INTRODUCTION

Siri Peyer

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

In the past years, there has been an increasing presence of film and video works in art exhibitions. Where does it come from, this growing predilection for a medium which is not particularly easy to present in an art show setting? Film and video works require a darkened room and attention over a span of time which far exceeds the average duration of an exhibition visitor’s stop in front of an artwork. The soundtrack (where it exists) often clashes in a disturbing manner with the other works on view in the same room. The typical cinema arrangement, consisting of a dark room, a film, a projection, and the audience, is so closely associated with the act of watching a film that it virtually seems like a must, and, unsurprisingly, large, international art institutions are increasingly having their own cinemas built for the purpose of showing these works. The distinguished media theorist Christian Metz associates the space of the imagination, the space of projection, with the present economic order: “It has often rightly been claimed that cinema is a technique of the imagination. On the other hand, this technique is characteristic of a historical epoch (that of capitalism) and the state of a society, the so-called industrial society.” Scopophilia (pleasure in looking) and voyeurism are deeply inscribed in our society; in a cinema, the audience is placed in a voyeuristic distance and can unashamedly satisfy his curiosity. Passiveness, a play with identifications and a consumption-oriented attitude constitute the movie-watchers’ position. Laura Mulvey moreover calls attention to the fact that the visual appetite is as much dominated by gender inequality as the system we live in. Naturally, (experimental) films and the various art settings in which they are presented can and will violate the conventions of mainstream cinema from case to case.

The seven interviews address the question as to what constitutes and characterizes each respective style of curatorial work with the moving picture. How can the specific spatial situation in the cinema be conceived as a space which evokes meaning in a special way, and what is the nature of the narrative break brought about by showing films in exhibition galleries? What are the specific ideological structures which distinguish these spaces? Gridthiya Gaweewong and David Teh curated the thematic series *Unreal Asia* at the 2009 Oberhausen Short Film Festival. They were confronted with the question as to how a geographical region which is home to a vast range of cultures and ways of
life can be represented within a festival; indeed, the biggest question was whether they were at all willing to adapt to this parameter. For the two curators, however, a festival can be thought of as a format for drawing attention to film-makers otherwise unknown to the international art milieu.

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

The two English curators Mark Webber and Ian White are likewise concerned with showing films within the cinematic space. They conceive of the latter, however, as an exhibition space and a social space which permits a joint viewing experience. They show their film programmes in collaboration with art institutions. Why is the cinema an inscription here? The fact that, in the experience of both Webber and White, their programmes are not understood as part and parcel of the art exhibitions, but regarded as examples of the efforts made by the art mediation department.

The film medium is thus seen side by side, but not interlinked — in terms of content — with the exhibitions on view concurrently in the same institution.

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

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

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

I warmly welcome the opportunity to discuss the relationship between art and cinema. Do you see the museums and exhibition spaces you work in as spaces for the showing of films?

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

Sometimes they are very close to each other — sometimes they are almost interchangeable, but not all the time. Mainly I earn my living from working as a curator and as a writer and I teach as well. My artwork has always stood pretty much outside of any realistic (financial) economy — usually I have only a very small economy and often work collaboratively. My artwork is most often in the form of performance. And as such, sometimes it starts to cross over with curating film screenings. As a curator, I work mainly in the context of cinema. It is about showing artists’ film and video in the context of cinema, rather than in the context of an art gallery. It shares with performance this frame and emphasis on the event, and even if projecting a film is not immediately understood as a live event, to me sometimes it becomes very close to being a live event. That is for different reasons; sometimes it is because of the way in which the economy of exhibiting work in the cinema functions, by which I mean you might show a programme of videos by Martha Rosler; you would show this once and no one in London would show a programme of videos by Martha Rosler for another year. There is a lot of pressure on this one instant of it being created and manifested. There is a very immediate and sometimes urgent engagement within the audience because of this very practical thing. I think there are other ways that live performances, artists’ film and experimental film, could be read as being similar. They have a very similar history; by which I mean a very recent history (something that is only been developed in the second half of the 20th century). So much of the broader project around both live art and experimental film is about mapping this history now. It is still something that is undecided in a way. There is something that is really quite unique about showing work in this context. The history is being constructed in a collective way. That is it part of this thing that we choose to do together and we think about ‘together’ in terms of ‘we’ being a projectionist, and me, and an audience. I read the cinema auditorium as both a discursive space and a social space, in which there is some kind of shared experience, the opposite of a modernist cinema. I do not read it as an authoritarian or even a pedagogic space.

