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**Roundtable discussion: London Film-makers' Co-op – the second generation.**

With Nina Danino, James Mackay, Michael Mazière, Vicky Smith and  
Chaired by William Fowler

**Introduction: Nina Danino and Michael Mazière**

Over the last few years, we have discussed the possibility of taking forward and making visible the blind spot that is the work produced in the 1980s and '90s at the London Film-makers' Co-op (LFMC) and in its ideological ambit. This period saw a surge in activity among artist film-makers that concentrated itself between the LFMC cinema, workshop and distribution, supported by the intellectual and social networks that clustered around these nerve centres. Several dedicated historiographies of film in the British context have been published notably by David Curtis and the late great A.L. Rees.<sup>1</sup> However, the widespread adoption of moving image in the gallery by the yBas, somewhat overshadowed the period of the LFMC in the 1980s and '90s, whose practice was encircled by an emphasis on cinema, a certain isolationism, a collective ideology, the use of technology and film as a counter-practice. This period produced a wealth of work, mostly still hidden from contemporary curatorial view and knowledge. We convened the present discussion as a first attempt to open up a discursive space from the perspective of some of those who were there, in order to find out what our experience of it was and establish the legacy of the second-generation LFMC film-makers.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Curtis (2007), *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain*, London: BFI and A.L. Rees (2000), *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, BFI Publishing.

William Fowler: I would like to welcome Vicky Smith, James Mackay, Nina Danino and Michael Mazière and thank Nina and Michael for inviting me to chair this session that they devised. Today we will explore the dominant styles, modes and aesthetics of film production at the LFMC in the 1980s and early '90s and as a starting point its relationship to the practices of the previous generation – specifically, the structural-materialist position, which had received significant peer recognition from experimental film-makers and theorists internationally. The movement was forthright, confident and rigorously theorized, and it had a lasting impact on experimental film. I want to start by asking you all when and how you first came into the orbit of the LFMC and what were your initial impressions and experiences.

James Mackay: I was a student at North East London Polytechnic (NELP) studying film and video and the first person I met was Steve Farrer. He was projecting a film in the studio at NELP, which he made by filming postcards of Piccadilly Circus, colour separating them then re-filming the layers out of sync. 'In *Short Film* (1975), Farrer applied silkscreen printing techniques to the moving image. He used silkscreen as an intermediate step between 16mm negative and 16mm projection print. Although still in a structuralist genre, Farrer's playful use of a narrator hinted at other concerns'.<sup>2</sup> This was the first artist's film I ever saw – if you discount Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1964) and Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950). I actually saw Steve make *Short Film* during our first days at art school. 'But does it read?' he kept asking me. He said, 'Why don't you come along to the Film Co-op?' I remember turning up in Camden Town in about 1974 and stumbling up a staircase, which was strewn with bits of rubble to make my way in to this dark room, which had some very manky mattresses

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<sup>2</sup> Programme note from *Romancing the Frame*, Cambridge Film Festival 2007.

scattered over the floor. A film was being projected that night, through a hole in the wall onto the wall opposite. This was just on the cusp of the LFMC moving from the 'dairy' on Prince of Wales Crescent, Kentish Town to Fitzroy Road.

The important thing to note is that the LFMC was open access and there were many people working on different kinds of films. Some people made documentaries and animation, works you wouldn't associate at all with what is now seen as the Film Co-op school of film-making. There were weekly programmed screenings and also open screenings. It was about the time of the *Studio International* issue on avant-garde film.<sup>3</sup> At those events, you would get crowds of 100 to 120 people, so it was quite an active scene. There was a lot of experimental film going on then. It was a time, unlike now, when film-making was completely outside of the gallery system. It was not seen as part of fine art even though people like John Latham and other established visual artists were also making films. Malcolm le Grice, Peter Gidal or Lis Rhodes were not regarded as fine artists then, they were considered to be independent film-makers (partly through their self labelling).

It intrigued me that people were making films in such different ways, and in an interesting and supportive environment with many people coming and having discussions or debates; there was a community of film-makers.

