MALCOLM LE GRICE: PRESENT MOMENTS AND PASSING TIME

20 Jan - 18 Mar 2017
Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth University & Plymouth Arts Centre

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES
PACK FOR UPPER KS2 AND KS3

‘The intention with this as with my other shadow pieces, is to build a complex visual experience out of simple and readily available aspects of the projection situation.’

Image: Horror Film 1, 1971 © Le Grice
‘Born in Plymouth in 1940, Malcolm Le Grice is probably the most influential modernist filmmaker in British cinema.’

BFI Screen On Line

Malcolm Le Grice was born in Plymouth on 15 May 1940. He went to school at Plymouth College, then studied painting, sculpture, print-making and ceramics at Plymouth College of Art (1957-1961). Malcolm’s parents loved music and theatre, and were a big influence on Malcolm, who developed a lifelong interest in jazz music. In Plymouth he played with the city’s renowned jazz musicians Rod Mason, Mike Westbrook and Keith Rowe, who would come to be regarded as key figures in the development of British jazz. But even though Malcolm was involved in the cultural life of Plymouth, he was drawn to London. He recalls: ‘You had to go to London then. There was no choice... We thought of Plymouth as a culture-free zone... By contrast, London really was swinging in the 1960s, particularly in the arts. It was a period of massive experimentation.’ Malcolm moved to the capital city to study at the Slade School of Fine Art (1961-1964).

At art school in London, Malcolm began to question the limits of painting as a medium. He saw it as flat and static, and in response to this began incorporating three-dimensional objects into his works. For example, he constructed paintings that included flashing lights hanging in front of the canvases, and microphones that picked up sound from the gallery, such as Black Castle 1, on display in Peninsula Arts Gallery. Malcolm was trying to bring the type of improvisation used within jazz to painting. He began making film and computer works in the mid-1960s, combining film with performance and installation. This type of experimentation with film subsequently became known as ‘expanded cinema’. Malcolm has continued to explore different media and technologies throughout his artistic career. His work has been screened at many international film festivals, and at major galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Louvre Museum in Paris and the Tate Modern and Tate Britain in London.

In the exhibition, Malcolm Le Grice: Present Moments and Passing Time, in his home town of Plymouth, we celebrate Malcolm’s artistic innovation over several decades, and invite you to enjoy and explore his works through gallery visits and the activities in this pack. They are designed for young students to engage with the kinds of experiments that Malcolm pioneered, and to foster discussion about the artistic process, the role of the spectator, and the potential of art to challenge and transform how we view the world.

There is a 4 minute instructional film to accompany the activities, to view this please go to: https://youtu.be/hVqttWlqcyQ
Activity 1: Exploring Experimental Film

Watch, describe and creatively respond to an extract of Malcolm Le Grice’s film, Berlin Horse, showing in Peninsula Arts Gallery, or follow this link to view online: www.malcolmlegrice.com/1970s

What is going on? Can you verbally describe it? Is this film different to other films you have seen? How is it different? How does the film make you feel? Can you write a poem that conveys the mood of Le Grice’s film, Berlin Horse?

Berlin Horse is based on two sequences – one shot originally in 8mm and re-filmed in 16mm - the other a piece of found early newsreel. The common subject is horses - a horse being exercised and horses being led from a burning stable. Both sequences were visually treated and transformed at the London Film Makers Cooperative.

The ‘found’ footage is length of film originally shot by someone else and discarded then found by Malcolm Le Grice who used it to make his own film. You can build narratives (stories) in this way from other images such as from magazines or old photographs.
Malcolm Le Grice has used many different types of cameras to make films, from older ones that used 16mm film, to the digital ones of today. He has said that with a smartphone, anyone can become a film-maker, so now it’s your turn ...

Activity 2: Film Making

You will need:

Up to ten images/photographs and three smart phones.

Select up to 10 images from photographs the class has bought in from home. Order the images so that they tell a story. The story might be a news story, a dramatic story or a stream of thoughts and feelings. Write the story in 90 words or less. This can be a script for your film.

Have one person place the images on a flat surface – placing a new image on top of the original every three seconds - while a partner films them with a steady smart phone.
Activity 2: Film Making - Continued

Now you have the image sequence for your film. (Here your team is acting as an optical printer, turning your found images into found footage.) Footage means it occurs in a certain time – your series of still images becomes a sequence with duration.

Now in a very quiet place read your story while your partner records you using another smart phone or audio recorder. This is the sound track for your film.

How to put the sound and image together?

With a third smart phone looking at (recording) the sequence on the first one and while playing the sound recording you have made on the second phone, record both on the third phone. You now have a married version of your sound and image – your film.