A lot of my curatorial work also involves understanding the cinema auditorium as a very particular kind of exhibition space, which is why this unique event, in this architecturally defined fixed space, is able to function like an exhibition. My artistic practice and my curatorial practice can be very separate too, mainly when the curatorial work becomes more about constructing a historical programme. The level of my subjective involvement and the way in which I sometimes try to make that visible and turn that into part of the dynamic of a film screening can sometimes be very pronounced, like the screenings in Berlin [under the title, borrowed from the 1971 Rosa von Praunheim film It’s Not The Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But...].
The Situation In Which He Lives, Kino Arsenal and other venues, March 2009], which was an extreme version of this. They were highly constructed and ‘wrong’, in a way.

| Image 1 |
| Image 2 |

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

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

A few years ago I organised a series of screenings at the Cine Lumière in London. The room used to double as a traditional theatre space, where they showed mainly dance. They had quite a large stage in front of the screen and lights and blinds that could move up and down. Suddenly, there were several other material elements that could be manipulated in different ways; to read or to reveal or to challenge something about the work you were looking at on screen. The programme currently running at Whitechapel looks at one single work each season. That work is shown a number of times. And each time it is shown with something completely different. It tries to bring out radically different ways of reading one piece of work. We have held live performances in the auditorium at Whitechapel but they are not so successful in the space. I suppose it is trying to be sensitive to the situation that you are in, making the viewer aware of the material circumstances of their looking. What I do is somehow affiliated to that. It is about an awareness of the space that you are in or allowing the space that you are in to articulate something about itself. It is about constructing a kind of present. And in a way the performance work that I have made, I am also really trying to do that. In different ways maybe, but it is very much about trying to construct this urgent present. It is not so much about the content of the performance work, but of the awareness that you are in space and time together.

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

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

As the film curator for the Whitechapel in London, you work in a very specific environment. Your programmes are inside an art...
institution and there they are showing inside a cinema room. How do you work with this room, and do you ever feel the urge to change something, for example to tear out the chairs?

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

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

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

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

You did the theme programme for Oberhausen 2007 called ‘Kino-museum’. How does a film festival work, is it like a big exhibition?

Festivals can work in all sorts of different ways. With Kinomuseum, which was the big project I made here in 2007, it was precisely that, to re-imagine the auditorium as a particular kind of museum, and to think about what the terms are of this particular museum; and how this space might function, what the idiosyncrasies are, and what the impossibilities are, where the limit are of this ideology. In a way, it was about questioning the role of the curator, work, which literally either featured the museum, figured the museum, or was set inside a museum, or was addressing the museological in general or in abstract. Part of the research I was doing was looking at the early film collections of the Natural History Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (Which were really the first art institutions to have significant collections of films with educational material and to use it in this very pedagogical civilising way.) At the beginning of the 20th Century, museums like these two, were exploiting the fact that film was reproducible. So you could tour unique objects. In a way, film programmes crossing America were extensions of the museums and what the museums stood for. So it had this pedagogical civilising effect. Some of these films are quite extraordinary. There was a film of the school’s unit of the Natural History Museum and how that functioned, and a long film from the Metropolitan Museum, just cataloguing the American wing, and its interiors. But suddenly, within this very rigid format, there were strange idiosyncrasies and intertitles that did not quite match the picture. So at the same time that it was constructing its authority – if you really thought about what it meant to watch a black and white film with an intertitle that told you that the curtains were yellow – the authority of the film was in travel. How do we know the curtains were yellow? It is a black and white film. That was a really mind-blowing moment, because [located] there is the authority of the institution. That is another thing that really interests me across the performance work and the curatorial work, this investigation of taking authority visible in different ways. So that was the first half of Kinomuseum.

