

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 09: Saturday 17 March, 2007, 0910h

Lizzie Muller, Bob Percival

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Lizzie Hello Bob.

Bob Hello Lizzie.

Lizzie What time is it?

Bob It's, I reckon it would be about nine o'clock.

Lizzie Maybe a bit later.

Bob A bit later maybe.

Lizzie And how long have you been here?

Bob I think I've been here for about nearly an hour, maybe. Half an hour to an hour.

Lizzie Half an hour to an hour? Maybe a bit longer?

Bob Maybe a bit longer – it's timeless. It's a nice space it's kind of relaxing, it's good.

Lizzie So I'm going to ask you some questions about your experience of the work – so can you tell me the, maybe start from before you walked in, even from when you decided to come; why you decided to come and what you were expecting?

Bob Yeah, I suppose the main reason I came was that I think, you know when artists are practicing I always try to be, I think you should be supportive of that, you know? So I suppose the main reason I came was, one, I was a little bit interested in the work because I like this kind of work; and two also because I think it's kind of critical that if you know if people go to the trouble of putting on a performance, with that much effort and that much thought and that much time, kind of the least you can do is actually go along and participate, you know? Because there's a recognition of the work that's (of the?) people, really.

Lizzie So you decided to come this morning.

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie For any particular reason? I mean I'm doing (inaudible)...

Bob I kind of, it was interesting because from your brief explanation it sounded like a kind of a quiet, meditative work, so in lots of ways I thought that would be kind of good as an early morning thing rather than as a late night thing. I thought if I came last night it would be all noisy and...

Lizzie Mm, rowdy.

Bob ...rowdy and guffawing, whereas the work didn't really sound like that you know? It sounded more like a work you should kind of contemplate and meditate on and kind of experience a little bit more. So I thought you know, you're half asleep in the morning so I thought that would be good.

Lizzie So you set your alarm did you?

Bob Yes I did.

Lizzie And you got up and you drove over here in your car...

Bob After a coffee, yeah. I made sure I had a coffee first.

Lizzie And what were your feelings as you came in?

Bob It was nice, it's, I just – I have a real love for art you know? So when I come over here it's like almost going into a lolly shop or, it's like a little Christmas present you know? So I just really always look forward to, like a totally new experience and you know someone's kind of gifted you this, I suppose chance to kind of experience something new, which is lovely you know? I think that's the beautiful thing about art you know that people actually go to that much trouble to do that.

Lizzie So then describe what happened to you when you came into the room.

Bob Into this room?

Lizzie Mhm.

Bob Well before I came into this room was probably more important because I got to meet, talk to Marcus and...

Lizzie Lucas.

Bob Lucas – I don't know why I say Marcus all the time? I got to talk to Lucas and I kind of, the talk to Lucas in a way, you know like talking about art and talking about what he's doing, and where he's going and this work was really like the main thing I guess I wanted to do when I came here anyway, was to kind of to meet Lucas, talk about the work, have that kind of you know intellectual exchange and talk about art which I love doing you know, which is a great thing, and learning about the work. And I think Lucas was very good with that, you know like he was very good at kind of you know, making you feel comfortable, explaining the work to you, seeing that as part of his job to do that - which is interesting because you go to a lot of galleries a lot of the time and you haven't got an artist there who's actively pulling

you aside and saying, ‘well look’, you know, ‘this is what this work’s about and I’m really interested that you’re interested and I’m really happy to have this exchange with you, I’m not being some pretentious prick and I’m not being some pretentious art dealer I’m just here purely to share this work with you’. So that’s a great experience, that’s a very, very positive experience you know? So, and it was interesting that once he, he put me towards an article that was written by the artist in the 70’s, typed up, that the artist was – I think the artist was saying was that he was kind of sick of the product and that you know even avant garde film had become a commodity, it sounds like he’d been working in the London co-op and that, and he saw in the end that you know the London co-op was as restricted as much as commercial film, you know? And that he actually thought – I think he was saying that he actually thought the most important thing was the interaction of people, and that it’s that interaction and that exchange that is the kind of critical thing.

Lizzie Did you read all this before you came in?

Bob No, I read that while I was in here.

Lizzie So basically you came in, you met Lucas – he gave you that article at that point, or...?

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie And then you came into the space?

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie What did you first notice in the space?

Bob Well when I came into the space I made sure that I looked around the space, so...

Lizzie What did you first see though? As soon as you walked in?

Bob The first thing you see is those three massive areas of light that are on the other side of the room from where we’re talking.

Lizzie Ok so the three big windows?