WF: At this point, the film-makers Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice had both written books and had a particular visibility within the sector.<sup>4</sup> Could you Michael, Nina and Vicky talk about how you came

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<sup>3</sup> *Studio International*, Materialist Film Issue, no. 190, November 1975. The issue included Peter Gidal's text, 'Definition of structural/materialist film', pp.189-196.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gidal (1976), *Structural Film Anthology*, London: BFI; Malcolm Le Grice (1977), *Abstract Film and Beyond*, Cambridge, Mass/London: MIT Press.

to the LFMC and what your sense was of structural materialist practice and whether that was something you were attracted to and interested in.

Michael Mazière: My background was in photography and I was a student on the Creative Photography course at Trent Polytechnic from 1976 to '79. Simon Field was teaching film there and he was showing mostly American avant-garde work and some from the LFMC. He showed us Stan Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), which suddenly opened up this whole new world of film, which I didn't know about. I started making tape slide and then films. I knew of the LFMC but I hadn't been there and when I went to the Royal College of Art (RCA) Film and Television course in 1979, I became one of Peter Gidal's students. Steven Dwoskin was also teaching there, as well as Howard Brenton. My first real contact with the LFMC was at their summer show in 1980 where I showed one of my films for the first time outside the walls of the education system. It was an important moment and it felt like a big event, the place was packed and there was a critical atmosphere. During my time at the RCA from 1979 to '82, I went to screenings regularly. James (Mackay) was programming the cinema and there was a whole series of major retrospectives including one for Gidal, which I attended in full because I had never seen all his work.

WF: Was that unusual for you to go and see everything?

MM: No because I was very hungry for something new.

WF: So what did that provide you with?

MM: It was about trying to understand the work. It wasn't about immediate gratification and it was quite hard going as the work was durational. That was my first introduction to the LFMC cinema

screenings and I soon realised that there was also a workshop and distribution. After I left the RCA, I needed somewhere to base myself as an artist. I then put my films into distribution at the LFMC and the first person I met who encouraged me to get involved was Anna (Thew). It was probably late 1981 or early '82. My involvement was firstly though exhibiting then viewing work. I was voted onto the LFMC Executive Committee and eventually worked there as a projectionist, also running the print processor service as well as making my films in the workshop. Later, I was elected Cinema Organiser, programming the cinema from 1986 to 1988. I had also been writing for the LFMC journal *Undercut* for a few years and joined the *Undercut* collective. Crucially, it was an artist-led space with a co-operative and collective structure. There was the central notion of integrated practice: exhibition, production and distribution.

The LFMC was rigorous and took an oppositional stance in relation to the terribly right-wing government of the time. The left was in tatters and an important part of being on the RCA Film and Television course was being active and exposed to all the in-fighting. The documentary people hated the fiction people, the fiction people hated the experimental people, the feminists hated the macho film-makers. It was just at a political boiling point. We were all leftwing and oppositional, but in different ways. The LFMC felt like somewhere safe that you could go to be with like-minded people although there were also tensions, which developed there later amongst the different factions.

It's important to note that distribution was non-selective but the cinema programme was selected by the cinema organiser.

WF: Vicky would you like to say something about your first impressions and maybe about your relationship to what we might

think of as being the dominant modes of theoretical debate and forms of production?

Vicky Smith: I am on the cusp of that period of the 1980s and '90s. I was with Guy Sherwin at Wolverhampton Polytechnic studying fine art and he brought the LFMC to Wolverhampton in many ways.

Visiting lecturers included diverse practitioners from George Saxon to Annabel Nicholson and John Smith, so I quickly got a sense of the broad possibilities of experimental LFMC work, from satire through to very tactile reflective and personal subjects. Then once I graduated, I was actually recruited to the LFMC in 1989.

WF: So how would you describe that time?

