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dispatch 120

Roger Hewins

Independent film '70s and '80s

23 February to 4 March 2006

Opening Wednesday 22 February 5.30 to 7.30

Presentation East Anglian Film Makers Co-op

NSAD Lecture Theatre Duke Street (Wednesday 22 February 2.00pm)

open to the public

Norwich had an active Film Makers Co-op in the '70s and '80s that was part of a national network. Roger Hewins, and members of the East Anglian Film Makers Co-op will be screening films and speaking about their work.

INTRODUCTION

Roger Hewins worked as an independent filmmaker in Birmingham, Nottingham, Derby and Chicago before settling in Norwich in 1984. This exhibition will present his films and documentation of the period including the organisations promoting independent filmmaking in the English Regions at that time: British Film Institute, Regional Arts Associations, Arts Council of Great Britain and Channel 4. We are interested in this network of twenty-five years ago as an inspiration for the widespread but isolated practice of independent film amongst artists using digital technology today. Roger Hewins has said: "There was a feeling of hope towards the end of the '70s and early '80s when Channel 4 was created that there might be more regular funding and opportunities for new film forms and new relationships with audiences. There was debate about how artists and independent filmmakers could get their work on-air and a more long-term discussion was whether the aesthetic concerns of artists' film could be integrated into mainstream forms. This hope created an excitement around filmmakers Co-ops."

In 1979 the active film groups in England included Amber Films, Newcastle, Birmingham Film-Makers Co-operative, Chapter Film Group Cardiff, Colchester Film-Making Workshop, Independent Film Makers Association East Midlands, Leeds Animation Workshop, Manchester Film and Video Workshop, Merseyside Visual Communications Unit, North East Films, Portsmouth Community Film and Video Workshop, Sheffield Independent Film Group, South Hill Park Film Workshop Bracknell and York Film Group. They functioned with makeshift darkrooms, primitive editing equipment and negligible funding.

The members of the East Anglian Film Makers Co-op included Richard Casey, Nicki Darrell, Clive Dunn, Famous Five Films, Brian Gardner, Nick George, Tony Hare, David Hilton, Julian Jarrold, Andrew Lees, Glenn Medler, Caroline Merz, David Orr, Tim Rayner, Ken Rice, Digby Rumsey, Martin Sercombe, and Robert Short. We are interested in contacting other members of the Co-op to document this significant period of independent artist films in East Anglia. The artist filmmakers Annabel Nicolson and Ian Breakwell worked with the Co-op while they were Brinkley Fellows at Norwich School of Art.

Roger Hewins was born in Birmingham in 1953, studied Photography with a Film option at Trent Polytechnic Nottingham and Derby College of Art from 1972 to 1975 with Thomas Joshua Cooper, Paul Hill and Bill Gaskins. The influential teachers of film studies were Al Rees, Ian Christie and Stuart Pound. They worked with Structuralist Theory and gave students an introduction to New American Cinema. Simon Field, the editor of *Afterimage* was also teaching there.

After Trent Hewins returned to Birmingham and was involved in trying to set up a film co-operative, based on the model of the London Film Makers Co-op. This became Birmingham Filmmakers Co-op which operated from 1976 to 1979. Hewins and Tony Bloor toured a programme of films *Urban Cinema* reflecting the almost documentary imagery to be found on their doorstep as an alternative to structuralist analysis in 'Landscape Films' inspired by Land Art. The ACGB *Filmmakers on Tour* programme was used for these screenings, and they also organised a screening for the British Council in Paris.

