different experience. Their film programs are completely separated from the other departments in their institutions. What made it possible to work in this 'new' way at the Walker Art Center?

We have a new director, Olga Viso, as of a year ago and we have a new chief-curator, Darsie Alexander, who came to the Walker from Baltimore a few months ago. She was surprised when she got there that we were separated at all. We were able to adapt very quickly, because we were all very ready to work together. It is very encouraging.

When you program the Cinema Space, do you put this program in relation to the other exhibitions going on at the Walker Art Center? Do you all work on the same themes?

We work at connecting themes within our areas, but one concern is that work on different timeframes. The Visual Arts is determine gallery exhibition up to three years, and in Film, we work very quickly to keep fresh work in the cinema, so we are about four months out. There have been times, in the

past (because this is not totally new), there was a gallery exhibition of Cameron Jamie while his films were in our small screening room. We have a history of had this kind of relationship, where an artist works very specifically in two mediums, in which we would collaborate across departments.

For me, to be able to recommend an artist for a Gallery is new. A work for example, that we saw here in Oberhausen yesterday by Eija-Liisa Ahtila from Finland, has been shown very much in both the film and gallery worlds. The film that she showed here and the film that she showed at Sundance were flat projections variations of a three dimensional installation. So where does she go? Where do we put her work? Would it be fair to her, if I would only show the flat version but no one would be able to see the three or four dimensional room with projections that she builds?

There are lots of artists who work with moving images and intend their work to be shown in a gallery-space. Is your department also working with those kinds of works?

We are just beginning to do that now, because territory inside the museum has been very specific to each department. Whoever controls the space, controls the budget, and they control all of the activity there. But, that is what is changing. The first time I came to Oberhausen, was when Ian White curated the Kinomuseum program two years ago. That was such an important discourse that helped shape all of our thinking.

One of the things artists sometimes say to us (who have traditionally been in galleries), is that their work is installed and people walk in and they stay thirty seconds, maybe they stay two minutes, maybe they stay for the duration, but most people do not. Then artists say: "I am tired of having people walk in and see a minute of my film and walk out. I want to have them to have a cinema experience, come in and sit down and the room goes dark; they see the work and leave at the end". Watching a film as a communal experience. Some filmmakers really love this. It was, if you are a filmmaker you are in the cinema, if you are a film artist you are in the gallery. I think that is blurring for the artists and then it is blurring also for the curators. It is a very exciting time to be a film curator. Another discussion is what should call our departments. At the Walker, my official title is 'Curator of Film and Video'. Those are odd terms when you think about it, because here we

are at a film festival and we see nothing projected on film at all. So what does the word 'film' mean? Maybe my title should just be 'Curator of Film', and that means all moving image.

Yet, there are still in some peoples' minds a big difference between film and video. Forms are changing so fast, that even 'video' is old fashioned. What do we mean by these terms? If we really take it seriously, they change the way we work. Should we change our titles all across the board? Maybe we should get rid of distinctions and just be curators. And even that, what does that mean? Because, curatorial usually means you are taking care of a collection; presenting a collection and have a relationship to preservation of history. We end up being much more like programmers than conservators. These words are in flux and it will be interesting to see how quickly we change them, or if we start holding on to our own traditions and history.

Thank you for the interview.

Sheryl Mousley is Curator of Film and Video at the Walker arts Center in Minneapolis.



Luke Fowler / Lee Patterson

B8016, 2008, Film-Sound-Performance, 26. Mai 2008, im Rahmen des Projekts Draw a Straight Line and Follow it, The Long Weekend 2008, Tate Modern, © Tate Modern, Photo: Ivo Gormley

FILM SAMMELN

Interview mit Alice Koegel, by Siri Peyer

Sie haben Kunstgeschichte studiert und befassen sich mit Film und Performance, können Sie kurz etwas über ihren Werdegang erzählen.

Ich bin Kunsthistorikerin und habe als Kritikerin, Redakteurin und Kuratorin in institutionellen und außerinstitutionellen Zusammenhängen gearbeitet und Texte und Publikationen über zeitgenössische Kunst, Avantgarde- und Künstlerfilme und -videos veröffentlicht. Mein Interesse und Enthusiasmus für Film und Performance wuchs mit zunehmendem Schauen von Filmen, Filmprogrammen, Performances, Besuchen von Festivals, Kontakten zu und Austausch mit bildenden Künstler/innen und Filmemacher/innen, Kurator/innen und Kritiker/innen, in Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Medien. Drei Jahre lang war ich zudem Mitinitiatorin und Kuratorin des unabhängigen Ausstellungsraums April für die Präsentation von zeitgenössischer Kunst, Film und Musik in Köln, wo es in unserem Team aus Künstler/innen, Filmemacher/innen und Kurator/innen aus den Bereichen bildende Kunst und Musik viel und bewusst um interdisziplinären Austausch ging. Seither haben mich Film, Video und Performance und Austauschprozesse zwischen bildender Kunst und Film und zwischen Film und Performance als zeitbasierte Medien weiter beschäftigt. Als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Museum Ludwig in Köln habe ich dann interdisziplinäre Ausstellungen mit umfangreichen Filmprogrammen als integraler Teil initiiert und kuratiert – etwa das Projekt Peter Doig. Studiofilmclub, das nachfolgend auch in der Kunsthalle Zürich gezeigt wurde, oder Christoph Schlingensief. Church of Fear. Zudem habe ich ausstellungsunabhängige Filmveranstaltungen und -reihen als Ausstellungen auf der Museumskinoleinwand kuratiert, etwa das Filmprogramm PopProjektionen, das Spektrum und Facetten der Popkultur, ihre Bilderproduktion, Mythen, sozialen und politischen Anliegen untersucht hat. Auch habe ich am Museum Ludwig die Film- und Videosammlung mit betreut und an der Reaktivierung

