Installation and its Audience

The proliferation of multi-screen gallery installations by younger artists in recent years has been striking: at the 11th Kassel Documenta, held in 2002, it was estimated that it would take a full week to view all the moving image work that was on show. But there is a relatively unknown historical precedent for this kind of work in the form of Expanded Cinema, which has enjoyed a recent resurgence, partly through the revival of interest in historical work from the 1960s and 1970s occasioned by two major surveys of work from that period. *Live in Your Head* was held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2001, where David Hall’s *TV Interruptions* were shown in the gallery alongside conceptual and sociopolitical work from the period, and the multi-screen films of Filmaktion (Malcolm Le Grice, Gill Eatherley, William Raban and Annabel Nicolson) were presented by the film-makers over two days. *Shoot Shoot Shoot*, a comprehensive survey of work from the London Film-makers’ Co-op from 1966 to 1976, was held at Tate Modern in 2002, prior to a world tour.

Expanded Cinema is characterised by a concern with the nature of the projection (as) event: the space and the audience’s placement within it, the projector, light beam and image. The work characteristically aims to change the spectator’s relationship to the image, not just conceptually, but also physically, as in Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), where the spectator is expected to walk through and peer into the projector beam, or Tony Hill’s *Floor Film* (1975), in which images are projected onto the floor on which he/she stands. This tradition has been sustained by artists like Neil Henderson and Simon Popper, whose practice is evidence of a resurgence, if not continuity, of activity by younger artists who have been taught by older film-makers in those art schools where a tradition of semi-formal teaching of experimental film-making has survived. In its characteristic concerns Expanded Cinema has been more sophisticated and effective compared to recent gallery installations, where the problems of presenting time-based work in galleries have often been fudged, or avoided altogether by constructing an entirely conventional cinema space within the white cube.

Typical in this regard is Tacita Dean. Although her 16mm films are shown in art galleries, they are in many ways akin to straightforward cinema films, since the specificities of the space or the sculptural implications of the projection process are not
explicitly addressed. The loop machines which allow the shorter pieces to run continuously are enclosed in order to minimise their presence, while the longer films are shown from specially constructed projection boxes. In this respect the work also conforms to the common practice of video artists of using silent, digital video projectors mounted high above the spectator.1

The multi-screen work of artists like Sam Taylor-Wood and Stan Douglas has exhibited a more engaged relationship with the viewing space, but in so doing it has often merely resurrected issues which were dealt with explicitly by makers of Expanded Cinema works. For example Stan Douglas’ double-sided screen film/video Der Sandmann (1999) reprises some of the formal innovations made in the 1960s and 1970s, without engaging at any level with the implications of the latter. The work appropriates the forms which emerged from those radically analytical films and uses them to serve a narrative conceit, negating their original purpose. The fact that such work is hailed as innovative merely betrays the ignorance of many critics in their consideration of contemporary video work.2 It also points to the gulf, both ideological and institutional, between the traditions and practices of experimental film and video, and work by artists who insist on the gallery as their rightful arena, or who, like Sharon Lockhart and Matthew Barney, strictly control the conditions under which their films are screened, in order to safeguard their value as limited edition commodities.

Castle One
In 1966, Malcolm Le Grice made his film event Castle One, an emblematic attack on audience passivity. The film is composed from found footage, mostly of mass meetings, demonstrations and political speeches: situations in which coercive rhetoric combines with mass psychology to overwhelm individual critical voices – an evocation of administered modern society and the oppressiveness of consensus politics. A light bulb hanging by the screen flashes on and off periodically, partially obliterating the film and illuminating the audience, so that they become self-spectators, obliged to consider the nature of their situation. The effect of the light bulb is not only to break the spell of cinema, but potentially to offer the audience an alternative experience. Just as John Cage sought to break down the distinction between music and noise, so the light bulb – the ‘noise’ in Castle One – can become the source of an aesthetic experience. The audience, meanwhile, silhouetted or half-lit, become part of an audiovisual experience in which they are participant-observers. Castle One, in making the audience’s relationship to the film/screen the subject of the work, thereby constituted the symbolic beginning of Expanded Cinema.

