

**Nicky Hamlyn** Film Works



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Art Gallery of Windsor  
Media City Film Festival



Nicky Hamlyn filming *Parking Garage*, Windsor, May 2012  
Photo: Oona Mosna

## FOREWORD

Srimoyee Mitra, Curator of Contemporary Art

In the spring of 2012 we were pleased to invite experimental filmmaker and artist Nicky Hamlyn to spend three weeks at the Art Gallery of Windsor (AGW) as an artist-in-residence. Organized in collaboration with the annual Media City Film Festival, the site-specific films Hamlyn created during his residency premiered at the 18th edition of the festival that took place from May 22–26, 2012.

From April 25 to May 16, 2012, a narrow gallery space on the third floor of the AGW, typically used to display works from our permanent collection, was transformed into the artist's studio. As a space for film production and experimentation, it became Hamlyn's headquarters for most of his time in Windsor. In three weeks, Hamlyn created seven films totaling 18 minutes which recorded various oddities and idiosyncrasies of the border cities of Windsor and Detroit. His films echoed the monotony of empty parking lots that are ubiquitous in Windsor, the rhythmic flicker of the General Motors' logo at the apex of the Renaissance Centre, and a time-lapse film of Detroit's infamous abandoned train station.

Upon entering Hamlyn's studio at the AGW, visitors would often find reels of freshly developed film hanging to dry from one wall to the other, forming a zig-zag pattern in a dimly lit room. At other times, they might have been lucky enough to catch one of his newly developed films projected on the walls. Hamlyn's residency brought immense excitement and energy into the gallery. Apart from creating new work, Hamlyn presented tours to students from high schools and colleges every Wednesday. He inspired and encouraged burgeoning experimental filmmakers through a series of intensive 16mm workshops in which the artist taught participants how to make a 16mm film from concept to close.

On behalf of the AGW, I would like to thank Nicky Hamlyn for his enthusiasm and commitment in taking up a residency in Windsor. Thanks are also extended to Media City Film Festival Program Directors Oona Mosna and Jeremy Rigsby for their hard work during Hamlyn's residency. In addition, I thank my curatorial team: Nicole McCabe, Steve Nilsson and the designer of this publication Otto Buj for their contributions to this project. Finally, we are grateful to the AGW's granting agencies and supporters for providing us with crucial resources enabling us to continue the work of generating knowledge by providing a critical forum for artists to expand their repertoire and art practice through our residency program.

## INTRODUCTION

A.L. Rees

Nicky Hamlyn was born in England in 1954 and went to school at Christ's Hospital, Horsham. From 1972–76 he studied at Reading, one of only a handful of Universities at the time that taught Fine Art as a degree subject. It shared its culture, however, with most of the other kinds of Art Schools then to be found in the UK, some as independent colleges, others as departments in the new Polytechnics that aimed to bring arts and technology together in new fusions. Conceptual and systematic art vied with colour field abstraction as the major tendencies in the studio, but performance, photography, film and video also appeared on the curriculum at exactly this time. These diverse trends were reflected in Hamlyn's early work, and in some ways they continue in the present day to underlie his latest films.

In an interview about his residency in Windsor in 2012, Hamlyn recalls the many observational drawings he did as a child. By the time he went to college he was a budding colour field painter, influenced by Morris Louis and Barnett Newman. But within a year he had turned to film, after taking an introductory course led by his tutor, the installation artist and sculptor Ron Haselden. His first works were observational too, roller skating with a hand-held camera, or capturing the changing light over the course of a day in his archetypal student flat (*Silver Street*, 1974). A similarly playful and exploratory spirit invades the wholly abstract and performative *4 X LOOPS* (1974), in which four moving projectors trace a series of cross-shapes that reform in new patterns, to constitute a new kind of drawing for film.

This film was shown on his 22nd birthday, at the 1976 Festival of Expanded Cinema in London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. The timing

was coincidental but indicative. It recognized Hamlyn as a new structural filmmaker at the movement's peak moment. Despite the reservations he and others may have had then and now about the term "structural film", he remains committed to an experimental, frame-based, material and perceptual cinema. At the same time, he was friendly with a younger generation at the London Film-Makers' Co-operative in the later seventies, who were more critical of structural film and "formalist" abstraction, a number of whom were grouped around the LFMC journal, *Undercut*.

Some took the path of elliptical "new narratives" and political neo-documentaries, but they were swiftly outmoded by the rise of punk, rock videos, new romanticism and Derek Jarman from 1977 through the 1980s. The same fate overcame structural film itself, and only a few among its newer recruits forged from it a new and more personal direction that they could sustain in the years when this tendency was almost entirely ignored, until its belated rediscovery in the last decade. Among them were Nick Collins, whose work and ideas are close to Hamlyn's, and Rob Gawthrop, whose practice encompasses music, sound, live art and expanded video.

Like them, Hamlyn survived the era when a newly glamorized and commercialized avant-garde eclipsed his kind of filmmaking and overturned austere structural

**Nicky Hamlyn:** *Silverstreet*, 1975 (detail); 16mm film, 4 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist



hegemony. But in fact he and his like-minded peers had already adopted a more personal and even lyrical direction that both expanded and nuanced the structural film. It led briefly to a “room film” genre in which a filmmaker’s living space (or just where they happened to be when the film was made) is explored through montage, mobile camera, colour repetition and different film stocks.

Paradoxically, the founding film here — *Room Film 1973* by Peter Gidal — does not depict the filmmaker’s own room but somebody else’s, to deliberately confound hints of direct autobiography and personal reference. By contrast, the room films of the later 1970s were very much about the maker’s immediate environment, to see the overlooked in a new light, so that familiar spaces are revisited and revealed through the camera eye. Structural film of this kind became more subjective, pliable and subtle. Consequently, these filmmakers began to look for systematic schemas or procedures that might articulate and contain these new orders of camera vision. Specifically, through the hallmarks of grain, colour, light and focus, Hamlyn expanded positively on Gidal’s strategies of denial, while resisting Brakhage’s visual plenitude.

Hamlyn’s response to the crisis of structural film resolved itself through empirical research and testing, rather than predetermined grids or procedures. Even when he does use such processes — for example, by systematically exploring a landscape, the angles of

a room or the urban space of walls and pathways — what the camera captures in its frame is open to serendipity, to light and movement and the chance events of daily life. At first, as he worked his way through the dilemma of being a post-structural filmmaker in the 1970s and 1980s, he explored visual paradoxes through low-light registration, by overlaying or aligning shots of similar but different surfaces (walls, windows, tiles) and by clusters or patterns of repeated images. These modes of filmic inquiry were also metaphors for film itself in their play of focus, colour, screen and duration.

By the 1990s these pictorial procedures, which are essentially based on the shot as the basic unit in film, were expanded by Hamlyn’s growing interest in single or consecutive frames, as registered by the 16mm Bolex camera. As many readers will know, the versatile Bolex can shoot in multiple speeds and in single frames, and has a precise rewinding mechanism for overlays and dissolves. Without loosening the bond to his earlier shot-based work, in fact eventually merging with it, the single-frame aesthetic released new images, or ways of seeing, from the constraints of shooting in continuous time.

The illusion of stable space in film is in fact underpinned by fragmented time, when the shutter interrupts the filmstrip to record an image. This territory is explored by such frame-based filmmakers as Werner Nekes, Ken Jacobs, Kurt Kren and Rose Lowder, and is also the basic principle of animation, the process that generated many of the first avant-garde films in the 1920s.

While Hamlyn’s films are not literally abstract in the sense of Hans Richter and Walter Ruttmann, but are closer to the figurative abstraction of Fernand Léger, they share the common ground that metrics, rhythm, variation and interval are as fundamental to film as they are to music, from which the analogy is derived. But Hamlyn’s films are not predetermined and ordained by musical models. Rather, they are equivalents to them, achieved through visual observation of natural events, sights and occurrences that are not at all systemic, from the motion of water and trees to ordinary objects, urban clutter and traces of industrial life in the rural scene.

The point of view from which the film is shot also locates the filmmaker — and the viewer — in direct relation to the places thus evoked, such as rooms, gardens, roads or small factory workshops in the Umbrian countryside. Even when the spectator is presented with visual paradoxes or puzzles of shadow play and light — as in *Panni* (2003), where flapping sheets on a line are analogues of screen projection, or presence and transparency — the literal capture of the scene is as important as its camera manipulation. Such films as *Tobacco Shed* (2010) and *Double Fence* (2010) explore in this vein the shifting angles of architecture as captured in frame, while other films are more sequential in structure. For example, each of the *Four Toronto Films* (2007) contrasts the patterns of reflected light and the

**Nicky Hamlyn:** *Tobacco Shed*, 2010 (detail); 16mm film, 11 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist



passage of time on a pavement, in a studio skylight, across a lake, and over garage doors, walls and the backs of houses.

Hamlyn's output since the mid-1970s is prolific and varied, and resists easy summary. Nonetheless, a few compass bearings over this long period can be taken. First is a movement from the static to the fluid, in which slower-paced studies of flatness, colour and visual ambiguity were gradually replaced by time-lapse observations of light and motion. In particular, a series of recent films depict "real abstraction" by single framing the found or readymade moiré patterns in sunlit chairs and fabrics (*Autogrill Verghereto*, 2008), or alternatively when the variable focus of a digital camera records shifting and veiled layers of nearness and distance, invoked, for example, when curtains stirred by the wind are shot so as to make a varied, rippling surface (*Place Vauban*, 2012). These studies in perception are fully cinematic, or videographic in the case of the digital camera. They could not have been realized in any other media, as they exploit the time shifts and durations that these particular devices embody.

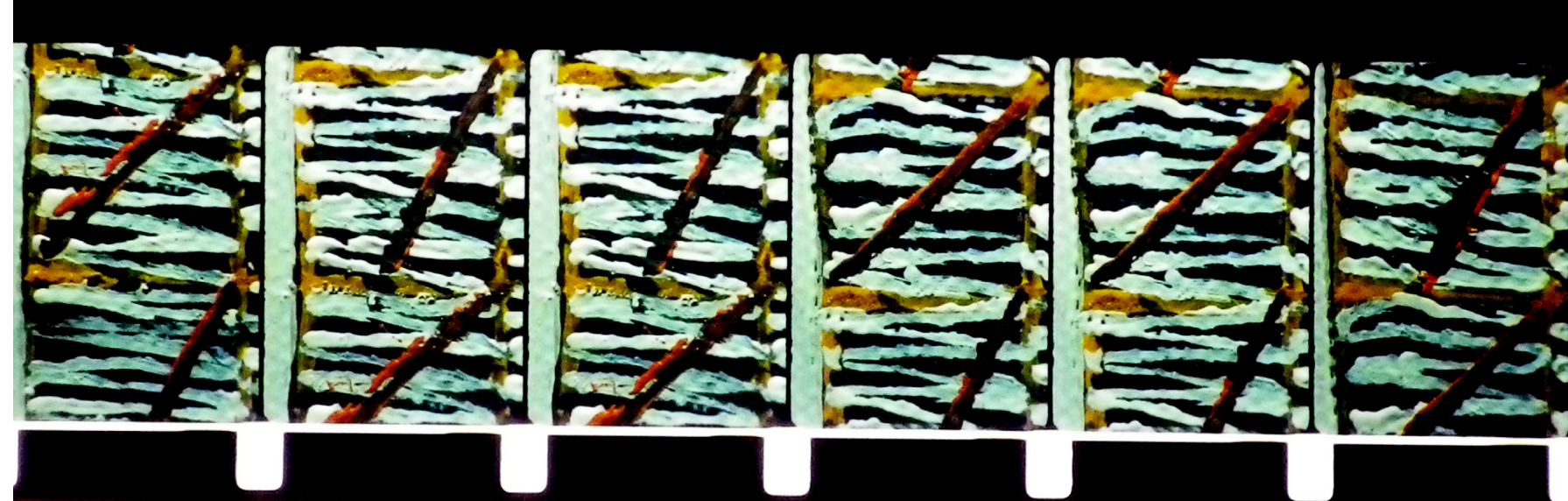
A second characteristic of Hamlyn's films is their continuing engagement with the other visual arts, especially painting, the art form with which he began. This is an exception today, when current artists' film and gallery video is oriented more to performance, theatre and documentary than to the visual arts. In one sense, a relation to painting and drawing is implied in all his

films, for example in their tonal sensibility and spatial awareness. The pictorial motifs of his films similarly vary from flat abstract planes to shallow-depth rooms or bounded landscapes. The effect of such films on new and often uninitiated viewers can be sudden and awakening, showing that film need not be tied to drama, expression and language. Several of Hamlyn's former students, now filmmakers themselves, have attested to this quiet moment of revelation when he showed them his own films or others by Michael Snow and Peter Gidal.