des Kinos im Museum Ludwig mitgewirkt. Als Kuratorin an Tate Modern in London lag mein Fokus auf Performance. Ich habe dort sowohl das gegenwärtige Spektrum und Potenzial von Performance-Kunst als künstlerischer Verfahrensweise als auch Pioniere der Performance-Kunst, unter anderem Allan Kaprow oder Gustav Metzger, vorgestellt und Fragen ihrer (Re)Präsentation und Institutionalisierung thematisiert. Insbesondere bei Projekten wie etwa Luke Fowlers und Lee Pattersons Film-Sound-Performance als Re-Aktion auf La Monte Youngs Composition 1960 #10: Draw a Straight Line and Follow it, oder wie von Tony Conrad, einem Pionier in vielen Bewegungen und Entwicklungen – Minimalismus, frühem Konzeptualismus, Underground und strukturellem Film, Expanded Cinema, Performance und Video-kunst-, hat die Beschäftigung mit medialen Austauschprozessen aber auch wieder eine wichtige Rolle gespielt.

Jetzt sind Sie seit kurzem an der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Konservatorin für Gegenwartskunst. Was ist dort ihre Aufgabe und wie arbeiten Sie innerhalb der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart mit dem Medium Film?

An der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart richtet sich meine Arbeit auf den Ausbau der Abteilung Gegenwartskunst, die Grafik, Malerei und Skulptur ab 1980 ebenso wie die gesamten Sammlungsbereiche der neueren künstlerischen Medien Film, Video, Fotografie sowie Performance umfasst. Letztlich aber definiert die Kunst den Gebrauch von Medien und nicht überkommene Vorstellungen von Gattungsgrenzen und so sind auch die medialen und zeitlichen Demarkationslinien der Abteilung bewusst flexibel. Das Sammlungsspektrum der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart von der Kunst des 14. Jahrhunderts bis heute ermöglicht es, aktuelle, und das heisst nicht nur just entstandene Kunst in Bezug zu ihrer Geschichte zu zeigen ebenso wie historische Positionen und für jüngere Künstlergenerationen wichtige Künstler/innen aus gegenwärtiger Perspektive zu befragen. Die in der Sammlung und in unseren Ausstellungen vertretenen Medien, also auch Film und Video, sehe ich als gleichberechtigt. Noch kann ich ja nicht aus eigener Langzeiterfahrung an der Staatsgalerie über den Umgang dort mit zeitbasierten Medien sprechen. In die erste Neupräsentation der Sammlung in unseren neuen Räumen im Altbau, die ich mit konzipiert



Luke Fowler / Lee Patterson

B8016, 2008, Film Still, Film-Sound-Performance, 26. Mai 2008, im Rahmen des Projekts Draw a Straight Line and Follow it, The Long Weekend 2008, Tate Modern, © Tate Modern, Photo: Ivo Gormley

habe, wie auch in der von mir kuratierten thematischen Sammlungspräsentation zum *Wiener Aktionismus* habe ich bewusst Film, Video, Musik und andere Audiobeiträge integriert. Gleichwohl gibt es großen Handlungsbedarf etwa im Bereich der Restaurierung und Langzeitarchivierung von Arbeiten und Dokumentationen in unserer Film- und Videosammlung.

Dieses Film- und Videoarchiv, gehört das zur Kunstsammlung der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart?

Ja, die Film- und Videosammlung ist Teil der Sammlung der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Seit den Anfängen der Videokunst wurden bereits Videos von der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart erworben, darunter aus Gerry Schums *Video Galerie*. Auch im Archiv Sohm, das seit 1981 Teil der Sammlung der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart ist, finden sich viele 8mm- und 16mm-Filme, Videos, Arbeiten der Klangkunst und audiovisuelles Dokumentationsmaterial. Das Spektrum des Archivs umfasst künstlerisches und dokumentarisches Material von Kunstströmungen und -bewegungen der 1950er bis 1970er Jahre – insbesondere der Beat-Szene, der Gruppe *Spur*, der Situationisten, von Fluxus, Konkreter Poesie, Wiener Aktionismus, Zero oder multimediale Produktionen Dieter Roths.

In letzter Zeit gab es in vielen Institutionen Bemühungen, das Medium des Films im Kinoraum zeigen zu können, es wurden zum Beispiel Kinoräume gebaut in denen Filme projiziert werden können. Wird in der Staatsgalerie auch über solche Präsentationsformen diskutiert.

