

## From the Fabric of Things

### *Difference Screen Dispatches*

By Gareth Evans

*A metaphor brings us into relation with the universe. It is a pattern in embryo, and there would be no poetry today if we did not still retain our primitive sense that meaning must fall into a pattern, or a pattern hold meaning.* - Roger Garfitt, from [www.fiveseasonspress.com/RoadToHeratIntroductionExtract.pdf](http://www.fiveseasonspress.com/RoadToHeratIntroductionExtract.pdf)

#### *Preface*

Due to the fact that the archive of works that make up *Difference Screen* will be experienced in variant programmes, sequences and assemblies across its life and across the world, this essay has focused on thinking *around* the specific pieces included, seeking to contextualise and to examine recurrent themes and any shared or divergent strategies present, rather than to provide summary or analysis of individual works, often provided in the contributor notes related to each title.

#### *1. Creating the Conditions*

Place begins when space is occupied by time. It is continued by the operation of unfolding elements within the dimensions established and is fully realised when those elements, on leaving the zone that has been created, look back as they mark the growing distance between themselves and the site and consider it, this location of origins and intention, with degrees of response that might range from longing to loathing, mistrust to melancholy; in short, the emotional memory of belonging (once, perhaps again...), which, expressed, enough, becomes culture.

Becomes identity:

I  
You  
We

Becomes culture...

#### *2. Difference*

The state or quality of being unlike

A specific instance of being unlike

A distinguishing mark or feature

A significant change in a situation

A disagreement or argument

A degree of distinctness

The result of subtraction

*and in secondary meanings...*

To have an effect  
To compromise

*from the Latin: differre, literally: to bear off, hence scatter, from dis- apart and ferre- bear*

### 3. *Moving Image*

Given that place is this productive conjunction of space with time, it follows, perhaps inescapably, that the media most suited to its exploration might be those that deal equally in such a union. Of these, the moving image – so named, it seems now, as much for its sensibility as for its technical qualities – is by some margin the most effective at delivering productive, even profound results. It is eclipsed only by music, that fleeting occupation of the air above the ground of a place, but it has often avoided its secondary status by incorporating the organised and melodic aural into its own project, therefore claiming not only its sonic glories but even, when particularly suited, giving the illusion that *it* occupies the pre-eminent role in the partnership.

### 4. *Screen* (italics are author's own)

A light movable frame, panel or partition *servicing to shelter, hide, divide etc.*; anything that serves to shelter, protect or conceal; a frame containing a mesh (put across a window to keep out insects); *a decorated partition*, behind which it is common to undress; a sieve; *a system for selecting people*, often for task suitability; a white or silvered surface, usually fabric, placed in front of a projector to receive the enlarged image of a film or slides; the wide end of a cathode ray tube, e.g. television; men or ships deployed around and ahead of a larger military formation *to warn of attack or protect from a specific threat*; anything that *prevents a person from realising their true feelings about someone or something*; to examine for the presence of e.g. a disease or hidden weapons.

*from the Old French: escren; related to the Old High German: skrank: cupboard*

### 5. *Engine*

*Difference Screen* is a difference engine. That is, it is not only a vessel but a maker of difference. In its choice of works, their contents and forms; its juxtaposition of images; its truly internationalist sourcing, stations and collaborations; its unpredictable sites of projection -

(from cave – perfect that *Difference Screen* is first delivered underground, in 4,500 year old mines, originally worked for ochre pigment; caves of forgotten dreams... painted, now projected images on the flicker flanks of walls – to industrial barge on the Thames; and from there to *all that is*; a post-imperial return of the world to the world... from country to country – Georgia, Vietnam, Mongolia, South Korea...) -

its aspiration for new, as yet unseen constellations; in all of these ways and more, it *generates* difference, so far from the usual suspects, its makers, despite one or two names familiar to British audiences for artists' film and video.

This difference, when expanded – or distilled – to the degree it is here, becomes a search for what finally unites us, across all the borders of 'supposed' 'unlikeness'. This is the primary rewarding paradox of *Difference Screen*. By not knowing the language, we must find other ways to speak to others. *Difference Screen* is an othering machine that refuses to abuse or ignore the 'other'.