Here, the films contribute to an unresolved challenge within experimental cinema, when it asks what it can do that painting can't. Or perhaps, how can projection and flatness, which are common to both the painted and the screened image, accommodate each other? What happens when temporality enters the frame?

Although the first avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s were mostly painters, they advanced a musical solution to the problem of film-time that proved insufficient on its own. Tagged to this is the unresolved question of representation itself, the visual realism that is ruthlessly embedded in the mechanics and electronics of the camera and computer as their default mode. To interrupt the vision machine, and to draw attention to its perceptually unprocessed raw data, is one of the few avant-garde aspirations to survive in the age of digital imaging.

Hamlyn's recent strategy here is surprising but logical — he has been filming paintings. Inspired by Kurt Kren and Marie Menken, who made vivaciously optical hand-held



Nicky Hamlyn: *Sequence XIII*, 2008 (detail); 16mm film, 16 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

studies of abstract art, Hamlyn has worked from paintings and drawings by London-based painter Angela Allen. The structures of the pictures directly inform the shooting of the film. The latest of these is *Correspondences* (2011), in which single frames were painstakingly shot inch by inch down and across the variegated canvas, with its bright punctuations of colour, so as to translate static images into illusionistic motion. Hamlyn describes it as a "composite or hybrid, neither picture nor film", but it might equally be seen as a dialogue between the two, at the edges of optical flicker and the moving eye that are common to both.

The extraordinary range of activities with which Nicky Hamlyn has helped to sustain an experimental film culture in the UK and beyond can only be briefly reported here. At their core is his prodigious output of honed and vividly observed films, based on a deep engagement with the critical theory and visual science of cinema. He extended his creative work over a long period when audiences shrank and only the makers and a few enthusiasts remained. That has now changed, and experimental film of Hamlyn's kind is back on the agenda, but it required a particular intensity and commitment to sustain the enterprise, and few had it.

He is also the only UK filmmaker of his generation to become a leading writer about the avant-garde cinema. His book *Film Art Phenomena* lucidly surveys the creative process in experimental film, and he has written precisely notated interpretations of films by Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, Michael Snow, Steve Farrer, Lis Rhodes, Guy Sherwin and many others. To expanded cinema, with which he entered the frame back in 1974, he has contributed site-specific and installation work, exploiting the looped or lens-less projector as an instrument for vision, rather than as a spuriously semi-sculptural object in the gallery. His work in this respect is firmly but unobtrusively polemical. It makes the case for a direct cinema of unhidden surfaces and visual declaration.

**A.L. Rees** is a research tutor in the Department of Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art, London, UK. He writes and teaches about artists' film, video, and digital media, and has curated numerous film programs for both the cinema and the gallery. His book *A History of Experimental Film and Video* was published by the British Film Institute in 1999 (revised edition, 2011). He was co-editor of the publication *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film* published by the Tate in 2011. Recent essays have appeared in *Millennium Film Journal* (USA), *Iconics* (Japan), *MIRAJ* and *Sequence* (UK). A former chair of the Artists' Film and Video Committee at Arts Council England, he was also head of Time-Based Media at Maidstone College of Art (1989–96). He is an advisory reader to British Film Institute publications (Palgrave Macmillan), s (Oxford University Press, New York), and is on the editorial board of *Film Quarterly* (USA). He is currently editing a book, together with Nicky Hamlyn, about the Austrian filmmaker Kurt Kren.



*Film. Develop. Project.* 16mm workshop led by Nicky Hamlyn, Art Gallery of Windsor, 2012; Photo: Oona Mosna

## INTERVIEW WITH NICKY HAMLYN

Oona Mosna and Jeremy Rigsby

August 2012

### **Can you start by telling us about your time as a Fine Art student at Reading University in the 1970s? You've cited Ron Haselden as being instrumental to your transition from painting to film, were there other influencing factors?**

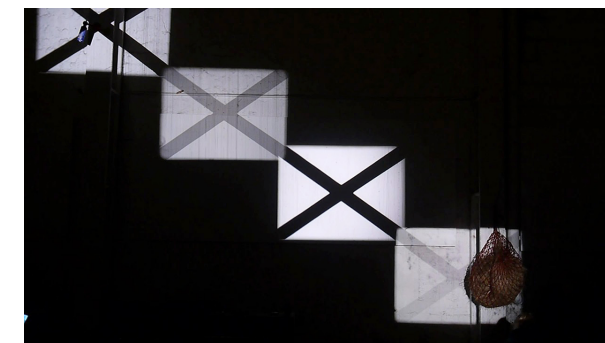
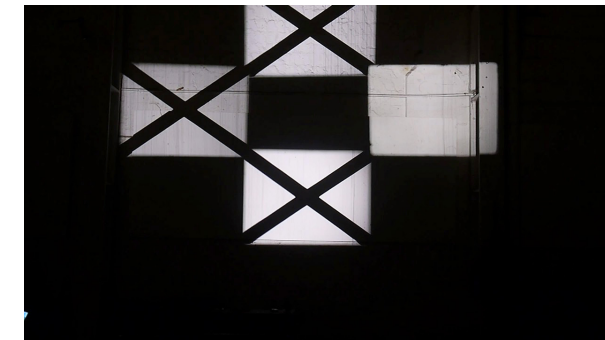
To set the Reading scene: the Fine Art course was very traditional; colour mixing exercises and copying paintings from the Tate Gallery for first year painting students, bronze casting for sculptors. Ron Haselden trained as a sculptor, which he still is, but he happened to be going through a filmmaking phase at the time, which included making multi-projector pieces. He later went on to make some great film / sculpture installations, long before "installation" became fashionable. He ran a short film project, using Kodachrome, all very casual. There was very little formal teaching on the course and no technical training in film, but this wasn't such a problem for me, partly because I had some technical skills and knowledge through having had a darkroom at home. The other key factor that turned me away from painting was that there were several students, including Anne Bean, doing installations, performances and events. Anne went on to found Bow Gamelan Ensemble with Richard Wilson, the sculptor, who was an MA student there at the same time as me, as was William Raban. Anne also ran Art Exchange, which was a weekly arts club. She invited a lot of performance people and musicians, including Derek Bailey, Tony Oxley, Barry Guy, Lol Coxhill and loads of other people who became major international figures. Performance artists included Reindeer Werk, Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti, and often students from other colleges. The Kipper Kids were also regulars. All this activity made a big impression

on me and I came to see most of the teaching staff as hopelessly old fashioned and reactionary by comparison. I ran Art Exchange for two years after Ann graduated. I hired a lot of films, including Michael Snow's *Back and Forth* (1969) and *Wavelength* (1967), Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966), and films by Ron Rice, Stan Brakhage and Jeff Keen. Ron Haselden also invited various people in to show their work and teach, including Malcolm LeGrice, who was a harsh but very helpful teacher, Mary Kelly, Marc Chaimowicz, Stuart Brisley and Peter Gidal, who showed *Room Film 1973* and annoyed the hell out of a lot of students, which really impressed me. It totally turned my head, and strengthened my resolve to reject the stodgy painting regime. It took me a couple of years to commit to film, but I managed to make several during my time there. It was a four-year course, very casual by today's standards. One was left to oneself to get on with things, sustained by contact with a lot of very interesting visiting artists.

### **Your multi-projector piece *4 X LOOPS* (1974) screened at the London Film-Makers Co-operative in 1975. Did the expanded cinema scene in London in the 1960s and 70s have an influence on the making of this work? Had you previously seen any of Jeff Keen's double-screen films, expanded cinema activities around the LFMC, or the Filmaktion events at St. Martins School of Art?**

The decision to make *4 X LOOPS* came out of two things. Firstly, I had been working with un-split Regular 8 (it's called Standard 8 in the UK), which has four images / frames within one 16mm frame. The idea to work this way came from seeing some films by David Crosswaite. I was also influenced by Haselden's work with three projectors, which I saw either at the Co-op or in Reading, though my work was nothing like

**Nicky Hamlyn:** *4 X LOOPS*, 1974–2012 (detail); 4 x 16mm film performance, 20 minutes  
Documentation courtesy of the artist





his. Most importantly, I thought that four projectors was a logical progression from four frames. It would give me more flexibility, and we had four projectors, so I could do this. I didn't see any Jeff Keen, apart from *Marvo Movie* (1967), which I hired for Art Exchange, or any Filmaktion, until the Festival of Expanded Cinema at the ICA in London in January 1976.

**What was it like coming into the milieu of the LFMC in the mid-1970s? How involved were you at the time?**

I had been to the Co-op a few times and saw a few things. I was a student until 1976, so not really involved in the beginning, but a regular attendee at screenings. I also used to go to the Gate Cinema in Notting Hill, which was run by David Stone, an important figure in the London art scene in the 1970s. I saw some of David Larcher's work there, including an ice cream advert that he made especially for Marine Ices, whose ice cream was on sale in the cinema. I also saw films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Louis Malle and other new wave directors. The other important event was the First Festival of British Experimental Film, held in Bristol in 1975, where I saw a lot of work, including a survey of Malcolm LeGrice's expanded films. My film *Silver Street* (1974) was shown there. In 1979 I was elected to the post of Workshop Organizer at the LFMC for two years. Then I was working there three days per week, renting out equipment, running the Debie contact printer and b&w processing machine, bookkeeping, building maintenance, etc.

**During this time you also co-founded the magazine *Undercut*. Can you tell us about the publication and how it came about?**

The Co-op published three issues of the journal *Cinim* between 1967–69, but there had been nothing since then. There were a number of filmmakers at the Co-op in the early 1980s that wanted to start a new journal that reflected the diversity of filmmaking emerging at the time. This included feminist work, new photography, animation and experimental narrative, as well as more formal experimentation. Michael O'Pray and filmmaker Tim Norris were instrumental in establishing the magazine, as were others. I wanted to be involved, and I was well placed, since I was employed at the Co-op at the time. Nineteen issues of *Undercut* were published between 1981 and 1990, coincidentally more or less the exact period of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as prime minister. We published critical essays, polemics, book reviews and photo-pieces, many of which were specially commissioned. An anthology, *The Undercut Reader* was published by Wallflower / Columbia University Press, in 2002.

**What was your role in the Festival of Expanded Cinema at the ICA in 1976? Can you describe this event?**

Ron Haselden was on the organizing committee of the festival and he co-opted me onto it too. He was good at getting students involved in things outside college. I was very involved in the organization of the festival, and I did have experience, having run Art Exchange more or less single-handedly for two years. It was the first UK festival of expanded cinema, a big event running over several days.