In der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart verfügen wir nicht über einen expliziten Kinoraum. Filmvorführungen finden bei uns meist im Vortragssaal statt, einem großen multifunktionalen Raum, dessen Architektur anders als etwa in Peter Kubelkas „unsichtbarem Kino“ während der Projektion nicht gänzlich aus dem Blickfeld

verschwindet, nicht auf die unbeeinträchtigte Projektion und Rezeption von Film ausgerichtet ist. Aber wir können dort verschiedene Formate vorführen, auch 16mm-Film. Derzeit finden dort eher Einzelpräsentationen von Filmen statt, meist im Kontext von Ausstellungen. Langfristig wünsche ich mir und arbeite an der Konzeption von Filmprogrammen als Ausstellungen auf unserer Projektionsleinwand dort. Auf ihr soll man den verschiedenen Formen des Mediums Film begegnen und sie als gleichberechtigt wahrnehmen können. Es soll dort also nicht ausschließlich um Avantgarde-, Experimental- und Künstlerfilm gehen, wie im Kunstbetrieb üblich, auch wenn dies natürlich Schwerpunkt ist, sondern auch um Dokumentar- und Spielfilm. Es geht nicht schlicht darum, dass das Museum eine Metamorphose zum Kino durchläuft. In unseren Räumen Situationen zu schaffen, Filme und Videos im Kontext der Sammlung und im Kontext anderer bewegter Bilder bestmöglich zu ihren jeweiligen Bedingungen zeigen und sehen zu können, ist uns wichtig. Dies erreicht man nicht durch oberflächliche Umwandlungen von Oberlichtsälen zu dunklen Vorführräumen. Statt künstliche Kinoräume in Museumsräume zu bauen, wird es darum gehen, je nach Arbeiten und Projekten, explizit die vorhandene Projektionsleinwand und die damit verbundenen Möglichkeiten eines Ortes für das gemeinsame Erleben von Film und für Diskussion zu nutzen oder aber den konventionellen Kinosaal zu verlassen oder zwischen beidem zu arbeiten und so auch das Verhältnis zwischen einer Filmpräsentation und ihrem Kontext zu thematisieren.

Wenn Sie Video oder Film zeigen, zeigen Sie dann diese Arbeiten also in den Ausstellungsräumen integriert in einer Ausstellung innerhalb der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart?

Wie und wo wir eine Arbeit bei uns präsentieren hängt vor allem von der Arbeit selbst ab. Unser Ziel ist, sie möglichst werkgetreu beziehungsweise in größtmöglicher Annäherung an die künstlerische Intention zu zeigen. Das heißt nicht etwa, einen historischen Film

noch mit Bogenlampen zu projizieren und die Originalvorführsituation zu simulieren, sondern auch die Distanz zwischen ihr und unserer Gegenwart bewusst mit auszustellen, gegebenenfalls auch auf den installativen Charakter des Kinos selbst zu verweisen, Zusammenhänge zwischen Filmen und ihren Orten bewusst zu machen. Idealerweise entscheidet sich die Präsentation in Absprache mit den Künstler/innen. Gerade im Falle neuerer Erwerbungen von Filmen und Videos oder Film- und Videoinstallationen erhalten wir präzise Installationsanweisungen oder erbitten sie. Entscheidende Fragen sind etwa: Handelt es sich um für den Monitor oder für die Projektion produzierte Arbeiten? Sind sie im Loop zu zeigen oder orientieren sie sich am Rezeptionsmodell des Kinofilms mit festgelegten Anfangs- und Endzeiten und Pausen? Implizieren sie ein fixiertes Sitzpublikum und kontemplative Rezeptionsmodi oder mobile Betrachter/innen, deren Erfahrung und Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer körperlichen Präsenz innerhalb des Raums für die Arbeiten eine Rolle spielt? Geht es nicht oder gar explizit darum, das technische Equipment etwa als Mittel illusionistischer Raumdurchdringung zu verbergen oder sichtbar zu platzieren? Entsprechend zeigen wir Filme und Videos entweder in unserem Vortragssaal oder innerhalb unserer Sammlungspräsentationen und Sonderausstellungen. Zum Beispiel zeigen wir in unsere aktuelle Sammlungspräsentation zum Wiener Aktionismus integriert Filme von Kurt Kren aus unserem Archiv Sohm, an denen sich zeigt, welche Schlüsselrolle Film wie auch der Fotografie bei der Vermittlung dieser performativen ephemeren Kunst zukam. An ihnen zeigt sich aber auch, wie sehr diese Filme mit ihren Cut-Up-Montagen die radikal inszenierte Authentizität jener Aktionen brachen und Kren eine eigenständige Position im Umfeld des Wiener Aktionismus hatte. Leider gibt es mitunter Kompromisse, wenn wir bei großen Ausstellungszeiträumen Filme oder Videos digitalisiert im Ausstellungsraum zeigen, immer aber unter Hinweis auf das Originalformat. Denn es kommt natürlich nicht nur auf den „Inhalt“, sondern auch auf den Träger an und DVD, Film oder Video haben ihre je eigene Materialität. Die Entscheidung fällt also leider manchmal nicht materialgetreu, aber zugunsten der Sichtbarkeit der Arbeiten aus. Im Falle von Krens Filmen haben wir in Kooperation mit sixpackfilm und der Medienwerkstatt Wien die von ihnen sorgfältig produzierten digitalen Versionen gezeigt. In der Ausstellung haben wir Krens Schaffen eigens Raum gegeben und unter anderem auch seine von ihm entworfenen Filmboxen, Multiples mit Super 8-Filmen, Kaderplänen, Fotografien und Kontaktabzügen, mit weiteren Originaldokumenten von Kren aus unserer Sammlung gezeigt.

Was sind ihre Strategien im Umgang mit bewegten Bildern, die ja oft ihre Zeit brauchen, um rezipiert zu werden? Die auch oftmals einen fixen Anfangspunkt haben, von wo aus man die Arbeit betrachten sollte, damit man sie versteht.