### 6. *Whose Local Is It Anyway?*

In Michelangelo Antonioni's defining 1975 feature *The Passenger* (in Italian, *Professione: Reporter*), Jack Nicholson's journalist protagonist steals a dead man's identity and proceeds to live out this borrowed life. At one point, circumstances dictate that he make a long walk back to his North African hotel through the desert. He passes a Bedouin man and attempts to speak to him. The man does not reply or even acknowledge him. In fact, it appears that the man does not even see him, and this is not because he is looking elsewhere, is preoccupied or does not understand the entreaty Nicholson is making, but *because the two men do not exist in the same territory of time and space, in the same place*. They cannot meet.

### 7. *Short*

The overwhelming majority of these films is short; in duration only, not in ideas. In a culture of exponential acceleration, attention occupies an altered priority and is no longer a given, a granted component, in the

encounter with an artefact or image. Impact is not the same as attention. We might recall the difference between shock and suspense, so famously and effectively understood by Alfred Hitchcock. Show / create an explosion and there is horror and discord. Plant a bomb and reveal that information only to a selective number, and at once the device become altogether more implicated – in the narrative, in the lives of those whose paths might meet its realisation. Can it be found, be defused or removed, in time (and also, of course, in place)...

So it is with a short film. Brevity can generate sudden and substantial impressions. In this temporal concentration, however, it is normally much harder to install depth, which is the fuel that attention craves. And yet, this compacting of the clock *can* create intensity, an initially concealed energy whose constituent parts only reveal themselves *after* the event of their expression. In this way, they operate like the light of stars, heralds to us from the past, despite our perception of them as apparent in the same moment as our breath.

They are threads torn from the fabric of things, from which it might be possible, with scrutiny, generosity and even an iteration of faith, to establish the whole of which they are a part.

#### 8. *Longer*

In light of this, it makes richly charged and political sense that the longest piece (a minute over an hour) is Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi's *The Day I Disappeared*. A work of the epic everyday (for millions of people, voluntary and not), it tracks, in many registers and frames, its maker's moves from Iran to Western Europe, through the various arenas of vanishing that such a journey entails. We are regularly assured – for our own security of course - that it is impossible to dissolve one's public face and footfall, to escape the panopticon gaze of planet-wide surveillance. And yet, and yet, and every day, numerous migrants achieve just that, are forced or choose to enact an unravelling of their signature selves; burning papers, changing or losing names, even filing fingerprints clear off, so that the tree rings of their unique growing are forever deleted; and all such casualties remain the still walking brothers and sisters to the countless unknown ended violently – in starvation crossings, drowning, trafficked suffocation, detention, deportation, enslavement, suicide; fatal fears made shockingly real.

For those that do make it through – to where, with what – they are permanently changed, and what they hold might only be as tangible as film, as what a hand raised in the projector beam can grasp, the thrown light of a path in dust that closes more finally than night ever can or does.

#### 9. *Medium*

Realm of ghosts; clairvoyant cinema, calling those passed to presence; we cast our losses, our fears, our dreams, our hope back to birth every time the screen is lit; back so that we might move forward into the space that exists when the gleam has gone; when the screen can no longer protect us from the full and present glare of day. When everything has vanished into thin air, only the shed skin of the image remains to console us, the torn security that we take with us, held deep in the eye, at the place where the mind meets the heart (impossible to locate in any autopsy), forward into the all too claustrophobic chambers of the times within which we *must* live; must *live*.

If it is remembered, it has not died; it has *only* passed... away.

#### 10. *On Volume*

The world is a camera. No conspiracy here, but who determined that every new technology, regardless of its ostensible purpose, should also carry a lens... all of us Warholians now, so we surely are...

But this is something more, beyond the human gaze cults, the catwalk consciousness we briefly all can know – and *feel* – and share, now that everywhere is everywhere and everyone is (potentially at least) looking on... (youtube check at 23.32 / 4.7.13: Psy's *Gangnam Style*: 1,701,561,576 views).

Take this to its endpoint conclusion and it transpires that - given the long since reaching of a critical mass, when it comes to a dynamic and predatory relationship between image volume and its relation to population, topographic area and scale, 'event' moments and also, indeed especially, the daily acts of no particular note even

to their participants - the image seen is no longer being perceived by independent human eyes and minds but, far more likely, *by other images*... The mirrors are now the hall and all beyond it too.

Homer Simpson knows a thing or two. When Bart, through various ingenious plot devices, is required to skateboard home naked through town, he relays his shame and humiliation to his old man, declaring that 'this is the worst day of my life.' Opening another beer, Homer looks at him with a face etched in the bright yellow wisdom of ages and replies, 'the worst day of your life... so far.'

