



## Record of Response

Friday 25th June 10.00-1.00pm –  
'Cinema of You' Session 3: 'Making their own Television'

The responses came in three waves, each with a different trajectory. They criss-crossed paths, mixed and resonated, hummed, thrummed, then continued on their way. For a while there I felt triangulated, globally topically positioned, but this sensation soon faded, along with a wholly accurate memory of the responses. Correction: I remember ALL but my version seems at odds with photos taken at the time or the accounts of others - which may be a comment on the memory of the others or the framing of the cameras.

Therefore, in the interest of comprehensiveness if not coherency, this piece is an amalgam. There was some disagreement over the relevance of pictures submitted by a couple of the respondees, so they've been edited down and selected by a hopefully 'fair' randomising method i.e. coin tossing and dice rolling.

What I'm aiming for is an aleatory collage, but yesterday it looked like a pig's ear, today more like a patchwork quilt. I will continue with the process until Chance makes it work. Hopefully there will be something here for everybody, or most, or failing that just YOU.

*"I'm not embarrassed by having TV style and pacing; I'm not ashamed of being inspired by that whole world."*

Alex Bag in conversation with David Frankel

The original idea was to give a lecture-screening based around **critically reviewed** experimental moving image works rarely being entertaining. This was a contentious opinion, but one that had bubbled up from a couple of decades of watching experimental film + video and finding that formal, structurally foregrounded work was the mainstay subject of the critical writing, as if serious work necessitated gravitas - on both sides.

Seeing as humour has a richly subversive potential beyond its obvious pleasure-giving: used effectively it can undermine representational orthodoxies,

question cultural assumptions, suggest new methods of articulation, and posit a radical reworking of power relations - all concomitant with the ideals of an avant garde cinema - this marginalisation must be the effect of other (more powerful) prohibitory discourses, I reckoned. That's what the talk was going to look for and at. But after a few days of thinking and initial scribbling I used my usual measure: where's the *joy* - for me doing it and for those attending? I was hard pressed to find it, even with a great leap of imagination. So I did the tv talk instead.

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Note left on seat after lecture, middle front row:

*The hands. The hands moved too much. And they formed strange shapes in the play of the light. I saw, variously:*

*a walking man; a barking dog; head of an ankylosaurus; Gog and Magog; two ducks: amatory and then in conflict*

*Was this part of it? The films seemed made by people with low self-esteem and limited resources. The hand show, then, proved the highlight but seemed more of a sidebar. Make up your mind!!*

(accompanied by a doodle of an owl trailed by angled lines, signalling either taking off or urinating)

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I'm looking at a display of glove puppets in the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood. The tigers and cats are very hard to tell apart, and I keep focusing/defocusing between them and the barrier glass. It gives the sensation of surging backwards and forwards, through and then out again, like I'm on a swing. Every time I'm back 'in' the case I have another go at telling the cats from the tiger. Swing. Now I'm out I think of my day. Swing. Cats. Tigers. Swing. Maybe time for tea. Swing. On the next arc out I become aware of a woman standing to the side of the case, looking at me. She says she came to that talk, the library thing, and that though she didn't agree with me it was good of me to try. I nod and smile like she's praising but don't really know what she means. I don't remember her

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either, and when I go home and check she doesn't appear in any of the many photos that Jennet took.

She adds that she's a friend of my sister's and then says:

*"Beetles"*

like it's a punch line, or an old shared joke. I try and look as blank as I can without seeming surly, but I'm no good at silence so quickly add a:

*"Where?"*

and look down and about me, as if they're maybe just scuttling by.

Later that week a book arrives from Amazon - *'Television'* by Jean-Philippe Toussaint - and I assume my sister has sent it as she gave me his *'The Bathroom'* for my birthday. But she hasn't/didn't. It's either an anonymous gift or a mistake, but both options I find unsettling. I don't enjoy the book particularly either.

I have a dream in which I remember ordering it but it's just that: a dream. None of my waking life bank statements show this purchase. When I mention it to Jennet she suggests maybe I ordered it in my sleep.

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1898 - N.Tesla submits U.S. Patent 613809 - 'Method of and Apparatus for Controlling Mechanism of Moving Vessels or Vehicles' - and includes schematics for the first 'at a distance' (= remote) controlling device.

1935 - The 'Sticksman' becomes the first commercially available television remote. An extendable telescopic tube with a clamp end, its maximum reach is six foot.

1948 - The 'Listener' is launched by the Garod Corporation: a successful audio-activated remote, incorporating on/off and 'picture zoom' functions. Public interest is short lived as its sensitivity prohibits conversation whilst viewing.

1950 - The 'Lazy Bone' is introduced by the Zenith Radio Corporation. Offering on/off and channel changing, the connecting cable is bulky and constitutes a tripping hazard. This becomes a popular gag in comedy shows of the time.

1955 - Tired of the jokes, Zenith introduce the 'Flash-matic'. Relying on four photocells positioned about the screen, the system has problems working well on sunny days when the sunlight sometimes changes channels at random. More gags ensue.

1956 - The 'Zenith Space Command' appears, and employs a unique 'battery-less' system. Inside the transmitter are four lightweight aluminum rods that emit high-frequency sounds when struck. Each rod is a different length to create a different sound that controls a receiver unit built into the television.