Idealerweise versuchen wir, die von den Künstler/innen intendierte Präsentations- beziehungsweise Erfahrungsform für ihre Arbeiten umzusetzen: Monitor oder Projektion, Loop oder vorgegebene Anfangszeiten und Pausen, keine oder feste Bestuhlung, Verhältnis von Arbeit und Raum, dessen Dunkel- oder Helligkeit, gewollte Unsichtbarkeit von Technik oder bewusstes Ausstellen der eigenen Produktionsbedingungen, und so weiter. Viele Künstler/innen treffen ihre Entscheidungen für Film oder Video als Material ja auch spezifisch auf ihren Präsentationskontext, Rahmenbedingungen, Produktions- und Distributionsmöglichkeiten hin. Anders als im Kino oder auch in unserem Vorführsaal haben wir in den Ausstellungsräumen vor allem ein mobiles Publikum. Arbeiten, die das nicht voraussetzen, möchte ich in Situationen zu zeigen, die eine Konzentration auf sie möglich machen. Man kann vor Monitorarbeiten in unseren Sammlungsräumen, beispielsweise vor *Vertical Role* von Joan Jonas oder *The Nature of our Looking* von Gilbert & George, Platz und sich Zeit nehmen, wenn man möchte. Sie stehen so mit anderen nichtzeitbasierten Arbeiten in einem Raum, der die Bezogenheit der Kunst auf den menschlichen Körper thematisiert, dass man die anderen Arbeiten nicht gleichzeitig, gar ablenkend im Visier hat, wenn man es nicht möchte. Der Ton beider Arbeiten kommt jeweils über Kopfhörer, damit ihre Soundtracks sich nicht gegenseitig überlagern und bis in andere Räume tönen. Joan Jonas mochte, dass ihre Arbeit auf diese Weise integriert gezeigt wird. Umgekehrt haben wir aber auch Räume, in denen ausschließlich Filme laufen oder auch zu einem bewusst ausstellungsintegrierten Filmprogramm mit kenntlich gemachten Laufzeiten zusammengestellt sind, wie etwa in unserer kommenden Hommage an die Ausstellung *Film und Foto*, die 1929 in Stuttgart und Folgestationen stattfand, zum Meilenstein der Ausstellungs- und Mediengeschichte wurde und damals schon Filme in die Ausstellungsräume integrierte, aber auch auf einer Kinoleinwand zeigte.

Zeigen Sie im Unterschied zu ihrer Arbeit im Museum Ludwig mit eigenem Museumskino jetzt in Stuttgart vermehrt Arbeiten, die dazu

intendiert sind, im Museumsraum gezeigt zu werden? Oder sehen Sie da eine gewisse Transparenz, dass wenn man vom Medium ausgeht, dass man auch diese Intention ändern kann?

Wie am Museum Ludwig möchte ich auch in Stuttgart parallel zur Präsentation von zeitbasierten Medien in unseren Ausstellungsräumen explizit die auch bei uns vorhandene Projektionsleinwand als Ausstellungsfläche verstehen und nutzen. Die Präsentation hängt aber, wie gesagt, entscheidend von Arbeit und künstlerischer Intention ab. Aber sie ist natürlich auch nicht immer fix und Sichtbarkeit, Zugänglichkeit und Reflexion der Zusammenhänge zwischen Film und seinen Orten sind auch wichtige Aspekte. Nur ein Beispiel: Ben Rivers etwa, der seine Filme meist auf 16mm dreht und so auch in Leinwandprojektion zeigt, war einverstanden mit einer Monitor- und Internetpräsentation seines 16mm-Films *The Coming Race*. Diese Arbeit hatte ich, eingeladen vom Bielefelder Kunstverein, für die Reihe Subjektive Projektionen vorgeschlagen, nachdem Ben Rivers und ich zuvor diese anderen Kontexte mit anderen Sichtbarkeiten und Öffentlichkeiten diskutiert hatten. Sie ersetzen die Erfahrung der filmischen Materialität der Filmprojektion von *The Coming Race* nicht, tragen aber mit bei „zum Leben des Films“, wie Ben Rivers es umschrieben hat. Es war nicht als Plädoyer für die Ortlosigkeit des Kinematografischen gemeint.

Inwiefern müssen Sie in ihrer Position in Stuttgart vermitteln, wenn Sie Filme ankaufen möchten? Wie selbstverständlich ist es, dass das Medium Film auch in eine Sammlung gehören kann?

Videos und Filme wurden seit den 1970er Jahren an der Staatsgalerie gesammelt. Vorschläge für Ankäufe im Bereich der zeitbasierten Medien muss ich nicht mehr und nicht weniger gut begründen und vermitteln als in den Bereichen Malerei, Skulptur, Fotografie, Grafik. Auch Restaurierung und Langzeitarchivierung im Bereich der zeitbasierten Medien in unserer Sammlung werden inzwischen als sehr wichtig eingestuft. Da gibt es großen Handlungsbedarf, leider aber noch kaum ausreichende Mittel. Das ist eine unserer Baustellen.

Alice Koegel vielen Dank für das Gespräch!

Alice Koegel ist Konservatorin für Gegenwartskunst an der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Zuvor war sie wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Museum Ludwig in Köln, Kuratorin am Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie / Museum für Neue Kunst in Karlsruhe und Kuratorin für Performance / Gegenwartskunst an der Tate Modern, London.