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

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

Ian White thank you for the interview!

Ian White is Adjunct Film Curator for Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, an independent curator, writer and artist.
The Catholic Church and residence of Margaret of Austria’s reign; it was the seat of the archbishop of Mechelen, itself a city steeped in history, seems the perfect place to engage such questions.

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

The artists participating in the biennial take recourse in the past to re-frame the present and to demonstrate the complex and often persisting entanglements between past, present and future. They highlight how the residue of history affects our future. Employing a variety of narrative strategies, they reflect on memory and the passage of time, often creating distinct ‘chronotopes’ of their own. Their work foregrounds practices of retrieval, researching, re-contextualizing, recycling and finally erasing, exploring how historical narratives, or to bring to the forefront repressed or peripheral ones.

How does one deal with the spectre of history and the ghosts of the past? How is history written and by whom? Whose history is it? Contour 09 advocates the importance of history in our age of forgetting. To quote Eric Hobsbawm, one of the greatest historians of our time, “History alone provides orientation and anyone who faces the future without it is not only blind but dangerous.
especially in the era of high technology”. In any case, an understanding of history – or histories, as is perhaps more correct a term – is paramount as it entails an understanding of social and cultural being. Thus, in a nutshell, the exhibition advocates the importance of history in the public as well as private realism, and revolves around questions of historical representation and historiography. It explores how historical narratives are constructed, highlights the complex and often persisting entanglements between past, present and future, and aims to demonstrate how the residue of history affects our perception of the present as well as our visions of the future.

Does the video-biennial have fixed venues?

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

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

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

Video or film-works mostly have a beginning and an end, it takes time to look at them how do you dictate how one will navigate the show. However, it was important for us that the exhibition can be viewed in a whole day, and that is indeed possible. The fact that the exhibition is dispersed in various venues, within walking distance of one another also allows the audience to take a ‘breather’ in between works, and avoid the feeling of being trapped in a dark space all day.

What is the theme of the ‘Contour 09’ Biennale?

I answered this above but here are some additional criteria about the artists I selected: The exhibition showcases a variety of practices but focuses more on work that features complex, layered narratives and rich, memorable visual languages, which are often consciously cinematic, as well as practices that are obviously hand crafted and labour-intensive. Lastly, the exhibition aims to argue for the deceleration of perception by including works that need to be viewed from beginning to end, works that are more gradually immersive, unfolding over time. Many artists augment their film and video installations with other visual material. The exhibition presents recent as well as newly commissioned work by the participating artists.

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

Yes, there will be some selected events, which relate to the theme of the Biennial. One was an exhibition at the Beurschouwburg in Brussels, which took place in September as part of the European Media Event. It was entitled Past Imperfect and included artists in the biennial such as T.J. Wilcox, Lene Berg and Yorgos Sapountzis, but also other artists who are exploring issues of historiography. On the 16th October we have invited the Finnish artist Mika Taanila to show two of his seminal films New Stance for Tomorrow (1998). This event has also been planned in collaboration with the Beurschouwburg in Brussels, where it will also take place. Taanila’s films deal with the issues of urban artificial surroundings and futuristic utopias of contemporary science, so his work is perfectly complementary to the biennial and its preoccupation with the complex entanglements between past present and future. Lastly, on the closing day of the Biennial, October 18, we will present the European Premiere of Sami van Ingen’s Just One Kiss: The Fall of Ned Kelly.
is today a lack of care and concern for people and the environment. The problem is that there are still many cases of cultural vandalism and neglect in the world—especially in countries like Thailand, where the cinema is considered more of an entertainment medium, format, content, and not viewed as an art form. Some film / video works are better viewed in a specific exhibition space that reflects the vision and intentions of the artist. This is based on the surviving synopsis story line and appropriate found footage, with live sound track.