VS: My role was workshop organiser. At art school, we were just making do with cobbled together equipment. At the LFMC there was industrial technology and skilled operators, a policy that Malcolm Le Grice had implemented. Where I had previously been just an artist tinkering around, I was now thrown into the role of technician along with Gina Czarnecki and Noski Deville who were the previous workshop organisers. James was talking about fine art not recognising the moving image or experimental film. I was interested in discovering what fine art film might be and how that clashed with this emphasis on skilling up with big technological, industrial machines. Later on, I realised that there was value in learning how to avoid having drip marks over your print, which is what happened when you processed it in a bucket. In particular, as a woman and a technician, using all this technology, which was associated with a male industry, really did feel quite empowering and liberating. In time, I came to enjoy knowing all the machinery and its various possibilities.

WF: When I think back to my understanding of the early 1970s, production and exhibition were in very close dialogue and one fed the

other. Nina, could you say a bit about your experience of the LFMC and maybe something about this relationship between production and exhibition.

Nina Danino: There was a Gothic atmosphere at the LFMC, an impression that remains with me to this day. In the workshop, it was monastic. The space was divided into cubicles and people working inside them were cut off from one another. However, I began critical exchanges about film with those working or showing there such as Jean Matthee, Nicky Hamlyn, Nick Collins and David Finch, but initially it was quite an intimidating place and had all the ingredients of an initiated cult.

I am the only person here who was not staff at the LFMC. My link is through *Undercut*. I joined the editorial collective in 1982. The cover of *Undercut* carried the subtitle 'The Magazine from the London Film-maker's Co-op' although the editorial board was independent of the LFMC executive. We met at the LFMC regularly every two to three weeks at least until 1984. We were producing 2-3 issues per year so this created for me a relationship with the LFMC.

As a film-maker I also came to the LFMC through art school. I was at the RCA in Environmental Media.<sup>5</sup> I was there from 1979 to 81 with Catherine Elwes, Kate Meynell, Patrick Keiller, and others. Although I had made a 16mm film already, I started to use slide tape, which allowed a considered experimentation with sequence, sound, pace, and duration, which in turn become quite intrinsic to a relationship with film. Peter Gidal and Lis Rhodes also taught in Environmental Media, with Peter Kardia and Stuart Marshall. I went to the Film School to edit my film. I did of course encounter this cauldron of factionality that Michael has described. I knew people from the

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<sup>5</sup> Environmental Media (1971-'86) was an interdisciplinary time-based department at the Royal College of Art in London set up by Peter Kardia.



documentary group, like Ian Owles, the experimental group such as Lucy Panteli, Joanna Woodward, Rob Gawthrop and Michael himself. There was a feminist group with Sue Clayton, Caroline Spry (who later became a commissioning editor at CH4), Christine Felce and Gabrielle Bown. Of course, I encountered structural materialist film but I was following a different direction. I was told about the LFMC by Lucy Panteli. I joined the workshop in 1980 or '81 because I wanted to continue making my own work on film. I started to immerse myself in the experimental films that were showing at the LFMC cinema.

The April 1980 LFMC programme demonstrates the diversity and heterogeneity of the work screened. The first film that I saw was a Marguerite Duras film. It was very important that LFMC was screening European as well as American underground, as well as British experimental films. There was also the 'Women's Own' screenings at the ICA in November 1980.<sup>6</sup> To me these two were important because I wanted to combine my interest in the feminine with experimental film. The Slade, RCA and St. Martin's women's groups met regularly and some of us were starting to show our work at the LFMC. So the relationships between outside and inside started to converge and we created a network of practitioners.

WF: You and Michael have noted that the 1980s were a contentious time and Nina, you have talked about the gender movement, and about content and political perspectives. Maybe we could consider these concerns and how they were addressed by those interested in structural materialism.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Women's Own' was programmed by Sue Clayton, Felicity Sparrow and Deborah Lowensberg. The screenings formed part of the ICA feminist exhibitions, *Women's Images of Men* and *About Time*, the former curated by Jacqueline Morreau, Pat Whiteread, Catherine Elwes and Joyce Agee, and the latter by Rose Garrard and Catherine Elwes.

MM: We can't rewrite the 1970s. This is about the 1980s, but there is no doubt that the 1970s was much more diverse than it has been represented.