There were gallery installations and multi-projector films, but what strikes me now, looking back on it, was the predominance of performance. There were a lot of hybrid film performances by Malcolm LeGrice, William Raban, Rosalind Schneider, Carolee Schneeman, Rob Gawthrop, Tony Sinden, Guy Sherwin, Robert Fearn, and Jeff Keen, who did a long multi-projector spectacle. Steve Farrer and Chris Garrett, both did photography-based performative presentations. Lis Rhodes and Ian Kerr made a quasi-performative installation with 100-foot long film loops. Derek Jarman and Peter Logan showed multi-projector Super 8 installations. LeGrice, Raban, Haselden, Fearn, Annabel Nicolson, and others showed multi-projector films. I showed *4 X LOOPS*, and a three-screen film called *Window* (1975). There was definitely a sense of a second generation of makers, including people like Farrer, Fearn, Gawthrop, and myself. LeGrice, Raban, Sinden were the first generation. Many of the participants went on to do other things, but a good number are still involved with film and video: LeGrice, Raban, Rhodes, Sherwin, and Gawthrop, who is an exact contemporary of mine. Gawthrop did a performance with the same film running through two projectors, which he manipulated live, removing the lenses and hand holding them, pulling the film off the claw, etc. This was typical for the time. The installation work also had equally strong elements of performance and / or sculpture. Peter Logan's Super 8 sculpture used about four projectors running footage of football filmed off a TV and projected onto a complex arrangement of small screens on the gallery floor. A Parisian, Pierre Rovere, gave a kind

of lecture based on small constructions he had made from 16mm film. As a whole the festival was quite different and the work seemingly more diverse than that of today's more routinely projector-orientated performers like Bruce McClure, Metamkine, Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, Guy Sherwin even, but I'm probably generalizing. There was no found footage either, unless you include Peter Logan's off-TV film.

**Malcolm LeGrice defined structural film broadly as “the dialectical problem of ordering in relationship to experience”. Can you talk about the politics of form? How do these ideas relate to your current filmmaking practice?**

Perhaps one way to think about politics in relation to Malcolm's formulation is to think about the way language carves up the world. Our familiar ways of conceptualizing the world are enmeshed in the language we use. The same thing applies to images, more so since they are un-encoded, and thus seemingly natural and therefore unassailable, unlike language, which is conventional. Barthes explored this in some of his essays, like *Rhetoric of the Image*, for example. Malcolm's remark entails a similar process of constant revision in relation to film images. We make an image then consider it, then remake it in relation to our interrogation of it. Hence it's dialectical. It has its counterpart in Gidal's praxis of “withholding full representation”, or the idea of the subject as “in process”. Thus nothing is taken for granted, including the subject and therefore its relationship to its world.



The image making process becomes a way of rethinking the world and our relationship to it: something like doing philosophy by other means, an analytical tool or process. In a political sense this means constantly questioning, being critical, against the normalizing tendencies of political discourse, where everything is talked about as if self-evidently right. In the green section of my film *Object Studies* (2005), a static scene undergoes continuous change, which is a product of applying a set of systems to that scene. The camera takes one frame every fifteen seconds for a whole day. During this time various other factors were altered so that the image continuously mutates, is in-process, unfixed. In *Pro Agri* (2008) the distribution of light changes the scene utterly from an image of a building to a green fluorescent sign bearing a Latin phrase, text-as-image, image as / in text. Everything changes even though it's still the same scene, so that what's given at the beginning is transformed by the end into something like its opposite. I think there's enough politics in simply making work that tries to interrogate its own ontology, its own conditions of existence, especially against a background of the unquestioning, ironic or plain cynical appropriation of mass media imagery that a lot of work seems to trade in.

**You've written about "the production of a mode of seeing that replaces the anthropocentric point of view of the cinema with the mechanical gaze of the camera". Do you consider this approach as being in line with a filmmaking tradition that began with Vertov? Or do you have other motivations?**

Vertov is important in this regard. His statement at the beginning of *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), that this is a film "without the help of inter-titles...story...theatre", and which is based on the "absolute separation of cinema from the language of theatre

and literature", implies a non-anthropocentric approach.

One important factor for me was my irritation with the idea of the camera as an extension of the eye-brain, specifically in relation to Stan Brakhage. It seems an incoherent idea: how can a camera be an extension of the eye-brain, other than as a simulatory device, the very idea of which experimental film should be against, since to simulate is to reproduce uncritically, slavishly, as in a simulated ride, where technology is deployed to fool the embodied subject into feeling they are floating in space, or whatever it is, through a kind of total sensory realism. That kind of thing belongs in Disneyland, if anywhere. It certainly has no place in experimental film. Brakhage's camera records what it "sees", not what Brakhage somehow mysteriously wills. The idea that we are seeing what Brakhage sees is all part of the mythologization of the artist as visionary, which places him beyond criticism. The idea of the camera as an expressionistic device goes against its radical potential, and seeks to entrench it as inward looking. I have aimed to explore what the camera sees, or rather does. How much more exciting to see what the camera can do, detached as far as possible from human agency, at least in the sense discussed above. The camera's vision is outward, towards the world, not in to the psyche of the artist. The idea of the mechanical eye is consistent with other ideas about using features of the pro-filmic to structure the work, in the sense that I am trying to allow the materials of production to shape the work, as opposed to imposing my will upon them.

(facing page; right)

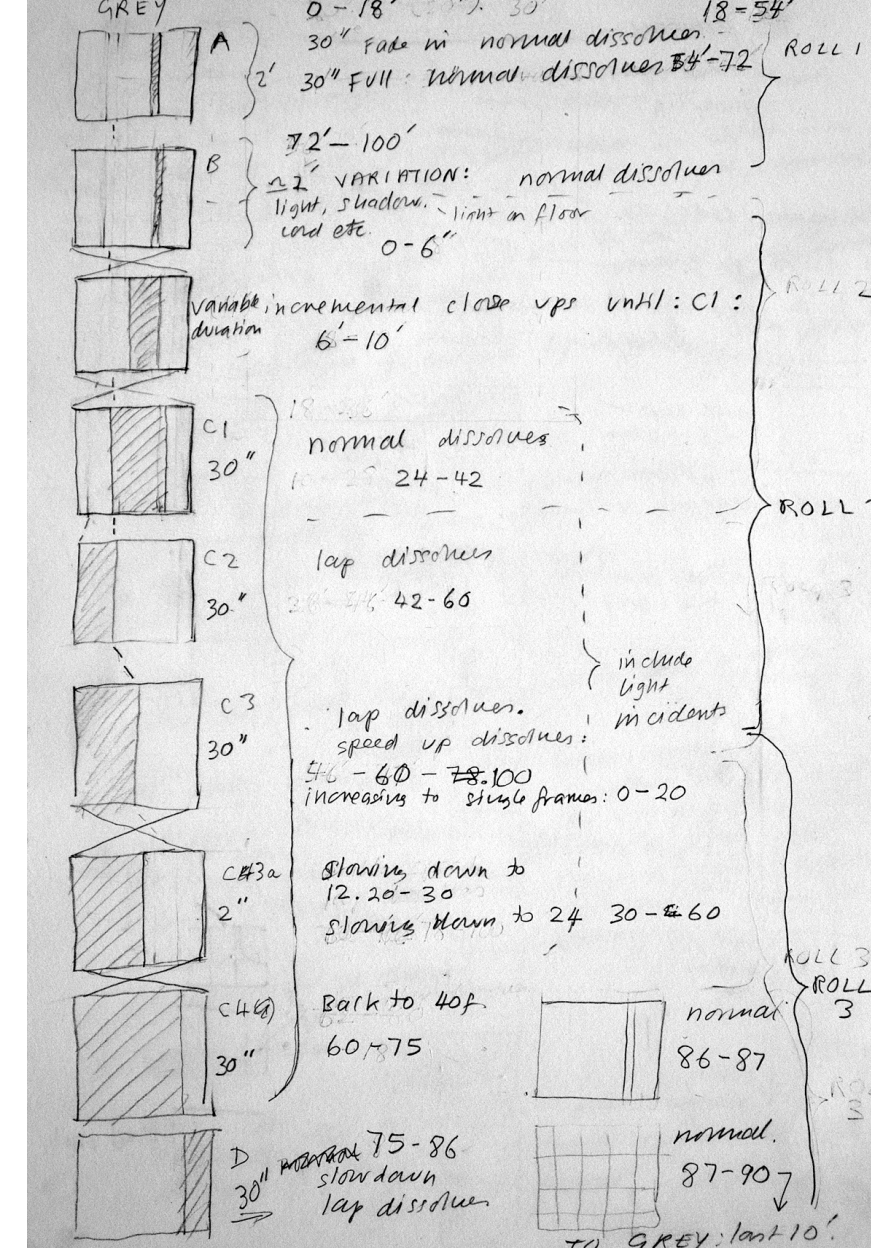
**Nicky Hamlyn**; *Pro Agri*, 2009 (details); 16mm film, 3 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



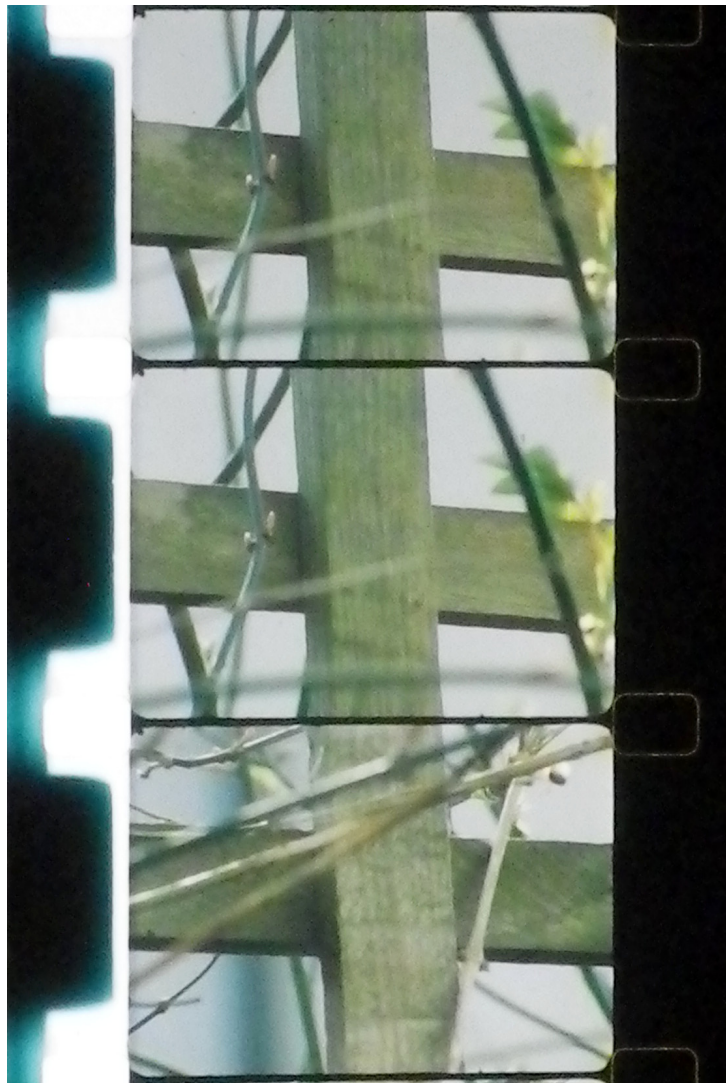
You've described *Penumbra* (2003) as a film about "transition as an image". One could say that the spectator's experience of the work is analogous to this idea of an image in transition, in that human perception of visual stimulus is a progressive processing operation. Can you talk about the use of lap dissolves as a structuring principal for an entire film?