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

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

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

Thank you very much for this Interview.

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

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UNREAL ASIA

Interview with Gridthiya Gaveewong (GG) and David Zeh (DZ)
by Siri Peyer (SP)

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

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

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

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

We had four venues: one was a shopping mall, one was a cultural centre, which was the cinématheque at the Alliance Française in Bangkok, the third was a contemporary gallery space, and lastly we had an installation at the Jim Thompson library, which was a smaller screening. We also had a guerrilla channel in public spaces, which was a projector mounted to a bicycle, held in China Town, in collaboration with a local artist. The main venue was definitely the programme in the shopping mall, that we were able to use freely — a megaplex in a shopping mall. Normally, they show a very limited range of commercial films, very bad films, and that really is the context in which cinema lives in Thailand today. The other end, the China Town thing on the bicycle, is a very important point for curating the moving image in a region like South East Asia.
The cinema did not arrive in the form that is currently consumed. It arrived as a mobile form for a huge majority of the population and in fact, it still is a mobile form for a significant portion of the population. If you add the mobile and pirated together, then the informal and street-based distribution of cinema is still alive, and in some places it dominates. I was quite self-conscious about using the megaplex space, but at the same time we were trying to bring some of the programme through in more peripheral spaces, that were decentred and organically connected to a community; which is impossible at the mall.

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

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

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

In 2005, I co-curated one exhibition with my Singaporean friend in Berlin, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt about South East Asia. The central theme was concerned with redefining South East Asia, which is very problematic for us. When you are asked as an Asian People to do something that is not Asian, it is more difficult than to present yourself in another context. The major issue we wanted to avoid, was to present something exotic. A very important discussion resulted from this show, which was called Politics of Fun. We focused on a younger generation and we showed a lot of video works. It is very difficult to present South East Asia in a singular way; there has never been a ‘singular’ South East Asia before.

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

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

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

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

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

We started with this philosophical idea which is – in an academic discourse – not a new idea at all, that a very different set of factors furnish the reality of life in that part of the world: That there are not really rational principles, scientific thinking, doubt, those sorts of processes. Instead, comparatively irrational principles tend to drive behaviour. And this can be read also in the social structure, in the way institutions are ordered. We started with this question: What if ‘realism’ had no real counterpart in a South East Asian headspace? What would a thing be built on if not on those rationalist principles? The idea really unravelled over the course of putting together the show, which I am not at all uncomfortable about. It was not a bad starting point. Where it led us, was to the flipside of a lot of things that are really very prominent already in collections of art and film from this region. The obvious one is migration, which is of course, a huge text. The other one is about ‘reality’ and the definitions of that, and the construction of that, the construction course and so on. But then what facet of that story might be missing? One facet is the idea that when people go, half of the story is left behind. How do we think about internal migration? It might be geographical within a city, within neighbourhoods, or within a country. And try to think about some of the less explored territories within that. On the whole State Fictions theme, which began the programme, that again is very obvious subject matter; the state and its struggles, still form a very significant text in peoples everyday life and still dominate the history of that region. And so we were looking at how the explosion in digital video might unveil some of those official stories with a more organic storytelling; a more direct reflection of grass roots existence. There is a programme on geography called Uncanny Geographies. Again, we have seen a lot of these sorts of things; the rapid transformation of urban spaces in Asia and the spaces of poverty it has caused. This is an aestheticised genre in the museums and festivals around the world. So ‘realism’ had no real counterpart in a South East Asian headspace? What if we could undermine all of those cognate terms of the real? Then, for example, how would we interpret the maze of the slums in Jakarta? Of course there is an order there that is cognate terms of the real? Then, for example, how would we interpret the maze of the slums in Jakarta? Of course there is an order there that is...
The Australian artist, Alex Pershaw, has never shown his work on a single channel before. This is the first single-channel film he has ever made. I mean, you can use the institutional event if you like as a sort of impetus for challenging peoples practices. That is one of the pos-
tives of the process. I think it is really important that individuals who are not plugged into the film festivals and film funding networks, can penetrate this audience. Because this audience is not restricted to those networks. This audience is a more catholic collection of art professionals, and people making video in South East Asia cannot access these networks. There is a certain political scope to what we are doing. It might be more an economic question, but there is a question of access that needs to be answered. We were mindful of, in approaching our selection as well.