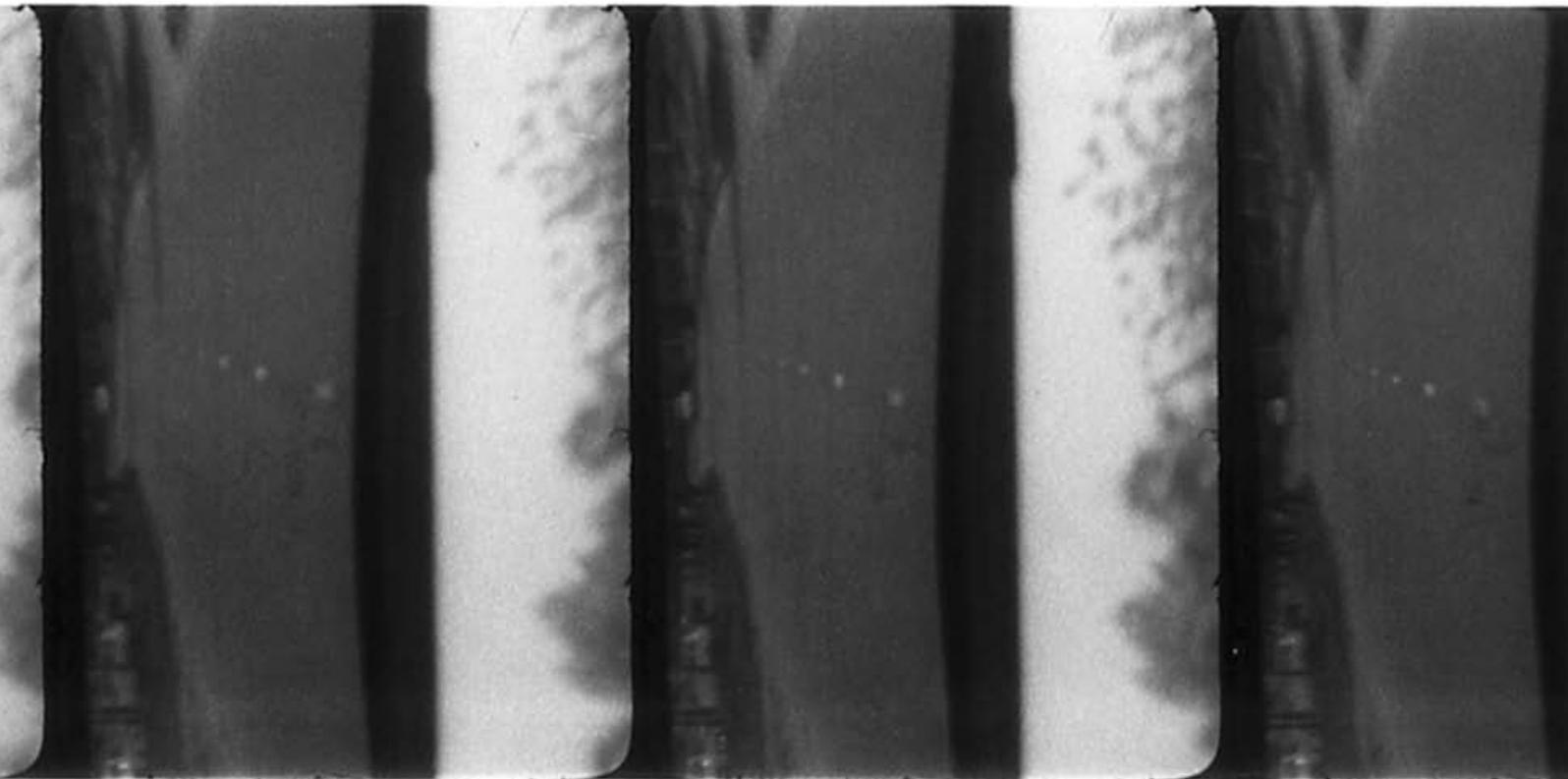
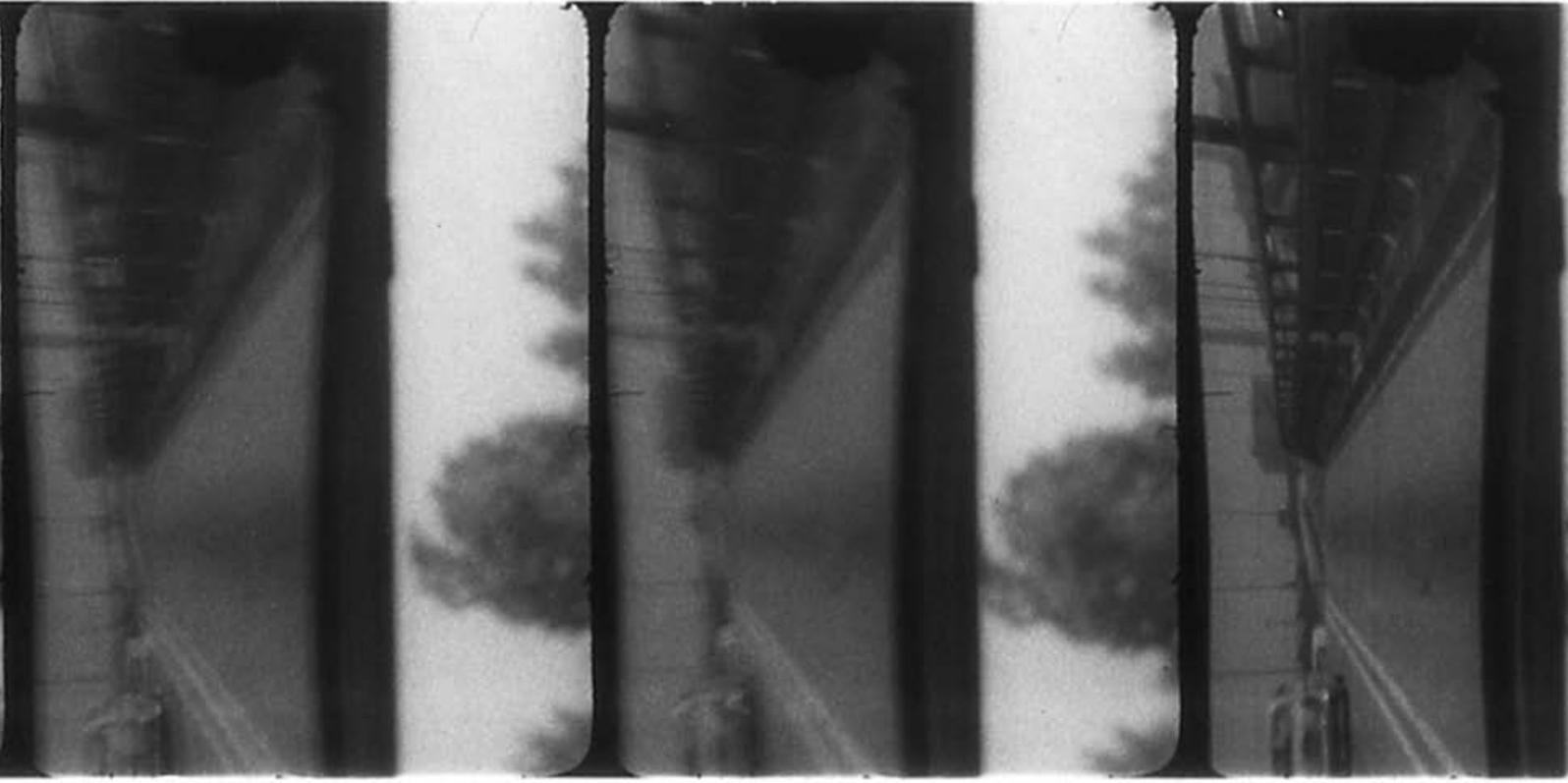
During this period Roger Hewins started occasional teaching with Guy Sherwin at Wolverhampton Polytechnic. In 1979 Roger Hewins returned to Nottingham to take up the job as Film Technician at the Polytechnic and became active in East Midland Independent Filmmakers Association at the Midland Group. Other members of the EMIFA included Frank Abbott, Geoff Baggott, Tony Bloor, Michael Eaton, Fizzy Oppie, Kate Adams, Karen Ingham, Vicky Jones and Chris Andrews. A Leicester group worked out of the Arts Centre including Lorraine Porter and Liz Soden. The East Midlands Arts film officer at that time, Alan Fountain, moved to Channel 4 as its first commissioning editor for Independent Film. Other key figures in regional filmmaking Co-ops were filmmakers Rob Gawthrop at Hull, Jeff Keen in Brighton, Mike Leggett in Bristol, and activists such as Rod Stoneman in the south-west, who would later join Alan Fountain at Channel 4.