I had been developing a way of working that involved increasingly ambitious planned sequences that are constructed in camera. This arose from the fact that I wanted to do complex edits but not have to deal with the negative-cutting difficulties arising from that. Partly this stemmed from the experience of making *Not Resting* (1999). I noticed that when nothing is moving in a shot — neither camera nor subject — there is a visible bump as the join goes through the projector, even though there's no physical cut in the print. However, there is a physical join in the negative, which creates this slight bump in the print made from it. In order to avoid this I tried to structure shots in the camera so that there would be no join in the negative either. This technical solution evolved into a modus operandi. Ultimately though, I liked the idea of an image in continuous transition. This could have been done with three rolls of negative; A, B and C rolls. This allows you to introduce a new dissolve before the previous one has finished, but it's a complicated and expensive laboratory job, whereas it's easy and costless to do in camera using a Bolex, providing one doesn't make mistakes, and of course the result is an image composed of shots blending continuously into one another, so that nothing ever settles. All the dissolves are forty frames

(one foot) long — 1-2/3 of a second each. This is simply because the mechanical fader for the Bolex gives only a fade of this length (a dissolve is a fade-out superimposed on a fade-in). I like the fact that it's given and invariable: one works with what one is given and this is another way in which determinants of the work are taken away from subjective influence. I liked the idea of the transition — the dissolve — becoming both the main image and the structuring device for the entire film and, as you say, it raises the question of what an image is, and a shot, with its implied fixity, which obviously are negated in *Penumbra*. In conventional cinematic terms, a transition is the antithesis of a shot, so what I was doing was turning this notion on its head. It's a good example of how a simple formal strategy can have aesthetic, "grammatical" and ideological effects. It's a good example of the politics of form, because it challenges conceptual assumptions that are sedimented in a grammar that, because it is understood as such, are assumed to stand outside aesthetic or ideological considerations, in the same way that ordinary language embodies ideological assumptions. It goes back to the idea about how language carves up or organizes experience, and is related to your earlier question based on Malcolm LeGrice's definition of structural film. I suppose there's also a tension in the fact of film's being made up of static frames and this idea of continuous transition, one image blending into the next. I also liked the idea of the image emerging from a field of grain then returning to it at the end. Perhaps that's a bit neatly symmetrical, but I wanted to stress the material flux out of which the image is made, and which is its continuous state for the whole film.



Nicky Hamlyn; *Penumbra*, 2003 (16mm film, 9 minutes); partial score from the artist's notebook, pencil on paper; Courtesy of the artist



**There's an important tradition of experimental filmmakers working with the single frame as a unit. You've employed this strategy in various ways from your earliest films through to more recent works including *Matrix* (1999), and *Four Toronto Films* (2007). What interests you in the single frame as such? How does your work differ from other filmmakers like Paul Sharits and Kurt Kren who have also worked extensively with the single frame?**

I was certainly influenced by Sharits' ideas about building a new kind of film language based on the frame. As a student I read *Words per Page* (in *Afterimage* 4, 1972), the essay where he sets out those ideas. However, whereas Sharits' films are mostly abstract, mine are mostly not. I am interested in the precise control of movement that's possible with single frame shooting and I like the idea of synthesizing movement from single frames, as opposed to panning the camera at 24fps. Another specific influence here was Ian Kerr's film *Post Office Tower Re-towered* (1977-78), which animates a continuous photograph of the Post Office Tower in London as a series of contiguous single frame images. Kren operates a dynamic between single frames and the quasi-movement generated by small rows of up to eight frames, more or less as an end in itself. I'm not so concerned with this kind of operation per se, more with the way single frame filming allows one to construct complex structures, including inter-weavings and clusters of frames,

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Matrix*, 1999 (detail)  
16mm film, 7 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

alternating frames, pixilation and so on. In the *Four Toronto Films* there are two time-lapse sections, which is another kind of frame-by-frame procedure. Other sections were shot frame-by-frame as part of an overall strategy of treating the shooting as animation. Shooting frame-by-frame takes a lot longer than normal 24fps filming, which means that in the first part of the film a lot of time passes during the time it took to shoot; the sun moves round, the light and shadows change, etc. All this is part of the work and wouldn't have happened in the same way if I'd made a series of shots at 24fps. Working frame by frame scales everything down and things tend to get compressed. This is what I very much admire in Kren's work, that a little goes a long way, as in poetry, and of course, the music of people like Webern, which is an obvious and noted precursor to the films of Kren and Kubelka.

**Let's discuss your films made from Angela Allen's drawing and paintings. With *Interruptions VII* (2008) you seem to be emphasizing different kinds of intersections and layers within the images, whereas in *Sequences XIII* (2008) the ordering has a more direct connection to the cell-based or encoded grid structure of the paintings. Can you talk about this in relationship to your strategy of using the topography of the pro-filmic to inform a film's structure?**

This is something I became really conscious of in making the *Four Toronto Films*. I deliberately, almost polemically, set out to make a film that took its structure from the morphology of the pro-filmic, in this case the form of a typical North American sidewalk, which often resembles

a film strip. Your remarks about *Interruptions VII* are spot-on. I analyzed the drawing into grids of various scales, layers, conjunctions and intersections, similarities and variations, all of which were dealt with in order. So the film is systematic in that sense, although the drawing is quite diverse in its form: there's a ground made of fine lines, on top of which rests a coarse grid. This is overlaid with lozenge-shaped occurrences, which have a staged unfolding appearance relative to each other, so there's a kind of implied narrative or time-based structure on this level. I endeavoured to translate all this into a time-based structure by filming the drawing frame by frame in extreme close up, which was necessary in order to isolate the intersections and many incidents in the picture. This necessity to film in extreme close-up has a fortuitous consequence, which is that it results in a massive magnification of the surface of the picture, so one seems to see, as Allen notes, more than is visible in the drawing. There are also the cartouche, or niche-shaped, forms at the bottom, which are semi-detached from the rest of the picture, and which are filmed normally at 24fps in a sequence of continuous shots that dissolve from one lighting angle to its opposite in order to highlight the three-dimensionality of the shapes, in contrast to the flattened layers of the rest of the picture. The variety of approaches in the film of *Interruptions VII* reflects that of the drawing, whereas *Sequences XIII* is a more homogeneous film, in keeping with its subject, which as you say, is cellular and wholly grid-based. In this case I made two versions from the same material (something I also did with the first of the



Four Toronto Films). The first version has two frames of film for every cell in the painting, the second one frame per cell. This results in two structurally similar but experientially distinct sequences. Because the cells are square and the film frame is rectangular, every frame of a cell contains part of the next cell that will appear in the sequence. This also happens in a different way in *Penumbra*, which is similarly a film based on square forms, in that case white bathroom tiles.

**In *Correspondences* (2011) there are sequences where the texture of the canvas produces unusual visual phenomena. It appears that the differences (in framing) between the (film) cells are what create these kinetic effects. Can you talk about your methods? To what degree do these visual events result from a predetermined framing strategy and how much of the phenomena are chance occurrences?**

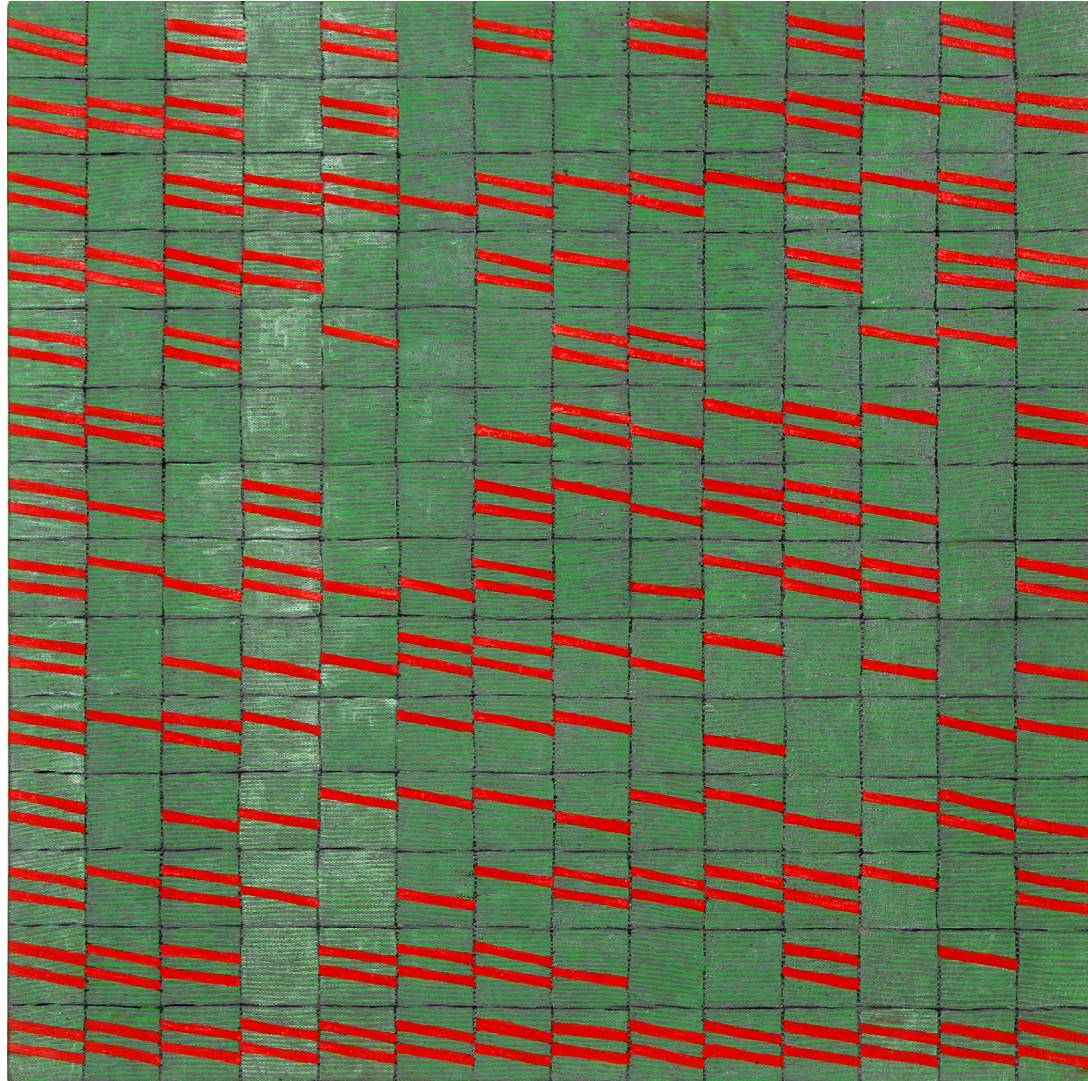
A lot of the phenomena, most in fact, are chance occurrences on the level of their precise effects, but I was confident that parts of the film would generate something like them, based on knowledge gained from previous films such as *Risoni* (2004) and some videos made of naturally occurring moiré patterns. The film has different degrees of close up to the cells in the painting, which are similar in size to those in *Sequences XIII*. As you say, the extreme close up sections magnify the texture of the canvas, whose prominent bumps catch the light and

**Ian Kerr;** *Post Office Tower Re-towered, 1977-78* (detail)  
16mm film, 7 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

generate kinetic effects. These sequences were created by interweaving one frame of one cell with a number of its neighbouring cells, and by creating repeating sequences of several frames. I allowed these repeating patterns to run for up to thirty seconds to give the effects a chance to assert themselves, and to give time for the viewer to really look into the surface texture. Most of these sequences are made by exposing some of the frames, then winding the film back through the camera and exposing the ones not exposed in the first pass.

