

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 11: Saturday 17 March, 2007, 1145h

Lizzie and Fiona Winning

Lizzie Hello Fiona.

Fiona Hi Lizzie.

Lizzie What time is it?

Fiona It must be quarter to twelve or something.

Lizzie Even a little bit later.

Fiona Maybe, just about to finish.

Lizzie How long have you been here?

Fiona This time maybe an hour? I don't know.

Lizzie You've been here a few times?

Fiona Yeah I've been here three times over the 24 hours.

Lizzie Ok, so – well you present a challenging and interesting experiential interview case - so we're going to spend a little bit of time trying to think about the artwork from the point of view of your experience of it as it was lived, so maybe we could start with – with you also we could go quite far back but perhaps we won't go too far back, maybe we'll just go to before the first time you came to the space, and what was it that made you decide to come at that point? And pick that time and, what were your expectations?

Fiona For this work?

Lizzie Mm.

Fiona Well I work in the building so I had, and I knew – hey Dennis, how are you? So I knew the description of the work so I had that sort of sense that to some extent I knew what to expect when I walked into the room but of course you know the gap between knowing about a work and then the lived experience is, you know differs

actually as to how, how large it is. So I kind of wanted to, with a lot of durational work I actually like to do the visit several times.

Lizzie And what made you pick that time, that moment, for the first one?

Fiona No intellectual kind of process; more just it was lunch time and I kind of remembered that the work was actually up, it was kind of in my mind and I was thinking it was going up later and then I remembered it was already up so I came down then, so no sort of deliberate decision about the time.

Lizzie And you pushed open the door and what was the first thing you noticed in the space?

Fiona How bare the space was, how kind of monumental it seemed and how tiny this little light bulb in the centre of the space was, and it made me – oh because, because I was in the middle of my work day you know where you're kind of moving between multi tasks and talking with different people and working on your computer, I just had an automatic experience of kind of dropping away as I walked into this sort of blank space, this kind of opportunity to not think about those things for however long I was here, about half an hour.

Lizzie And was that a physical experience, that...?

Fiona It's hard to say, I think it was; I think the first was intellectual in the first ten minutes but then it became actually a physical experience that, that was very calming, mm.

Lizzie Can you tell me if you had any kind of feelings or thoughts arising from that particular moment, that dropping away?

Fiona Well Lucas and I kind of had a chat about that time about – he made a joke about meditation because I was saying oh how stripped back or something, and I guess that made me then in the next sort of twenty minutes feel like it was very meditative and actually slow down, and because I know this room a bit I just started looking at the room and thinking about the work but it really made me see things in the room I've never seen before. I don't know the room well because we've not been here very long but I, I've been involved in the planning of it and the design of it and – not been involved but you know been around when it was all happening and then seeing it in its construction and its finished form but I actually noticed lots of things about the room in that sort of first forty minute visit or thirty minute visit.

Lizzie Ok, can you kind of maybe describe for me how those details unfolded in your perception? So which things you noticed first – well it doesn't have to be accurate, just an impressionistic...

Fiona Mm, really, really the height that the, the ceiling, the sort of detail in the ceiling – actually probably, no first probably was actually the state of the windows and the fact that Lucas and Louise have papered the upper two – and this is actually the first time I'd seen the room with the external doors open and I knew the top two glass things are normally clear so I asked them how they, how they did that because at that time the light actually hit those walls and they looked really...

Lizzie Uniform.

Fiona ...there wasn't a distinction between the bottom two and the top two.

Lizzie Which is interesting because it must have been about the same time...

Fiona Yeah but I guess it was - the sun was from a different direction because it was after midday, it's so distinct now; I mean the paper's also slipped so it's kind of more obvious now. So yeah so I was really sort of, the windows first and then the ceiling and then that strip of original wall which, and the strip of original wall behind the columns, they took my eye and my fascination for quite some time. And I just really enjoyed sort of looking at the textures really.

