

Simon Wilkinson

artist & film maker

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Interactive Video and expanded cinema

Over the past seven years I have been researching technologies and techniques which utilise performance and exploit the live environment in which a viewer experiences video and digital content in order to encourage kinesthetic and immersive body responses from audiences. (see artist's statement at the end of this document).

The most recent examples of this type of work include;

'The Great Spavaldos'

by Simon Wilkinson & Silvia Mercuriali – an *Il Pixel Rosso* production
Currently Touring – Co-Director / co-writer [2012]

Reviewed by **The Times** as '*a tantalisingly dreamy show which, for a short spell, takes you both out of your body yet more deeply into it at the same time,*' **The Great Spavaldos** is a 25 minute autoteatro cinema piece in which the audience experience multi-sensory integration into a film via video goggles and headphones in combination with synced live interactions with hidden performers. Commissioned by The Roundhouse, London in 2012 and funded by Arts Council South East, the piece has been created as a collaboration between myself and Silvia Mercuriali.

'What was wood will be glass...'

by Simon Wilkinson [2012]

A video installation in which the audience are invited to lie on a bed to watch a video projected on the ceiling. The bed is fitted with sub woofer speakers so that they experience the work not only with their eyes and ears but directly through their body. The work was commissioned as part of Boca-2-Mouth & PigHog Press's 'Invisible Bridges' book project in which 10 artists were asked to respond to selected poems of Galician writer Xelis de Toro. The work was made using a 1982 BBC micro computer, video, audio, a television and a flame thrower.

'The Sound of the Wind in the Trees...'

Currently touring – Director / writer [2011]

An ongoing and evolving piece of live / expanded cinema featuring interviews with older people accompanied by a soundtrack performed live and with vintage electronic instruments, 1980s home computers, live strings, noise and effects. The work is designed to evolve as it tours, adding new material from each touring location during a short residency period prior to the show so that no two performances will ever be the same. Commissioned by White Night Brighton and Hove and funded by Creative England.

An interactive online version of the work can be experienced at www.thesoundofthewindinthetrees.co.uk.
The online content will change and evolve in parallel with the live version.

'And the Birds Fell from the Sky...'

by Simon Wilkinson & Silvia Mercuriali – an *Il Pixel Rosso* production
Currently Touring – Co-Director / co-writer [2010]

Reviewed by **The Guardian** as '*a potent collaboration between a theatre and a film director,*' **And The Birds Fell from the Sky** is a 20 minute autoteatro cinema piece in which the audience experience a multi-sensory integration into the film via the technology of video goggles and headphones combined with live interactions with hidden performers. Commissioned by White Night Brighton & Hove in 2010 and funded by Arts Council South East, the piece has been created as a collaboration between myself and Silvia Mercuriali (Rotozaza). This work has been translated into six languages, featured at Tate Modern as

part of Merge Festival and has been on an extensive international tour since 2011.

'The FlopHouse'

Writer / Director [2009]

This show was designed to further explore the possibilities of the expanded cinema / theatre hybrid by presenting a six part TV series over six months, screened within a theatre which itself was a location in the film. The FlopHouse as a live environment was a bizarre cabaret club featuring off kilter performances from a cast of theatrical characters. Three times during each evening the live action would freeze and the screen would come alive with the TV show; the narrative within the TV show featured a parallel story incorporating the live characters and designed to draw a bridge between the cinematic world and the audience within the live environment. In this way the audience found themselves becoming characters within the story; interacting with characters on and off screen and with elements they experienced live in the show often appearing on screen later within the TV show.

'The Raven's Song'

Co-Writer / Director [2008]

An Arts Council funded show which experimented with fusing live performance and pre-recorded film / audio into a single narrative. Working with story telling musicians 'The Hat' I developed a narrative built around a fictional suitcase of the old 16mm films, reel to reel recordings and musical scores of 1940s swing band 'Vincent and the Viceroy's'. Past and present merge with live performers walking off stage and appearing in the projected films, travelling between worlds and becoming embroiled in the Viceroy's dark legacy of fame, fortune, murder and deceit.

'Seeking Connection'

Writer / Director [2009]

An outdoor projection commissioned as part of Brighton's 2009 White Night Festival. The projection purported to show a news broadcast from the year 2069 which had been received through a wormhole created by the Large Hadron Collider. The projection itself was supported by a series of radio interviews with myself claiming to have been the recipient of a bursary from astronaut Buzz Aldrin, enabling me to work with CERN to research the possibilities for sending and receiving television signals across the divide of space and time.

Dance for Camera

I have been working with dance for camera since 2001, collaborating with a range of choreographers and disciplines including;

'Red Dolly'

2001 – made as a collaboration with choreographer / performer Shelley Love. This film was shown on Channel 4 as part of their Dance on Screen season and has toured extensively Internationally.
funded by South East Dance

'Aparato'

2002 – made as a collaboration with choreographer / performer Miriam King. This film has toured extensively on the international dance festival circuit.