The process of re-recording your film on the phone mimics the optical printer which projects one film that is recorded by another camera. In the process of turning the found footage into a film, Malcolm Le Grice used an optical printer. His sound track was added at the time of final printing of his film in the laboratory.
In this diagram below, the construction on the left represents the original film passing through a projection system, projected through a lens onto new film to be exposed in the camera represented by the right construction of the diagram. What do you think the source is? Can you also see: the aperture, the shutter, the projection lens, the claw, the unexposed film and the exposed film?

Referring to the diagram the ‘Source’ is the light source; the light passes through the condenser – which is a lens – and then through the aperture – which is a small hole that the original film passes in front of, then through the shutter – which opens only when the film is not in motion – then through the projection lens, and is focused onto the unexposed film. Once the film has been exposed it is removed from the camera and sent to a laboratory for processing. So your film played back on your smartphone acts like the projector and your second phone acts like the camera (on the right in the below diagram). Malcolm Le Grice originally worked with film but has been a pioneer in the use of digital technology.
Do you know what a sprocket hole is?  The claw mechanism in both the camera and the projector ensures that the film is not moving at the point when the shutter opens and light passes through to expose the image. Then the shutter closes and the film moves to the next frame to be exposed.

Analogue (as opposed to digital) film is made up of single still frames recorded one at a time at a rate usually of 18 or 25 frames per second, this is achieved by a claw engaging with a sprocket hole in the film and feeding the film one frame at a time into the aperture (hole through which the light passes).

Your smart phone usually combines a lot of the different processes used to make films: camera, player (projector) and sound recorder. With two phones you have the projector and camera of the basic optical printer shown on previous page.
Activity 3: Breaking with Conventions

Watch an extract of Malcolm Le Grice’s film Finiti, showing in Peninsula Arts Gallery, or follow this link to watch online: www.malcolmlegrice.com/2010s

QUESTIONS:

What were the main colour themes of Finiti? Why do you think the artist chose these colours? Do they have an emotional connection for you?

Did you notice the sound and how it relates to the images?

“I have long ago abandoned narrative – its causal linearity is too simple to make sense of the inconsistencies of my life experience.

...there is an aesthetic exploration of colour, and movement.”

Malcolm Le Grice

IMAGINE AND DISCUSS:

Having made your film complete with a story that has a beginning middle and an end, can you imagine how it might work without the order that you have given it? What if you were to shuffle the images like a pack of cards and record them in a random order? What difference does this make to the meaning of your film? What if you have no sound track at all? Think about this and discuss in class whether or not you want, like Malcolm Le Grice, to ‘abandon narrative’ in your own film. If you do want to have your film story with a beginning, middle and an end, ask yourself: Why is that? If you think you would prefer to remove the story element (narrative – beginning middle and end – opening, build-up, ending) from your film, ask yourself - Why do I prefer my film that way?

After this discussion you may feel like a break, perhaps open a jar of Quality Street and remove the brightly coloured cellophane wrappers. You will need cellophane in bright colours for the next film experiment.
ACITIVITIES

Activity 4: Exploring Colour

You will need:


PART A

Choose one photograph from your original 10 photographs and lay it down on a flat surface. Take your smart phone and hold a coloured gel - a coloured cellophane sheet - between the camera and the photograph. See what affect you get and experiment with holding different coloured overlapping cellophanes in front of the lens. Record video with your smart phone for 30 seconds when you are happy with the colour effect. If you wish, you could repeat this process by holding the gels in front of your original moving image film from Activity 2.

Did you know?

Some of Malcolm Le Grice’s work is informed by Greek mythology - *Finiti* was part of a larger film project called *Chronos* – Chronos in Greek mythology is the God of time.

Malcolm Le Grice uses the Greek Myth of the Cyclops in a film he made over a period of five years, called *The Cyclops Cycle* (1998-2003). In Greek mythology, the Cyclopes are a race of savage one-eyed giants. In an on-line film site, *Luxonline*, Malcolm Le Grice describes one element of the film, *Even the Cyclops Pays the Ferryman*, in this way:

‘The cyclops is the one-eyed father, the one eyed king in the land of the blind, the single lens of the camera...’

In the film, *Even the Cyclops Pays the Ferryman*, the imagery is viewed through a circular *vignette* echoing the one eye of the Cyclops.

PART B

You can try this out as a filming technique by recording through the bottom of a coloured beaker, plastic jar or bottle with your smart phone. Experiment with your photograph and moving images to see if you can create a circular vignette – the view of a savage giant.
Activity 5: Shadows and Colours

You will need:


Horror Film 1, 1970 © Le Grice

“The intention with this as with my other shadow pieces, is to build a complex visual experience out of simple and readily available aspects of the projection situation.”