The Festival of Expanded Cinema, held at the ICA in London in January 1976, was an important event for the exhibition of a range of this kind of work. It celebrated the consolidation of a number of related areas of work; fixed duration, multi-screen films, film installations and events with elements of sculpture and/or performance.3
The aim of the festival was to produce 'a shift in the role of the spectator, a shift in the complacent expectations of the audience'. The critical criteria for the work that was selected 'centred on the creative use of the projection event ... the selected pieces tend to emphasise either the physical, spatial or temporal aspects of these creative possibilities to facilitate such a perceptual shift'. In his introductory catalogue essay, Deke Dusinberre summarised the 'didactic function' of the festival as being the cultivation of 'An awareness of the physicality of cinematic image production in space and time'.

The festival brought together work by older makers from the London Film-makers' Co-op: Malcolm Le Grice, William Raban and Ron Haselden; a younger generation of experimental film students: Rob Gawthrop, Steve Farrer, Lis Rhodes, myself and others; and artists from outside the Co-op ambit; Derek Jarman, Peter Logan, Jeff Keen, Carolee Schneeman, Pierre Rovere. Le Grice was by then a grand old man of structural film, with ten years of work behind him, and was already beginning to move out of multi-screen projection events into single-screen experimental narrative. He showed a bridging work, the four-screen, sixty-minute After Manet, which is discussed in Chapter 8.

Sculptural concerns
Ron Haselden trained and practised as a sculptor before turning to film-making in the mid-1970s. His work is concerned with three-dimensional space, in which the aspect of time as a structuring element is equally important. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s he made a number of single-screen and expanded films, and multi-media installations in which his sculptural interests came increasingly to the fore until film eventually dropped out of the work in the mid-1980s.

Many of Haselden's early films, like the two multi-screen pieces shown at the ICA festival, MFV Maureen and Lady Dog (both 1975), were evolving presentations, in which, respectively, footage was reworked over a period of days, or which took the form of a short film or loops projected onto a screen to which was added photographs
of frames from the film (MFV Maureen also exists as a six-screen loop work). In Lady Dog Haselden filmed:

> the actions of a dog and a naked woman in my living room. The camera records the event from a position overhead and in the projection the film footage will be subjected to a time and spatial transition. Using a montage of stills from the brief sequence filmed, the action is performed as a part static and part animated structure while the projection is directly integrated with the stills.⁸

At the ICA Haselden projected the looped film in a dark space. As it ran he attached photographs to parts of the screen, gradually building up a sequence which traced the cine camera’s original trajectory. A timer switched on lights at regular intervals so the audience could see the developments.

There are two opposed forces in these films, both of which emerge from Haselden’s background as a sculptor. On the one hand the sculptural concern has been translated into the decision to represent the spatial disposition of the frames in the film, repositioning them on the screen such that they trace the path of the camera as it cuts through space. The representation of a film as a sequence of photos perhaps reflects the desire to arrest and spatialise the camera’s movements, to turn time into space so that the spectator can contemplate what is otherwise a transitory experience.⁹ Sculpture is not only spatial and actual – a real object in the real world – but it is also more strongly temporal than painting, because the experience of having to move around a sculpture reminds the spectator, through the bodily effort required to take in the object, that time is passing, that the experience is temporal. The duration of this is in the spectator’s hands, whereas in fixating, immobile, on a painting which can be taken in from one position, the sensation of temporality is held in abeyance. Haselden’s strategy restores to the spectator something of the temporal experience of sculpture. On the one hand the momentary is held indefinitely; on the other the spectator is obliged, in order to trace the path of the photographs, at least to turn the head and move the eyes, and eventually, when the photo piece is large enough, move bodily.

Haselden has long been interested in dance and has made several other pieces of dance-related work, some of which were filmed from overhead. This practice of filming the subject from above flattens it out, Busby Berkeley style, emphasising movement as pattern and de-emphasising the bodily. The strangeness of Busby Berkeley routines stems mainly from the fact that our attention shifts off the individual bodies when they form part of a larger pattern. However, the exact overhead view is also an important component here. This is partly because we are unaccustomed to seeing bodies directly from above, but even if we were, we would still only see a one-dimensional, hat-shaped head- and shoulders-plan, which
conceals almost everything underneath it for most of the time. The flattening out which occurs in Haselden's film may be seen as a way of reordering sculptural imperatives so as to incorporate the specificities of the moving image. Since the work cannot be three-dimensional, that aspect is translated into time, while the illusory spatiality of the photo is suppressed, and its flatness emphasised. It is interesting to compare David Hall's route to video from sculpture. As the elements in the sculpture were reduced, it became flatter until in 1970 he made Displacement, an installation in which a shape was sanded into the floor of the ICA gallery in London. From this position of negativity, of making work by removing rather than adding, Hall moved into time-based work, but a number of his video pieces, both single-screen and installation — such as, respectively, the third of the Seven TV Pieces and A Situation Envisaged: The Rite 2, play on the contrast between the monitor as image bearer and as physical object. The precise placement of monitors in the space has always been an important part of Hall's aesthetic, reflecting the influence of his former discipline. Most of Michael Snow's most notable films, Wavelength (1967), Back and Forth (1969) and La Région centrale (1970), also reflect his concerns as a sculptor. As in Haselden's work, all three films involve the flattening of deep space through particular camera strategies.