JM: After the LFMC was set up by the original group of film-makers, structuralist film-making and theory dominated well into the 1970s. It petered out in the early 1980s because the protagonists had moved away from the LFMC.

MM: There was also a vacuum at the end of the 1970s when many women went to Circles and Four Corners and by that time, the people who had started the LFMC were all teaching in art schools, so it didn't have a singular direction. Later on, that vacuum increased when Channel 4 was created in 1982 and people left to form franchised workshops (funded by Channel 4), which the LFMC never became.

WF: In the 1970s and '80s, the LFMC appears to have been quite a porous place in terms of the relationship between the different activities to which it gave space. Shall we focus specifically on production?

ND: There were different migrations into and habitations of the LFMC but at the centre was the equipment.

VS: One of the LFMC's big features was that there was a cinema, a library, a workshop and education, all under one roof. Steve Farrer filmed people coming through the entrance door, processed the film and exhibited it that evening straight from the processor to the projector. This showed that, contrary to the idea that to use film properly was very expensive and involved industry and time, it could be done with immediacy and cheaply. I think that is part of the autonomy that Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal intended by bringing all this equipment into the workshop. What was interesting for me

was not so much structural materialism, but Malcolm's intention with this technology, which was to avoid the alienation of the labourer when s/he is separated from the means of production.<sup>7</sup> For him, the trace of contact at all stages of production was important for the film. I am interested in how that technology made possible the types of films that I was encountering in the late 1980s and '90s. For example, Tanya Syed was processing very high contrast black and white print stock. This stock was a signature of the LFMC print/processed films of the early 1990s, and rendered a dramatic and clearly differentiated image. In Tanya's case, the contrasty stock appeared to emphasise tactile differences between skin, soil and fabric. There was a lot of strong, visceral imagery in the late 1980s to early '90s and the use of classical composition gave the impression that the film-makers were very much in control of the types of imagery that they were producing. Jayne Parker's imagery for example was clear and easy to see; the difficulty in this work lay less with image legibility and more with what was being said about the body and interiority. This type of image wasn't what I associated with structural materialist films which were, to my mind, hard to see because they were often under-lit and murky and there was not much to actually look at.

WF: Can someone else pick up on these themes of aesthetics, technology and content?

MM: You don't want to get into a situation of technological determinism where you think this technology would immediately make a certain kind of film. There was an ecology of equipment that was also non-hierarchical. Technology was a liberating force within the LFMC and it was transferred from one person to another in a loose way. I remember working on the optical printer in the mid 1980s, and people were working round the clock making their films because it

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<sup>7</sup> See Malcolm Le Grice (1977), *Abstract Film and Beyond*, Cambridge, Mass/London: MIT Press, p. 118.

could take as long as three months to complete a work. Film-makers like Sandra Lahire, Nick Gordon Smith, David Larcher and I were practically living there for a while.

WF: Could you say something about the optical printer because there may be people who come to read this who don't know what it is.

MM: It is a piece of equipment that allows you to control film frame by frame. You can control the speed, you can superimpose images and blow up super 8 to 16mm. Having come from photography, for me film was 24 photographs per second; it wasn't really a fluid medium, so the optical printer made perfect sense. The printer was being used in a multitude of ways creating different results, and this changed as the 1980s progressed. At first, the personal was quite taboo, but soon films became more imagist and subjective; the poetic was accepted again, there was narrative, there was an opening up of aesthetics and content. I would summarise it as the reinscription of the self. And the technology was a catalyst for that.

WF: So what would those films look like?

MM: There was pleasure, colour, richness, sound and music. But without the rigour of certain structural-materialist films of the previous generation, who had previously frowned upon imagist qualities that were now emerging.

JM: When I was at Art School, 16mm became more expensive. It was always difficult getting hold of 16mm cameras. There were only two of them at our college and they were always booked out but there were plenty of Super 8s lying around. People like John Maybury just picked them up and used them. It also meant you could go and buy your own film, it cost less than a fiver including the processing – you sent it off and it was back a week later.