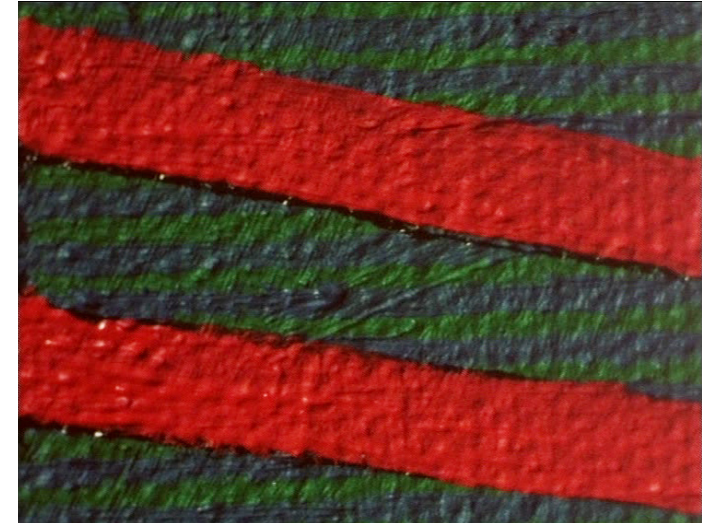
**As part of Media City's 18th edition, *Correspondences* screened in both gallery and cinema. How do you think these films operate differently as looping installations than as cinema projections? How does your approach to making work intended for a gallery setting differ from much of the other "film as art" practices common in contemporary visual arts?**

To answer the second part first, if I were making a film for a gallery I would normally aim to make something that integrated the conditions of its presentation into the work itself, so that the film and its form of presentation were in coherent dialogue. It's rare to see gallery work that does this. A lot of the dispersed forms of presentation, in which videos are shown on multiple screens placed around the gallery, seem quite spurious to me. Recent shows by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno spring to mind, where the form of presentation has nothing to do with the form of the films (I've written an essay on Gordon and Parreno that is published in issue 1.2 of the British magazine *Moving Image Review Art Journal (MIRAJ)*.



It's invidious to single out these two, however, as the practice is widespread, Anri Sala, Rosa Barba and Eija-Liisa Ahtia are other names that one could also mention. The alternative is the ubiquitous "black box in the white cube", where a cinema space is created in the gallery. Here the work ignores its context because it is basically a straightforward cinema film, not a gallery work! One can also have the worst of both worlds. I recently watched Tacita Dean's two-hour long *Craneway Event* (2009), in which Merce Cunningham rehearses a group of dancers in an old Ford plant near San Francisco. It was shown in a white walled, echoey space with plastic seats. Because the film runs continuously the prints tend to wear out, which means multiple copies are needed. This entails the making of an inter-negative from which the copies are made, which means that one is watching an image that is three generations away from the original negative (original negative, inter-positive, inter-negative, print). This results in poor definition. 16mm optical sound also needs all the help it can get, so playing it in a noisy space makes things worse in that respect. Having said all of this, *Correspondences* was presented in a black box in the gallery, but I think this was justified by the fact that the pictures needed to be shown in a conventional manner, nearby the films, whereas the films obviously needed darkness. The film rooms were isolated and really dark, and were not thoroughfares, so people couldn't simply walk through and glance, which all helps to induce visitors to sit

(facing) **Angela Allen**; *Correspondence: red on green*, 2011  
oil on canvas; 42 x 42 cm; Courtesy of the artist  
(right) **Nicky Hamlyn**; *Correspondences*, 2011 (detail)  
16mm film, 15 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



down and watch. I think it worked well, and I certainly can't imagine how else the work could have been shown, given its hybrid nature. However, when it was shown in the cinema the film did look stunning, thanks not least to the exceptionally high quality of the projection. It's also true that the cinema is a much more conducive space for concentrated viewing than the gallery, where one always has the option of walking away. It takes a lot more self-discipline to stick with a film or video in a gallery. Nevertheless, I think we managed to create quite a sympathetic environment in there.

**This spring you were Filmmaker in Residence in Windsor for seven weeks. You had visited the area several times for previous editions of Media City. How did the films you made here respond to the city and its environment?**

I already had a couple of ideas based on familiar landmarks, such as the Renaissance Centre. I was also interested in the parking garage on Chatham Street West, opposite the Media City offices. I had photographed this building before and was interested in it specifically because its modular form — a set of similar but not identical decks — has correspondences with the film strip. The rest of my decisions were based on observations I made in and around the Art Gallery of Windsor, because I wanted to make the work as site-specific as possible. My thinking was informed by the fact that I would be making negative films, some of which might be printed and shown either as negative, or positive, or both. In the last case the image would be seen right way up in negative, then upside down in positive. This gave me three possibilities in terms of

black and white structures. I was attracted by the south stairway on the second floor of the AGW for a number of reasons. As a south-facing space it's an obvious light trap and I could see that the sun's movement would generate something interesting for a time-lapse sequence, given the window bars, the mesh barriers between the handrails and the stairs, and David Partridge's totem pole sculpture made of nails. Secondly, the meshes also interested me as potential generators of moiré patterns and thirdly the sculpture had potential as a generator of shadows and other effects. I also like the idea of making a film of another artwork, as it connected to the films made of Angela Allen's drawing and paintings. So I had three potential films that would all be made in the same space, which seemed a good focus for the films and their interrelatedness. The Michigan Central Station came later in my thinking. The colour film of a bright red abandoned shopping cart immediately suggested a red and green film, made by filming the cart on grass. *Red Green* (2012) complements the other colour films in the series and again connects to Angela Allen's pictures.

**Can you talk about your decision, apart from the technical practicalities, to use Agfa ST8 negative stock for many of the films shot in Windsor?**

I had made a site-specific negative film the previous year (*Stacking*, 2011) using the Kodak equivalent of ST8. I had also used the Agfa stock as a student so knew a bit about it. The film is a low sensitivity (12 ASA) high contrast sound recording film: it's intended use is in the making of optical sound track negatives, not pictures, but of course it can be used in a camera. I like the way the high contrast leads to

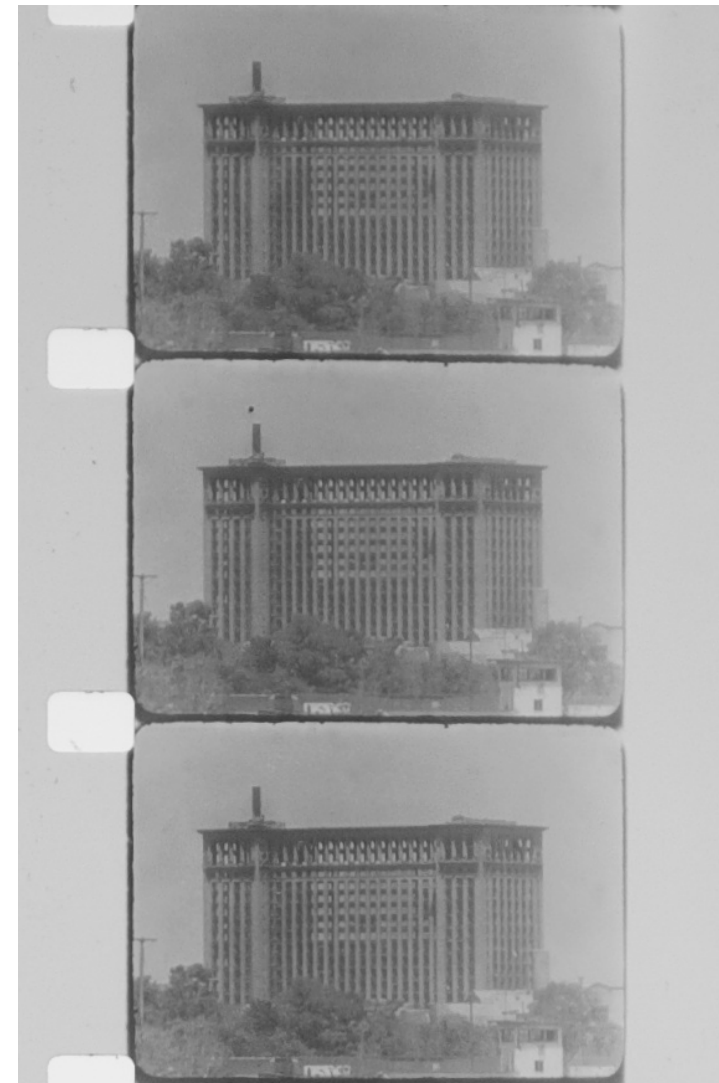
a certain kind of graphic and / or abstract quality.

I wanted to stress the balance between representation and abstraction, which shifts around depending on various factors. I was also interested in exploring the perception of negative imagery by using a stock that doesn't look like ordinary camera negative and is thus harder to identify as such. This leads to interesting ambiguities that depend on things like the array of tonalities in a shot. The high contrast film tends to reduce the grey scale — actually it can't really register grey very well at all — so works best in strong light conditions, where abstract qualities tend to come to the fore, because shadows and dark objects can become indistinguishable by virtue of their shared tonal values.

**During the residency you made two films from iconic architectural structures in Detroit — Michigan Central station and the Renaissance Center. How do these films engage with the specifics of history or place, do they have to?**

I suppose the films could be read as some kind of comment on Detroit's industrial history. I was interested in the top of the building as a subject for a time-lapse film, because its façade is made up of flat windows placed around a circular structure, which reflect passing clouds in the form of an animated mosaic. Then there's the electronic GM logo screen, the changing colour light band below it and the movement of clouds in the background. I knew all these elements would generate a complex set of effects when

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Michigan Central Station*, 2012 (detail)  
16mm film, 1.5 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



seen in time-lapse. The station film is intended to complement the colour and drama of the Renaissance Center film. It's a very slowly changing black and white time-lapse, shot over a five hour period at a rate of one frame every eight seconds, in contrast to the rapidly paced Renaissance Center film, which covers forty-eight hours across three days at a rate of one frame every thirty seconds, so that things are moving at more than three times the speed of that of the station film. In the latter I was interested in the two visible facades, which become illuminated in turn during the film's duration, and in the fact that one can see right through the building's skeletal structure, so that the sun also illuminates its interior. The films were both shot from the riverbank in Windsor, so, two tall, iconic buildings, filmed from broadly the same vantage point, with the same lens, but different parameters in other respects.