Haselden's other ICA presentation was MFV Maureen. This is composed of six loops, each of which was shot from the centre of a Scottish fishing vessel as it worked off the coast of Eyemouth, near the border with Northumberland. The six screens make up a putative panoramic view of about 160 degrees, but a number of factors prevent the images from ever coalescing into a unified view. In each shot the camera makes shallow, back-and-forth pans of about 40 degrees. Each was filmed individually and all overlap to some extent, so that even if all six were aligned there would be some duplication of parts of the image. As it is, in the process of viewing the work, these overlaps form key moments which allow the spectator briefly to get his bearings. Because the camera is on a tripod it is held vertically in relation to the angle of the boat, which means the angle of the horizon seesaws constantly. There is a complex interaction between the chaotic pitching and rolling movement of the sea and the steady panning of the camera. Thus the horizon, as the most persistent presence in the image, forms a constant behind the other, more occasional appearances of wheel house, winch etc. At the same time the horizon never lines up, stressing the discontinuous and ever-changing nature of the filming situation. The activities of the
fishermen are another imponderable. Their movements help to disturb what could otherwise be a dry mechanical record. The film, then, is the product of a number of forces: the unpredictable movement of the sea, the habitual activities of the fishermen and the planned camera movements.

What is striking about the viewing process is the way one is tempted ceaselessly to shift attention across the screens, searching for the moment of synchronisation that never comes. The movement within each screen is steady and predictable, but as a whole the piece is highly active and complex, which makes it hard to follow one screen alone. It is very much a composite work, as much about the interaction of movements between sea and camera as it is about individual framings or even the documenting of life on a fishing boat, although the fishermen’s activities are an important part of the work’s dynamic. The linear presentation format is critical here, as the eye tends to be drawn along the row of screens, for which the panning of the cameras is a key factor. In After Manet and Sam Taylor-Wood’s seven-screen loop film Third Party (1999) it is possible to concentrate more on individual screens, since each has a relative autonomy. In the former, diverse framings, degrees of close-up and the fact that the cameras are hand-held by four individuals means that each screen has a life of its own which can be followed as such. In Third Party the screens are separated in space as well as being disposed around four walls, which obviously necessitates their being watched individually.

Haselden’s interest in boats and dogs led to several more innovative multi-screen films, many of which incorporated photographic images derived from the cine film. Sticks for the Dog was presented at the Acme Gallery, Covent Garden, in 1976. The work consisted of three short film loops back-projected onto a screen to which individual frames, printed onto transparent film, were attached over a period of several days. The three moving images – of a hand throwing a stick, the stick turning in mid-air, and a dog scrabbling for it on the ground – were positioned so as to reproduce the camera’s original arc. The frame enlargements were placed in the same way as in Lady Dog.

Sticks for the Dog foregrounds a linked, double tension: first an extrinsic one between the spatial and temporal continuity of the profilmic event and its presentation as a trio of spatially disconnected moments, and second an intrinsic tension between the experience of film as continuous, and its reality as a series of frozen moments, made explicit by the representation of the film as a sequence of frames: a true, if uncinematic, state of film.

Expanded projection
In MFV Maureen the role of the projector is important as a sculptural presence in the gallery, where its function of reduplicating, through the beam of light, the scope and movements of the camera is made explicit. At the same time, however, its function is subsidiary in the whole structure of the work. In my own four-projector loop
film *4 × LOOPS* (1974), the projectors have a similar status. Each is used to throw a simple image of a black diagonal cross on a white background, which flashes regularly on and off as part of a larger permutatable image composed of four such crosses which flash at different rates. In a conventional two by two configuration (Figure 1), the image appears as a permanently incomplete composition, but when the projectors are moved into different configurations, different aspects of the experience are emphasised. Figures 2 and 3 show increasing degrees of overlap, while Figure 4 represents total superimposition of all four screens. In Figures 2 and 3 the configurations stabilise and the fluctuation of light intensities is foregrounded. In Figure 4 the image reaches maximum stasis, both in terms of light fluctuation and form. This is the closest the piece gets to a conventional single-screen film. In the opposite direction, opening up, the image is increasingly fragmented as the configurations are more dispersed (Figures 6 and 7). Figure 5 offers an ideal balance between light fluctuation and formal stability. The work has an unfixed duration and is performed as a live
event in which the projectors are moved into the various configurations (there are a number of other possible ones) every few minutes.