1959 - The 'Maestro' appears and disappears within the year. Using electric field motion sensitivity - similar to a Theremin - channel changes and volume adjustments are achievable by gesture alone. Despite the capacity to calibrate to individual living rooms, pets prove a recurrent problem.

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I've yet to start work on this piece but am coffee-fuelled, so spend some time skittering back and forth online. I come across a review-blog on the LECTURE HALL. FREE SCHOOL. series by someone calling himself Bunny Boy. Unfortunately he doesn't seem to have made it to any of the Friday events, which is a shame as from a quick skim read he seems incapable of negative comments.

Unlike most blogs people do seem to reply to his posts, though, and if the number of response comments is anything to go by he has quite a big readership. But on scrolling through I find that most of them are from someone calling them self The Critical Friend. It looks like they should get their own blog - but maybe they're building up to that.

The Critical Friend was there on the Friday of my talk but spent most of his time in the Reading Room down the corridor, leafing through a slab like edition of *'Faust'* and some encyclopedias. At one point he passes through the lecture room (en route to the toilets) where he describes the architecture of the stalls and the patination on the tiles. He's blogged all this live so I learn that at:

10.34am - he Digg'ed the Faust book

10.36am - he Buried the person who had removed the illustrations

10.55am - he Digg'ed the collection of Pearson's encyclopedia

11.10am - he Digg'ed the tiles (with a response of 112 who 'Dug' his 'Digg')  
11.25am - he Digg'ed the ordnance survey maps  
12.15pm - he was Digging his cappuccino at E Pellicci

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My sister has just finished a hypnotherapy course at City Lit and is looking for subjects. I ask if she can take me back four months to the day before, and then the day of, the talk. I want to rewind the tape and refresh my memory, look around a bit: maybe keep an eye out for Beetle Woman, The Critical Friend's fleeting appearance, and the Owl Doodler. Maybe even watch myself?

But she says it isn't like that. Regression isn't an exact science. It's more about exploring channels, following threads of connections, like untangling a web in the dark. And you can't change seats and watch yourself. She said she could take me back but it was just as likely to be four years, fourteen. You know the film *'The Time Machine'*, and how it had a steering lever made up of a stick with a jewelled knob on the end? Yes, of course. Well, it's like that machine but without the knob or the stick - it just *goes*.

Now that she has the Certificate she's considering going for the full Diploma. They don't even mention regression on that, she said. It's much more practical. The stress is on its therapeutic value: weight loss, stopping smoking, fighting phobias - though there is also an optional stagecraft module. That's as close as it gets.

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Fredric Jameson described Brecht as "an adversary of entertainment" but I can't help thinking that his alienation devices - through set design, intertitles, acting methods, use of music, and knock knock knocking at the fourth wall - look exactly like the methods and strategies employed in Olsen and Johnson's hit knockabout musical comedy *'Hellzapoppin'*" (a stage show about making the stage show (1938), remade as a film about making the film that we're watching (1941)), or the Marx Brothers *'Duck Soup'*, and which are all ... entertaining. They foreground process, but don't dwell on structuralism; they employ representation, but pull back the curtain to reveal the illusion: they serve pleasure on the same plate as ideas. This giddy mix continues on through Ionesco, Adamov, N.F.Simpson, Pinter, Barthelme, B.S.

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Johnson. It was there before in Jarry and Satie, Kafka, Hoffmann, Sterne and Cervantes. Carries back forward again through Godard, Ruiz, Anderson, Chytilova and then, heading TV box-wards come Alex Bag, Mike Smith, George Barber, Eileen Maxson... It keeps on carrying on.

James Benning (*'13 Lakes', 'Ten Skies'*) is talking following a screening of his *'One Way Boogie Woogie'* (1978) and the companion piece *'27 Years Later'* (the same 60 shots as in *'OWBW'* but filmed again in 2005). Mr. Benning comes across as an affable sort, and despite the formal structure of *'OWBW'* he explains it as a very personal work, with puns and personal references abounding. These are maybe more hidden to a lay audience than he realises, and he goes on to explain how after this first solo feature he was very careful to keep the humour hidden as he wanted to be taken seriously as a filmmaker.

*"Humor in Benning's work is woefully unrecognized"*, writes Jay Kuehner.

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1928 -Television is LIVE. A NY station broadcasts on a 48line spectrum a montage of moving faces and jumping, jerking wind up toys. Station owner Hugo Gernsback declares:

*"In six months we may have television for the public, but so far we have not got it."*

1928 -The world's first dramatic television play -*'The Queen's Messenger'* -is broadcast in the US. Two actors speak their lines on camera, whilst two others act as hand models for close-ups. The broadcast is received by four television sets.

1928 -penicillin discovered; clip-on tie designed; Mussolini ends women's rights in Italy; Mickey Mouse makes his first appearance; 51frogs entered in 1st annual "Frog Jumping Jubilee" (Angel's Camp, Cal)

1928 -1928

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- **so sorry**

Sent: 25 June 2010 12:05:33

From: V\*\*\*\*\* C\*\*\*\*\* (v\*\*\*\*\* c\*\*\*\*\*@hotmail.com)

To: Paul Tarrago (mistralstudios@hotmail.com)

So sorry I missed your talk this am - and I cd have gone too!  
I only just remembered and I am really cross with myself as  
I really wanted to go. Been suffering a bit with my back so my Mind was a  
bit elsewhere. So sorry. Hope it went well.

Bests

V\*\*\*\*\*