

Recreating the Conditions for *Long Film For Ambient Light* (Anthony McCall)

12 noon Friday 16 March - 12 noon Saturday 17 March, 2007.

Teaching and Learning Cinema (Lucas Ihlein and Louise Curham)

<http://teachingandlearningcinema.org>

Interview 07: Friday 16 March, 2007, 2300h

Lizzie Muller, George Khut, Lucas Ihlein

- - -

Lizzie Do you have the time?

George It's 11 o'clock.

Lizzie Mister George Khut – so when you first arrived in the space what first attracted your attention?

George The piece of paper on the door and the fact that the door was blocked open with this big metal weight and I wasn't sure if this was the front entrance or a back entrance, and that it was like an aperture and that light was flooding into the space from where I was, outside. And I thought that might be some kind of aesthetic feature and I could be like, fucking it up by walking through it.

Lizzie So you worried that you were breaking the aesthetics?

George Mm, breaking the spell, and then I thought, 'oh no, I know this space a bit and there aren't any other ways to get in or out of it so this must be it' – ok, can you keep me a bit more focussed, (perhaps?)? Because I'll just get all evaluative, you know? You don't want that...

Lucas He's the best interview subject in the world...

Lizzie Yeah he's like the interview subject that pulls you up when you're...

Lucas 'Ok, now can you ask me this?'

(laughter)

Lucas We'll just leave you to it.

Lizzie Alright, so the first thing you saw was this gap in the door at the side – I mean I've got to admit, the reason I'm kind of like, 'aha ha' (lovely?) is because I'm a bit (doozy?)' – ok you noticed the door was slightly open and there was this shaft of light and then you pushed the door open and came in; what in the space first attracted your attention?

George The people who were in it and that I knew several people and I was kind of scanning the room and, 'oh there's Chris, and there's Lucas, and there's Louise, and there's Louise's boyfriend', a kind of social, like...

Lizzie And so what were you drawn to do immediately as you came in?

George I was just trying to get some sense of the space in here and what the energy was, and then, and I was trying to kind of work through, 'ok what is it I know about this piece?' from what I've seen in the diagram and read briefly, glanced through the catalogue, and I put all of that together – 'ok, this is the structure and how am I going to respond to this, or what am I going to do? Or what are my expectations?' - and then I was very, I started thinking about how informal the environment was...

Lizzie How what?

George Informal, and like there were the kind of the crash mats over in the corner and people were drinking out of long neck beer bottles and part of me was like - and then there were people talking, lots of people talking in the space and I was kind of thinking, 'oh, oh this is all a bit too kind of casual', I was expecting something like much more holy-holy and reverential.

Lizzie Can you tell me how you felt? Were you disappointed or were you pleased or were you excited or...?

George I was slightly, slightly disappointed but then the more I kind of sat with it I started to think, 'no, there's' – and then reading through the catalogue I started thinking, 'well you know, it's ok for people to talk', and it's kind of part of what - the work includes that in the kind of proposition then it makes you think about, 'well yeah what are the people talking about?' and then I was just slipping into, in terms of an experience, just being aware that there were people talking but not bothering about what they were doing and then I knew, I saw Chris Abrahams was in the room, I thought it was Chris Abrahams, the (pianist?), and he was walking around the room very intently so I spent quite a long time just looking at Chris, and just thinking, 'oh what's he doing? What's his interaction with it?' I had a conversation with Chris Ryan, who was standing around the room, we were commenting about how noisy the air conditioning was and that it was a kind of presence. Then I went over and saw Lucas and Lucas said, 'g'day', it was all very friendly and that was again this kind of thing about, 'oh, is this breaking the spell? We're having conversations and we're talking about things', and, 'oh is this ok?' and feeling like, 'oh I could quite happily have a conversation and enter into a conversation with Lucas', but then...

Lizzie Was it the first conversation?