**In your description of *Totem Pole '67* (2012), you write about your recurring interest in the “relationship between rectilinear forms and the film frame”, which in turn draws you to film what you call “found structures” — constructed forms such as buildings or artworks rather than organic or natural forms. Is working with these “found structures” similar to working with found footage or other rephotographic processes, insofar as you attempt to generate new forms from existing social artifacts?**

Funny I mentioned that in relation to that film, whose forms are almost entirely circular! Anyway, I don't think working with found footage or photographs is the same as filming most buildings, because most found footage has specific

meanings already encoded. In his films *Schatzi* (1968) and *Western* (1970), Kurt Kren fragments, to the point of obliteration, two loaded photographs, one of a Nazi officer looking at corpses lying on the ground, and the other of victims of a Vietnam War massacre, whose meanings are then allowed to reassert themselves with considerable strength. That's an honest approach to working with found images. I have found most found footage films end up reiterating the meanings they supposedly re-work, although there are exceptions to this, such as Bruce Conner's *America is Waiting* (1981), but even that film seems to turn on assumed meanings and attitudes to the military-industrial complex. With buildings it depends on the building. I would avoid famous landmarks because of the meanings they carry with them, although Tony Hill made a great film, *Striking Images* (1990), of the Big Ben tower in London, which depends partly for its efficacy precisely on the fact that it's a much-photographed object, whose familiar representations he subverts by turning the camera progressively through 360 degrees while juxtaposing views of the tower with disruptive foreground objects. That film is an exception though. Although anonymous buildings are still social artifacts, they don't carry meanings in the way that images of the Houses of Parliament or the Statue of Liberty do. I am more interested in their formal possibilities, and this has a lot to do with trying to explore the dynamic relationship between the givens of the film frame and those of a similarly rectilinear subject. It is possible to generate more precise interactions between the film frame and similarly rectangular subjects than is possible with filming a bush,

say, where a change of camera angle or framing probably won't change the meaning of the image very much at all. Paintings are different again. Angela Allen's work is purely abstract, so I do not have to take on meanings encoded as representations. However they still embody intention in that they are artifacts. I like the idea that her paintings and the films, as intentional objects, generate meaning between them, so that the experience is neither only painting nor only film, but lies somewhere else as an ideal hybrid. The paintings are both subject and score for the film, and I am trying to be faithful to what the paintings seem to want to do, to expand and amplify their effects in detail, so in this sense I am trying not to reconfigure or subvert their meanings in the way that a lot of found footage films aim to do.

**In both *Totem Pole '67* and *Red Green* you used the subject you were filming as a physical support for the camera, during the filming. That could perhaps be interpreted as a maximal extension of your interest in the reciprocity of camera and subject, making them literally contiguous. Can you elaborate on how this especially “intimate” approach directly influenced the construction and appearance of these two films?**

Yes, I certainly was thinking about the camera physically contacting the subject as an extension of the reciprocal relationship, which I discussed earlier in relation to the *Four Toronto Films*. However, whereas in those films the reciprocity was based on ideas about frames within frames, about the way the pro-filmic figures, almost metaphorically, formal correspondences with the filmstrip, there was no such

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *AGW Second Floor South*, 2012 (detail)  
16mm film, 2 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



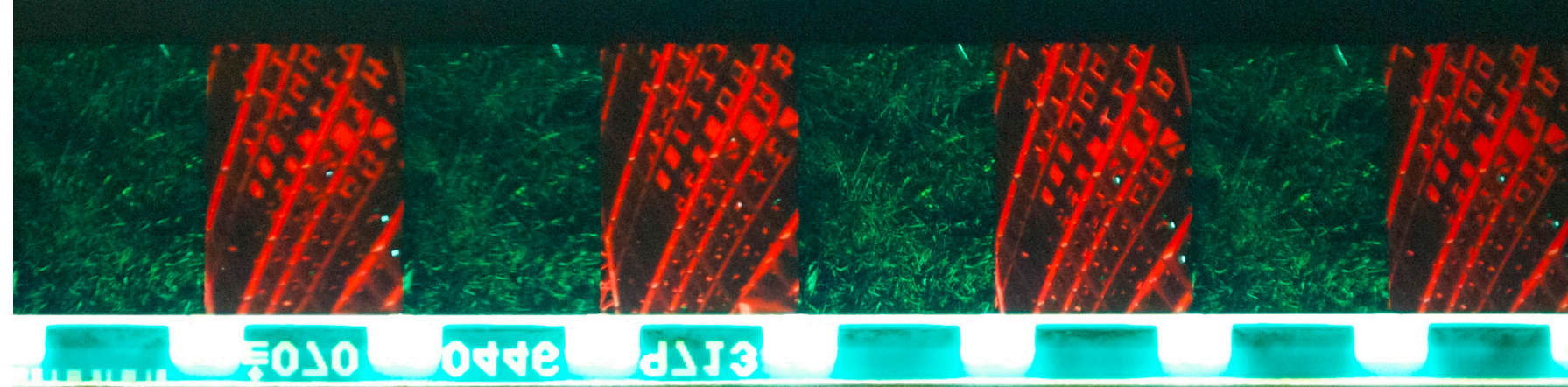


connection in the two films here. Rather, the idea was that the physical form of the subject directly determines, or at least severely constrains, the position and possibilities for movement of the camera. This is yet another way of removing the imposition of subjective intention, so that the work makes itself as much as possible and hopefully thereby generates something new. Of course the determinations aren't rigid or exact, and if they were the film would probably be boringly didactic. Rather, there's interplay between possible camera positions and decisions about how many frames to take, in what order, from which angle and so on. Nevertheless, once the camera is placed in a given position there is little choice about what kind of shot will emerge. *Red Green* is the looser of the two films, and, as you suggest, I used the cart as both subject and camera mount. I was trying to film layers (moiré patterns again), by shooting through at least one side of the cart as much as possible, and at the same time trying to juxtapose red and green in the same shot. At other points colour juxtapositions are replaced by alternating single and double frames of cart and grass, but even here there is a logic to how this is done. For example shots of the latticework of the cart are interlaced with the formally similar shadows cast on the grass by the cart: one image's form necessitates that of its companion. I also slid the camera along the top sides of the cart to create tracking movements. In the Totem Pole film the camera is especially close and constrained. I used extension tubes between the camera body and the lens, which gives the possibility of very extreme close-up, so that the

front of the lens is almost touching the thing it's filming, in this case the large flat heads of the galvanized nails. Adjacent nails hold the lens housing in place. The image that forms is dominated by the nail head and the surface behind it, which may also contain either nails or the spaces between them. A formal pattern emerges from this. I like the paradoxical tension that's at the centre of this strategy. The camera has to have some distance from its subject in order to register it, yet one always wants to get closer to what one is looking at. This idea originally occurred to me while I was watching Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* (1964), where there's a strange, extreme close up of the side of someone's head.

**You've been critical of figures like Peter Wollen and Colin Perry for their characterization of structural film as "premised erroneously on a reductive conception of the medium's 'material substrate'". Do you think such writings have promoted widespread misreadings of your films, and those of other like-minded filmmakers? Do you find that these criticisms have been detrimental to the reception and relevance of materialist practices in contemporary film/art?**

Yes, in Wollen's essays *The Two Avant Gardes* (*Studio International*, November–December 1975) and *Ontology and Materialism in Film* (*Screen*, volume 17 number 1, 1976) there was a tendentious simplification of the materialist work coming out of the LFMC, and a traducing of the accompanying theory, designed to favour his own approach to filmmaking, whose paradigm was the Godard of films like *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (1967),



Nicky Hamlyn; *Red Green*, 2012 (detail); 16mm film, 2.5 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

which he explicitly praised (I think in his book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*) for the use of a full range of signifying forms; speech, text, image, sound, music and combinations thereof. Ironically his reading of film was in a way just as essentialist, or at least as prescriptive, as that which he was criticizing, because he said this is what film can do, so therefore it should, which is absurd. Film is a complex technical medium, consisting of distinct stages, as I argued in my essay *Medium Practices* (*Public* journal issue 44, 2011), so the idea that it can be reduced to one thing in the way Wollen tries to impute to materialist thinking, is clearly a gross simplification. As far as I'm aware, no experimental filmmaker has ever argued that film is solely "about" sprocket holes, or grain or whatever, although they may have been concerned with some of these features at various moments. Even that most archly self-reflexive of

films, George Landow's *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc* (1966), is a complex object, consisting as it does of something that is temporal, material, flat, illusionistic and literal: it contains both photographic images and the film's own sprocket holes projected as image. I think more recent writing, like that of Colin Perry in *Art Monthly*, is simply uninformed: he doesn't seem knowledgeable about the tradition he's criticizing. However, this writing doesn't come out of nowhere. It's occurring against a background culture in which "content" is newly valorized. There's a lot of work currently that, in contrast to the investigative ethos of much experimental film and video, samples from culture: takes existing, pre-digested artifacts — texts, images, stories, ideas, films — and simply puts them together in a *mélange*. But what's noticeable about this work is that the material is not

worked through or transformed. It's simply presented for the viewer to somehow form something coherent from. The experience is a bit like going into an artist's studio and trying to work out what their work is about from all the stuff that's lying around, rather than the work they make. This tendency could also be stimulated by a kind of misconceived democratic notion that the viewer should be an equal participant in the art process, perhaps based on Marcel Duchamp's idea that the spectator completes the work:

[T]he creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.

*(The Creative Act, 1957)*

But as Duchamp's statement makes clear, the work must have some kind of coherence or rationale — its “inner qualifications” — if the spectator is to be able to enter into dialogue with it. I don't find this to be the case with a lot of contemporary work. It's not surprising that there's a covert hostility to materialist practices, which tend to be concerned with the conditions of their own ontology. A lot of contemporary work appears to be somehow critical except in relation to the givenness of its images: it seems not to offer a self-critique, therefore, precisely where it matters. This is a criticism that has often been leveled at Godard, for example in the way he represents women, yet contemporary artists seem unconcerned with what's ideologically assumed in the images they produce, quite the opposite in fact. A lot of work takes its inspiration from contemporary TV or cinema without raising any doubts about what it might be perpetuating, inadvertently or not.

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Renaissance Center / GM Tower*, 2012 (detail)  
16mm film, 4 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



## Nicky Hamlyn

In 2007 I completed a six-week filmmaking residency at the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto. Before leaving the UK I made an elaborate work plan to realize a project consisting of a suite of twelve, fifty-second long, single-take, 35mm films, to be shot at a set of equidistant locations based on a circular sweep around the city. The films were modeled on, and intended to celebrate, those of the Lumière brothers, whose original films were of the same length, in the same format, and consisted in large part of “views”. After arriving in Toronto, and having spent a few days grappling with the intricacies of blowing up Super 8 and 16mm to 35mm, I realized that I was working far outside my familiar *modus operandi* in technical terms, but more importantly my efforts to plan ahead had left no room for a flexible response to the character of the locations. There followed a few days of mild panic. What would I do? Firstly, I realized that there’s nothing wrong with depending on tried and tested methods and approaches, providing they are not allowed to become formulaic — a way of avoiding self-scrutiny and innovation. In fact, most creative practitioners rely on an evolving repertoire of gestures or procedures or methods: even free musical improvisers have recognizable timbres and licks, despite the underlying principle that what they do should not become idiomatic or harden into a style.

For the next few days my routine included a walk down Manning Avenue to a bar for an early-evening drink. This walk led to the first film, with the realization that the sidewalk resembled a filmstrip in a number of respects. It was divided into rectangles of near-identical size and shape (which isn’t always the case). The curb resembles either the sprocket-hole or soundtrack area of a film and the divisions between paving slabs the frame lines.

The presentation of film as a series of similar but different photographs depends on their being consistently registered, and this was achieved in the filming by placing the two front legs of the tripod in the dividing line between slabs, such that they are visible in the shot. The left leg was placed at the point where the dividing line meets the curb strip, so that the camera was consistently orientated on two axes. Thus the visible feet of the tripod, as well as the shadow of the camera, evidence the role of the recording device as being part of, or in, the work: a constant comparison is possible between the conditions of that which is being recorded with the condition of the technology in use.

On an aesthetic level there is a reciprocal relationship between the film frame, the framing edges and the subject matter, such that “subject matter” is a function and effect of the process, so that the distinction between recording device and subject — or “pro-filmic” — dissolves. Although not all four of the films I made succeeded as well as this first one in this regard, the project consolidated a more or less conscious process of attempting to find a rational relationship between recording device and subject. This principle has been applied in the films made during my residency at the Art Gallery of Windsor (AGW).