As I became more involved with the LFMC and with fundraising for it, I encountered a certain resistance to anything that wasn't 16mm. Steve Farrer and I had to battle to get a Super 8 projector, this must have been around 1979 or '78. I was even told by someone who shall remain nameless, that Super 8 film-making wasn't serious. So maybe that is why people like John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans when they started to make Super 8 films, didn't use the workshop. There were no Super 8 facilities, but they did use the cinema space to shoot films and to screen them.

MM: The LFMC had many different entry points: the cinema, the workshop or distribution and people gave different percentages of their energy to different parts of the organisation. Certainly in terms of our main question, which is about film practices at the LFMC, I think that the workshop was at the centre of it. It was influenced obviously by what was shown in the cinema and what was in distribution, but the workshop did continue to operate as a unique space. You couldn't get access to that kind of equipment elsewhere. When we were on the optical printer half of us had shot on Super 8 and were blowing it up to 16mm, so the question of what film format to use became aesthetic not factional.

WF: Well maybe Nina and Michael specifically could say something about the interrelationship between, content, political issues and production in the workshop.

MM: I tried in my films to take structural film and use it as one of my sources of inspiration. I wasn't trying to make pure structural films, it's just that some of the techniques and some of the effects of structural film were very useful particularly in terms of controlling the image, the means of production and paying attention to process. I found that you had to struggle to reinsert subjectivity, beauty and

ideas that seemed to have been taboo, perhaps because I was influenced by Peter Gidal, whose work suppressed subjectivity and identification. The good thing was that if you were rooted in structural film and you knew how to use all the equipment, then it opened up many possibilities for development.

ND: Women worked with that equipment and explored its possibilities but used structural techniques such as repetition, superimposition and other aesthetic effects achievable by the optical printer to different ends. I made *Stabat Mater* (1990) on the optical printer but concentrated on sound and image, on the dialectical relationship of cutting, and on the voice. Women working with representation and the subjective may also have created a context for developing men's practices such as those of David Finch, David Larcher or Guy Sherwin. Representation now shifted to the centre of practice. Women's practices started to mould and change the kinds of representations this equipment could produce. We need to look more closely at how work by women brought a new agenda to this equipment, which was the nerve centre of the LFMC and how these practices created new aesthetics and film languages. It maintained links to the structural project through interests such as medium specificity, self-reflexivity and awareness of the apparatus. These were applied to practices within a new agenda of the personal, material beauty of production and craft. So perhaps structuralism never went away, but was transformed and embedded in a new rigour but one that looked different to the old rigour.

ND: One cannot fault the original and charismatic project of Peter Gidal's structural materialism, which was his theory and his practice, but I would draw a distinction between his position and the mechanistic production techniques associated with formal structural film, which, in my view had become exhausted. They had reached the end of their line and had become mannered.

VS: Like modernist painting, structuralist-materialist practice is looking at its own conditions of production, and from that perspective, it can't allow anything else. The argument that says something is informed by structural materialism is an impossibility. Strictly speaking, you can't have it both ways – a film can't be *only* about itself *and* about other things (beauty, the personal). On the other hand, I do recognize that your work, Michael and Nina, has qualities of repetition, perspective, duration that were enabled by access to the same technologies and similar processes as structural-materialism.

ND: Structuralism incorporated the idea of process, close observation, attention to medium, and it also sometimes involved a restraint and formal control. When some work adopted extravagant theatrical stagings and embraced a kind of decadent aesthetic, it seemed led entirely by content without any reflexive framework. It borrowed from music video and music entertainment. In fact, this work fed off and, in turn, was incorporated into the music industry.

MM: My question is, was there was an equivalent or coherent grouping or form that developed in the 1980s that you can actually define? Or was there always a strand of more personal work within structural film? Is it misleading to say there was one generation followed by another that was completely different? In a way, that is what historians do. So far, unfortunately the LFMC in the 1970s and '80s has been coherently but partially historicised through definitions of structural-materialism. There hasn't been much else. The objective history of the LFMC from its inception to its demise, has not yet been written.