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie They were the first thing that...?

Bob Yeah and also because they’re giving your eye so much light you then kind of have to turn around from those, you have to take a while to actually adjust, to have the light – you know, for your eyes to accommodate to the light. So I knew that there was an electric light bulb in here because you’d told me that but it actually took me a long time to see that electric light bulb because the light is quite, is not very bright compared to the light coming through the window now.

Lizzie Can you tell me how you moved? So you came in and you immediately saw those three windows, and what...?

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie How did you move?

Bob I moved around the edge of the room first.

Lizzie So did you try and get away from the light, or towards it or...?

Bob I went away from the light to a corner.

Lizzie Cause you (inaudible) lights, so light is your enemy.

Bob That's right, well I think that's a pretty, that would be a pretty instinctive, you know, thing to do.

Lizzie For you to do.

Bob For me to do. Oh yeah I keep on thinking genetically lately, I keep on thinking of everything in terms of genetics, you know? Like you know what people do genetically to kind of survive, I keep on getting drunk and having conversations about that so I'm thinking that you know if, as a survival point of view a person would come into this room – me – and might go to an area that's kind of safe and not so exposed. Which is what I did.

Lizzie Ok so you went into that corner over there where the cameras are there. Did you notice those?

Bob I noticed the cameras and I, and I thought, 'oh god it's all this documentation stuff again', you know? So I noticed that it was being documented.

Lizzie Had you seen the light bulb at that point or had you still not seen the...?

Bob No I hadn't seen the light bulb yet at that point, so then I saw – I was kind of looking, I thought there was a projector but there's obviously no projectors, and I realised that that's a part of the work, and then I looked back and had a look to see for the light bulb and then I could see the light bulb. So – hm.

Lizzie And can you give me any impressions of the space that were kind of coming into your mind, or any thoughts or feelings?

Bob Well it's, it's a very kind of - I noticed the space was very quiet and kind of very meditative, that you were talking quietly over in the corner and doing your interview so it wasn't really kind of like a pub space you know it was a space that had become quiet space, you know? It wasn't like an opening of an art gallery opening where there's people talking and it's very loud space, so – which it kind of made sense because I thought well you've been here all night so you would have

chilled out a lot over the night and you would have become you know, fairly quiet I guess. And that the light is, is just a kind of a beautiful light space, mm.

Lizzie Ok, so you kind of came around this side and what did you decide to do? What did you decide to focus your attention on?

Bob Well because, I guess because you're taught from when you're quite young you know that you should, to appreciate a work of art that you should sit there and appreciate it so I thought, 'well there's no use me coming here, quickly looking at it and going, so I should stay here and get what I can out of the work, so I should sit down quietly and just be here for enough time to at least experience a bit of change', because from what I read the work is about the changing light and, over a period of time and to just to be here for a split second only once is very different from being here for an hour or coming at night and then revisiting it some other time, so I wanted to kind of notice those subtle changes that were happening. Which you kind of do, you know you kind of, there's clouds coming over so the, so the light from the windows goes down and then that means the light from the bulb goes up; you know you kind of notice that and slightly just a, a mood change that - depending on how much light there is your mood changes with that, you know?

Lizzie Can you describe that a bit? What, (actual examples?).

Bob I guess it's kind of the intensity of light seems to be that it increases the intensity of your experience, so when the light is low it's a bit more contemplative and a bit more relaxed for me but when the light is high it's a kind of a high energy thing so it's a bit less relaxing and more kind of stimulating. And it kind of, when I read the article - then I thought I should read the whole article - he kind of made it aware that at night time those, it would be dark outside so those windows would be reflecting the light, would be kind of mirrors of the light which they're not now, which kind of made me think, 'well that would have been nice to see', but I didn't see that but I suppose just reading about it was enough to, you know - so yeah so it kind of, it's kind of one of those, I guess one of those works that makes you appreciate something that you don't always think of, you know? You can't think of everything you know? So it's nice to just stop and think of one thing because most of the time you know you're thinking of a hundred things, a thousand things.

Lizzie And what is that one thing?

Bob Here? I suppose just how light changes you know? The changing aspects of light and how light can affect your mood; so to me the only thing that's happening here is light.

Lizzie Can you tell me a little bit about any other aspects of this space or the people that you actually noticed, that say made an impression on you? Apart from the light, was there nothing else? You don't have to...

