## Moving image and institution: Cinema and the museum in the 21st century, University of Cambridge (6-8 July 2011)

Art institutions have shown a growing interest in the moving image throughout the last two decades. Both museums and institutional art spaces have witnessed an increase in the exhibition of film and other moving images. In these spaces we can see films displayed along with other art forms, such as painting and sculpture, or as part of screen art installations. The proliferation of projected moving images and screens re-configures common assumptions about what cinema is and opens up a new set of questions concerning museum exhibition, film curating, and the cinematic experience. Does the gallery space change the way in which we think about and experience cinema? What are the boundaries between artist film and video and the traditional film institution? Which theoretical or conceptual links and historical connections can we establish between cinema as medium and museum as space? These are just some of the questions that arise from the fruitful encounter between museum and cinema. Thus, in this scenario, a conference such as Moving Image and Institution: Cinema and the Museum in the 21st Century was indeed necessary.

Hosted by Cambridge University's Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CRASSH), the conference was a joint project between faculty from the Department of Architecture and the Department of French (where the Screen Media group has been established). In the conference call for papers the organisers stressed the interdisciplinary character of the event, aimed at successfully bringing together delegates from across a wide range of disciplines including film studies, art history, museum studies, architecture, modern languages, and anthropology. Academics, museum curators, architects, filmmakers, and artists alike sought to overcome the scarce attention given to non-theatrical film exhibition in the museum. Although there are books on experimental film and avant-garde filmmakers, catalogues on particular 'film artists', and art history books on installation art, few publications have directly explored the relation between cinematic works and the space of the museum. The conference provided an extensive account of contemporary research on this topic.

During three days the conference featured 16 parallel sessions divided between the Fitzwilliam College Auditorium and the smaller Gordon Cameron Lecture theatre. The 50 delegates in attendance, representing universities and cultural institutions in the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Europe, explored a variety of topics in their papers; these ranged from theoretical and historiographical discussions about the complexities of time-based media exhibitions to aesthetic analysis of screen media art installations through the study of particular auteurs and film artist's work. Most of these, if not all, were established artists such as Peter Green-

away, Michael Snow, Tacita Dean, Atom Egoyan, and Philippe Parreno, among others. Issues related to the economic aspects of film distribution and questions on indexicality in the age of digital media art were addressed, respectively, in Laura U. Marks' (Professor of Art and Culture Studies, Simon Fraser University) and Angela Delle Vacche's (Professor of Film Studies, Georgia Institute of Technology) keynote presentations. Furthermore, in conjunction with the conference, two public events took place during the evenings in different settings around Cambridge: a screening of Visage (2009) by Tsai Ming-Liang followed by a talk with Catherine Derosier-Pouchous, Head of Cultural Production in the Louvre Museum; a round-table discussion held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, with the intention to open up the dialogue to a wider audience.

The conference began with the panel 'Moving Image Installation and Screen Experience', which included Suzy Freake's (University of Nottingham) paper 'The Politics of Peripheral Viewing: Theorising Multi-Screen Film Installations', an examination of what happens when the concept of spectatorial suture to the single screen of theatrical exhibition is applied to multiple screen installations. Freake argued that multiple screen environments question the logic of spectatorial immersion, disrupting the single point of view into a multiplicity. As a result, this turns into a different model of thinking about spectatorial engagement. Drawing on Freake's presentation, though from a different perspective, Volker Pantenburg's (Bauhaus University at Weimar) paper 'Temporal Economy: Distraction and Attention in Experimental Cinema and Installation Art' posited the problems that, in his opinion, arise from the exhibition of experimental cinema in the museum space. Pantenburg claimed that the ways in which time-based art works are displayed and viewed in this space induce a distracted mode of reception that unsettles a proper reception of the films, which were originally created to be viewed in different conditions. The temporal economy of the museum exhibition forces artists to model their works into this particular regime, turning the film into an art object without taking into account some of its historical specificities; for example, when experimental films are re-staged as film installations or shown in digital format, as is the case with Michael Show's Wavelength (1967).

In 2003 Snow re-edited the original 45-minute film into a 15-minute digital version that was re-named WVLNT (Wavelength for Those Who Don't Have the Time). Pantenburg sees this as symptomatic of the economy of time that affects durational works when entering the art institution space. Marks also pointed out how the art institution exhibition and market model force experimental filmmakers and artists to fit their work into this particular economy. The clash between artists, filmmakers, and art institutions carried across subsequent presentations such as Juan Carlos Kase's (University of North Carolina Wilmington) 'Paul Sharits and the Institutional Instability of Experimental Cinema in the 20th Century Museum'. This presentation focused on the scarce attention that new media curators and art

historians have paid to the history of experimental cinema while insisting on the economic split generated between artists who work with film and experimental filmmakers. Kase provided the example of Paul Sharits as a filmmaker who tried to overcome this division in the 1970s by relocating the apparatus of experimental cinema from underground venues to gallery spaces. Kase noted that this is a history of cinema that has not only been ignored by art history but also has not been properly acknowledged in the field of film studies, which in his opinion fails when it comes to considering films in relation to other media such as sculpture or painting.

