

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 04: Friday 16 March, 2007, 1900h

Lizzie Muller, Sam James, Lucas Ihlein

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Lizzie So first of all can you describe the experience of first walking in the door - what you first noticed, what first attracted your attention?

Sam I think at first yeah I didn't know – it seemed more like an installation so I couldn't help looking at the light bulb as an object rather than a light source...

Lizzie What was the level of light in the room when you first came in?

Sam It was about six o'clock so it was say about 50% or 60% light coming from outside and you know the light bulb in the centre, but I just thought at that time I couldn't really distinguish between well, any kind of – I think I was looking for a filmic effect but it seemed quite even and it just, for the first fifteen minutes I couldn't stop just thinking of the light bulb as an object hanging in the room.

Lizzie Ok, so you say you came in and you were looking for a filmic effect, from the minute you came in – is that the expectation you came in with, do you think?

Sam Yeah I think because I knew it was about film I was looking for, for an installation that was just reduced to light effect, and I had just been you know, editing videos on a computer screen so just seeing like incredibly complex stuff going on and then just coming in here I – yeah it was a huge, it took a really long time to actually see what the elements of the room were and how they were working with each other.

Lizzie So when you say you were looking for filmic effect, you mean light, or...?

Sam Yeah.

Lizzie Can you describe what you mean?

Sam Yeah I guess light, and shadows – mm, relief on – you know say like my own shadow cast on anything but at that time there wasn't much happening.

Lizzie So the light bulb was the first thing that you really felt attracted your attention?

Sam Yeah.

Lizzie And as an object rather than a light source, you said?

Sam Yeah.

Lizzie Can you describe how you looked at it, what actions you went through to kind of...?

Sam I – well it was in the centre of the room and I just walked straight up to it but then I felt that it was a bit – well because it's a bright light it hurt my eyes and I wasn't able to see much else if I was too close to it so, and also I felt a bit self-conscious about being in the middle of the room and that there were other people in the room and that was this effect was this, affecting the installation adversely by me being close to it, or you know, it was hard to gauge how to be sensitive to the installation, yeah.

Lizzie So then how did your experience then unfold after that initial light bulb negotiation?

Sam I had a look at the, I read the description but I thought the concept seemed quite far away from what I was experiencing, and I had a look at the graph over there and realised that, that was when I understood the time-based experience of what - I suppose I'd been in here for maybe 15 minutes before the time I was looking at that and I felt like some change had happened in the room, and also I could see that I was probably there at the dramatic time when things were happening, just by looking at the little up and down lines of you know, when things are changing light-wise.

Lizzie I love the fact that this has been a dramatic time.

Sam Yeah, I mean...

Lucas Such high drama.

Sam ...well yeah, I mean because I drove across the city to get here so, and it was peak hour so I was incredibly over-stimulated and coming in here it was pretty hard to read much, I need something pretty high-impact to get something from it but after being in here for an hour it's starting to get a bit dark outside and I don't know, I suppose the main thing I'm thinking is that as an experience for someone that you know has been on the internet for half the day and you know, looking at normal screen-based video level of stimulation and, and then being outside in the busy traffic, it does, it's hard to adjust to an installation of this subtlety, and to actually get something from the installation. It feels more of a time experience (for?) us sitting here with - well it feels very zen with the only object being this one (block?) of light, but say now the darker it's getting the more it feels like the experience is intensifying but I don't know if that just means it's going more into your own cognitive meditation and less to do with what the work's about, but – yeah.

Lizzie So what you're wondering right now is whether or not it's the length of time you've been here that's making the experience feel more intensified or whether it's the changing light levels that are make...?

Sam Yeah I think the longer you spend in here the more it becomes a time-based understanding of shifting light in the room, but then it seems like it's in danger of becoming just a self-meditation.

Lizzie 'In danger', ok – so you talked about adjusting from like the outside to the inside and then getting something out of the installation, and I'm interested to know how you feel now, at the end of the experience? Or let's say, at this point?

Sam I wish – this probably sounds really bad but I wish the time could speed up a little bit, and so I wish it could be nine o'clock now and I could have gone through that period and kind of – yeah, sort of had a – cause then I would (be able to see a bit of a wave of experience?) there.

Lizzie So you want to fast forward?

Sam Yes.

Lucas You can watch the time-lapse video later on.

Sam Afterwards? Oh thanks.

Lizzie But can you kind of reflect a little bit on how you actually feel? You know physically, emotionally, mentally – if there's anything you can use to describe – because you said 'overstimulated' before you came in?

Sam Mm – I think, say sometimes when you go into a really minimal installation, especially one that's using light, I usually respond quite a lot to the sensory, the visual sensory experience of it whereas I feel like this is a, this is more of a conceptual installation; visually I feel a bit frustrated.

Lizzie Interesting, ok – and how about physically?

Sam Yeah I noticed just as these windows were getting a bit darker that to be close to the light bulb enhanced the feeling of myself being between the light source and a potential screen outside - between me, behind me, and that before I'd been close to the light bulb I didn't feel like I had anything to do with the installation but I guess that's just from feeling like the light is coming more from one direction and then hitting another surface. And I'm not sure if the walls in the room have anything to do with this work or not, at this stage I don't know.