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

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

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

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

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

Gridthiya and David Thank you for the interview.

Gridthiya Gaweewong is an independent curator and cofounder of Project 304 in Bangkok.
David Teh is a bangkok-based critic and curator and works at the National University of Singapore.

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

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

I became aware that there were other forms of cinema when I was a teenager obsessed with movies. I very quickly discovered the Velvet Underground and became obsessed with them, Andy Warhol and the Factory, and I began to read all those books about the exciting people who would be around the Factory: Jack Smith, Jonas Mekas, Piero Heliczer and so on. I lived in a small town in the north of England and there were no experimental film screenings. When I was a little older, I would start coming to London to go to concerts. At my friend's house, where I would stay, on the back of the bathroom door, they had the calendar posters for the Scala cinema, which was active in the 80's and 90's. It was kind of a hangover from the midnight movies circuit and what people might now call 'cult films'. They would show things like John Waters' triple bills, but they would also show the Paul Morrissey / Warhol films. So I went throughout the time and I thought of the Magic Lantern Cycle by Kenneth Anger or a double bill of Flaming Creatures and Blonde Cobra. It was a big old cinema with maybe six hundred seats, a balcony, a huge screen, and pretty bad prints. It was just fantastic! It was just really difficult to see things in those days and I wasn't living in London at the time. Not long after that there was a TV show on Channel 4, which was trying to do more cultural television programming then, called Midnight Underground. The films of the first season were chosen by David Curtis and Simon Field, who both long been active in avant-garde film in England. The first series showed things like Little Stabs at Happiness, Pull My Daisy, Meshes of the Afternoon ... a lot of classics and a few contemporary works. Fast-forward a few years; I moved to London and started to go to more screenings and it was just depressing. I would go to the ICA to see a programme and there would be six people in the audience; the person that organised it, myself and four random people. The London Film-Makers' Co-op was still around then and I would sometimes go there but there were never many other people. This was 1988/89 when I was 18 years old. The Co-op would also do a programme once a month at the National Film Theatre, the BFI, and again there would be ten or fifteen people. I was just hungry to see more films, but there was no way to see them, and see stuff all the time. I soon discovered that it seemed that whenever I would go and see contemporary film or video at that time, that it was pretty terrible, but when I would go and see historical work, I was always more excited by them. So I decided, that I would just ignore what was going on now and just focus on discovering the history.

Later, I started organising screenings. I was in this pop group called Pulp and we were quite successful, and the Barbican – which is an arts centre with a cinema, gallery, and concert halls for classical music – were having a year of American culture. I somehow got involved because I knew the composer La Monte Young and they wanted to do something with him. So I was talking to the music promoter there and he showed me the programme for this whole year of events, which was just an old time screening, and an old film, and then a new film, David Lynch film, so I suggested that I could do a film season. They probably thought: "This is fantastic, you're in Pulp, hundreds and thousands of people will come and we'll get lots of publicity!" So I got this chance, they gave me free reign and it was my first chance to go out and discover things. When you start to curate film and video programmes you often show a lot of things you have not seen, because you want to see them. This was a season of sixteen programmes called Underground America at the end of 1998. There'd not been this kind of survey in London for a long time and there was a lot of films that had never been seen for years or never had a chance to see. If I say so myself, it was quite fantastic! We did half the programmes at the Barbican and half at the Lux Centre. And that is, kind of, how I got started.