The production of Visage was commissioned by the Louvre Museum and Derosier-Pouchous presented the Louvre's departure in a new direction – not just as a repository and place where art is shown but also as a place where art is produced. Although this is an interesting new relationship between museum and cinema Derosier-Pouchous' presentation did not lead to a productive discussion, as she did not specify the Louvre's current and future plans regarding film production but only described their previous project. She did mention the Louvre's plans to continue producing films directed by renowned filmmakers who, as she remarked, have a personal vision. The general impression was that these plans are part of an overall strategy undertaken by the Louvre as a mean of modernising the institution. Still it would have been interesting to know how the relation between the Louvre and cinema is going to evolve. For instance, in addition to producing, is the Louvre going to take this relationship further by including the collection and exhibition of films?

Marks' keynote 'Immersed in the Single Channel: Experimental Media from Theater to Gallery' opened the second conference day. Her thesis was that the different economic regimes which characterise the art market, and independent channels of film distribution such as VDB, EAI, Vtape, or LUX, somehow force artists to work within the gallery setting for economic reasons. Marks claimed that artists tend to model their works in order to enter this market, leaving the traditional single-channel projection characteristic of movie theatre exhibitions in favour of the multiple-screen installation. She provided a comparative analysis on the amount of money paid in these different distribution channels by presenting the fees of various well-known film distribution companies in opposition to the list of fees recommended by the Canadian government for museum group exhibitions, solo shows, or biennials. As expected, this comparison revealed the distinct economic regimes in which each institution is inscribed, showing how the art market is largely more profitable. While Marks presented well-documented research on the incomes of artists in contrast with that of experimental filmmakers, I believe we must also take into account the positive aspects present in the relationship between the art institution and experimental film, by focusing on what has been gained: more visibility, along with a renewed interest in experimental cinema.

Linking back to Freake and Pantenburg, Marks continued questioning the assumptions of the apparatus theory that described theatrical film experience as mostly passive. She argued against those who, like Chrissie Iles,[1] claim that in the gallery space the spectator is released from this passive theatrical immersion by acquiring an active role and liberating their gaze while freely moving through the space. For Marks the museum demands a cognitive understanding of the filmic work, whereas the theatrical immersive viewing allows a more sensorial experience instead of a passive one. In the Q&A session that followed Marks' keynote, Ian White (film curator at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and editor of the book Kinomuseum2 [2007]) pointed out the binary dialectics into which the cinema/museum discussion has entered, continually focusing on the oppositions between attention/distraction, mobility/immobility, active/passive, or black-box/white-cube. White expressed an ambivalent general feeling about this rhetorical situation, which closes the debate and emphasises confrontation.

Moving on to an evaluation of cinema in the age of digital technologies, Erika Balsom (Carleton University) in her presentation 'Cinema in the Museum, Between Senescence and Spectacle' argued that the interest of artists and museums in cinema is in part a consequence of its newly-acquired status as an obsolete medium. In our contemporary post-cinematic condition,[3] in which cinema is no longer the dominant form, the art institution has become its savior by exhibiting films or directly re-staging the theatrical cinematic apparatus in the gallery. Balsom acknowledges this trend as a response to the move from analog to digital media, pointing to the artist Tacita Dean who, in the gallery, encounters a new space for an old medium.

A problem arises when this trend is linked to an understanding of cinema in terms of its specificity as a distinct material medium, without considering that historically cinema has been and is a mutable, hybrid form. Instead of thinking in terms of the so-called death of cinema, the shift from the movie theatre to the gallery can invite us to think that cinema is more alive than ever. As Balsom discussed, the museum has adopted a strategy of presenting itself as new – by displaying cinema as something old. Matilde Nardelli touched upon this strategic effort in museology in her paper 'Nested Architectures: Cinemas in the Gallery', in which she offered an account of re-creating cinema architectures inside the gallery space through provisional 'black box' environments. In her paper she examined *The Paradise Institute* (2001), Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's installation for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

The art institution's interest in obsolete media also incorporates television, a medium that is quickly losing its supremacy to the internet. Maeve Conolly (Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology) provided an insightful examination of a series of museum exhibitions focusing on television (such as MACBA's *Are You Ready for TV?*) in her presentation 'Exhibiting Cinematic Space and Televisual

Time in the Contemporary Art Museum'. In attempts at constant renewal museums even display new media, as is the case with the Guggenheim museum which presented an exhibition of YouTube videos in 2010. Gregory Zinman's (New York University) paper 'I Can Haz Art?: YouTube in the Museum' tackled the problematic of curating and showing amateur videos in the museum environment, where interactivity is completely removed from the equation and the curator's selection determines the viewing pace, as opposed to the user.