I was already familiar with the AGW and the city itself from previous trips to attend Media City. This knowledge partially informed my approach to the work I would make, but other considerations were in equal part technical and material.

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Four Toronto Films*, 2007 (detail); 16mm, 16 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist



I knew I would be processing most of the film in a tank and printing it by using a clockwork Bolex camera as a printer. This is done by sandwiching processed negative and unexposed film on a single camera spool and running them through the camera with the lens pointing at a white wall. In the previous year I had made a film installation using Agfa ST8, a high-contrast 16mm film stock designed not for cinematography, but for recording the optical soundtrack that is printed as a waveform along the edge of the film. It has similar characteristics to photographic paper, in that it is slow and orthochromatic, that is, not sensitive to red light. It can be used in a camera to produce high-contrast negative images.

I was immediately struck by the complex shadow play in the south gallery staircase, level two, where sunlight enters directly through the large windows, hitting the steel mesh barrier between handrail and stairs, thus casting complex shadows. The sculpture *Totem-Pole '67* by David Partridge also had similar potential as an object that was notably animated by light and shadow between the different length nails that make up its outer surface, and the space between and behind them. I also saw the potential for generating moiré patterns through the interplay of layers of mesh, which could be juxtaposed by framing through the layers, then activated by moving the camera across and around them. These three focal points provided the subjects for three black and white films, which would be shot and printed on the same Agfa film. A further pre-formed idea was brought to bear on this subject, with the realization that a positive print made from the original negative could be joined to that

negative to create a mirror structure in which the film runs the right way up in negative then, at the halfway point, flips over into upside down positive and runs backwards, thus forming a mirror structure, but which is laterally inverted in terms of the distribution of light and dark. The structure thus resembles the Mirror form found in Baroque fugues and other musical works, such as J.S. Bach's *Crab Canon*.

I was interested in the differently disruptive forms that this structure generated: right way up and forward running, but in negative, then a normal positive image that runs upside down and backwards. However, I was equally concerned to dissolve some of these distinctions. Depending on the tonality of the image, and especially when using the Agfa film, positive and negative are not necessarily distinguishable as such.

The same applies to forwards and backwards, and right way up and upside down. Thus a central concern in making work is how a priori conditions, such as the materials and technologies of image production, have a determination on the outcome. These determinations can be suppressed through the development of familiar cinematic languages, or foregrounded, as in some artists' film and video. My own concern here, in allowing technological conditions to be more than significantly determining of the work, is related to an interest in using given or found structures, specifically structures that are suggested by the form of the pro-filmic. To this end, much, though not all, of my work has had buildings and, occasionally, abstract paintings (by Angela Allen) as its

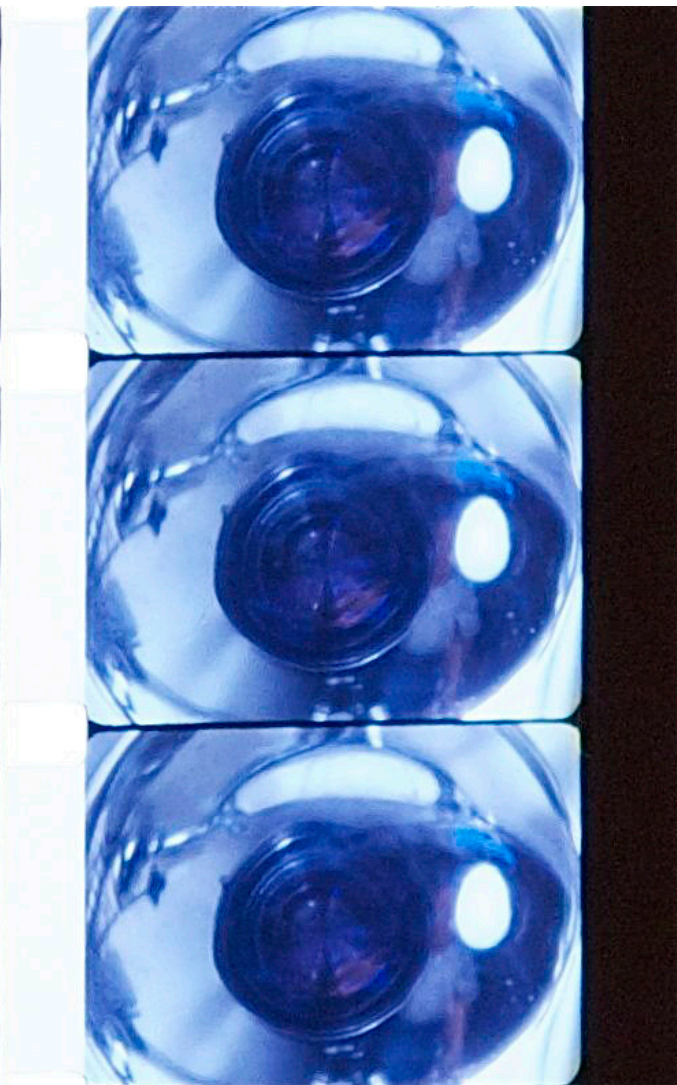
subject matter, as opposed to people or animals, though plants do make regular appearances. It is through the precise, more apparent, relationships between rectilinear forms and the film frame that these relationships can be forged, as opposed to, say, that between bushes and the camera, where different framings may make no significant difference. Thus a range of decisions, from the material characteristics of the medium through to such aspects as camera angle and framing, are derived as much as possible from existing conditions and morphologies. This is not so much in order to make the familiar point of removing subjective choice from the image making process, as it is an attempt to allow new forms and hence new perceptions to emerge from disinterested processes. Insofar as I am trying to some degree to make something unforeseeable, the work is experimental. This is not pure machine art, which would be devoid of intentionality and thus not art. Intentionality is present precisely in these decisions to absent oneself as much as possible from subjective decision making in order to fulfill the aforementioned aim of generating new forms.

Three distinct procedures were used to make the three films in the south staircase; tripod-mounted time-lapse, hand-held single frame filming and hand-held continuous filming at 24 frames per second. The time lapse film *AGW 2nd Floor South* was shot with a wide-angle lens (10mm) at a rate of one frame every twenty seconds, so that a whole day is compressed into two minutes. The camera pointed south, towards the sun. The patterns generated are far more complex than could easily have been envisaged and confirm, yet again, both Vertov's and

Kracauer's convictions that film can reveal aspects of the world that would be otherwise inaccessible to normal vision.

The film of the nail sculpture, *Totem Pole '67*, is an animation, insofar as it was shot frame by frame, using extension tubes between the lens and the camera body, which permits extreme close up filming. Because it was impractical to use a tripod, many of the frames were exposed by resting the front of the lens, or parts of the camera body, on the nails themselves. Thus the physical form of the subject comes directly to determine the outcome: it is both subject and camera support, that is, part of the technology of which it is also the subject, or rather framing device, since "support" understates its influence on the work. This reciprocal relationship between camera and subject continues, in a slightly different form, an idea first explored in an earlier film, *White Light* (1996), in which a faucet / tap is both subject and technological determinant of the work. Although the camera doesn't actually touch the tap it is filming in *White Light*, there is a strong tautological relationship between the two, which are only a few millimeters apart, in that the reflection of the lens onto itself that dominates the image is mediated by the surface that reflects it.

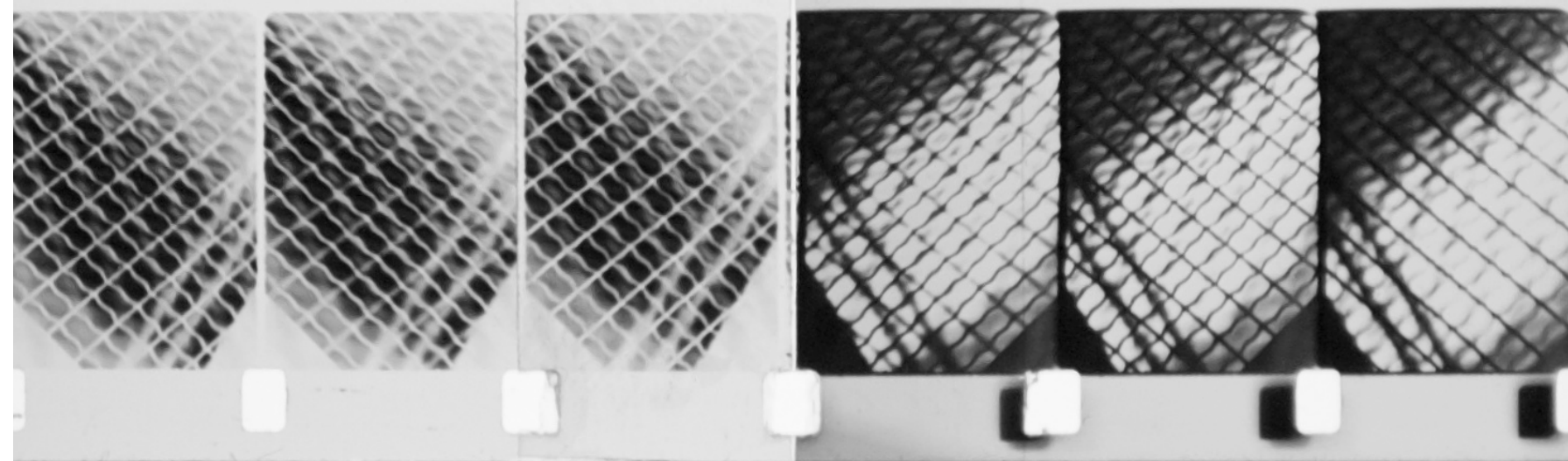
In *Totem Pole '67*, frames of the nail heads were alternated with frames of the space between them, negating / breaking down distinctions between object and surrounding space, shape and void, such that void is also defined by object, seen through it / on it, since the eye-brain superimposes the alternate frames. Again, however, the closeness of the nails to each other determines the framing



possibilities, since it is impossible to completely isolate individual nails: others are always visible in the frame, if not always in focus. This fact dictates a certain kind of approach, so that a nail may be framed centrally but the disposition of the surrounding nails varies, depending partly on their length. Thus the film brings constant and irregular elements into conjunction. At these points it bears a passing resemblance to the drawing pin sequence of Man Ray's *Retour à la Raison* (1923), but regularity is also achieved through repeated filming of the same nail or alternating nails.

The third film, *Meshes*, involved a kind of filming that I almost never do: hand-held camerawork at the normal speed of 24 fps. I long ago moved my working methods as far away as possible from what I see as techniques associated with expressionism. The exemplar here is the US filmmaker Stan Brakhage, with his incoherent notions of the camera as an extension of the eye-brain, and, related to this, the way in which his nervous camera movements constantly refer back to the unique mind-body of the filmmaker. The films in this sense are egotistical self-portraits, something I am not interested in. However, *Meshes* required specific camera movements in order both to generate the moiré patterns from the interaction of layers of mesh, and to connect those many layers to the handrail, floor and outside views in a continuous flux, so that the camera appears to dematerialize and rematerialize the space. This process

**Nicky Hamlyn:** *White Light*, 1996 (detail); 16mm, 22 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist



**Nicky Hamlyn:** *Meshes*, 2012 (detail); 16mm, 2 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

of rendering the subject as a shifting arrangement of layers and points of focus arguably draw the eye away from the camera movements per se towards the transformative effects of continuous reframing and refocusing, thus denying any sense of expressivity in favour of perceptual self-consciousness.