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

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

It just so happened that related to Frieze, the Serpentine Gallery were doing an event called The Manifesto Marathon, which involved inviting any famous artist that Hans Ulrich Obrist could think of to come and present a ‘Manifesto’. For some reason, Jonas, they invited Ben Vautier; he was also in town and was able to do something for us though we had no idea what that might be. Even when we had dinner with him before, we didn’t really know. It seemed obvious that a good way to start would be the Nam June Paik, Solo for Violin and the Fluxus issue. So we just so happened. The whole evening quite reminiscent of this cinema the Scala where I had a lot of my early cinema experiences. It was a similar kind of building and on Saturdays the Scala would do all-night screenings that had a similarly active audience, none of this reverence we’re now so used to. So we organised all these performances, like giving out paper airplanes and passing a block of ice around the audience to the sound of a fire burning. The last piece was by Ben Vautier, Audience Piece Number 8, which involved taking groups of the audiences to see a performance at a secret place, so we took them down to the basement of the cinema through these dark, abandoned rooms and corridors and then out through a side exit onto the street. And that was the end of the evening, we just left them there in street! It’s not very often that I do an event like this, but it was a success beyond our wildest dreams. We could have filled the cinema twice, it was sold out the week before, it was crazy!

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

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

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

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

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

There are two parts to that question: one is that it is not a cinema. I think that the architects, the famous Swiss architects, have probably never been to the cinema or had just forgotten that this was going to be one of the uses when they designed the room. It’s a very problematic room; it’s bright red and has a reflective glass wall on one side, it’s got a very small screen and the projection booth is not well equipped. It is more a room they can hire out to companies for conferences and things like that, that was maybe a priority when it was designed. And in a way, that’s understandable because at that time when it was being designed, Tate was not really doing film screenings. A lot of people who go to film screenings at Tate would not go to see the same film somewhere else. A portion of that audience is the art world because Stuart Comer, the film curator at Tate, is very good at bringing people in to see things. They also always get well-attended screenings because they have a huge amount of tourists that pass through the building, so it’s sort of a place where these worlds come together, for better or for worse.

In 1999, Chrissie Iles invited me to do a large season with her at the Whitney Museum in New York, it was not long after she started there, and the rest of the museum didn’t show any interest in this film programme. That’s probably changed now because Chrissie is really advanced in the institution. We did a three month long programme, almost with different programmes every day, ridiculously ambitious with more than a hundred individual programmes. I don’t know if
anyone from the museum came to anything, and they didn’t really promote it, they didn’t really understand what we were doing. We even had a meeting with their press department where Chissie had to explain how film is different from videotape... and this is within the Whitney that has had film activities since 1970. The one thing that I really regret is that there’s still nowhere that does regular programming every week or every fortnight. It’s something that I tried many times to establish in every institution in London, and they’re just not interested. They still have that historical view that these films are boring, that no one is interested, it’s too expensive... which it is, I can appreciate that... you would think that one programme a week in an institution like the NFT, where they have three screens open seven days a week, would hurt them, but they just won’t do it. This also relates to my work about building an audience, by having consistency and developing an audience, by showing different kinds of things in a serious way over an extended period.

Thank you for the interview.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We work at connecting themes within our areas, but one concern is that work on different timeframes. The Visual Arts is determine gallery exhibition up to three years, and in Film, we work very quickly to keep fresh work in the cinema, so we are about four months out. There have been times, in the past (because this is not totally new), there was a gallery exhibition of Cameron Jamie while we were screening a small screening room. We have a history of had this kind of relationship, where an artist works very specifically in two mediums, in which we would collaborate across departments.

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

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

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

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

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


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


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

Wie und wo wir eine Arbeit bei uns präsentieren hängt vor allem von der Arbeit selbst ab. Unser Ziel ist, sie möglichst werktreu beziehungsweise in größtmöglicher Annäherung an die künstlerische Intention zu zeigen. Das heißt nicht etwa, einen historischen Film
noch mit Bogenlampen zu projizieren und die Originalvorführsituation zu simulieren, sondern auch die Distanz zwischen ihr und ihren Orten zu integrieren. Idealerweise entscheidet sich die Präsentation in Absprache mit den Künstler/innen. Gerade im Falle neuerer Erwerbungen von Filmen und Videos oder Film- und Videostillationen erhalten wir präzise Informationen, woher sie kommen und wie sie im Museumskino jetzt in Stuttgart vermehrt Arbeiten, die dazu intendiert sind, im Museumsraum gezeigt zu werden. Oder sehen Sie da eine gewisse Transparenz, dass wenn man von Medium aus geht, dass man auch diese Intention ändern kann?