Hewins left Nottingham around Easter 1983 and travelled to Chicago. Access to regular screenings at the Art Institute of Chicago enabled him to see more of the 'New American Cinema', such as the films of Stan Brakhage, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland in far greater depth than had been available in the UK. The critic and activist P.Adams Sitney, an enthusiastic advocate for experimental film, taught at the Art Institute at this time. On visits to Toronto he met Super 8 filmmaker John Porter, whose work he had seen at the London Filmmakers Co-op, together with other local filmmakers. Hewins came back to the UK in late 1984 and worked on projects within the Co-op in Norwich. The Co-op had strong links to Anglia Television, a five minute walk from the Co-op premises, first at Cinema City and then at Colegate. Several original members worked at Anglia and, together with other emerging local filmmakers, used the Co-op workshop to make their own films, including drama, documentary and more experimental films.

Hewins is currently working as freelance lighting cameraman and programme maker, and teaching film and video production at the University of East Anglia, and City College, Norwich. *Windowframe* was included in *Shoot, Shoot, Shoot* 2002 Tate Modern curated by Mark Webber.

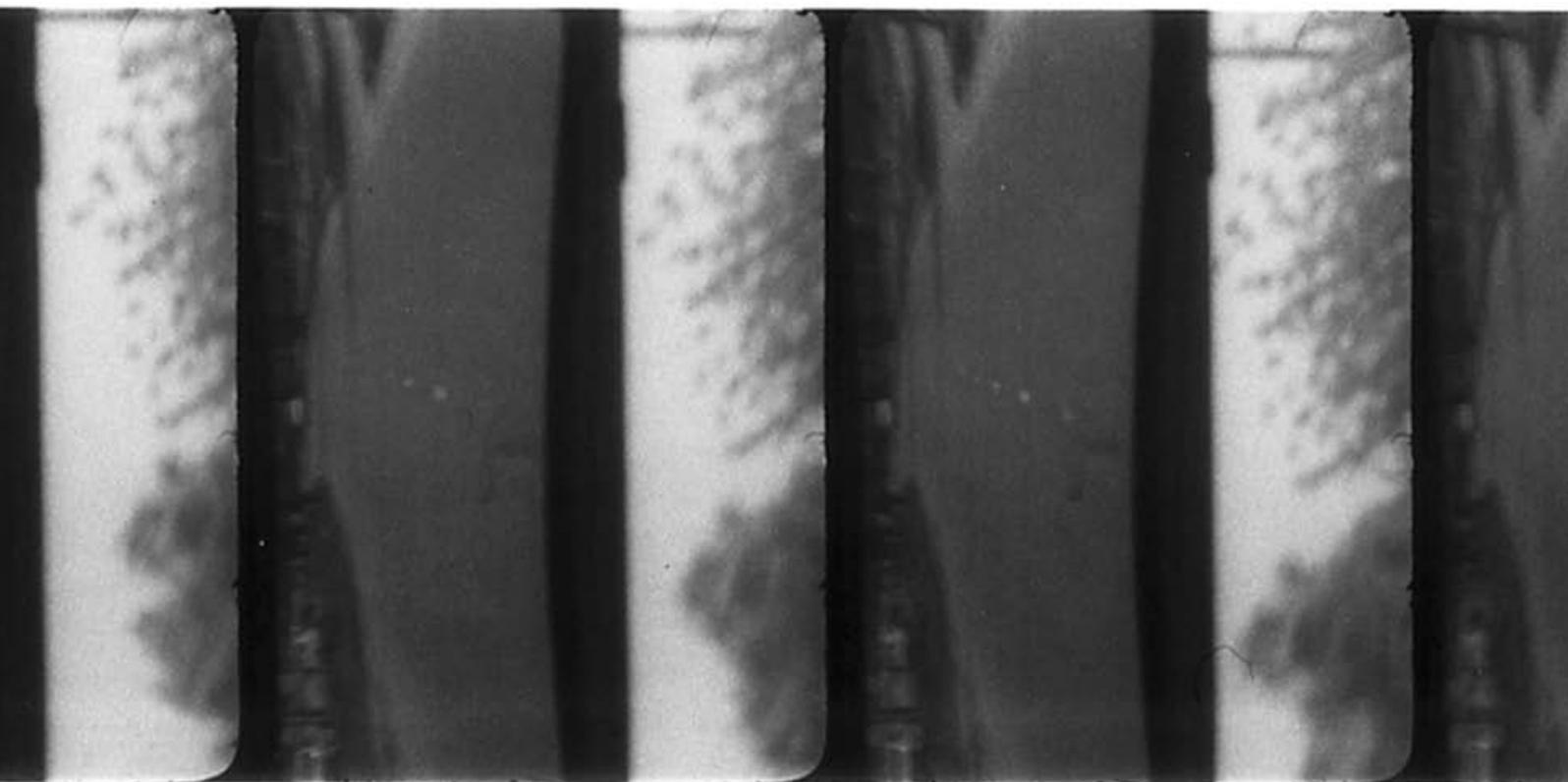
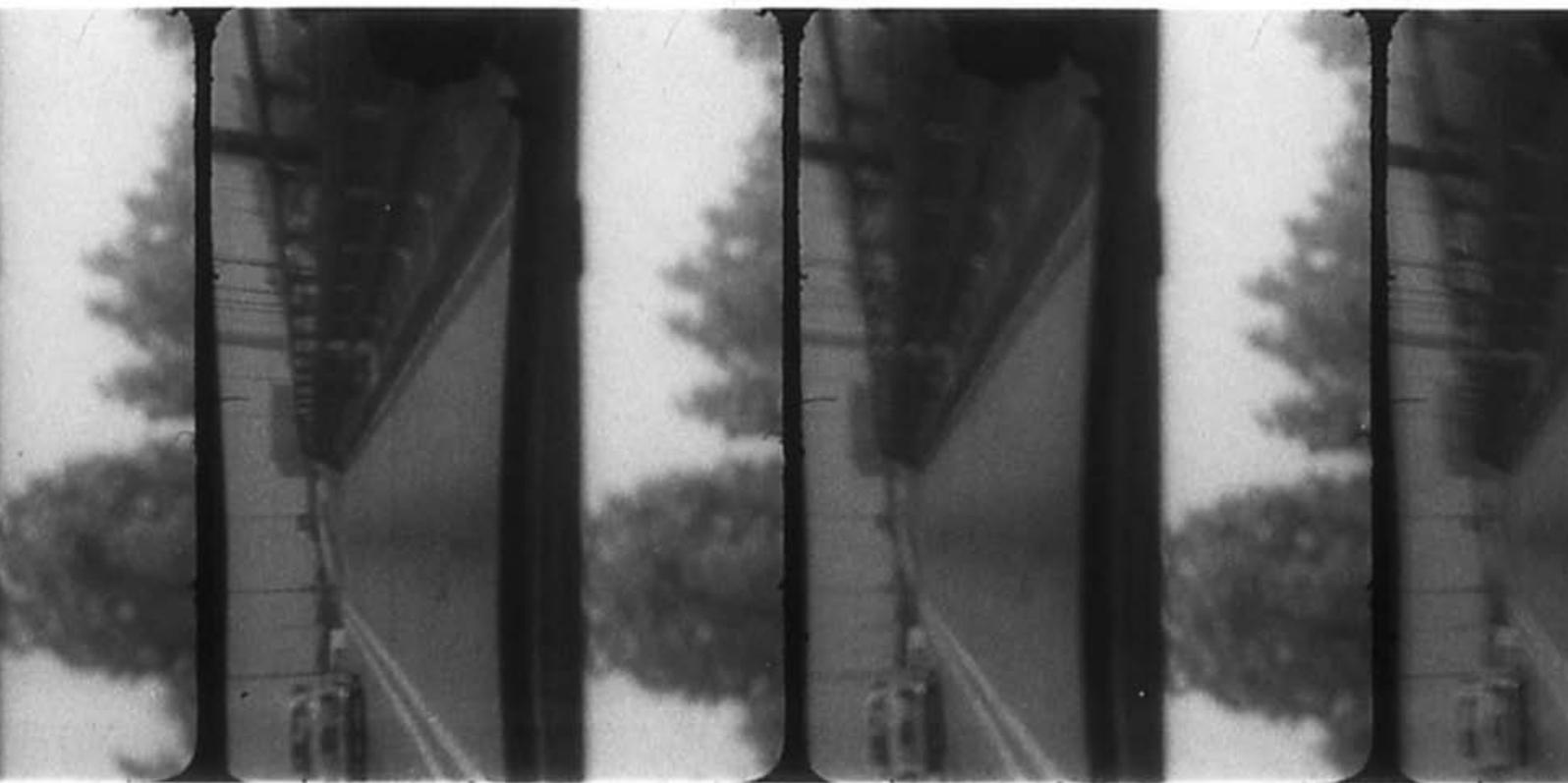
Lynda Morris and Dan Tombs December 2005