Two colour sections punctuate the sequence, in which colour is of primary importance. The time-lapse film *Renaissance Center / GM Tower* was shot from the third floor terrace of the AGW, at a rate of one frame every thirty seconds, compressing forty-eight hours into four minutes. Filming began at midday and ended two days later. It was shot with a 150mm telephoto lens so only

the top of the tower is visible. I was interested in the interplay of artificial animation, in the form of the repetitive cycle of the GM logo sequence, with naturally occurring movements, such as the clouds behind the tower and, thirdly, hybrid forms, such as the reflections of cloud in the semi-circular array of the tower's windows. This grid of flat planes broke the cloud reflections up into rectangular fragments that resemble film in both its appearance and manner of operation.

The second colour film is strongly contrasted to the GM tower sequence. *Red Green* is a tightly structured study of a red shopping cart on grass, filmed in the back yard of the house where I stayed during the residency.



Saturated colour contrasts are enhanced by alternating individual and pairs of frames of red and green. In a similar manner to *Totem Pole '67*, the cart also serves as a camera mount for a number of fixed, frame-by-frame sequences and moving camera shots. Camera positions were determined by the distance between the lattice of plastic bars comprising the cart's sides and bottom, while different focal lengths change the proportion of red and green in a given shot. The intention was to exhaust the physical characteristics of the cart as a subject-cum-camera mount. The use of the cart as a camera mount was consciously connected to the similar function of the nails — their physical influence and their disposition — in *Totem Pole '67*.

The most ambitious film in the series is *Parking Garage / Chatham Street West*. Here the height of the building and its sight lines, its modular construction as a set of near-identical decks, and the strong shadows cast by the building onto itself, as well as its interaction with other nearby buildings, all mould the approach to filming. The aim above all is reciprocity between camera and subject, so that subject and the camera define each other: two boxes, one very large the other small, face each other in a variety of ways. Both have an internal and external architecture and both function as nexuses for the collection, reflection and diffusion of light.

Most of the film was shot with a 150mm telephoto lens, which flattens out apparent depth. The coincidence of intersecting lines — joins, corners, ledges, edges, etc. — in the building

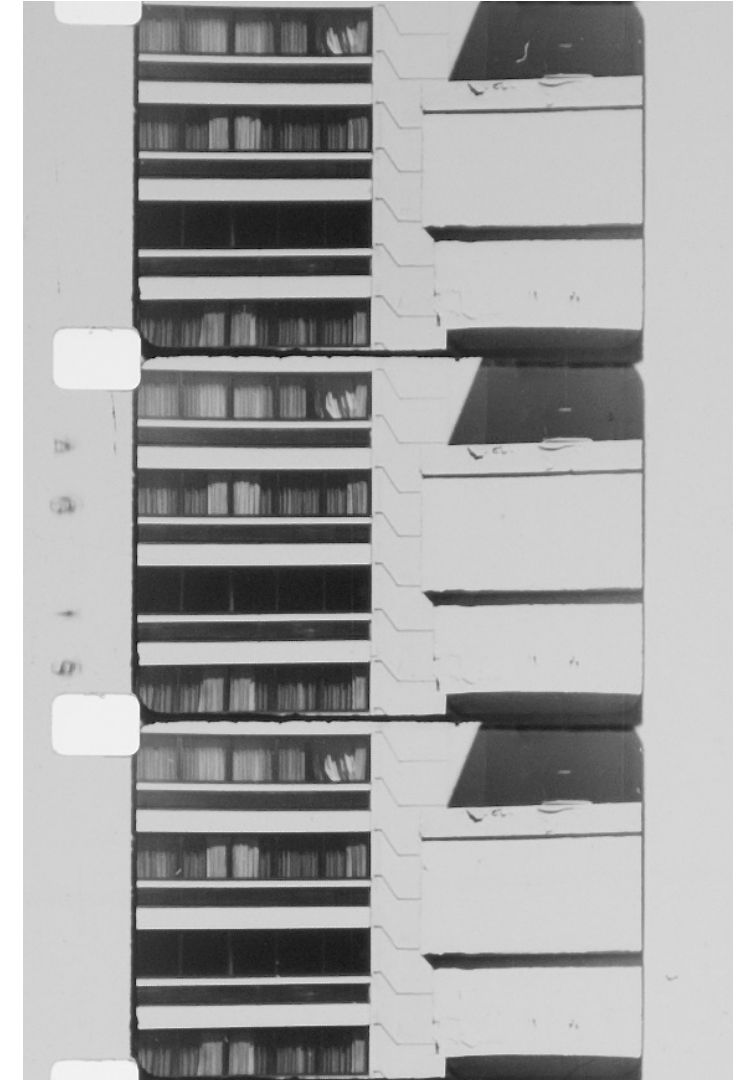
**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Renaissance Center / GM Tower*, 2012 (detail); 16mm, 4 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist

varies depending on where the camera is placed: by moving nearer or farther away, apparent conjunctions of unconnected features can be brought into being. Thus these relationships are the product of the camera's distance from, and angle of view on, the building.

The film is conceived of as a series of juxtaposed, variable scales (like those on an old-fashioned slide-rule) composed from the building's uniform repeating elements, whose pitch is determined by the pitch of the various elements of the building. The camera attempts uniformly to frame each level of the building, but the angle on a level varies depending on its distance from the ground (from where the entire film was shot) and this introduces parallax distortions, which become a feature of the work.

As well as the scales generated by the building in itself, other contrasting scales generated by juxtaposition with nearby features, such as similarly modular buildings, lamp posts etc, are also actualized. Thus the film attempts to be true to its subject, while at the same time actualizing distortions from which, in principle, the camera's position in relation to its subject could be inferred. On the other hand, given the reciprocal relationship between camera and subject, their mutual reinforcement, precludes the possibility of an Archimedean viewpoint from which the accuracy of the representations can be judged: there can only be partial points of view, fragments from which a whole can at best be conjectured.

**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Parking Garage / Chatham Street West*, 2012 (detail)  
16mm, 4 minutes; Courtesy of the artist



The final film in the series complements the first colour film, *Renaissance Center / GM Tower*. It is a single time-lapse shot of the abandoned Michigan Central Station in Detroit, filmed, like its companion, from across the river with the same 150mm lens. It was shot at a rate of one frame every ten seconds, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., during which time the sun rotates through about ninety degrees, illuminating first one, then the second of the two sides of the building that are visible from the southern bank of the Detroit river.

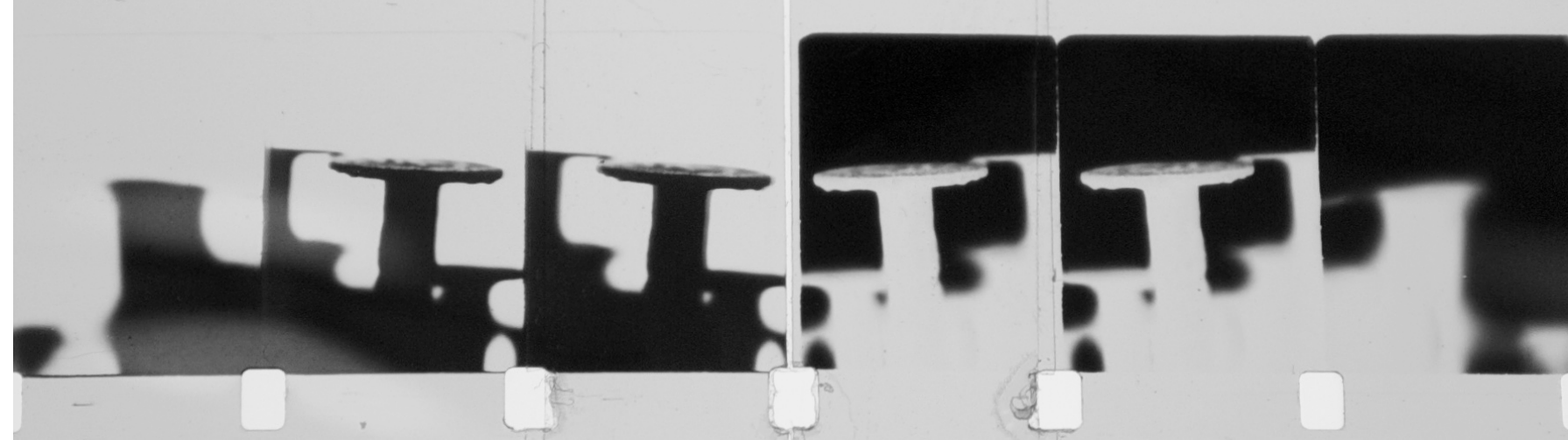
The intention here was to record subtle changes in the light as it pierced the hollow skeleton of the building. My hope was that the changing angle of the sun would alter its outward appearance, depending on how it illuminated the internal face of the northern elevation visible partially through the window openings, themselves visible from the filming position. As in other works in the series, I aimed to align a filming strategy with the character of the subject. Two sides of a building that are successively illuminated by the sun's movement through 90 degrees determined the duration of the filming (five hours). Within the limitations on camera position imposed by the river, I tried to find an angle where both sides are visible, but also one in which the empty windows in the facing elevation permit a view into the interior of the building, so that hopefully there is interplay between the sunlight reflected off the south elevation and the light reflected from inside the building.

An important feature of this suite of films is the order in which they are shown. Here the curatorial expertise

of Oona Mosna and Jeremy Rigsby was crucial in elucidating formal and semantic connections between works that had been only at best implicit. The films were shown at Media City in the following order:

1. *Renaissance Center / GM Tower*, 2012  
16mm, 4 minutes, colour, silent
2. *AGW 2nd Floor South*, 2012  
16mm, 2 minutes, b&w, silent
3. *Totem Pole '67*, 2012  
16mm, 2 minutes, b&w, silent
4. *Parking Garage / Chatham Street West*, 2012  
16mm, 4 minutes, b&w, silent
5. *Red Green*, 2012  
16mm, 2.5 minutes, colour, silent
6. *Meshes*, 2012  
16mm, 2 minutes, colour, silent
7. *Michigan Central Station*, 2012  
16mm, 1.5 minutes, b&w, silent

Firstly, this order disperses the three films made in the Art Gallery of Windsor throughout the program. The two that remain adjacent, *AGW 2nd Floor South* and *Totem Pole '67*, are strongly contrasting. *Renaissance Center / GM Tower* and *Michigan Central Station* (the first and last films in the sequence) are time-lapse works of landmark buildings, shot across the Detroit River, but also strongly contrast aesthetically. *Red Green* and *Meshes*, though also aesthetically distinct, share a concern with layers of latticework. There is also a different, static kind of latticework in *Michigan Central*



**Nicky Hamlyn;** *Totem Pole '67*, 2012 (detail); 16mm, 2 minutes; Courtesy of the artist

*Station*. In *Totem Pole '67* and *Parking Garage / Chatham Street West*, pixilation is deployed to very different ends: continuously (in *Totem Pole*), in keeping with the sculpture's being compounded from numerous identical units, and intermittently (in *Parking Garage*), in order to emphasize some of the conjunctions between disparate elements, as discussed above.

The suite of seven films discussed here consolidates a continued aim of establishing a rational reciprocity between camera and subject. However, this aim has in turn been driven by the urge to open up complexities and foment unpredictable outcomes from the process, rather than to achieve a reductive or deterministic tautology between them.

## Nicky Hamlyn: Film Works

### Art Gallery of Windsor

*Correspondences*: April 21 – June 10, 2012

Nicky Hamlyn residency: April 9 – May 26, 2012

Exhibition curators Oona Mosna and Jeremy Rigsby

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