SUCHE NACH IDEALEN BEDINGUNGEN

**Interview mit Alexander Horwath,
by Siri Peyer (SP) and Wolf Schmelter (WS)**

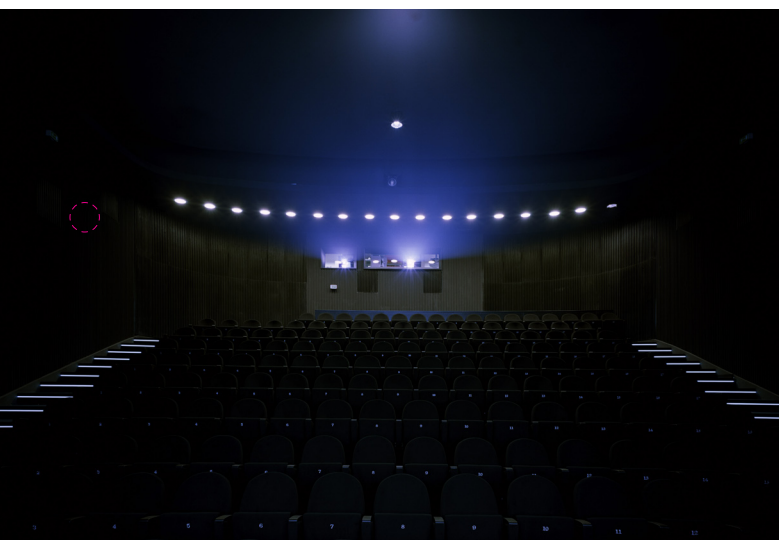
SP: Alexander Horwath, Sie sind der Direktor des Film-museums in Wien, können Sie etwas über diese Institution erzählen, wie wird in dieser Institution das Zeigen des Mediums Film verstanden?

Es gibt zwei grobe Linien, wie das Medium in einem Museum präsentiert werden kann: die eine Linie, das sind die Orte, an denen Objekte, Apparate, Kostüme und andere Paraphernalia aus der Geschichte der Filmkultur ausgestellt werden, in Vitrinen sozusagen. Die andere Linie bilden Museen wie das österreichische Filmmuseum, die das Zeigen der Filme selbst ins Zentrum stellen. Dies ist für mich die logische Perspektive. Auch ein kunsthistorisches Museum stellt ja primär die Werke der Kunstgeschichte aus und nicht die Köpchen, die die Maler getragen haben, oder die Pinsel und Staffeleien, die sie verwendet haben. Die Konzeption von Peter Kubelka und Peter Konlechner, die das Filmmuseum 1964 gegründet haben, war von Anfang an dem filmischen Ereignis gewidmet. Film hatte in Österreich damals, mehr noch als in anderen europäischen Ländern, einen schwachen Stand, wurde vom Kulturbetrieb nicht sehr ernstgenommen. Es gab kaum filmkulturelle Initiativen, die eine seriöse Beschäftigung mit dem Medium erlaubt hätten. Vor diesem Hintergrund wollte man eine Institution schaffen, in der der Film mit ebenso hohem Anspruch und in ebensolcher Qualität behandelt wird wie die anderen Künste in ihren jeweiligen Museen oder Institutionen – was die Präsentation, die Bewahrung und die

in der ganzen Bandbreite ernst zu nehmen, ernster jedenfalls als viele Cinematheken, die sehr stark auf den Spielfilm konzentriert sind.

SP: *Der Kinoraum als Ausstellungsraum, das sind ja einigermaßen fixe Parameter: die Leinwand, die Bestuhlung und so weiter. Gab oder gibt es im Filmmuseum Versuche, diese zu sprengen oder aufzulösen?*

Diese Versuche gab es in der Film- und Kunst-Geschichte ja immer wieder. Aber sowohl der kommerzielle als auch der unabhängige Film sind, rein quantitativ betrachtet, primär als ein Medium betrieben worden, das für die Aufführung in einem bestimmten Setting, einer bestimmten räumlichen und apparativen Konstellation gemacht und gedacht ist. Historisch betrachtet, hat der Film in diesem Setting seine inhärenten Qualitäten und Möglichkeiten am besten entfaltet. Das hat natürlich manchmal zu Situationen geführt, in denen Künstler diese dominante Anordnung sprengen wollten – z.B. mit der Idee eines Expanded Cinema, das dem „autoritären“ Massenmedium Kino mit „antiautoritären“ Umgangsweisen begegnet. Der Film wurde in den Galerieraum oder in den Aussenraum geholt, oder es wurde mit Mehrfachprojektionen gearbeitet, das Publikum oder der Projektor selber wurden zu Mitspielern, statt ins Auditorium oder in die Vorführkabine „verbannt“ zu sein. Oder man verzichtete ganz auf den Filmstreifen und fokussierte auf die Dimension der Projektion. Es war damals, in den 60er und 70er Jahren, aber schon etwas spät, um das Kino als „grossen Gegner“ zu betrachten, weil es längst im Begriff war, seine Rolle als dominanter Motor der Unterhaltungsindustrie abzugeben, nämlich an das Fernsehen. Insofern finde ich es immer recht ironisch, wenn heute, im Kunstbetrieb, grosse und potente Institutionen, die selbst mit dem kapitalistischen Kunstmarkt verschwistert sind, in emphatisch „antiautoritärer“ Gestik eine Art Neo-Expanded Cinema ausrufen, mit dem sie die „simple“ oder „lineare“ Relation zwischen Zuschauer und Leinwand sprengen wollen. Da wird dann das Faktum, dass sich der Betrachter einer Filminstallation körperlich freier bewegt als der Betrachter im Kino, zu einem politischen Befreiungsakt stilisiert, als wäre die Installation eine nicht-hegemoniale Form gegenüber dem hegemonialen Kino. Das ist gänzlich absurd, wenn man bedenkt, dass heute das Flexible, das angebliche „Sich-frei-bewegen-können“, zum eigentlichen hegemonialen Modus geworden ist, im täglichen