Independent Film



Roger Hewins

'70s and '80s



norwich gallery

FILMNOTES BY ROGER HEWINS

December 2005

Screen Space/Camera Space

Windowframe 1975 16mm colour sound 6 min

Duet 1976 16mm two screen projection silent 7 min 30 sec

Duet 1981 single screen scope sound 3 min

Dual Carriageway 1978 16mm b/w sound 28 min

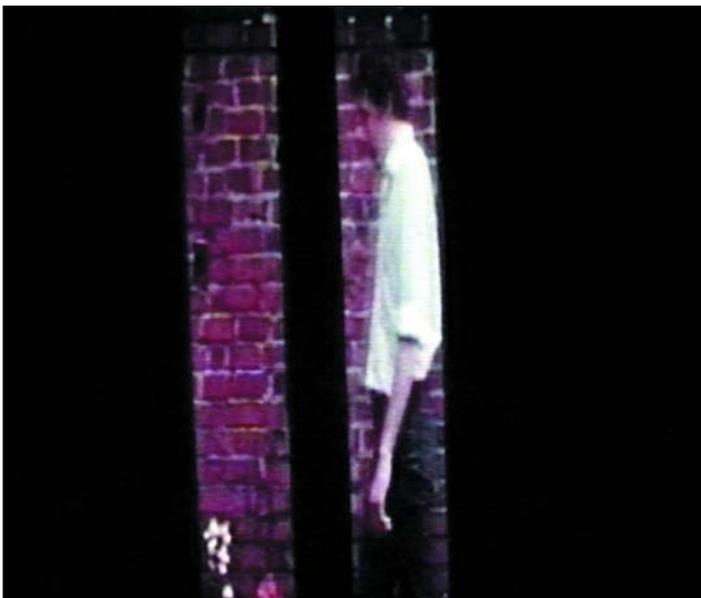
Riproduzione Vietata 1980 16mm colour sound 30min

The cinema screen is like a map. What you can see is visually complex, interesting, and informative, but what is more exciting is what lingers just outside.

Cinematographers always train themselves to look at the edges of the frame. The highly charged areas cinematographically, in terms of progression from shot to shot, are the edges of the visible picture. Editors are also concerned about the edges of the frame, about entrances and exits, as these provide the dynamic links that enable the editor to manipulate time and space, and to control pace through editing.

My interest in the edges of the frame began through still photography. A concern for framing an image in terms of what *was not* included as being inseparable from *what was* included, within the frame. Moving into the medium of film one is not thinking solely of a single image but the one coming next and the one after that. Frame space can change through subjects/objects entering camera space or through camera space changing due to camera movement.

The frame-within-frame structure of *Windowframe* forces the viewer into a number of re-assessments of their relationship and reading of the image as the film progresses, through the various readings of the restructured adjacent frames, increasingly disallowing the viewer to make a conventional reading. *Dual Carriageway* exploits image-within-image, in this case by using the car's mirrors, resulting in a moving image that can be recognised as representational at times but also as an abstract or surface image. An indication that a viewer may feel at ease with the familiarity of an image without examining it in detail is that few viewers notice that the image throughout the film is reversed laterally, offering a view that appears to be a straight record of reality, but is in fact manipulated graphically. The soundtrack acts as commentary and interrogation of the act of viewing, of attention, and of perception.



Duet 1981 single screen scope sound 3 mins

Duet should perhaps be a project rather than individual titles. There were four films called *Duet*, with two extant versions 1976 and 1981. The earlier (lost) versions used a moving camera panning with no prescribed pattern through 360°, altering direction at random. An actor walked through 360°, again changing direction at random. The anticipation of the actor entering the screen space but never knowing when or where successfully focussed attention to the 'charged' edges of the screen.



Dual Carriageway 1978 16mm b/w sound 28 min

A two-projector version the images shown side-by-side introduced the idea of a cinematic space as more complex than the single projector version. The side-by-side images could be read as contiguous space when camera and actor movements, on occasion, synchronised. These dual-screen experiments led to the existing versions of *Duet*, using a frame-within-frame technique. Two narrow moving vertical bars 'scan' the entire extended frame giving viewers knowledge of the complete space (camera space), but only ever allow them to see the walking actor intermittently within an otherwise black field (screen space). The earlier version was a two-projector version in which the varying speeds of the projectors introduced an element of chance. The 1981 version was optically printed in cinemascope format to facilitate conventional cinema exhibition.



Windowframe 1975 16mm colour sound 6 min

Technology 1

Windowframe 1975 16mm colour sound 6 min

The simplicity of the film and the ease with which such frame-in-frame matting can be achieved with contemporary digital technology, hides the challenge of making the film with 16mm film. The original scene was filmed with actors behind the window frame. The original film was processed and then projected and re-filmed to achieve the final result. The re-photography procedure was complex. The window frame structure used for the original filming, with the addition of a white backing board, became the projection 'screen' for studio re-photography, matting and recording onto 16mm film, in its final form. This required five passes of the film through the camera. The first pass exposed the white window frame only, with matt black boards preventing exposure of the 'panes' of the window. The white frame was then painted matt black to prevent further exposure and each of the four panes exposed in turn by projecting the planned image into the area of the windowpane, the black mattes being removed in each case to provide a white projection area beneath. The camera film had to be rewound in the darkroom between each successive exposure and synchronised each time by a punch-hole in the film that was lined up in the gate of the camera.