Lizzie Any other details?

Fiona Yeah just, just how insignificant the light seemed in that, the light bulb seemed in that moment and I imagined, I sort of imagined that when darkness came there would be quite a neat pool of light below the, you know sort of cast on the floor and around it that I thought would not reach the ceiling or anything like that and I was pretty wrong about that.

Lizzie Maybe we should move on experientially to your next visit then, so - and we'll come back I think maybe to that first one perhaps as well in terms of how it relates to the others. But, so you decided to leave at the end of that first one, what gave you this clue it was time to leave? What made you leave?

Fiona Oh I had to go to an event at 2:30.

Lizzie So you were here for probably about 40 minutes that first time?

Fiona Yeah I think 30 or 40 minutes, yeah.

Lizzie And did you want to leave? Were you reluctant to leave?

Fiona No I would have loved to have stayed actually at that point, yeah.

Lizzie Ok, so you were probably looking forward to coming back again when you'd come back?

Fiona I was and I had looked at this paper thing and talked with Lucas and I asked him to explain it to me and then when he did I realised that that crystallised for me that the exciting time to be here was the, where you saw more kind of change in light; given that I knew I couldn't be here for hours and hours, so I was very interested in coming back for dusk and so I did that. And yeah and that was a conscious decision, I would have got here a little bit earlier except for work but – and then I don't know how long I stayed, 40 minutes an hour, I'm not sure, and there was that sense of shift that was more intense and more obvious.

Lizzie In the lighting?

Fiona Yeah.

Lizzie And can you tell me on that second visit you opened the door, what was first thing that took your attention that time?

Fiona How bright the light was, and how...

Lizzie The light bulb?

Fiona Yeah the light bulb, yeah and how it had seemed so puny and I had, you know I had this kind of perception that it was not going to do anything like fill the space, that in fact the, all of the edges of the space like deep – you know not just the edges but more deep into the space was going to be sort of inky black, and so I'd kind of you know made this image in my mind about what it would be like and it didn't get there. But I didn't leave – I never, I never saw it in full darkness, so it was almost dark when I left that, that time.

Lizzie So the second time round you come in and you notice the, the brightness of the light which you hadn't expected, and anything about people, the configuration of people in the space?

Fiona Yeah there were a few people here sort of around that corner and earlier in the day Lucas had described that as 'a concession to comfort' which I thought was hilarious because at that point there was nothing on it, it was just the mats and I said I thought it was not that much of a concession so that was fine. But he said, 'no there's doonas and cushions' and I went, 'oh good'.

Lizzie And what were you drawn to in that second visit? You were drawn immediately to...?

Fiona I think I was actually, I was drawn to walk around the space and experience - because the, the light was, coming in from the windows was much, you know there was, it was far diminished from when I'd been here earlier and so I was really drawn to walking around the space and seeing the difference from different angles and certainly at that point watching the light, with the natural light behind me, was actually

more interesting than watching it from this side with the light, with the natural light behind the light, if you know what I mean. And the other thing that I really remember very clearly from that visit was when you and Lucas went and sat over there and when Gail and Sam were talking over there and this sense of silhouette was just automatically romantic, it's hilarious. What is that you know in my, in my sort of cultural memory? And I was just like, 'oh wow, it's quite beautiful', that sort of back light.

Lizzie And did you interact with people in the space? Did you have conversations?

Fiona Yeah I had conversations, every time I've been here I've had conversations; you made me a cup of tea and we had a conversation about 'tea for thinking by' or something? And so it, like I, what I also like about it, it is a very – for me you know it's been a very sort of gentle social space; you know I didn't expect to see you here, I didn't expect to see Mike and Deborah here – you know it wasn't like I thought about who was going to be here, I knew Lucas and Louise would be here each time I came but you know – so that's kind of nice, it's sort of a reflective space, a space where you can be by yourself to look at things but also where you can have little chats with people.