The role of the projector is radically widened; it is no longer a passive projecting device, but an active tool in the creation of new kinds of films/concepts/spaces. The role of the rectangular screen edges is opened out, by direct use of its shape, and by the employment of images which (conceptually) lead out of its confines into wider spaces. The frame itself is no longer a discrete entity, but an active unit, capable of immeasurably numerous possibilities.11

Neil Henderson, a film-maker who works mostly in Super 8, has produced a series of works, each time with an ever-larger number of projectors. His earlier pieces involve more or less straightforward projections of coloured loops or short films, which overlap to create complex colour mixes. In some respects they resemble Paul Sharits’ work, except that in Henderson’s films colour-mixing effects occur as much on the screen as afterimages do on the retina. Because Super 8 usually runs at eighteen frames per second (18fps), instead of the standard 24fps of 16 and 35mm, the after-images associated with flicker films are gentler, and the overall experience less frenetic, and more intimate, because of the domestic scale of the medium and the relatively low power of the projector lamps.

As Henderson’s work has progressed, paradoxical concepts have entered his thinking and these are evidenced in some of the titles of his films: *Nine for Black and Red* (1996), *Twelve for Black with Splice Marks* (1996) and *Twelve for Black, Green and Red* (1997–8). In each case the number in the title refers to the number of projectors. In *Twelve for Black with Splice Marks* the only image, or rather the only moment when light hits the screen, is when a splice mark passes through the projector gate. But a splice mark, like the dropout from which David Larcher conjured his video work *Videovoid*, is a gap, an absence, which in the case of film is actually substantial, consisting as it does of splicing tape, under which may be trapped dust and air bubbles. In *Thirty Six Working Projectors* (2000), his Slade School of Art MA graduation piece, Henderson developed the sculptural and kinetic implications of the increasing number of projectors. The projectors are placed on Dexion racks, close to the screen/wall in such a way that the spectator cannot easily stand in front of them. One is obliged thereby to view the work through the bank of projectors. This arrangement brings to mind the structure of the eye, in that the nerve ganglia which channel the light from the receptors to the optic nerve lie in front of the retina, so that we see through an invisible mesh of technology. Similarly, we watch Henderson’s work through the (visible) machines which generate it. In obstructing our field of vision the projectors also become a central, paradoxical, part of the piece.

*Black & Light Movie* (2001) is a five-minute work for fifty Super 8 projectors. It
is not an installation, however, even though it requires an open space in which to be projected. *Black & Light Movie* has a beginning, middle and end, yet at the same time it overturns those notions, even raising the question of whether it is a film at all. The projectors are again placed quite close to the screen, and are loaded with five-minute (50-foot) rolls of black film (spacing). They are switched on one by one, then each is turned off when its film has run through. Thus it is only at the end of the film that the projectors can begin to fulfil their function of projecting a beam of light onto the screen, but it is at this point that their job is done, and they are turned off. So the film is darkness, and the end of the film light. But whereas with most films the end of the film is the end, this work has a brief but crucial afterlife, between the moment when the film runs out and the projector is turned off: a matter of a few seconds.

This paradoxical work raises numerous questions, some of which may seem banal or obvious, but which take the viewer right back to the fundamentals of the film experience in a novel way, and which raise metaphysical issues about what a thing is and how it can be defined. Can a roll of mute black spacing count as a film? What is a projector when film is running through it and its lamp is switched on, but nothing is projected? On the other hand, can the empty projector beam on the screen be an image? This latter question is similar to one that Clement Greenberg asked: can a stretched, unpainted canvas be a painting? (Greenberg thought it could be a *picture*, though not necessarily a good one.) Yet there is a film, projectors, light: all the necess-

*Black & Light Movie*, Neil Henderson
ary elements for the event to count as a film screening. There is projector noise too, but can that be a soundtrack?

In addition to these aspects, the work is sculptural and kinetic. Light escapes through the cracks in the projectors' lamp housings. Because of the absence of image on the screen, our attention is drawn to them, and they become the focus of the work, the counters of time passing. As some of the films run out, the projectors are back-silhouetted against the white rectangles on the screen, so that briefly they become the image, rather than its source.

