

Here Is Information. Mobilise

Cinematket Oslo,
9 April 2017 18.00

A collaboration between
The Dream That Kicks and
Sad Disco Fantasia, organised in
collaboration with Kunsthall Oslo



Programme

Morgan Fisher
Screening Room
Norway/USA, 1968/2017
6 mins, 16mm

Sharon Lockhart
Teatro Amazonas
USA/Brazil, 1999
40 mins, 35mm

A performance by Cara Tolmie

If you had been wanting to go to the movies in London sometime in mid-March 2001 and you had opened a listings magazine (say *Time Out*), then you would have discovered amongst your options – alongside *Dude, Where's My Car?* and *Hannibal* – a film called *Teatro Amazonas*. The film, for its UK premiere, was playing for a whole week at precisely one cinema: the Lux Centre in Hoxton Square.

The Lux Centre was an arts venue built to house two formerly artist-run organisations, the London Filmmakers Co-op and London Electronic Arts, and its cinema was then being programmed by an artist, curator and writer called Ian White. White had previously programmed an alternative arts venue called The Horse Hospital and would go on to become one of the most influential film curators of the early twenty-first century, through his work internationally for organisations including LUX (the Lux Centre's successor), the Whitechapel Gallery, the Oberhausen Short Film Festival and

Kino Arsenal Berlin, amongst many others. So if, one evening that March in 2001, you had decided to go to see *Teatro Amazonas* rather than *Dude, Where's My Car?*, you might have got some insight into what made White's work as a curator so striking. The film itself is by the American artist Sharon Lockhart and, although it is shot in 35mm – the format of commercial cinema – is about as uncompromisingly minimal and structural a film as it is possible to imagine. Not only does it withhold many of the things which we might expect when we buy our cinema ticket (plot, character, dialogue, editing, camera movement, etc), but it also confronts us with a mirror image of ourselves as a potentially restless, baffled audience. *Teatro Amazonas* is, in its deadpan restrained way, a provocation – and giving it a week-long theatrical 'release', offering it parity with other feature film releases rather than a one-off screening, was White's way of trying to extend and radicalise that provocation beyond the usual confines of 'experimental film' (as it was still often called then, less often now). But he surrounded it too by a contextual programme of other films over the course of that week, some of them paired in double-bills with Lockhart's films, with work ranging from Chantal Akerman and Jean Rouch to Hollis Frampton and Yvonne Rainer.

I was an intern at the Lux Centre at the time, and I was part of one of the (small) audiences for one of the screenings of *Teatro Amazonas*. The film made an enormous impression on me, as did White's extraordinary ongoing programme for the cinema, which combined everything from European arthouse

(a Walerian Borowczyk retrospective) to wildly performative and site-specific events (a dawn screening of David Larcher's 6 hour psychedelic epic *Monkey's Birthday*, 1975, springs to mind). White was a distinctive and highly visible presence around the Lux Centre, notably when introducing the films he had programmed in the auditorium: highly intelligent, funny, camp and outspoken. (The phrase 'not suffering fools gladly' might have been invented for him.) We quickly became both good friends and collaborators – I was briefly his assistant at the Lux Centre before it closed late in 2001, and we went on to work together on many projects and publications over the next decade.

By the time of his early death in 2013, having curated hundreds of screenings and events internationally, as well as developed his own practice as an artist and a performer, White had influenced a generation of artists working with the moving image. In particular he had developed a constellation of concepts around 'cinema' – understood less as a physical space, or a particular canon of films, but rather as a set of social practices open to radical political possibilities. He was interested, as he once put it, in cinema as "a practice that extends or multiplies the frame of the screen to incorporate what is happening in the screening room itself, to include space, movement, live speaking, to incorporate the corporeality of the spectator as also constituting the work itself through relative, physical positions in space".

This event is not a memorial for Ian White. Very few people in Norway knew him directly (he came to Norway only once, for an OCA

seminar in 2007, although his writing featured prominently in a show by Jimmy Robert at the gallery1857 in 2013). It is rather an attempt to translate some of White's ideas about the importance of cinema as a collective space of experience into a Norwegian context, which – from my experience of it – has perhaps not had the same history of artists' screening culture as other places. It is hopefully the start of other conversations, other possibilities, other multiplications of the frame.

Below are some short extracts of White's writing on the two films presented tonight, taken from the collection of his writings *Here Is Information. Mobilise*, for which this event also serves as a launch.

–Mike Sperlinger, April 2017

Screening Room

Ian White on *Screening Room*, extract from 'Wishful Thinking: Morgan Fisher at the Ziegfeld Follies, or, Oliver Husain and the Potential of Theatrical Excess':

"Fisher's Screening Room might be thought of as a kind of instruction work in the conceptual idiom (with the political resonances of such), although it is only made known as such by and in its materialisation. It is a unique work. Or rather it is one film that consists of a potentially infinite number of unique works, each of which is materially inseparable from the auditorium in which it is shown. Which is to say that the film is made exclusively for and featuring the auditorium in which it is shown and its immediate vicinity, the streets by which it is approached, and each print produced cannot be shown anywhere else, although it may be shown in the same venue no matter how many years ago it was shot.