Lizzie Can you talk to me about those chats? Like the quality of them, or the pitch of them? What kind of chats you had?

Fiona Yeah mostly they were, well Lucas probably, I asked him quite a few questions and that was great, then mostly it was, sometimes they were chats that were disassociated from the work but each time, but within that chat that was disassociated from the work somebody would say every now and again, 'hm, the light feels really hot', or you know, so, so it would keep coming back, there would be a kind of comment about the awareness of where we were and what's happening.

Lizzie It didn't stray too far from the here and...?

Fiona Yeah it was kind of interesting actually and then I had a conversation with Louise that was also, that was about re enactment and you know the politics around that, and that kept on being interrupted with one of us noticing something or, and that kind of turned into a conversation that could almost have been two people – I was reflecting on this this morning – that could almost have been two people you know who'd smoked a lot of joints and were kind of you know riffing on, you know...

Lizzie Man.

Fiona Yeah and, and it was, but it was gorgeous I mean we were sort of, I was laughing I said to her this morning when I came in, 'you know you were saying last night "oh, the light just feels so hot" and we were all going, "yeah, it does!"' and then I went outside and it was like 30 degrees and my impulse was to run back in and go, 'it's hot! It's really, really hot out there too!'

Lizzie Mike said, ‘have you guys had LSD?’ we went, ‘dude, you don’t need it here’. Look, I’d like to come back to re enactment actually at the end maybe and have a talk about the experience in relation to that, but moving on perhaps now to the last time you’d come.

Fiona Yep.

Lizzie So you left at the end of – how long did you spend the second time?

Fiona That was probably about an hour.

Lizzie About an hour.

Fiona Forty, fifty minutes, an hour – I can’t remember, I didn’t have a – the sense of time is really unclear actually, I’d say that you know, I, I could, each time I could have spent longer here but there was something that made me have to leave, and this time it will be the end of the work. I wanted to come back at dawn I have to say and I set my alarm, but I just, I turned it off and looked, looked outside and thought it would be really great to see the ascent into light but I couldn’t do it, I’m very bad in the mornings.

Lizzie It’s a funny thing in a way, just to slip in there – it’s actually less dramatic than you think.

Fiona Yeah, yeah.

Lizzie Bizarre, very interesting – anyway so you wanted to come back but you just came as soon as you could, that was what happened?

Fiona Yeah, yep, mm.

Lizzie And the third time you walked in, where did your attention go this third time?

Fiona Oh to the four sort of prone bodies on, you know on this side of the room probably. You know you and Lucas were talking, were deep in conversation, Peter was quite like, meditated-out and Louise actually looked really tired and kind of exhausted and was just about to take more photos and, and my fascination was – so I did sort of, that was probably the first thing I noticed but then I, I was really interested in whether – you know I was there about an hour after midday yesterday, I wanted to see what it was like an hour before midday and what the difference was with the light. And what really struck me then, and I walked around and sat over there, what really struck me was that I, I had done some almost conscious, not really conscious but almost conscious kind of trying to memorise the, the state of the light this time yesterday, and then I was

interested, when I was watching the change of the light last night to sort of take that in but I realised that I couldn't, it wasn't burned into my memory as a kind of...

Lizzie How would one?

Fiona Yeah it was kind of you know, I couldn't quite remember if it was bright or – I mean it seems like it's brighter actually, but - the light bulb - and certainly the pulsing of the sun on the windows was different to in the afternoon yesterday, that was quite different, so there were lots of differences but I, I couldn't just quite remember you know...

Lizzie Or articulate in your head the differences.

Fiona Mm.

Lizzie Ok and so this third time a lot of the impressions were about comparison and about light quality and about the state of the people in the room?

Fiona Mm.

Lizzie Any other feelings coming back to other aspects of the room? Or even bodily aspects of your own experience?