Österreichisches Filmmuseum: Das Unsichtbare Kino.
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wissenschaftliche Arbeit betrifft. Es wurde sukzessive eine Sammlung angelegt, Konservierungsmassnahmen begonnen, Publikationen erarbeitet usw. Das Modell war also das des klassischen Kunstmuseums. Man verzichtete auf sämtliche nostalgisierenden Elemente, die damals – gerade in Österreich – üblich waren, wenn „entzückende alte Filme“ gezeigt wurden. Der

Stummfilm z.B. wurde gern verniedlicht, indem man schlechte Kopien in falscher Vorführgeschwindigkeit und mit beliebigem Piano-Geklimper zeigte, und das dann in paternalistischer Manier mit dem gerade aktuellen „State of the Art“ verglich. Das Filmmuseum hat sich stattdessen bemüht, Filme in den bestmöglichen Filmkopien aus der ganzen Welt, in der korrekten Geschwindigkeit

und insgesamt unter möglichst idealen Kinobedingungen zu präsentieren. Schon ein Jahr nach der Gründung ist das Filmmuseum Mitglied der FIAF geworden, der internationalen Vereinigung der Filmarchive. Dadurch konnte man in einen Austausch mit den diesbezüglich bedeutendsten Institutionen auf der ganzen Welt treten. Ein weiterer Aspekt war die Betrachtung des Mediums weit über den Fetisch des Spielfilms hinaus. Es wurden zwar von Beginn an auch Retrospektiven zum Genrekinos und zum Kunstfilm im Sinne der Nouvelle Vague und des Neorealismus gezeigt, aber noch vieles mehr. In den Gründungsdokumenten stehen zwei Sätze: „Film ist die wichtigste Kunstform des 20. Jahrhunderts“ und „Film ist das wichtigste Dokument des 20. Jahrhunderts“ – soll heissen, dass der dokumentarische Film, gerade auch das anonyme Dokument oder die Wochenschau, der Propagandafilm, der wissenschaftliche Film, also diverse in der Filmgeschichtsschreibung marginalisierten Gattungen, ebenfalls Aufmerksamkeit erhielten. Und natürlich die internationale und österreichische Avantgarde, das experimentelle Kino. Der Fokus des Filmmuseums ist im Grunde ein „Nichtfokus“, es versucht Film in all seinen Spielarten,

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Dasein wie in unserer Relation zum Filmischen. Hegemonial ist heute die Omnipräsenz des Filmischen, also Laufbilder auf dem Handy, in der U-Bahn oder eben im Museum, in der Installation. Das Bewegtbild ist schon längst selber beweglich und hat sich „verflüssigt“, genauso wie der flexibilisierte Mensch der Gegenwart. Der nicht-fixierte Film und sein nicht-fixer Betrachter bilden das eigentliche hegemoniale Paradigma. In dieser Situation kann das Kino, einmal nur formal betrachtet, noch eher einen „widerständigen“ Ort abgeben als die Filminstallation im Kunstmuseum. Das fixe Setting kann Akte der Konzentration und Sinneszusammenhänge generieren oder ermöglichen, die im dominanten Umgang mit Medien und Bewegtbildern gar nicht mehr vorgesehen sind. Und es kann einen Wahrnehmungsmodus stärken, bei dem man sich tendenziell „auf gleicher Augenhöhe“ mit einem Werk befindet, gerade weil man nicht als frei flottierender Flaneur an den Bildern vorbeizieht.

Volker Pantenburg, ein jüngerer Berliner Filmtheoretiker, hat kürzlich etwas sehr Schönes geschrieben, dass nämlich nach der Kritik am White Cube in den 60er und 70er Jahren nun schon längst eine Kritik an der Black Box fällig wäre. Nämlich eine Kritik an der Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der eine bestimmte Form der Darbietung von Bewegtbildern im Kunstbetrieb reüssiert hat. Es gibt natürlich zahlreiche bedeutende filmische Werke, die dezidiert für Nicht-Kino-Konstellationen geschaffen wurden, darunter auch solche, die auf eine Black Box im Galerieraum abzielen. Es wäre absurd, diese Möglichkeiten und Werke aus der Filmgeschichte auszuschließen. Aber eine Institution, die für 120 Jahre Bewegtbildproduktion „zuständig“ ist, wird anders mit diesem Umstand verfahren als eine Institution in der Tradition der bildenden Kunst, die womöglich erst seit den 90er Jahren das Bewegtbild als ein relevantes „Thema“ erkannt hat.

WS: Wird institutionsübergreifend über solche Themen diskutiert? Über Präsentationsformen von Filmen, die im Zwischenbereich von Bildender Kunst und Film arbeiten. Wie zum Beispiel die Künstlerin Sharon Lockhart, die ihren Film „Theatro Amazonas“ auf der Biennale im Kino und den Film „Pine Flat“ als Installation im MUMOK gezeigt hat.