A further consideration in the re-photography process was that a flicker can be created when a motion picture camera films an image from a motion picture projector, due to the fact that the rotating shutters in each machine are not synchronised. Industrially, when re-photography techniques are used for back-projection behind an actor, camera and projector are controlled by synchronised motors. Overcoming the disruptive image fluctuation was the most difficult problem. The system eventually devised used a Beaulieu camera and a Specto analysis projector, designed for showing films frame-by-frame for scientific analysis of movement. It can run at 2 frames per second, as can the Beaulieu 16mm camera. At this speed both camera and projector shutters rotate many times during the time each frame is on the screen, thus eliminating any possibility of flicker on the recorded image. The ten minutes of re-photographed material at 2 frames per second took two hours for each of the five passes of film through the camera, a total of ten hours filming time.

Technology 2 Access/Resources

Wiper 1977 16mm b/w sound 10 min

Return 2003 DV colour sound 5 min 10 sec



Wiper 1977 16mm b/w sound 10 min

Wiper was made in 1977 at the Birmingham Filmmakers Co-operative. At the time they had very few resources other than enthusiasm and a 16mm Bell & Howell camera on loan. The only publicly accessible resource of the type required to produce the frame by frame manipulation in *Wiper*, was the optical printer at the London Filmmakers Co-operative (LFMC). As with *Windowframe*, the production required the filming of the original footage and subsequent re-photography to produce, in this instance, the

intervention and restructuring of the frame order down to single frames. Photography took place on the outskirts of Birmingham using an electric drive Bolex camera borrowed from the Arts Council in Piccadilly. The subsequent re-photography took place at LFMC using the optical printer. This machine is a camera with a lens set so that it can focus on an entire 16mm frame of film – about the size of a quarter of a postage stamp. Consequently, it can make a 1:1 copy of any frame on a film laced in the film holder in front of it. Both film holder and camera can be controlled synchronously or individually by stepper motors. The time manipulations in *Wiper* were made by re-photographing frames from the original footage in the new order required. For example, in the section of the film where the wiper blade flutters almost vertically, the original footage was run through to select only the frames where the blade was in this upright position and only those frames recorded to create the final sequence. Choice of frames could only be done by estimation by eye, and considerable testing was done to get the smoothest effect possible.

This re-photography took several weeks, travelling to London each weekend. Laboratory processing was out of the question for tests, the short lengths of tests being difficult to deal with on machines designed for continuous operation, but also the time taken to review test material and test again would have extended the entire procedure of testing and analysing results for months. Consequently, weekly travel to London was with an accompanying mini-laboratory of Ukrainian made 16mm processing tanks, bottles of developer and fixer, and a borrowed hair dryer so that tests could be processed immediately and further tests carried out.

Return 2003 re-visited the concept of *Wiper* using digital technology. This film took two days to make including photography and post-production, which took place at home. Digital editing offered the flexibility to compile sequences of individual frames and also to be able to immediately view the frame-by-frame sequences under construction and to adjust individual frame selection. However, whilst new technology aided the ease and accuracy of the production procedure the 'film' has also inherited characteristics of image quality – the electronically edge-enhanced sharpness of video and the overall cleanliness of the enclosed system of the digital domain. *Return* lacks the textural and tactile surface qualities of *Wiper* which makes the viewing of each a completely different experience. Projected at the same size I continue to remain somewhat distanced from *Return*, as if the digital medium in some ways sanitises the image; raises an invisible barrier between viewer and surface image.



Return 2003 DV colour sound 5min 10 sec

Institution 1 Broadcasting

Riproduzione Vietata 1980 16mm colour sound 30 mins

Mona Lisa 1982 16mm colour sound 3mins

Channel 4 went on air 2 November 1982. When the Thatcher Government announced its intention to develop an additional TV channel, lobbying as to the form this might take began amongst broadcasters and production companies, and filmmakers who felt the

new channel should commission a much wider range of material. The Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA) was formed 1976 as a voice for filmmakers working outside of formal structures of broadcast. Consequently, the organisation was the most organised voice for independent filmmakers. The IFA encompassed filmmakers who were working just on the edge of conventional broadcast format, such as Cinema Action to artist filmmakers seeking a space for new forms and concepts of film and television.

Channel 4 developed the brief of 'innovation', and indeed for some time it did develop new strategies, showing existing material previously ignored by broadcasters, and commissioning new material. Jeremy Issacs championed the concept of editorial balance across the Channel rather than within each individual programme, opening the doors to a wide range of radical material. I suspect that the embrace of the previously disenfranchised was probably through the commitment of individuals, such as Issacs and Commissioning Editor, Alan Fountain. The title of the independent/experimental 'slot', The Eleventh Hour, reflected more than its transmission time.