Fiona No just again a kind of calmness; I mean I didn't come from work this time, so both the first times I had so I was already in a much, a state of calmness and relaxation you know, when I arrived and I'd, I'd walked down here and it was just a nice walk and you know I'd run into a couple of people that I knew and was feeling very warm about Redfern, and...

Lizzie A bit mushy.

Fiona Yeah and kind of walked in and went, 'oh yeah here we are' and it was kind of like arriving at a, a place of comfort so like a home away from home, that kind of you know, very comfortable.

Lizzie Did you look at, in any of the three visits at either of these two?

Fiona Yeah sorry I did that the first, the very first visit.

Lizzie Oh I remember you said actually you looked at the diagram and you made yourself, made your judgement that you wanted to come back and...

Fiona Yeah and I read that as well.

Lizzie Now can you talk about an impact that these two bits of information had, if any, on your experience? Can you reconstruct...?

Fiona Hm, well I read that first and that brought back – I’ve read about this work before and that brought back memories about that; well it sort of brought back into sharpness what it is that I was actually engaging with, so it was kind of loosely arranged in my head and then I kind of arrived and read that and went, ‘oh ok, that’s kind of...’ – ‘I get it’, in a sense, and I was also struck by this thing, this mental residue – I think it’s on that text? Or maybe it’s in the, in the little thing that Lucas gave us, the little...

Lizzie Zine?

Fiona Zine yeah, but somewhere I read about this thing called ‘mental residue’ and that made me think about, compare it to Clifford (Geertz’s?) stuff about (the aftermael?), the afterlife of artwork, and I was kind of throwing those things around in my head, what is the difference between...?

Lizzie A kind of ethnographic reference.

Fiona I...

Lizzie Social science.

Fiona ...yeah a social science reference, yeah, but he was talking about art in that case. And (‘aftermael’?), yeah, the afterlife and I was trying to think about what’s the difference between mental residue and afterlife and, so...

Lizzie Which visit was this on? This was the first?

Fiona That’s the first visit actually, mm.

Lizzie So you were in a kind of a slightly privileged position to be able to talk about afterlife to some degree because this is your third time in?

Fiona Yeah that’s true, that’s true.

Lizzie Can you describe a trace that happened when you left? When you were outside of this space, going back to your daily life? Or was it just out of your head?

Fiona No, no it’s an intellectual – it’s like a, it feels less experiential than it is kind of you know, a thinking trace but it’s a - it’s so clichéd but what was, stayed with me was the kind of need to find the space to sit still, to be still in the, in the brain and notice detail rather than kind of – which is really what my life is and what most people’s lives are so, so for me there was that you know, thinking about that – I wasn’t kind of physically experiencing that afterlife but I was thinking, it was a, it was a desire.

Lizzie Ok, interesting. Can you talk to me a bit about this re enactment thing that you and Louise talked about and what your impressions of the experience are in relation to re enactment?

Fiona Well we were kind of talking about you know why, why it's worth doing or you know - and I was talking about another project that I was trying to get up with (Russell Dumar?) which, which we got up a little bit but, which was called 'Re Staging the Disappeared' which was about, it was more about bodies, physical performance and finding, either getting the same bodies twenty years later to re visit a piece of choreography or a piece of movement and to - he's got incredible documentation so you, you know you, there's always a piece of film that you could pick and say, 'well we'll do this bit' or whatever, and our interest in that was partly about sort of the - and then also to get, to get bodies of the same age performing the same piece of material, and part of our, our sort of interest in that was about sort of the loss of the lineages of the practice and, and sort of the, the difference between reading about a work and actually experiencing a work and I guess the thing that we were trying to do then was not to fetishise the - this was kind of going through my head as part of the conversation with Louise - you know is not to fetishise the original work but is to actually experience it and draw you know contemporary kind of references to the work or associations with it or - I got lost in that conversation so I can't remember what the question was.

Lizzie The question was just how your experience here relates to your thoughts about re enactment?