Es ist nicht so, dass wir mit den MUMOK- oder Generali-Kuratoren wöchentlich zusammensitzen. Aber ich glaube schon, dass es in Wien, dank einer bestimmten Tradition, die auch mit der historischen Funktion des Filmmuseums zusammenhängt, eine grössere Aufmerksamkeit und Wachheit auf beiden Seiten gibt, gerade was die komplexen Fragen betrifft, wie man Film am sinnvollsten präsentiert. Wir arbeiten viel zusammen mit Kunstmuseen und Ausstellungshäusern, z.B. mit der Secession, dem MUMOK, der Generali Foundation, gegenwärtig auch mit dem Lentos in Linz, und natürlich auch international. Das MUMOK zum Beispiel hat vor 5 Jahren mit seiner X-Screen Ausstellung einen sehr überzeugenden Umgang mit dem Medium an den Tag gelegt. Mir geht es bei diesen Dingen vor allem um eine bestimmte Transparenz dem Publikum gegenüber. So wie man in anderen Medien oder älteren Künsten nicht auf die Idee käme, eine Sache für eine andere auszugeben, bin ich auch der Meinung, dass man einen Kurt-Kren-Film nicht als DVD projizieren sollte. Das ist vielleicht auch ein gewisses „edukatives“ Moment, das wir bei Kooperationen einbringen – nicht nur Werke aus der Sammlung. Und da hat sich viel verändert, man merkt, dass eine neue Generation von Kuratoren an vielen Museen tätig ist. Matthias Michalka und Susanne Neuburger am MUMOK zum Beispiel denken diese Fragen, die auch uns beschäftigen, sehr genau mit. Vor zwei Jahren hat das MUMOK seine Sammlung klassischer Moderne neu aufgestellt. Das Filmmuseum und die Fotosammlung der Albertina sind eingeladen worden, mit ihren Beständen an dieser Neupräsentation mitzuwirken, da das MUMOK in diesen Bereichen zu wenige Beispiele in der Sammlung hat. Das fanden wir interessant, aber zugleich musste man gut überlegen, wie das in der konkreten Ausstellungspraxis aussehen könnte. Es ging um die 20er und 30er Jahre, also nicht um 16mm, sondern um 35mm-Filme, Werke von Man Ray, Dziga Vertov, das Anemic Cinema von Marcel Duchamp usw. Früher – oder in anderen Museen – wären diese Filme entweder als Video oder in 16mm-Reduktionskopien, in nicht verdunkelten Räumen oder gleich auf Monitoren gezeigt worden – also in einer „faksimilierten“ bzw. verfälschenden Form, die man in anderen Sparten nicht akzeptieren würde, weil sie das Band zwischen Herstellungs- und Wahrnehmungsweise eines Werks zum Verschwinden bringt. Wir haben mit dem MUMOK also vereinbart, dass im grossen Saal dieser Ausstellung ein eigener „Kinoraum“ eingebaut wird – durchaus eine Art Black Box, mit Sesseln. Und dort wurde mehrmals am Tag, mit häufigen aber fixen Beginnzeiten, ein circa 45-minütiges Programm gezeigt. Als 35mm-Filmprojektion. Das gleiche haben wir jetzt im Lentos in Linz als Beitrag zur Best of Austria Ausstellung gemacht. Insgesamt wollen praktisch alle Museen, aber auch Theater und andere kulturelle Institutionen, heute Bewegtbild zeigen, und 90% aller Veranstalter machen es „irgendwie“. Daher glaube ich



Peter Kubelka
Invisible Cinema' im New Yorker Anthology Film Archives.

auch, dass sich über kurz oder lang gewisse Institutionen herausprofilieren werden, die damit auf eine angemessene Weise umgehen, gegenüber jenen vielen, die halt irgendwas irgendwie zeigen.

Durch seinen starken Avantgarde-Fokus hat sich das Österreichische Filmmuseum von Beginn an mehr als Teil der Kunstwelt verstanden als andere Cinematheken. Es konnte potentiell immer schon jedes Museum oder jeder Veranstalter in Wien, der mit Film etwas tun wollte, im Filmmuseum ein Gegenüber finden. Das betrifft auch die maschinellen Ressourcen, die man braucht, um das Medium seriös darzustellen. Viele Museen schrecken davor zurück, wenn man deutlich macht, dass eine ordentliche 16mm- oder gar 35mm-Projektion betreuungsintensiver ist als der DVD-Player im Dauerbetrieb. Aber die Museen merken auch schon, dass die digitale Maschinerie manchmal schneller kaputtgeht oder Probleme bereitet als die Filmprojektion. Es ist also auch eine Frage der Gewöhnung, das habe ich vorher mit dem Wort edukativ gemeint. Ich sehe eine unserer Aufgaben darin, „bewusstseinsbildend“ im weitesten Sinn zu sein, auch was das Unterscheidungsvermögen des Publikums betrifft. Wir sind ja selbst auch nicht auf Filmwerke fixiert, wir zeigen alle Werke in jenem Medium, in dem sie gemacht bzw. öffentlich geworden sind, d.h. Videos als Videos, 16mm-Filme als 16mm-Filme usw. Es gibt da keine Abschottungen. Aber was ich nicht tun würde, oder nur wenn es der

Künstler dezidiert will, ist die Kinopräsentation einer Arbeit, die dezidiert als Installation gedacht ist. Es gibt zwar heute immer mehr Künstler, die bewusst Werke schaffen, die auch für das Kino „gemeint“ sind – und in einer anderen Variante für den Galerie-raum. Aber es gibt viele tolle Arbeiten von Stan Douglas, Matthew Buckingham oder Tacita Dean, die wir nie zeigen werden können, solange wir nicht einen zweiten, anders strukturierten Raum haben. Das ist sicher ein gewisses Problem, auch wenn es nur einen winzigen Ausschnitt aus der Geschichte des Films betrifft. Ich wäre froh, wenn wir in einem separaten Space Filmarbeiten dieser Art darstellen könnten, die nicht als klassische Kinoprojektion gestaltet sind.