George Mm, the first conversation and then I thought, 'well I could do this or I could just shut up and try and attend to things', cause it seemed to me when I approached this piece and I heard about it I thought it was about attending to light in a room, but (inaudible). Then I started thinking, 'oh maybe it's open to other things and there's more than that happening' and then I got a bit kind of, I wondered a bit more about people drinking beer out of long neck bottles, it's a (little kind of?) thing. And then...

Lizzie You wondered a bit about...?

George About just the alcohol consumption in the space – again it was that kind of fixation on this kind of reverential idea about what was in the space, and at the time I thought, ‘well if you’re having alcohol that’s kind of you know, that’s impairing your ability to attend to the work’ – I’ve since had quite a few red wines, and I’m having a fine time!

Lizzie How’s your attention?

George Don’t know – and what happened after that? And then you came in – oh no, and then the air conditioner turned off, there was a sudden drop.

Lizzie Was it the air con or fan?

Lucas It’s not really an air con it’s just a...

George Smoke extractor or something, but it was like, suddenly where people could be conversing at a kind of ok, sort of gentle quiet level, (*whispering*) it became like, hushed, ‘psst psst, I’m just going to go outside for a moment’, ‘are you ok?’ ‘yeah’, ‘are you going to be back in?’ – (*back to normal voice*) that kind of thing.

Lizzie So there was a distinct shift in the pitch of the...

George Yeah and in between all this I was looking at the light bulb and there was all those kind of rays and kind of iridescences that your eye makes through looking at the light bulb, and then looking at the ceiling and going through a lot of – part of my mind was wanting to race away and think about what this stimulated for me for my own artworks and practices, and then the other part was saying, ‘oh, just give it a break’, you know? ‘You’re here to be with another person’s artwork and like just don’t pick up the notebook, you know? Just try and soak it up in all the different ways that you do’. And...

Lizzie Can you talk to me a bit more about those different ways? Because we’ve talked about what you’re noticing and your feelings about other people in the space but I’d be interested to know now like what impact the actual space itself has made on you?

George It was only when the fan switched off and you became aware of the kind of the silence thing, and for a long time I was dwelling on the kind of musicality of the space and all the different resonances and the way the kind of echoes might have a kind of pitch or tonality. Then Chris Abrahams was like – was it Chris Abrahams?

Lucas Mhm.

George He was kind of making, tapping something very quietly, the different (beams?) and hearing the pitches so there was a long period where I was just like tuning in just to the beautiful sounds and the crickets outside and some trains and all those sorts of things, and I thought, ‘oh I wonder if the person who devised this piece took that kind of thing into account?’ because obviously once you take away one set of sensorial stimulations you jump onto the next closest thing, so I was thinking about

that. And then stopped thinking about it and concentrated again on the space and looking at the ceiling, then I thought, ‘oh maybe I’d enjoy this piece more in a simpler architecture’, if there was actually less to look at that would kind of make it richer for me.

Lizzie Can you explain that a little bit more?

George Well I was, I was thinking, ‘oh if it was just kind of you know all concrete or all simple surfaces I wouldn’t dwell so much’ I’m thinking, ‘oh wow look there’s all these I-beams up there and you could rig things from there and stuff’, and start making all these conjectures about things you would do in the space. And then what happened? And then, then I was thinking back to experiences of meditation and then I just had an appreciation for – this is kind of my first appreciation for this fact that, the fact that people can devote a time and a space just to be present to something in a kind of open kind of way. What happened after that?

Lizzie Physically? Were there any things going on – can you explain what you did with your body? Because you sat down...

George Yeah I sat down for a while and I was, I didn’t – I noticed that I wasn’t too uncomfortable, that I was quite, just slightly pleased with that. And then I picked up a cushion later on and I sat on the cushion and then I went through a little bit of a very minor micro-dialogue about you know, should I sit in any particular way that’s going to be more comfortable? (I mean?) it’s just like you know all these habitual flash backs to being in like Zen retreats you know, and all that kind of stuff and I thought, ‘well no it’s not a Zen retreat’ and you know, you don’t have to assume any of these different kind of postures that you might habitually assume in those things, and that could be pretentious or whatever. And then I lay down on my side, which was quite comfortable, and I was just looking.

