

Film Art Phenomena:

Works by Nicky Hamlyn

Nicky Hamlyn In Person

Sunday, March 4, 2007 at 7:30 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
Book signing and Q&A to following the screening

Prolific film and video artist Nicky Hamlyn has made over forty films since 1975. He has also written numerous essays and reviews on experimental film and video, including his book *Film Art Phenomena* published by the British Film Institute/University of California Press in 2003. He is currently a senior lecturer in Video Media Arts and Visual Theory at the University College for the Creative Arts at Maidstone, Kent in the United Kingdom.

“I see my films as arising out of an encounter between a situation or location or subject, and a camera/production strategy. For example, in an early film, *Silver Street*, I used the same 25mm lens throughout, the same framings, parallel cutting between two spaces—indoor room and outdoor street—that was suggested by that situation. This leads towards the production of a mode of seeing that replaces the anthropocentric point of view of the cinema with the mechanical vision of the camera. I tried to suggest this in a number of ways, for example, by using identical framings for shots of the same objects, rather than varying camera position slightly, which tends to suggest a shifting, and hence human, point of view. I have been inspired partly by Robert Morris’s reading of Jackson Pollock’s paintings as resulting from the interactions of horizontal canvas, paint viscosity, stick, gravity, arm mechanics. Morris’s behavioristic take on Pollock redeems it from an expressionistic reading. It points towards an open-ended way of making art/film, in which, rather than attempting to harness a technology teleologically, allows the various forces at play in the situation to produce an open-ended outcome whose meaning arises from the light that outcome throws (fortuitously) on questions of matter and perception.” (Nicky Hamlyn)

Minutiae (1990); 16mm, color, sound, 1 minute, print from the maker

Nicky Hamlyn's portrait of BBC2's The Late Show studio was shot in one continuous sequence with no subsequent editing. Within the limit of a one-minute duration, the film captures an eerie and haunting look at the empty interviewer's chair and the empty studio. Featuring a coyote howling at the moon as darkness encroaches upon rich hues of reds and blues.

Hole (1992); 16mm, color, silent, 2 min, print from the maker

Hole is a pendant/coda to a longer film, *Only at First*, completed a year earlier. The subject is an absence, a hole in a fibreboard security fence surrounding a large construction site. The hole was made by a drunk who kicked the fence as he was passing my house one night. Behind the hole can be seen fragments of an older fence that enclosed an area of “allotments” rectangles of land that can be hired by members of the public who wish to grow their own vegetables. The hole appears in every shot and the work is principally an exploration of light, but also of scale: feline and human appearances articulate the space in passing through it. (Nicky Hamlyn)

Not Resting (2000); 16mm, b&w, silent, 4 minutes, print from the maker

A film entirely composed of shots from the filmmaker's bed in a single session.

Pistrino (2003); 16mm, b&w, silent, 9 minutes, print from the maker

Time-lapse sequences shot in Central Italy. Composed of uniform shots, each one frame every minute, which compress a long summer's day into a half a minute. The movement of the wind and sun through tree branches charm shadows into dancing across white walls and patches of glittering sand as the sand dramatically meshes with the grains of the film.

Water Water (2003); 16mm, b&w/color, silent, 11 minutes, print from the maker

Water Water revisits the bathroom location of a previous film *White Light* (1996). It is based around a set of antinomies that operate at various levels, from between frames to between the two halves of the film. The black and white first part is composed of individually filmed frames (animation) which form shots of interlaced contrary motion that nevertheless can be read as sequences of individual frames, and/or in which alternate frames are lit in contrasting ways so as to emulate negative-positive juxtapositions. In the colour second half, dissolves replace cuts, light softens and contrast decreases. Continuity, by way of isomorphic features in the room, replaces the discontinuities of part one. (LUX)

Matrix (1999); 16mm, color, silent, 2 minutes, print from the maker

Matrix is constructed in terms of receding planes. It shows a back garden/yard and the housing beyond it, in which the divide between the private and public sphere, a garden wall topped with wooden trellis, acts as a fulcrum for various spatial elaborations. *Matrix* is both analytical and synthetic. Analytical in that there is an attempt to explore three-dimensional space through two dimensional planes, but without resorting to Cubist fragmentation, in that the planes are unified around a singular position (not point) of view, synthetic in that every aspect of the space is re-configured through shifts in the angle of that point of view, bringing into alignment previously seen elements from earlier, different alignments. The trellis acts as a framing and aligning device, and its form echoes that of the filmstrip and the manner in which the film is assembled, that is, in a frame-by-frame manner.

This film was also an opportunity to question what for me has always seemed a difficult distinction: that between analytic and synthetic as applied to Cubist painting. In order to undertake the spatial analysis attempted in *Matrix*, it was necessary to bring into being—to synthesize—images through points of view, camera operations and so on. This is what one is doing in making a shot, unless one subscribes to the naïve view that film simply re-presents its pro-filmic objects. (Because all painted images are, in a literal sense, synthetic, it is tempting to assume that camera images can be more properly analytical in that they are not constructed but are disinterestedly, since mechanically, revealing). The “synthetic” reconfiguring of space, on the other hand, may just as easily be understood as analytical, since the act of trying things out constitutes an exploration of immanent possibilities that yield a further understanding of the space (as pro-filmic of course) under consideration. To this extent it may be as much analytical as it is synthetic. (Nicky Hamlyn)

Penumbra (2003); 16mm, b&w, silent, 9 minutes, print from the maker

In *Penumbra* the camera strategy, and shooting scheme, are rigidly determined by the film's subject, a grid of off-white bathroom tiles. The work is formed as a continuously evolving image. In other words it has neither cuts nor dissolves, both of which affect the transition from one shot to another, but exists as a single fixed shot made with a static camera. *Penumbra*'s spatio-temporal grid structure parallels the structure of the filmstrip, which is similarly grid-like: spatial in its actual physical form, spatio-temporal in its manner of operation. (Nicky Hamlyn)

Object Studies (2005); 16mm, color, silent, 17 minutes, print from the maker

Object Studies was shot in northeast Umbria, Italy. It was made in the same location as a number of my other recent films. It is organized around a colour scheme based loosely on the hues of the colour temperature scale; brown, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, white. Time-lapse, interlaced single-frame sequences and overlapping dissolves were deployed to explore densities and translucencies of light and the interactions of different kinds of cast-shadows. The space between the camera and its subject is also

explored: Space is flattened, collapsed, expanded and bridged. In each section I tried to establish a relation between camera and subject that responds to the peculiarities of the spatial array in front of the lens, but there is a sense in which, at the same time, I want to challenge formulations like "in front of". (Nicky Hamlyn)

Transit of Venus (2005); 16mm, b&w, silent, 2 minutes, print from the maker

Transit of Venus is composed of two consecutive, partial, time-lapse records of the "Transit of Venus", when Venus passed across the Sun on June 8th 2004, "Transits of Venus" are rare and currently occur in a pattern that repeats every 243 years, with pairs of transits 8 years apart separated by long gaps of 121.5 years and 105.5 years. Before 2004 the last pair of "Transits of Venus" were in December 1874 and December 1882. The second of the current pair will be on June 6th, 2012. Although the film was shot with a very small aperture, reduced shutter opening and several layers of neutral density filter, resulting in a black sky, the sun nevertheless remains contrastingly dazzling, and Venus, consequently, is obliterated. These two short sequences are contextualized with data detailing the various technical parameters, which determine the peculiarity of the image. (Nicky Hamlyn)

Total running time of program: 64 minutes

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Program notes by Jennifer Blaylock