Fiona Mm, yeah well I guess, I guess one of the key things is really that thing about knowing about a work and then experiencing it, and there's always a - you know there's obviously always a gap and I was describing to Louise that a lot of people pitch work here and I might see it on DVD or I might see the documentation of it or whatever but very often you know the lived experience is just...

Lizzie Very different.

Fiona ...it's just so different and, and sometimes it's actually - but sometimes you can, you know sometimes that gap is, is you know understandably quite large but sometimes it's enormously large and, and I'm kind of always surprised you can never know, you just can't know. But certainly in durational work I feel like that's that, that is always so interesting because you know I guess a stripped back work that is so much about the embodiment, the embodied experience of the, of the people in this room for example is, is enormously different to anything you could read about.

Lizzie Could you talk about the gap between your own read thoughts about this work and your own lived experience of this work?

Fiona It's just an interesting idea when you read about it, you know and it's something that you can imagine only in terms of the actual shifts in light, more so than actually the intensification of everything in the room whether it be the visual or the sonic

or the you know, so you know maybe I didn't spend enough time imagining the work but you can't, you know that – I don't even know that I'd want to spend the time imagining that, you know it's only an experience so that sort of intensification of clear space and then the, the time to notice, you know time stretches out basically and you have to experience that just, you know – it's just words otherwise, if you just talk about it. See you Dennis!

Lizzie See you! I just want to pursue a couple of things that other people have talked about and I haven't done this with other people but just because you've been back three times and it's the end now, I just wanted to reflect on some things other people have said which included that, you know that other people in the space had a great effect on them, they were either avoiding people, they weren't sure what pitch of conversation they could have, they were hoping for people to talk to, they couldn't wait to discuss, they hoped no one would approach them – could you, do you have any thoughts yourself about those social dynamics? Because you said it was a very gentle social space.

Fiona Mm, I thought it was but then I'm comfortable here and I probably knew almost everybody that was here too in one way or another, you know some people well some people not well.

Lizzie You didn't have a struggle with pitch? You know, 'what is it ok to talk about in this space?'

Fiona Not really but I think it helped that I, that when I was first here Lucas and Louise were still a little bit setting up, so there was a bit of sort of functionality going on, Louise was setting up the camera – we had a conversation about the camera and I had a conversation with Lucas about the sort of space and this, so maybe that sort of, that set a pitch for me which was that it's not a sacred space, it's actually a space that's...

Lizzie That makes sense, I think it was similar for me because I had a job to do. So one other question other people mentioned that I thought you might be able to shed some light on in terms of this thinking about re enactment; a lot of people have been bothered by this parade of cameras and some people particularly were bothered by the little LED, the screen that kind of says to you, you know, 'this is being documented', and this process too, you know this kind of like recorded conversations in the space.

Fiona Mm, no I was interested in that actually that's why I asked you how many people you'd interviewed actually because I was kind of like, 'oh, I wonder what that was like for people actually you know' – I, what I don't know is how long people spent in the space, you know I wondered if some people spent hours and hours in the space in one slot?

Lizzie Most people spent you know a while, the only dippers were the post-show crowd who came in after just having – so what's your impression of this process as part of your experience? What does it do to it?

Fiona Oh, I mean it's fine, it's quite nice to talk about it actually but I was not even really aware of anyone being interviewed in the space; I mean I did notice that you and Lucas were talking to each other with this but I didn't even know if that was about the work.

Lizzie Our cattle prod, yes.

Fiona You know you might have been telling each other stories to pass the time, I don't, you know – so and I did, I did - actually now that you mention it I did have a moment when I first walked into the space that I was quite aware of that and I kind of stood in front of it a couple of times unintentionally and moved around it and I, I actually hate being documented myself, like I understand why a piece of documentation would happen but I actually don't, don't enjoy it so I kind of, I did have a couple of moments where I went, 'oh I just want to move out of that screen', but apart from that I didn't have any problem with it, it just seems normal to me that there would be...