Lizzie What were you looking at?

George Around the space, mostly – mostly at the walls and the bulb and these windows along here, and then I would start to go off onto little things about, ‘oh, these cloths are worn up at the corners’ and all that kind of stuff, and then I would kind of pull myself back from that again and just try and see if I can not invest so much in all those little ruminations.

Lizzie Do you mind if I indulge in a small bit of microanalysis of your experience and see what you think about it?

George Mhm.

Lizzie It strikes me that a lot of your experience was kind of structured by this relationship between wondering what you should be doing and what you actually were doing, what was the best way of doing this experience?

George Yeah I guess there’s a sense of scarcity and that like, you don’t have an opportunity to be in this situation all the time – or maybe you do (*laughs*) – so isn’t that an interesting – yeah so there, and it was like, ‘oh well, in the time that I have

available how do I want to spend it? Am I only just going to kind of fuck around and get pissed and just hang out with my mates or...?’

Lizzie Yeah cause that worked for me, but...

George Yeah, yeah it’s great - and I started appreciating that more and more as I had more glasses of wine (*laughs*) – or do I want to see if there’s something else that I don’t know about, that maybe I could come to if I was a bit more you know, reverential maybe, or...

Lizzie And would you say that you did come to something that you didn’t know?

George I think I’ve come to an appreciation of the kind of, of the social interactions that happen in this space and I was - when I first came in I was a bit like, ‘oh, this is...’ you know, ‘it’s not what the work was about’ and then I started reading more about the work and then I started thinking, ‘wow this is probably even more interesting than he ever even imagined’.

Lizzie Because of the social dynamic?

George Yeah, yeah and I’ve had really great conversations that are quite hard to have often, because people are busy and you know you’re in a foyer somewhere and everyone’s in a rush, and just the actual, the fact that 24 hours has been devoted to being with this thing somehow creates a different feeling, where people have slightly different conversations. And it was, everyone was having conversations focussed around this idea of experience and being in this place for a particular duration; and then I have to say I had a feeling when I came back in here just then, that it was like a big hug (*laughs*), just in the sense that like, ‘ok, these people put this energy into creating a space’ – which is quite a, it’s a kind of special space; you could argue that it happens all the time in reality everywhere, but no I think there was a kind of, it’s like a kind of permission to kind of have a range of experiences inside this structure, and all these conversations happen and then there’s also an ability just to be quiet, but in a way that (*says?*) kind of, ‘honoured’ or it’s like, ‘yeah we think this is important enough to kind of invest a lot of our time and energy and money into’, and there’s a sense of care which is why I said that image which is kind of like a hug, or kind of like friendliness; which is not just a superficial friendliness but a kind of care.

Lizzie Mm, anything else you want to say?

George Just for me it’s, I had some conversations with Louise and we were looking at some things in the program, when I went to the toilet, and then I was having all these insights into all these kind of problems I’ve had and things that I’ve enjoyed when I’ve read about relational aesthetics and it started making a lot more sense to me.

Lizzie Is that why you said what you said about conviviality?

George Yeah - yeah, yeah, but then also I started getting annoyed because all the literature about it and the reviews of shows, they never talk about the actual

conversations that happen at those events and then it becomes that thing about researchers and subjects as well, which is another issue for my work and it's just like, are they just these kind of like stupid natives which you take photos of and show your colleagues? Or are they people you work with and that you kind of share in the magic they create and it's, it's - you're more kind of equals, you know?

Lizzie Absolutely.

George Yeah, like guests at a party you know?

Lizzie (No we agree?)

(laughter)

George I know.

Lizzie But that's still lovely.

George Yeah.

Lizzie And – now at the end of the – well I don't know, are you going to leave soon or are you going to say?

George Not immediately, I'll probably try and stay a bit more.

Lizzie Ok I won't ask you the question I was going to ask you then – I was going to ask how you would know when it was time to go?

George I assume it's going to finish at 12 o'clock tomorrow afternoon?