Lizzie Was there any particular part of the room you felt drawn to apart from the light bulb?

Sam No.

Lizzie So you felt free to roam?

Sam Yeah it felt like every area was equally as low-impact.

Lizzie So it was all a background?

Sam It was a little bit hard to see whether yeah, there was any notion of depth in the space or point of light and, like a focal point in the space. Whereas now that it's getting darker that is seeming pretty clear, with the different - now that you're able to cast shadows and there is a you know, focal point between the single light source and an object.

Lizzie The kind of lighting situation's becoming more dynamic?

Sam Yep.

Lizzie Ok one last question – how did you know when it was time to go? You know, what kind of signals in yourself told you that it was time to end?

Sam I felt, once I felt comfortable being in here and that I had gotten something out of it as a time experience, which is probably after 45 minutes - yeah it felt, I felt like, 'ok I'm not just going for visual stimulus any more, it's something that's happening around me and it's not something that I'm going to pick up visually or aurally or sensorially, it's only in time'.

Lizzie That's very self-aware – actually I've got a couple more questions, I said that was the last one but I fibbed – what about conversations with other people in the space? People that you know, who were here already but also when Gail came in? Can you kind of just talk about those a bit and what happened, what unfolded through those conversations?

Sam Yeah I think (something?) that was a bit distracting and even when I came into the room there were mats on the floor and black curtains in one corner of the room, I was trying to understand if that was for a purpose or – but really yeah I thought they distracted from the experience.

Lizzie And the conversations themselves, what were they about?

Sam I talked to Louise about the, about why she wanted to do a recreation of this kind of work in this kind of media climate, and – because I felt like for myself that with the kind of overabundance and endlessness of YouTube videos everywhere, people want to be overstimulated and under-stimulated and they're always looking for novelty everywhere but this as an experience is the complete opposite because it feels like it's a removing of all expectations of visual, sensory experience. I don't know if that's intentional or not, but...

Lizzie Any other significant conversations that happened or that kind of affected your experience (at all?)? You know that altered it or that made you question it, or...?

Sam Not really, I mean I think I just wanted to not talk to anyone too much, but it was good to have a bit of a chat with Louise to start off. And I was trying to resist reading the background, but then I realised that that was probably just as significant as experiencing it as a, (as sort of an?) experience, yeah.

Lizzie Because you said you thought – I’m just going to chase up one little point you made, which was that you thought it was a conceptual work, whereas it seems to me it’s an experiential work, primarily – did you see a difference between those two or – is there a reason you called it one rather than the other?

Sam I think because like you could think of it as a political work or a physical installation, but I thought that as a comment on film it was pretty hard to read that from the experiential experience.

Lizzie Have you got any questions yourself? Or anything else you really want to say?

Sam Yeah how much has it got to do with say going through a whole day of being here, how much has that got to do with the work? Like the actual lapsing of the day?

Lucas You mean the need for us to actually be here for the whole day, do you mean?

Sam Yeah, or to experience the duration of the cycle of...?

Lucas That's partly what we're trying to find out because there's no indication in any of the notes that McCall made about what sort of expectations he has of his audience, or even whether he stayed with it for the whole 24 hours or if he just set it up and went off and then came back after he woke up in the morning or something, so there's no record of anyone doing that – there's no record of anyone not doing it but either way – so I guess by doing it ourselves, you know at least Louise and I are going to be here for the whole period so we'll be able to you know, talk about what that's been like and maybe compare that to your hour and a half at this point in time, and then someone else who's coming at five in the morning, what kind of experience they had at that time and stuff. I don't think there's any right or wrong, it's just - I don't think that he demands that the audience stay the whole time but one of the things that we grappled with was, in the installation shots and the notes about the work there's no indication that the audience should be accommodated and made comfortable in any way, so that, you're noticing of our kind of floor mats and stuff, that's like a concession that we've made to the idea that some people will want to stay for a period of time and - just to accommodate their bodies. Because in a way like, after being here for a period of time it becomes a kind of accommodation, like it's a space that we start to live in so we didn't want to go too hardcore in order to make it pure and look like the photograph you know? So yeah, so that I guess facilitates us trying out this 24 hour thing but in doing so it also changes the work.

Sam I guess also, what do you think the difference would be if it was just a room full of flouros and no single light bulb? But if it just, it was irrelevant whether it had external light or anything and it was just more of people inhabiting that frame which would be the room, for...

Lucas But you would have no sense whether it was day or night outside, like a casino or something?

Sam Yeah or it could just be a whole room full of fluorescent lights or...

Lizzie That's your work, isn't it?

Sam I mean...

Lucas Yeah I think it'd be quite different, really different.

Lizzie That would be McDonald's.

Sam But it would make you aware that you're one of the performers in the film work which (isn't?) being recorded.

Lucas And it would make you more aware of that than this does, you think?

Sam To me it would because at the moment I keep looking at the light bulb and sort of looking at the windows and going, 'what are they doing to each other?'

(end of recording)