## 11. Strategies

Scale surprises: a nipple expressing its milk is given the pictorial prominence respecting of its function (*my mother the mountain*...); a rain window becomes a vast terrain; an ice wall could be (hundreds of) metres high; an action figure becomes larger even than life; everywhere, inversions and reverses: the world turned upside down...

Conceptual play: formal games – with serious intent - that reconfigure the relationship to place and to the 'place' of the image...

Performance: the self becoming *itself* in light of its own reading; light readings; ritual behaviours to stave off collapse; enterprises of enduring...

Image bank: graphic apertures (screening the image from complete view); stilled images for a dead cinema (frozen time); tableaux vivants in the Russian forest; the smeared car window onto snow; the saving and salve of super 8; the split screen; the spinning lens, lassoing what it sees...

Text: from Gertrude Stein to Bulgarian Chalga, post-Soviet turbo pop; from Samuel Beckett to Tahrir Square tweets; from children learning to Gaelic extinctions; what goes around might not come round again...

Understated anthropologies of the visual, gathering the evidences of salvage ethnography (drawn from the sinking ship of history); reclamations before erasure: of Soviet women; of the fallout – literal and otherwise – from Nevada nuclear tests; of the Polish space programme; of military experimentation on shifting shingle spits; the trails and travails of the Vietnam war; the elevations still possible in a city of dead factories; and then the actual dead, and how the work has only just begun...

To borrow a phrase, so it goes...

## 12. Sure Thing

*Difference Screen* is an engine of, and seeks to manifest *against*, doubt and anxiety. These are works poised on the double edge of various blades (the balancing act of simply being); between hesitancy and conviction, loneliness and communion, history (seen and felt from the inside) and flight. It is a catalogue of thresholds – children, windows, doors, roads, journeys, the other shore of the river, cable cars – between... to dive or not to dive...

So *Difference Screen* investigates the challenges of choice in an era OCDed by it. Thus, to decide becomes a form of resistance; to decide, for example, to consume less, to live by other codes...

*Difference Screen* can move in seconds from myth to the all-too-grinding mundane – riding a scrap metal horse through almost more checkpoints than miles.

However, these are not really options or oppositions or even shifts when it comes (as it often does) to the crunch; rather than being twin faces of a sharpened implement, they are the two sides-become-one of a Mobius strip.

### 13. *Holding Device*

John Berger phrased it well, as might be expected. He said that he hoped he's never written even one line that wasn't informed by the political and social reality of things as experienced by the majority of the world's population. He wasn't saying there should be placards in every love poem, rhetoric in every delicate observation of human mystery; rather, that the truths of one's own place could never be separated from the truths of others; that one must stay awake, stay alert, pay attention; that, living responsibly, he said, *never again will a single story be told as if it were the only one.*

Now, that larger reality, within which all these stories must live, is starker than ever. Here it is...

[www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jun/30/population-growth-wipe-out-life-earth](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jun/30/population-growth-wipe-out-life-earth)

*Difference Screen* wants to teach us how not to fall into these black holes, the spaces between the fibres of the nets we have crafted together to hold us in to something recognisable as order; how not to fall and drag all else with us...

Finally, *Difference Screen* is curation as ellipsis, as what *cannot* be said, *cannot* be shown, as what can only be experienced. Sometimes, acceptance is just another word for nothing left to lose.

### 14. *This*

There's no law against my listening  
to this thrush behind the barn,  
the song so loud it echoes like a bell,  
then it's further off beyond the lawn.  
Whatever else there is, there's this as well.

There's no law against this singing –  
nesting I suppose – up in the silver birch,  
even though we build a common hell,  
have done, and will make it worse.  
Whatever else there is, there's this as well.

by Maitreyabandhu, from *The Crumb Road*, published 27.6.13  
[www.bloodaxebooks.com/titlepage.asp?isbn=1852249749](http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/titlepage.asp?isbn=1852249749)

### *Postscript*

The written conditions: breeze of an evening in the residential urban; blown scent of marsh channels and meadow grass; traffic's surf, its oily ebb and flow; music: Eleni Karaindrou, scoring the distances between; an easy summer quiet in the block, the fluent foxes out; promised heat by morning, so it's said; something different, good: the sun and then the screen.

*Clapton, London: 5.7.13*

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