After these revelatory explorations of the different ways in which the museum displays cinema, the roundtable 'The Imaginary Museum' promised to be a stimulating experience. Held at the Fitzwilliam Museum with the participation of Jane Munro (Senior Curator, Fitzwilliam Museum), Grahame Weinbren (artist and filmmaker), Derosier-Pouchous, White, and Dalle Vacche, the roundtable resulted in a series of individual speeches. The exception was White, who presented his *Kinomuseum* project and tried to establish a dialogue which ultimately resulted in a frustrated attempt. Shorter than expected, I believe the roundtable did not work in part due to the lack of an initial set of concrete objectives and questions. Without a common starting point, the speakers opted to talk about their personal projects or research interests instead of engaging in a constructive debate.

During the final conference day most of the papers, rather than discussing theoretical concepts, moved into the analysis of specific case studies, engaging with some of the issues explored in earlier sessions. Brigitte Peucker's (Yale University) 'The Spectator in the Text: Installation as Museum' and Martijn Stevens (Radboud University Nijmegen) 'From Night Watch to Nightwatching, or Making Sense of History through Historical Sensation' built upon Peter Greenaway's re-interpretation of canonical art works through screen installations. The former dealt with the interplay between spectator and the immersive space created by Greenaway's installation *Leonardo's Last Supper* (2008), while Stevens insisted on the sensual experience of cinematic installations.

The last panel, 'Avant-Garde Filmmaking and Exhibition Practices', held at the Gordon Cameron Theatre proposed (as the title suggests) an historical examination of avant-garde alternative exhibition practices of the 1960s and 1970s. This constituted a point of departure that must be considered when studying the interplay between art institution and moving image. The papers presented by Kristen Alfaro (Concordia University), 'Screening Film Art: Anthology Film Archives, the Avant-Garde Film, and the Material Screen', and Lucy Reynolds (Freelance Lecturer, Artist, Curator), 'Overlapping Spaces of Spectatorship and the Vitality of Indeterminacy', reviewed and actualised the history surrounding the foundation of Anthology Film Archives in New York and Arts Lab and Gallery House in London, respectively. Highlighting the implication of the artists in the exhibition process, these spaces where characterised by their interest in issues related with education and access to experimental and underground filmmaking, as well as creating a lo-

cal network of audiences outside the art institution. After their presentation both speakers were asked about the importance and utility of doing historical research. Both stressed this importance and here, I would also like to point out the need for historicising the relation between museum and cinema,[4] which might help us dismantle certain polarising approaches to the subject.

*Moving Image and Institution: Cinema and the Museum in the 21st Century* brought together a community of scholars and curators united by a common interest in mapping and theorising the blurring of boundaries between art institutions and the moving image, with a particular focus on cinema. Though still a relatively small community, the research and ideas presented throughout the conference have contributed to creating a wider perspective on the different approaches to this complicated relationship which, as Thomas Elsaesser has argued,[5] is characterised by a series of compatibilities and antagonisms that challenge traditional assumptions and open up a fruitful field of research. Hopefully this conference will not remain a single event and the community created will have the opportunity to continue sharing ideas in further conferences dealing with the relation between cinema and museum.

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## Notes

1   C. Iles. 'Between the Still and Moving Image' in *Into the light. The projected image in American art 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), pp. 32-69. Chrissie Iles, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum, argues that the expanded cinema works of the 1970s dismantle the conventional cinematic space associated with the movie theater by introducing multiple viewpoints and spectatorial mobility, thus liberating the gaze.

2   I. White (ed). *Kinomuseum: Towards an artists' cinema* (Köln-New York: Walther König/ D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2008).

3   S. Shaviro. *Post cinematic affect* (Winchester-Washington: Zero Books, 2010). Shaviro employs the term post-cinematic in reference to cinema's loss of a dominant position among media in light of the advent of digital technologies.

4   Haidee Wasson and Allison Griffiths have both written about these histories in their respective books *Museum movies: The museum of modern art and the birth of art cinema* and *Shivers down your spine: Cinema, museums, and the immersive view.*

5   T. Elsaesser. 'Stop/Motion' in *Between stillness and motion: Film, photography, algorithms* by Eivind Rossaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 109.