Lucas Yeah.

George So the sun would come up and the lights would change, and...

Lizzie How would you know it was time for you to go?

George Oh just because my partner at home would start kind of getting worried about me and my phone's run out of batteries to call him so it would be like...

Lucas The world summons you?

George Yeah the world summons me, but yeah – part of me wants to say, you know the kind of the fanatical (cultivist?) part of me would want to stay the whole 24 hours and do as little as possible and – yeah cause that was another conversation I had with Louise about this reverential thing; there are some good sides to it, and when you see a good performance it's about that total focus and commitment and belief that a performer has that's kind of spell binding and it holds you in there and you pay attention, and that maybe if you had someone in a space like this that was like, totally gung-ho and 100% just like, observing sound and light you know? Like their life depended on it...

Lizzie (The touching?) (inaudible)...

George Yeah.

Lucas Yeah.

George And if there was that presence in the room you would pick up on that and you would be attracted to that, in terms of your own attentiveness as well.

Lucas Are you imagining that you could have been that person?

George No – I could try it, I could try it, I'd put myself up for it.

Lizzie But I think, in a way what you're – I mean to move on from this kind of you know, experiential dialogue to a kind of analysis of (inaudible), depending on who puts this work on, the atmosphere they create around – because they are the hosts, there's no way around it, right? So they set up the rules of engagement, and Lucas and Louise have set up a convivial atmosphere in the actual sense of it, so there is food and crash mats, and then there is also chatting and some drinking, and you know, there could have been something – it could have been very different.

George Yeah, yep.

Lizzie Yeah, it could have been (hair shirts?) and kneeling on bare floors, and...

George Vipassana, or people breaking down crying every ten minutes.

(break in recording)

Lizzie Like on Sunday Lucas and I have got this meditation retreat to go to and it really amused me that two of them are coming...

Lucas The same weekend.

Lizzie The same weekend.

George Is that the one at (4A)?

Lizzie No it's - I told you that that guy was the same guy?

George Yeah, yeah.

Lizzie But it's like the duration of that retreat – because I did it in when was it, November or something? And it's like you know you might try meditating for twenty minutes a day or for half an hour or for fifteen minutes or whatever, and you know if you get it right, brilliant, you've had a great fifteen minutes meditation – if you get it wrong you go – like, '(inaudible) it's all wasted'.

George No...

Lizzie Whereas the thing about that...

George It's all good.

Lizzie Exactly but the thing about the duration is there's this kind of potential to fail and succeed in succession, you know? So you kind of get things right, you get things wrong – you kind of start to realise that the quality of getting things right and getting things wrong is not dissimilar.

George Mm.

Lizzie And once you've kind of like established the fact that sometimes you will succeed and sometimes you will fail but all of them lead in the same kind of direction, if you can kind of give yourself the duration to not have that pressure of making – like Chris was saying you know like, 'giving yourself license to waste time' – like that's exactly what a day like today or a day like that retreat does to you, suddenly you're kind of – just like (inaudible) - 'nothing to do', but instead of it saying, 'nothing to do in this moment' it's, 'nothing to do in this entire day, but just see what evolves', and more, more can come out of...

George There's also a kind of monumentality to having that much time set aside to be, to be quiet and to just try and attend; and you know your mind's going to be going all over the place and coming back and whatever but after like a couple of days it's just, it – in terms of scale, and you're here as a human being and then you've had this experience, this weird kind of big, vast time and yeah it kind of changes your sense of identity, doesn't it?

Lizzie In that respect – actually the more I think about it the more I think this artwork is a bit like (cardio morphologies?) in the sense that it sets up a space for an activity that isn't normally thought of as being a particularly artistic activity, like – or not associated...

George That's what most contemporary art does though in the everyday.

Lizzie But it's not the everyday, it's specifically not the everyday; it's like the, setting up a space for reflection and meditation and like stuff that you would normally think of as a practice of some kind you know? Like a spiritual practice of some kind; and is very unfashionable in art, don't you think?

(end of recording)