"On screen the audience sees a point of view shot, that of the person behind the camera approaching the cinema by the same route they would most likely have just taken themselves. The camera (person) enters the cinema through whichever passageways the viewers will also probably just have walked and into the (empty) auditorium, coming to rest on the empty white screen. Slowly the camera zooms closer and closer to the empty white screen until the empty white screen fills the actual screen of the auditorium – filling it with its own, empty, image. The light of the filmed white screen projected onto the actual screen lights the room. It is a kind of collapse the effect of which, amongst other things, is an awareness of the immediate present in a potentially Brechtian

sense: illusion is broken by/into the actual space/time of the viewer's own present, a kind of crushing."

Morgan Fisher on *Screening Room*, extract from the lecture 'Screening Room and Death' (2008), published in *Kinomuseum: Towards an artists' cinema* (ed. Mike Sperlinger & Ian White):

"Screening Room is a tracking shot into the theatre where the audience is watching it. Every theatre where the film is shown requires its own version, so the film must be shot again and again. Not remade; not reshot; not made over again; but rather shot again. A new place, a new shot; a different place, a different shot. Despite their showing different places, the different shots are, so to speak, duplicates of each other, but they are duplicates of each other without any one being the original. One was shot first, but it is no more the original than any of the others shot later, those already shot or those yet to be shot. But even though all the shots are different from each other, even though each shot shows a different place, they each have the same relation to the space in which they are shown, so they are all the same film."

Teatro Amazonas

Ian White, extract from 'Death, Life and Art(ifice): The films of Sharon Lockhart':

"The films of Sharon Lockhart [...] are documents and they are theatrical – theatre of a very particular kind [...] Primitive theatre, [Roland] Barthes says, was a form of tableau vivant where the living played the dead and by doing so, through make-up, costume etc., at one and the same time also became an image. Barthes reads this act in every pose for the camera, every framing: every photograph is the inscription of light onto paper of something (or someone) that was there in that time, however long ago or recently it may have been taken, and is the image of this thing, or the time, which is not here now as we view it. In a photograph stasis becomes emergence by way of what we do not see – the 'blind field' of what is beyond the frame that is also the off-screen space in cinema. It is the photograph defined in this way that is also the 'cinema' of Sharon Lockhart's invariably fixed frame or the construction of an image in which we see everything at once and ourselves. Moreover, the theatre that I think Lockhart's work proposes is uniquely linked to and can be traced through a reading now (towards a realisation, the assertion of a complex 'real') of a combination of early critical discourses on experimental film and minimalism in the visual arts.

"Lockhart's early films figure theatre as content [...] In Teatro Amazonas (1999) the camera, mounted on stage and facing outwards, frames the full auditorium of the famous opera house in Manaus, Brazil. A choir, hidden in the orchestra

pit, sings a commissioned work by American minimalist composer Becky Allen (who Lockhart also collaborated with on the soundtrack for her recent work Lunch Break, 2008). It is a single tone that incrementally decreases in volume. The audience have been systematically invited through a pseudo-ethnographic process which the artist consciously employed (and is further exploited in the series of photographs that are also part of this project). They variously react to this music, shifting in their seats, talking to their neighbours. Some leave: an induced but unpredictable unrest. That audience in Manaus are facing the camera and they are facing this audience watching the film. This exchange of looks is a question about who is figuring who, about the two sides of a mirror. This room and that room are different and equivalent. Behaviour (ours and theirs) takes the form of a fixed picture. We are performing incidentally or incidentalities."

Ian White (1971–2013) was an artist, curator and writer. He organised many influential screenings, events and exhibitions for venues including The Horse Hospital, LUX and the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Kino Arsenal, Berlin; and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. He taught extensively, holding positions at Goldsmiths' Department of Art and the Dutch Art Institute amongst others, and was leader of the LUX Associate Artists Programme (2007–13), an experimental post-graduate programme for artists working with the moving image. White's own performances – both solo and collaborative – were staged at venues including Tate Britain and Tate Modern, London; the Chisenhale Gallery, London; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The book *Here Is Information. Mobilise*, edited by Mike Sperlinger and published by LUX in 2016, brings together for the first time a selection of White's writing, ranging from reviews and catalogue essays to entries from his blog *Lives of Performers*. It includes essays on animation and visual art, cinema's relationship to conceptual art, and the idea of 'liveness' in performance and film, as well as texts on individual artists including Ruth Buchanan, Gabriel Byrne, Isa Genzken, Peter Gidal, Martin Gustavsson, Oliver Husain, Sharon Lockhart, Stuart Marshall, Yvonne Rainer, Jimmy Robert and David Wojnarowicz. There have been other launch events for the book in London, Glasgow, New York and Toronto.

The event *Here Is Information. Mobilise* is a collaboration between *The Dream That Kicks*, Greg Pope's long-running monthly screening programme at Cinemateket, and *Sad Disco Fantasia*, a new screening initiative developed by Mike Sperlinger in collaboration with Kunsthall Oslo. *Sad Disco Fantasia* will continue in autumn 2017, with a series of events exploring the idea that – in the age of Netflix and handheld screens – the collective, bodily experience of moving images is still crucial.

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