VS: Well, there was the *Her Image Fades as her Voice Rises* touring programme about feminist work.<sup>8</sup> It was based on the idea that the female body was denied as an object of the gaze in these works, and instead a woman's voice was gaining in prominence. The use of voice in your own work Nina impressed on me the affective possibilities for swinging between silence and vocal excess.

MM: The fact that the 1980s and '90s generation was pluralist is part of its quality and I think, the different groupings were linked by an interest in subjectivity, identity, sexuality.

ND: If those were the terms then they would form quite a large umbrella that would gather up a lot of work. A Will Milne film was about sexuality and subjectivity but used a very different language to the films of Cerith Wyn Evans, which were all about the surface and the content.

VS: Defiance and resistance should be central to defining this movement.

ND: They were all attempts to forge new film languages, which refused the idea of the short film form as a calling card for feature films.

ND: The interest in sexuality, identity, representation, narrative, and the personal – that seems to me to be a more productive way of finding common ground between the various film-makers.

JM: Perhaps there was a group or a certain generation of people who didn't care at all about theory. Roberta Graham, Cordelia Swann, Anna (Thew), Steve Farrer and various other people, are, in my

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<sup>8</sup> *Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises* (1983) was curated by Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow.



opinion, great film-makers and artists, even though they do not themselves theorise their work.

MM: They were well informed, though.

JM: Yes, but they didn't make theory a recipe for their actual practice.

ND: In the gallery and the art world, artists' work was mediated by the critics – not yet by curators. The LFMC was a place where artists led the critical terms. Artists wrote in *Undercut* about other artists and their films.

MM: Yes, what distinguished *Undercut* was that it was artist-led, like the LFMC. Most of the editorial collective were not writers, they were film-makers.

WF: So how did it work and what sort of films got covered?

ND: It was run collectively; there were no editors until the last 2 issues, after the collective disbanded. Pieces were submitted and commissioned; it was a very open process.<sup>9</sup>

WF: What other magazines were writing about moving image work ?

MM: There were quite a few. There was *Screen*, which was very academic, there was *Afterimage*, *Framework*, *Independent Video*, *Performance Magazine* and others. *Undercut* was the only one that was led by artists and didn't have academic restrictions, or journalistic and populist values. It was known as the magazine from the LFMC and it represented a certain strand of the Co-op. If you look at the

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<sup>9</sup> A collection of articles from *Undercut* was published as *The Undercut Reader; Critical Writings on Artists' Film and Video* (2003), Nina Danino and Michael Mazière (eds), London: Wallflower Press.

people that we covered, it was very broad. There was high theory, social commentary, reviews and many visual opportunities through photo-pieces.

ND: Everyone we have been talking about is in there; *Undercut* is a document of the decade.

WF: If we are saying that there was a porous relationship between the different elements of the LFMC, but also that there was a unifying interests in formalism and certain types of equipment use, as well as a widespread engagement with beauty, colour, content, political play and visual pleasure; looking into the 1990s, what influence did this work have?

ND: At Documenta 11 in 2002, there were large-scale projections by artists who make film but show in galleries: Cerith Wyn Evans, Steve McQueen, Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien, some of it expensively produced, some of it very long. Craigie Horsefield's multi-screen piece was about five hours long but you weren't expected to sit through it, which is quite contradictory to my mind because then it becomes about a conceptual understanding of the work rather than establishing a material, physical relationship to it. Much of the work referred to the moment of recording rather than materiality. For me, this constituted a cut with the work we are talking about, which was based on the physical relationship to the material, and a material relationship to the viewing situation. I also felt a cut in 1994. At Camberwell School of Art where we were teaching at the time, Catherine Elwes showed a video compilation called *Fresh* with short video performances to camera by Cheryl Donegan, Harrison and Wood and others.<sup>10</sup> This work was conceptually-led and some of it had moved into the gallery. It was significantly different to the work we

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<sup>10</sup> *Fresh* was distributed from London by the Film and Video Umbrella. It included short works by Smith & Stewart, Steve Reinke, Cecilia Parsberg, Katharina Wibmer, Michael Curran, Phillip Lai and Torbjorn Skarild.

have been describing, with its more complex narrative structures and layered readings. I would like to think that the influence of the LFMC work continued but at this point, I felt that it had been left in a historical pocket. I think this was a positive thing because it means that the work can be looked at on its own terms. Could this separation be a unique position? Why forge connectivity between practices that may not be connected? Perhaps the LFMC as an institution and its self-chosen marginal position may be a contributory factor.