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


Alice Roegel vielen Dank für das Gespräch!

wissenschaftliche Arbeit betrifft. Es wurde sukzessive eine Sammlung angelegt, Konzerntierungsmassnahmen begonnen, Publikationen erarbeitet usw. Das Modell war also das des klassischen Kunstmuseums. Man verzichtete auf sämtliche nostalgierende Elemente, die damals – gerade in Österreich – üblich waren, wenn „entzückende alte Filme“ gezeigt wurden. Der Stummfilm z.B. wurde gern verniedlicht, indem man schlechte Kopien in falscher Vorführgeschwindigkeit und mit beliebigem Piano-Geklapper zeigte, und das dann in paternalistischer Manier mit dem gerade aktuellen „State of the Art“ verglich. Das Film­museum hat sich stattdessen be­müht, Filme in den bestmöglichen Film­kopian aus der ganzen Welt, in der korrekten Geschwindigkeit


Wer wird institutionenübergreifend über solche Themen diskutieren? Über Präsentationsformen von Filmen, die im Zwischenbereich von Bildender Kunst und Film arbeiten. Wie zum Beispiel die Künstlerin Sharon Lockhart, die ihren Film „Theatro Amazonas“ auf der Viennale im Kino und den Film „Pine Flat“ als Installation im MUMOK gezeigt hat.


Vor zwei Jahren hat das MUMOK seine Sammlung klassischer Moderne neu aufgestellt. Das Filmuseum und die Fotossammlung der Albertina sind eingeladen worden, mit ihren Beständen zwischen Kunst und Film arbeiten. Wie zum Beispiel die Künstlerin Sharon Lockhart, die ihren Film „Theatro Amazonas“ auf der Viennale im Kino und den Film „Pine Flat“ als Installation im MUMOK gezeigt hat.

Abschließend denken wir, dass es nötig und sinnvoll ist, wenn man sich diesem Thema widmet, und zwar nicht nur, um Bildende Kunst und Film im allgemeinen zu diskutieren, sondern auch, um eine Art „Theater des Films“ zu schaffen, wie es zum Beispiel Peter Kubelka mit seinen Arbeiten wie „Invisible Cinema“ in New Yorker Anthology Film Archives, Peter Kubelka

Peter Kubelka

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

Das MoMa in New York hat 1935 seine Filmabteilung gegründet, also so neu ist das nicht. Ich war leider noch nie in der Tate Modern, aber ich kann sagen, dass es eine tragende Rolle in einer Kunstinstitution spielt. In der Tate Modern ist der Kinocollaboration, wie im MoMa, eine besondere Rolle zukommt. Der Kino- Raum ist einer der Hauptbereiche in der Tate Modern, und es ist zufällig im selben Jahr, als das MoMa seine Abteilung gründete, dass die Tate Modern in London eröffnet wurde. Ich glaube, dass man auf der Documenta die Genealogie und die Kraft des Films darstellen sollte, der mit dieser Gründungszeit Anfang der 50er Jahre begann, also so etwas wie die „zweite Hälfte des Kinos“, von circa 1952 bis heute. Ich wollte, ähnlich wie die Ausstellung selbst, nicht nur neue, aktuelles Schaffen zeigen, sondern Rekurse machen, die mit dem Aktuellen in ein Gespräch eintreten. Insofern sollte man, wenn man ein Museum der Moderne oder der zeitgenössischen Kunst gründet oder eines erweitert, nicht lange an der Frage herumfummeln, wie man Lafubilder projizieren will. Man muss als Minimum ein Kino einbauen, das ist ganz simpel. Man muss investieren, um möglichst alle Formate zeigen zu können.

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


Alexander Horwath, Danke vielmals für das Gespräch!