Lizzie Cameras everywhere.

Fiona ...an obsessive amount of documentation happening. And, and I'm kind of fascinated by – well I was fascinated by that camera in particular, what, what it's going to show, but...

Lizzie It's kind of historical.

Fiona Yeah, but also...

Lizzie It looks like it could show you 1975 doesn't it?

Fiona Yeah and on some levels I kind of think it's hilarious that there's a video of – actually I think it's great that there are a whole lot of stills that are taken over time but you know the idea of videoing this, this...

Lizzie Nothingness.

Fiona You know, yeah, is – you know I love it, it's kind of funny.

Lizzie There's a lot of funny things about this work actually. And from your point of view can you just reflect on the difference, if any – well I think it does make a difference - between the original work and this re enactment of the work? It seems to me and other people have kind of commented that this difference is this obsessive documentation, and that partly the restaging is an attempt to address a lack of documentation that people will feel, and – but then does the documentation itself have an impact on the work? So it's kind of like, you know wheels within wheels, regressive – do you have any thoughts about it?

Fiona I think that's the contemporaneity, you know, that is brought to a re enactment and you know we all know that a re enactment can't be a true and total re enactment, we all know that you know it's not the same building it's not the same context, you know it's - all those things...

Lizzie The same bodies.

Fiona Yeah the same bodies so, so I just see this as being you know – and this was part of our thing on our 'Re Staging the Disappeared', it, it wasn't actually about fetishising and trying to re create exactly that work it's actually about, what does it mean to look at that work now? And this is part of what it means to look at this work now, so...

Lizzie Or what it means to experience this work now I suppose.

Fiona Mm.

Lizzie Mm. Thank you. Do you have anything else that you want to say that's been burning away?

Fiona No; I would just say I mean because I haven't said it, it's actually a really pleasurable experience to pass time in this kind of calm space, it's beautiful.

Lizzie Thank you.

Fiona Pleasure.

(break in recording)

Lizzie An addendum...

Fiona Well I just looked at Lucas who's also wearing glasses, and I, I thought, 'oh I meant to ask Lucas about the experience of this work with the glasses', because I spent a lot of time as a child – I'm very blind – well, you know like very, very short sighted – I spent a lot of time as a child squinting at light bulbs and looking at the, you know the...

Lizzie The rays?

Fiona The lines and the rays that come out, and, and doing that thing that you know you can turn any light into a candle and blah blah blah, and so I did in this work have a, a physical experience of kind of remembering that and taking my glasses off and playing with the light with my eyes and putting them back on and seeing the difference and you know, so I did a lot of kind of glass action, glasses action.

Lizzie Oh, you relived a childhood moment?

Fiona Well I remembered a childhood moment yeah of, of just doing that. I don't know if all kids did that with glasses, but anyway...

Lizzie Did you wear your glasses much?

Lucas I, I only had glasses, I've only had them for about six years.

Fiona Right, mm.

Lucas So they're new for me.

Lizzie I kind of feel like you didn't wear them last night much, at all.

Lucas I didn't because I, like I use them for seeing long distances and if I don't need to, I don't. So I was...

Lizzie But I spent a lot of time doing that with the light, making it into a mirror ball. I was like – it was actually the only way that I could make that light bulb into anything other than a hideous enemy.

Fiona And it softens it, being, being – you know having sort of, being very, very short sighted what happens when you take your glasses off is that it completely softens it, you can't see any of the edges, you can't see - you know it sort of becomes this sort of softer ball.

Lucas I did notice when I got glasses the light became brighter and colours became brighter when I first got glasses.

Lizzie When you first put them on you mean, yeah.

Lucas Yeah I remember that distinctly, and so in that sense the light bulb would be harsher because you would...

Fiona That's right, so taking the glasses off actually disperses it, makes it gentler.

Lizzie Thank you for that.

Fiona That's alright.

(end of recording)