'Atropos'

2003 – directed by Simon Wilkinson in collaboration with choreographer / performer Miriam King. This film has toured extensively on the international circuit.
funded by Arts Council England and South East Dance

'Mrs. Sparkle'

2009 – directed as a collaboration with choreographer / performer Matthew Hellet.
funded by South East Dance and Arts Council South East

Artist's Moving Image

Since 1994 I have been making films which straddle the line between narrative film and artist's moving image. Below are recent and salient examples of this work, clips can be seen on my website at www.circa69.co.uk

'British Art Show 7 - 2010 – Artist Video Portraits'

Circa69 – October 2010 – director

Four video portraits of British Council showcase fine artists for exhibition at the South Bank Centre. Portraits of Phoebe Unwin, Cullinan + Richards, Matthew Darbyshire and George Shaw.

'Horsey'

2010 – made as a collaboration with performers *The Two Wrongies*.

This film is currently touring internationally as part of 'GLITCH', a collection of Circa69 short films

'Sparkle'

2008 – duration 3 minutes – director / soundtrack composer.

Award winning portrait of learning disabled drag queen Mrs. Sparkle. The film, shot on black and white Super 8 film, shows Matthew Hellett transform himself into his glamorous alter-ego whilst explaining what it is that makes Mrs. Sparkle important to him.

'Quiet Mary Fish Momma'

2007 – duration 7 minutes – director / composer

For this film I carried a video camera around with me at all times for three months asking the same question of many people I encountered in my everyday life. They were asked how they felt about someone close who had died. The answers were edited in such a way that all the participants appear to be talking about the same person and through this device the unsettling story of 'Mary' emerges.

'GLITCH'

2011 – a collection of Circa69 Video short which is currently touring internationally.

Education / Lecturing Work

*In addition to lecturing a film module at **Brighton University** I am a director of **Junk TV Ltd** and have, for the past twelve years managed and facilitated a hugely diverse range of youth and community film productions work with disability groups, Youth Offending Services, schools, travellers groups, youth clubs and older people. In the past eight years I have forged a strong collaboration with Carousel leading to the creation of **Oska Bright Film Festival**, the award winning international festival of short films made by people with a learning disability.*

Awards & Achievements

2009 - 'Best Documentary' - Picture This Film Festival – Calgary, Canada
2009 – shortlisted with Dave Blake for 'Artists Taking the Lead' Olympic commission
2008 - 'Best Lottery Funded Art Project 2007' BBC Lottery Big 7 Awards for Oska Bright
2008 - Best Art Film - FFTV Awards
2008 - 'Best Animation' - Picture This Film Festival - Canada
2008 - Koestler Award - Best Feature Film ' for 'The Front'
2007 - Triangle Award for 'Gypsy'
plus two First Light Awards for facilitated youth films

Directorships Past and Present

*Junk TV Ltd (2000 - present day)
The Basement Arts Production (2005 - 2008)*

Websites about the work of Simon Wilkinson

www.circa69.co.uk
www.ilpixelrosso.org.uk
www.junk-tv.com
www.thesoundofthewininthetrees.co.uk

Artistic Statement

When film was first made available to the public as an entertainment medium in the late 1890's the spectacle of seeing photographs move was nothing short of miraculous and totally immersive as an audience experience; in particular, magicians, who had previously exploited the potential of articulable magic lantern slides, incorporated film into their performances, projecting through smoke to create phantasmagoric effects and convincing audiences to entirely suspend their disbelief by presenting the projections as a revelation of something supernatural.

Cinema was so spectacular adept at presenting fictional realities naturalistically, however, that even without such theatrical presentational techniques the medium exploded in popularity; taking its cues from theatre to embark on it's own developmental journey, building on the strengths inherent to the form and, in particular, it's ability to convey narrative realism using a fast evolving visual grammar which aligned, ever more closely, with the ways in which human brains process information received through the eyes and ears. In this way cinema rapidly transcended theatre to become the most popular artform of the 20th Century and as it developed it was realism at which it increasingly excelled.

The audience file into a large room, the lights go down, the film starts and before long they have forgotten who and where they are to become bewitched by the moving images and booming surround sound crafted to convey a hypnotically engrossing narrative until, 90 minutes later, they are released from the spell, stepping out of the theatre and back to their everyday existence. So goes the theory.

But over time researchers have noted a consistent dropping off of audience focus, particularly with regard to broadcast television. The form is no longer miraculous. Typically a television audience will split their attention between the screen and other distractions within the room in which they sit to the extent that a 40 to 50% focus on screen is considered normal. Programme makers work hard to create content which is ever more engrossing in a bid to maintain audience focus and high ratings.

In the 1960s there was a trend for cinemas to employ actors who would dress up as zombies to invade the auditorium en mass, terrorising the audience just as the the zombies within the cinematic reality were engulfing the main characters on screen. Such actions create a bridge between the fictional reality on screen and the reality of the room in which the audience are sitting in a way that has the power to reframe the world into an immersive dreamlike hybrid of both realities. Which is difficult to ignore.

The live environment in which a screen is being watched is hugely significant to the way in which audiences engage with cinematic realities. Since 2006 this concept has been central to my artistic practice, finding ways to use technology, environment and performance to create immersive and kinesthetically engaging audience experiences.