JM: Recently when I was preparing my book on Derek Jarman's *Super 8's*, I had a conversation with Beatrice Ruf, a very smart curator who knows a lot about art.<sup>11</sup> She said that there was a point when artists picked up film and video as a tool for their artistic expression. She sees that as happening quite recently – in the 1990s. I tried to convince her that all film-makers who came out of the fine art tradition were not directors or producers or editors, but were artists. The art world has never accepted them as such and has only given any real weight to people who came after. The art world has still not discovered the huge well of fabulous work that already exists.

MM: I think that the break started around 1993 and when, in 1996, we did the Pandemonium festival at the ICA, we showed two completely different groups of people. There were the film-makers associated with the LFMC who were diverse in themselves and there were the yBas who were making very short films or installation works. One of the ideas behind this festival was to bring these two groups together. They showed together but they never interacted either socially or theoretically. There is this amnesiac position in the art world about LFMC work. The only part that has been properly historicised is structural-materialism because of its theoretical

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<sup>11</sup> James Mackay (2014), *Derek Jarman Super 8*, London: Thames & Hudson.

strength. Much of the work between 1979 and '94 is simply a missing link.

VS: I want to come back to the importance of the centrality of the workshop. You are talking about the petering out of a certain type of work and the 'pocket' where it was left. The yBas' rise happened simultaneously with the winding down of the LFMC and its relocation to the Lux Centre. Nobody was using the equipment any more. I didn't realise the value of having a hands-on relationship to the technology, but now it is of interest to many scholars, for example, in science technology studies. Lisa Cartwright and Stacey and Suchman write for *Body and Society* and are very interested in how these situated practices create and embody subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> They are precisely talking about, but can only speculate on, things that we actually acted out for ourselves. We were able to theorise our own embodied practice as we were doing it.

JM: I think the reason that structural-materialist film has been widely historicised is not because it was such a solid movement but because there was a considerable body of writing generated by its practitioners; then the SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT exhibition<sup>13</sup> and A.L. Rees's book enshrined it. What we need is a coherent history of the period after the 1970s.

WF: People who are interested in artists' film now and in art culture now *are* interested in the history and legacy of what came before. We are not quite in the same position that you described in the late 1990s or early 2000s. I would agree, however, that work from the period under discussion hasn't been screened much in recent years.

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<sup>12</sup> See Lisa Cartwright (2012), 'The Hands of the Animator: Rotoscopic Projection, Condensation and Repetition Automatism in the Fleischer Apparatus', in *Body and Society* 18:1, pp. 47-78.

<sup>13</sup> The touring exhibition *SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT: The First Decade* was first staged at Tate Modern in 2002 and concentrated on British artist film-makers from the 1960s and '70s.

JM: When the Lux moved from Camden and the LFMC became the Lux, that was almost the end of it because the screening space, which had been incredible, was lost. I must confess that I hardly went to the LUX because the cinema space was very uncomfortable and, the lack of hanging out space broke up that sense of community. The building was very slick as well, which it hadn't been in all its previous incarnations.

MM: That break happened before the creation of the Lux Centre, it started when the LFMC lost the Gloucester Avenue building. The building was in very poor condition. In the early 1990s during a screening, the ceiling started falling down. Kathleen Maitland Carter, who was running the cinema at the time, just said 'move your seats to the right', and the screening carried on with masonry falling on one side. It is a metaphor for what happened to the LFMC in a way, how die-hard the film-makers were, but we let the infrastructure collapse and the sky began to fall on our heads! The Lux Centre was set up by the necessity to re-house both the LFMC and London Electronic Arts.<sup>14</sup>

ND: The collective engagement was atomized and dispersed and film artists lost their links to a critical framework. The distribution collection from the LFMC, now at LUX, became an archive and study collection. Moving image as a whole went into a professionalized transition with acceptance into the gallery. Film practice became compartmentalized, and in a sense marginalized in experimental sections at festivals. The recent 58th BFI London Film Festival event 'Artists' Film and its Contexts' demonstrated how artists' moving image is now mediated and managed by curators and programmers.