WS: Kann man sagen, dass das Kino, das an eine Kunstinstitution angegliedert ist, wie zum Beispiel in der Tate Modern in London, eine zeitgemässe Möglichkeit darstellt, um mit diesem Zwischenbereich umzugehen?

Das MoMA in New York hat 1935 seine Filmabteilung gegründet, also so neu ist das nicht. Ich war leider noch nie in der Tate Modern, insofern kann ich das nicht konkret vergleichen, was die Raumsituation und „Benutzerlogistik“ anlangt. Das MoMA hat von Beginn an Film als notwendiges eigenständiges Department gesehen, und einen Chief Curator of Film etabliert. Und es besaß von Beginn an einen Kinosaal im Museum. Heute sind es drei oder vier Säle. Auch das Guggenheim oder das Whitney, um in New York zu bleiben, haben mehr oder weniger gelungene Kinosäle eingebaut. In Europa ist es im Centre Pompidou ebenso gemacht worden, das war 1974. Peter Kubelka ist damals eingeladen worden, die Gründungssammlung im Bereich Film zusammenzustellen. Das heisst, es gibt zahlreiche historische Beispiele für diese Praxis. Die Tate Modern ist diesen Beispielen wohl gefolgt, weil ein modernes Kunstmuseum, das mit vielen Medien hantieren will, gut beraten ist, dafür die jeweils adäquaten, ordentlichen Darbietungsräume zu schaffen. Insofern sollte man, wenn man ein Museum der Moderne oder der zeitgenössischen Kunst gründet oder eines erweitert, nicht lange an der Frage herumfummeln, wie man Laufbilder projizieren will. Man muss als Minimum ein Kino einbauen, das ist ganz simpel. Und man muss investieren, um möglichst alle Formate zeigen zu können.

SP: Können sie noch etwas über ihr Filmprogramm während der Documenta 12 erzählen?

Das was wir bisher besprochen haben, war eine wichtige Basis für die Entscheidungen, die wir in Kassel getroffen haben, zum Beispiel für die Entscheidung, mit dem Programm ganz bewusst in ein Kino zu gehen. Roger Buergel und Ruth Noack waren der selben Meinung wie ich: dass man auf der Documenta die Genealogie und die Kraft des Mediums Film einmal auch über den Ort „Kino“ darstellen sollte, nicht immer über diese Transpositionsakte. Das Kino, das Gloria-Kino, war ja bereits dort, und es ist zufällig im selben Jahr eröffnet worden wie die erste Documenta. Das war einer von mehreren Ausgangsparametern, die ich interessant und schön fand. Ich habe mit der Werkauswahl dann auch einen größeren Zeitraum ins Auge gefasst, der mit dieser Gründungszeit Anfang der 50er Jahre begann, also so etwas wie die „zweite Hälfte des Kinos“, von circa 1952 bis heute. Ich wollte, ähnlich wie die Ausstellung selbst, nicht nur neues, aktuelles Schaffen zeigen, sondern Rekurse machen, die mit dem Aktuellen in ein Gespräch eintreten. Insofern passte diese Einladung sehr gut zu den Überlegungen, die ich angedeutet habe. Man kann ja schnell einmal hören, dass so ein Zugang rückwärts-gewandt sei. Aber ich habe damit nicht nur kein Problem, sondern ich glaube, dass manche „Rückwärtswendungen“ eine bestimmte Sprengkraft haben können. Es gibt so ein Hecheln nach allem, was „Cutting Edge“ zu sein verspricht, dass man gar nicht merkt, wie sehr dies selber schon der absolute Mainstream geworden ist. Da finde ich meine Bezüge lieber in einer modernen Archäologie, oder in Benjamins Vorstellung von dem Historischen, das auftaucht und mit dem Gegenwärtigen reagiert, um blitzlichthaft ein Bild zu erzeugen. Erscheinungen aus der Geschichte, die vehement das kritisieren können, was jetzt so fortschrittlich und allseits beliebt ist. Mit der Geschichte arbeiten, um gute Gründe für die Gegenwart zu finden. Das war auch das Motiv, bei der Documenta ein Programm mit stark historischem Hintergrund zu machen.

Alexander Horwath, Danke vielmals für das Gespräch!

Alexander Horwath ist Autor und Kurator, war Direktor der Viennale und ist seit 2002 Direktor des Österreichischen Filmmuseums in Wien. U.a. Co-Herausgeber des Buches Film Curatorship. Museums, Archives, and the Digital Marketplace (gemeinsam mit David Francis, Paolo Cherchi Usai und Michael Loebenstein; Wien 2008, Filmmuseum-SynemaPublikationen).

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