Malcolm Le Grice
Malcolm Le Grice has been fascinated by the power of projected light. In this exercise you can follow in his footsteps in an experiment with shadow and colour. Shine the torches past the figures onto the whiteboard creating silhouettes. Interpose the coloured cellophanes between the torches and the characters and turn the torches on and off to create a flickering effect. Film this with a smart phone. By shining a light directly at the screen you can obliterate the shadows.

Where might you see this kind of technique? (adverts, music videos, horror films perhaps?)

In his 1966 film Castle 1, Malcolm Le Grice uses an image of a light bulb on screen and features an actual light bulb flashing on and off in front of the cinema screen itself as the film is shown to an audience.

Follow this link for Castle1: www.malcolmlegrice.com/1960s or view in the Peninsula Arts Gallery

Why do you think the artist chose to include flashing light bulbs in front of this work?

How does it affect how you, the audience, experiences the work on screen?
**GLOSSARY:**

**Sequence** - a set of related events, movements, or items that follow each other in a particular order.

**Found** - here referring to ‘found footage’ meaning film someone has shot and discarded, it could also apply to images you find in a magazine or photographs. Malcolm Le Grice found old film discarded by laboratories in Soho London – at one time the centre of the film industry in the UK.

**Footage** - raw, unedited material as it had been originally filmed by movie camera or recorded by a video camera. Film was measured by its length – in feet and frames.

**Narrative** - a spoken or written account of connected events; a story.

**Time** - is the indefinite continued progress of existence and events that occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future.

**Duration** - a particular defined period of time during which something continues – like one minute or three seconds.

**Sound track** - is the recorded audio, music or words or other sounds, synchronised to the images of a film.

**Married** - in film this means the sound track and the images are combined – in the film print or file.

**Optical Printer** - a device consisting of one or more film projectors mechanically linked to a movie camera. It allows filmmakers to re-photograph one or more strips of film.

**Analogue** - here we refer to technical processes that pre-date digital technology, such as gramophone records, tape recorders, film cameras.

**Digital** - here we refer to technology that uses digital encoding such as computers, cameras and so on.

**Sprocket hole** - perforations running down the length of a film that enable the film to be transported through camera or projector.

**Aperture** - a hole that can be varied in size to allow varying amounts of light through in a projector or a camera.

**Claw** - in a camera or projector the claw engages with the sprocket holes to move and position the film in a projector or camera.

**Vignette** - here we refer to an illustration or portrait image which fades into its background without a definite border.

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Malcolm Le Grice Film Workshop activities: devised and written by Linda Ward (2016). With thanks to Morpurgo Class, Brixton St Mary’s Church of England Primary School.

These activities are designed for the exhibition *Malcolm Le Grice: Present Moments and Passing Time*, a dual site exhibition at Peninsula Arts and Plymouth Arts Centre delivered in partnership with Plymouth History Centre, Friday 20 January – Saturday 18 March 2017.
ABOUT PENINSULA ARTS

Peninsula Arts is the wide-ranging public arts programme of Plymouth University, catering to many varied audiences, raising aspirations and enriching lives through high quality cultural experiences.

As well as hosting the Peninsula Arts Gallery, the largest contemporary art gallery in Plymouth, it also incorporates the Jill Craigie Cinema, the House with its cutting-edge performance programme, the Peninsula Arts Sinfonietta, the University’s resident musical ensemble, and a year-long series of fascinating talks that open up the world of history and contemporary culture.

Peninsula Arts is proud to be committed to supporting the arts in Plymouth, and especially to making them accessible to younger audiences – the next generation of creatives. In this spirit we welcome young people of all ages, from primary through to students in further and higher education.

Visiting the Peninsula Arts Gallery could not be easier and we welcome school groups of all ages. We are very happy to discuss your visit with you before you book, so please contact us with any queries or concerns. Please note that all school groups must be supervised by an appropriate number of staff members from the visiting school and we advise teachers to visit the gallery space before making a school visit. Peninsula Arts Gallery is fully wheelchair accessible.

Please contact us if you would like to book a school visit:

Email: peninsula-arts@plymouth.ac.uk
Telephone: +44 1752 585050

Peninsula Arts Gallery Visiting Hours:
Monday – Friday 13.00 – 17.00
Saturday 11.00 – 16.00 (closed Bank Holidays)

How to find us: Peninsula Arts Gallery is situated in the Roland Levinsky Building on Plymouth University campus. It is adjacent to Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery on North Hill. Peninsula Arts, Roland Levinsky Building, Plymouth University PL4 8AA