Bob No, no - I guess, it's kind of interesting that most of the people who are here are just now isolating themselves and just sitting by themselves and contemplating, you know? And there's not a lot of interaction happening between the actual people. It's not as if there's a gabfest going on, it's as though everyone is

really totally chilled out and just thinking about things – but that might be just the time of the day, it's the morning and it's been a long night you know? And I suppose after reading that article he was talking about how the most important thing is, maybe to him is it's interaction, is that that is happening at a whole lot of different levels, you know that interaction doesn't have to be talking, you know? Which I think a lot of people in this society it is kind of like that, you know reality shows, talk shows – talk, talk, talk, talk, talk; but interaction can also be about people sharing the same space without talking, and maybe that's a rarer thing than talking, you know? So you know you might think that it is really great to have this intellectual discussion, but one of the most enjoyable things you might have out of the experience might be just actually sharing, silently sharing a space with another person – so it kind of validates that kind of, that both things can be good. Which is kind of interesting because you know, you don't often think that just sharing a space is such a good thing. But it is actually part of the cinema experience, you know like the cinema experience is – what's beautiful about the cinema experience is, is that people share a space very intimately, like quite close together with each other, you know? And I think that's one of the most positive things and then you know, after they have that experience they go out and they will talk, you know they will have that interaction but here it's happening without, obviously without the film – he's making that happen without the film, you know? So - but I like the idea that here you actually, you've got a big enough space that you can sit quite a long way away from another person and share an experience. Which is a kind of a, not a light experience. It is a bit like an internal sunrise, you know like people going, after you have a big night and you go and sit, well you know you could go and sit on a cliff with people and watch the sun rise, and people will be like this – fairly quiet and you know not having to say anything and just appreciating the beauty of that. Whereas kind of here we're doing that without the sun – without seeing the sun it's just a 'light rise' rather than a sunrise. Yeah which is kind of nice.

Lizzie Mm, it does have that same atmosphere. Did you have a look at the diagram on the...?

Bob Yeah I read the article on the wall, which I kind of, I kind of - I liked; I mean I like that whole kind of avant garde thing about wanting to push boundaries and keep on negating you know constructions and wanting to move on and on and on and on you know? And I find it interesting that some artists can't rest in peace, you know? That I, you know that I think it is ok you know to make a film.

Lizzie We'll have to stake them through the heart.

Bob Yeah, that's right to shut them up, yeah. But it's always that kind of that cutting edge of things that I really, I like.

Lizzie The restless edge?

Bob Yeah, yeah, and it's interesting that he's given up – he reminded me a bit of Duchamp you know because Duchamp did the same kind of – well he supposedly did the same kind of thing, you know he did his art, anti-art or whatever you know, he got disillusioned with it and then he said that he gave up art for the rest of his life and you know, played chess or whatever but he really didn't do that he was secretly making a work of art for twenty years in that apartment in New York which

they found in the end when he died so he didn't really give up art, so it was kind of interesting...

Lizzie He gave up public...

Bob He gave up public art yeah and he told people that he'd given up art, yeah but he gave up art, and that this guy did as well for 25 years apparently because it seems like he came to this dead end, you know?

Lizzie Anthony McCall?

Bob Yeah.

Lizzie Anything else you want to add about your experience? Anything else that comes to mind that was strong in your impression?

Bob Oh well probably that it works, you know that it's a kind of like, it's – you know, as – well it's interesting you've revisited it, you know that you've historically revisited it because we were talking, I was talking to Therese the other day and we were going on a bit about how young artists of today seem to completely negate the history of where they come from, and they have this feeling you know that they're doing something for the first time or something like that.

Lizzie Oh, those young people...

Bob Yeah, those – well, well it's true because there is that, you know it's stupid to negate that because young people do, young artists do think differently from old artists and young artists have got these kind of – there'd be a Jewish word for it, but this kind of, you know like, 'I have done it for the first time, I am doing it for the first time; this is something totally new, no one has ever heard about this', you know, this is something that you know that I'm experiencing for the first time or doing for the first time or whatever. So it's interesting that this piece is actually revisiting an old artist, like an homage.

Lizzie And it's interestingly also doing something for the first time.

Bob Yes and doing something for the first time, so it's kind of yeah, taking it onto the next level which is great, I think it's fantastic, I think it's kind of quite successful because it's kind of carrying, it's kind of like fulfilling all the original artist's intentions, you know which was to make people interact and (to people?) experience this, plus laying that with your, the thing that you wanted to gain from it, you know you, the artist now wanting to gain from it so it's kind of achieved both of those things, it's achieved the original artist's intent and probably the artist's intent now, so it's added a whole other layer to it, which is very archaeological, isn't it?

Lizzie I'm about to have a little yawn, 'very interesting' (*yawns*)...

(end of recording)