Riproduzione Vietata 1980 16mm colour sound 30 min

These debates were current at the time *Riproduzione Vietata* was made. The film can be seen as a response to issues raised by the prospect of television. It seemed unrealistic at the time for television to take up a whole sector of work that it had previously ignored. If there was to be some engagement how might that be exploited? How might the collision of personal concerns and broadcast conventions result in new forms and ways of working?

Riproduzione Vietata was an attempt to voice these questions, integrating my interest in form; in representation and presentation of information; in extracting images from images, with a form that is clearly televisual, the art documentary. The play with framing and the use of the edges of the frame, of deception and perception, and



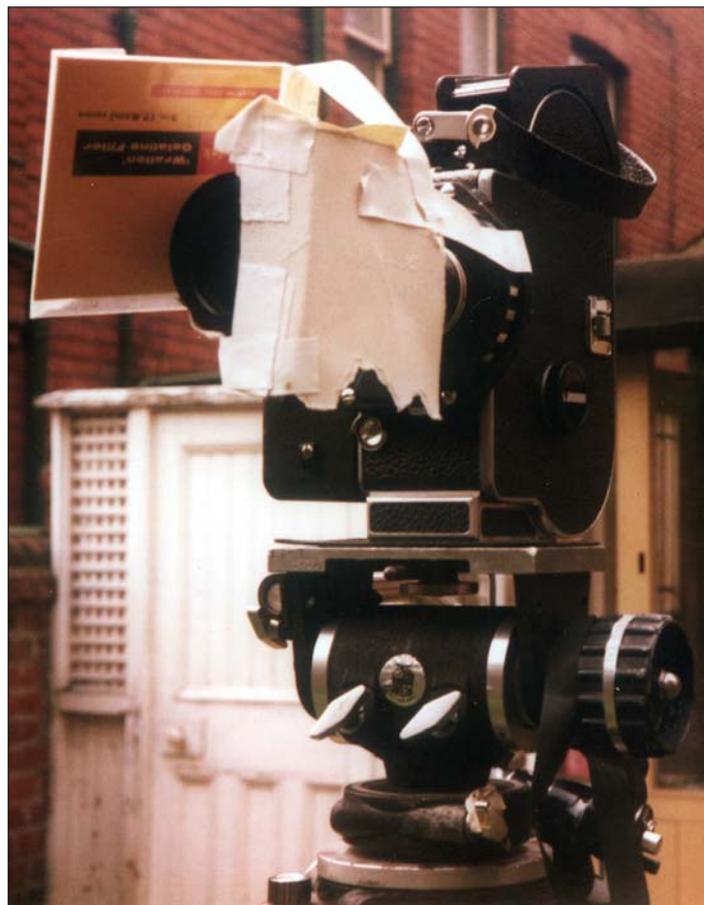
Mona Lisa 1982 16mm colour sound 3 min

juxtapositions of three-dimensional and two-dimensional space that forms the basis of some of the earlier films can be seen here in the treatment of different sequences.

Institution 2 The Filmmakers' Workshops

All of my films were made as a member of a workshop either in Birmingham, London, Nottingham, and later Norwich. The concept of a filmmakers' workshop in the UK began with the London Filmmakers Co-op (LFMC), although an argument could be made that the GPO Film Unit and Crown Film Unit under John Grierson in the 1930s exhibited a similar position in terms of dependence/independence. A group of similarly like-minded filmmakers sought a structure to produce alternative work both politically and formally, and had a similar economic relationship to the State. The LFMC was an organisation open to all, that integrated production, distribution and exhibition of artists work. It put the production resources into the hands of filmmakers by establishing a workshop/laboratory; they organised a distribution department and catalogue, and an exhibition space/cinema for screenings of members work and visiting filmmakers. Where the LFMC constituency was predominantly artist-filmmakers, other workshops arose, less comprehensively resource based but addressing the broad issues of facilitating alternative production and exhibition outside of established broadcasters and commercial production companies.

The development of digital technology now means that we all have a 'workshop' on our desktop. But where are the critical spaces, the points at which filmmakers meet, debate and argue? The technology that is enabling more and more people to produce moving images is also isolating them from social/regional/localised collective critical engagement with future forms, practice and culture of the moving image.



Location filming for *Duet* 1981