*Black & Light Movie* divides the viewer’s attention between the projectors and the screen on which one is waiting for something to appear. Two states of mind are engaged: the live experience of the projectors, and the state of anticipation regarding the screen. Thus the work focuses around a tension between the actual and the anticipated, a frequent state of mind, since we so often find ourselves in a state of present experience in which what is happening now is coloured by memories, or overcome or alleviated by our looking forward to some future event.

**Site-specific film**

In my own film installation *Glass Ground* (2001) I aimed to make a piece which was not simply ‘installed’ in a gallery with no regard for the specificity of the space, but to make a work whose meaning was dependent on being seen in that space. Thus the gallery becomes a necessary part of the work. Although the gallery in which *Glass Ground* was designed to be seen was a thoroughfare, the problems outlined above were dealt with first by the fact that the film was back-projected onto the gallery windows, in order to be seen from outside, and second by the work being the only piece on show at the time.

As a student I made a site-specific piece which consisted of a sequence of photographs taken in a corridor. As I walked along the corridor I took single frames with a Bolex 16mm cine camera, one for each step of the walk. Each frame was enlarged and hung out from the wall at an angle to it, so that the spectator

*Glass Ground*, Nicky Hamlyn
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Corridor Piece, Nicky Hamlyn

would undertake the same walk, viewing the photos as they passed them.

Glass Ground revisited some of the same ideas: a kind of matching of the world with its representations or, rather, a bringing together of the two into critical conjunction. Disjunctions are emphasised as much as coincidences: real space, physically negotiated by a moving body freely controlling its field of view, in contrast with the flat image which fixes the viewer both physically and optically. Real objects and solid surfaces, which exist in determinate relationships to each other, generate phenomena in which normal hierarchies are overturned: shadows can be stronger than the objects which cast them.

Incorporated into the film is a reconstruction of Grass (1967), a sculpture by Hans Haacke. The inclusion of this was fortuitous in that it happened to be in the gallery when Glass Ground was shot. However, its inclusion serves a number of purposes. I wanted to include other artworks in the film, partly because the subject of the film is an art gallery. The Haacke piece is appropriate because it articulates the otherwise empty middle of the film’s subject. Its presence stymies the urge to give inclusive or unambiguous views of the interior space: as a unique object, whose own dimensions are unclear, it cannot easily provide a sense of scale. It is also a conspicuous object in a film mostly of surfaces and ephemeral phenomena. The incorporation of the artwork into the film corresponds to the fact that the gallery incorporates the sculpture. The gallery holds the sculpture, the film holds the gallery, if not in the same kind of way. As an organic object it also provides a link through to the space outside: grass, trees, etc.
Notes

1. The film-maker Guy Sherwin has argued that, on the contrary, Dean's films are gallery works, insofar as most of them have no obvious beginning or end, making them suitable for continuous projection. To this end, like many such contemporary gallery installations, her shorter films are rudimentary in editing terms, being more like a small number of shots joined together than a film constructed and developed through the editing process. (This is not to say, however, that they are lesser works because of this.)

2. The superimposition of a negative image onto its positive derives from Malcolm Le Grice's film Yes No Maybe Maybe Not (1967). The device of double-sided projection onto a screen hanging in the middle of the space comes from Michael Snow's Two Sides to Every Story (1974) which is discussed in Chapter 11. Sam Taylor-Wood's multi-screen film/video Third Party is discussed in Chapter 10.

3. David Hall, who has described himself as 'a sculptor working with film and video', did not participate in the ICA Festival. However, he has also made a number of important video installations which developed his increasingly physically reduced sculpture into the temporal dimension. This work is discussed in Chapter 3 under the heading of 'Expanded Technologies'. For an account of his transition from sculpture into video see David Hall, interviewed by Steve Partridge (which is also the source of the above quotation), in Transcript vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 25–40.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Discussions of the work of many of these artists are dispersed throughout the book.


9. In the film Untitled, single frames from the film, printed up as photographs, were handed out to the audience. Audience members could then look out for their frame as it briefly flashed past. This practice dramatises the extreme ephemerality of the photograph as a film frame, concerned with its enduring, physical presence when in the form of a photographic print.

10. For an account of Hall's development, see Steve Partridge, 'David Hall Interview', Transcript vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 21–40.


13. The work was made and shown at the George Rodger Gallery, Kent Institute of Art and Design, Maidstone, in February 2001.