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<sup>14</sup> Formerly London Video Arts.

In the critical writing about experimental film, the structural period or 1st generation is seen as a founding exemplar and the contemporary critical accounts have tended to meld all moving image together. What we need is writing that is sensitive to the specific historical, political and institutional contexts in which different generations were working.

MM: I am amazed it took a new commission and exhibition of David Hall at Ambika P3 for the Tate to buy his key work *TV Interruptions (7 TV Pieces)* (1971) – recently on show at Tate Britain. That is one of the few pieces the Tate has collected by video artist in Britain. It is an example of that cultural amnesia and the reason why we also recently exhibited works by Terry Flaxton, Anthony McCall, Victor Burgin as well as artists taught by the influential Peter Kardia at the RCA such as Nina Danino, Jean Matthee and Katharine Meynell. We have been showing many of the pre-yBa generation of film and video artists because they have been ignored by the art world.

JM: Curators only write about things that seem to fit into their programme. If it does not conform to their current interests, it is overlooked. The BFI should be collecting all the documentation, the interviews and the films.

WF: We have begun to find common ground for a range of motivations and contexts, and unify what are often considered disparate works. The culture at the LFMC was rich, interlinking, and artist-led. Academics and curators have written about individual film-makers from this period but little of depth has surfaced on specific titles and certain shared forms of practice. The relationship of these concerns to distribution, writing and theory has also yet to be fully explored.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A great many of the works from the period are available through LUX, the artists' moving image agency who inherited the London Film-makers' Co-op distribution

Any work or research on the period should go beyond the yBas and consider the LFMC and also the maverick, underground cinema club Exploding Cinema, and other groups too. Looking to today, it is possible to see a return to duration-based film and video making. Where early pieces were clearly conceived to be presented in a gallery context and on a loop – and were concept-led – more recent titles have a developmental form or a ‘dramaturgy’ to use a word favoured by Malcolm Le Grice. Artists’ film and video undeniably has a place again in the cinema and to reconsider auditorium-based works from the 1980s and ‘90s feels not only overdue in terms of writing a fuller, more substantial history of UK artist and experimental film, but timely in terms of its relationship to work being screened in festivals, galleries and specialist, alternative cinemas today. There is much to discover and what was debated in this passionate, wide-ranging discussion about the LFMC feels like just the tip of the iceberg.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Nina Danino is an artist and film-maker. Her films have been shown internationally since 1980. She lectures in Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London and is represented by Magda Bellotti Gallery, Madrid.

William Fowler is Curator of Artists’ Moving Image, BFI National Archive. His most recent restoration project *This Is Now: Film and Video After Punk* is currently touring through LUX.

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library. Programmes and associated paperwork can be found at the British Artists’ Film and Video Study Collection at Central St Martins, University of the Arts London. REWIND has digitised an important archive of early British video art. The BFI National Archive also holds a significant number of works for preservation and in 2014, it presented the seven-part project *This Is Now: Film and Video After Punk*, digitally scanning titles as part of the process. LUX distributes these programmes internationally. There is, however, more work to be done in terms of more fully historicizing and activating experimental films from the 1980s and ‘90s.

James Mackay is a film producer and curator noted for his work with Derek Jarman. In the late 1970's he was Cinema Programmer for the LFMC.

Michael Mazière is an artist, writer and curator. He has exhibited internationally since 1980 and is currently a Reader at the University of Westminster and curator of Ambika P3 and London Gallery West.

Vicky Smith is an experimental animator. She has exhibited internationally since 1990, and is visiting lecturer in Digital Film and Screen Arts at the University for the Creative Arts.