

DW: So you have made installations...

GS: Well, there are two pieces, which are quite recent which I never quite got right; *Mobius Loops* and *Abrasion Loops* [2006]. *Abrasion Loops* has two [performers]; Lynn [and I] are both on projectors at either end of a long wall. The Chisenhale Gallery has this huge white wall. And the projector is quite close to the wall and then – we alternate by turning [projectors] on and off. And you start to see a little image either side and then we turn them till they start to angle across each other, and they face each other. And the image is – well, the image makes a sound as well, it's sandblasted film leader. So, it's kind of an all over image, a bit like white noise, white sparkle dust.

DW: Is it coloured?

GS: Well, the leader's bluish. So you get slight blue films. Whereas it has a very loud soundtrack. So, it's kind of [coloured].

DW: So, it's quite immersive.

GS: Immersive. That's a good word. It's an immersive piece. Definitely.

DW: So, [are] all these works are quite specific to the spaces that they're shown in? Or do you adapt them to it?

GS: Well, this one came about partly because up to that point I'd been making works and adapting slightly to spaces, as one does. But when I got invited to do a show at Site Gallery in Sheffield, and again, they had this great white wall, and I thought: "Why don't I start with the white wall and see what I can think of doing with a big white wall like that." So, it all came out of that. So it was site specific in relation to a large white wall. [Laughs].

DW: It's a kind of response to that blank screen in a way.

GS: Hmm. Well obviously, I've always enjoyed projecting and light and projectors. William [Raban] did a very nice piece with angled projectors [*Diagonal* 1973]. So, I acknowledge him as an influence.

DW: One of the questions I was going to ask was, that in your work, the projector seems to be as important as the camera. Would you say that this was true?

GS: Definitely. I mean in recent works. I even mention that in this book. [Guy Sherwin, *Optical Sound Films: 1971-2007* (London: Lux, 2008)]... The camera isn't even used in a work like *Mobius Loops*. I just get leader and put Sellotape on it and have household

bleach, strip it away, turn it into loop, and it's all down to projector and performance. There's no camera involved.

DW: There's quite a tradition of that type of filmmaking isn't there?

GS: Well, yes there is. I think there are various traditions. I mean the masters of this approach, I would say – I was going to say Metamkine (the group based in Grenoble) but they do use cameras. We're talking about the tradition of projector-based films.

LL Like Tony Conrad's...

GS: Bruce McClure is the key one isn't he? He's really cool... What have you seen [of his]?

DW: Well, I've watched all of Mark Webber's documentation [of performances] at Stuttgart and Dortmund [in 2006].

GS: You can't document Bruce McClure. He's the one person you can't document.

DW: This is the thing. I know. Mark has this exact argument. He's quite reluctant – he – Mark says: "As long as you realise it's not the same as seeing it."

GS: Hmm.

DW: Of course it's not, but it is interesting to see Bruce McClure give this lecture about 'how I'm here', before he starts his screening, and of course I'm watching a document of a work. And Mark's pointing out that there are problems with the video which means there are parts of the film you can't see because of the [optical] phasing in the video recording and things like that...

GS: It's not just parts of the film. I think it's the whole thing is a completely different kind of image... Bruce is the only person to whom I've sent the DVD to and he's written back...

LL: He didn't want to look at it.

GS: He wasn't particularly polite. [Laughs]. Not: "Thank you." But: "I got this stuff. What do I do with it?" [Laughs].

DW: What from the book?

LL: I think he likes the book but the idea of the DVD – watching those films on DVD.

GS: 'No, you don't want to do that'.

DW: Yeah, I'm looking forward to asking him about my BFI day [The Live Record – on the theme of documentation], just to see how admonishing the response is. [At 'The Live Record'] I'd quite like to display paper documentation and things. Things like drawings and diagrams that come out of these works.

- GS: Bruce has got lots of raw text. There's a publication coming out. Do you know this one? [Live Cinema: A Contemporary Reader— 2008] It's by Thomas Beard, that's got some text by Bruce. Can't make head nor tail of any of it!
Bruce's work is very intense. It's usually in one spot. It's like several projectors onto one image. It's not like he spreads it around. I guess all you need is a white wall or screen.
- LL: And a good sound.
- GS: Oh, the sound. The sound for him is very important. Especially recently, the stuff we saw in Windsor – he described it, he said he wanted the image to be like a dumb thing.
- DW: [Laughs]
- GS: [Its as if] there's not much going on with the image, is there? 'Oh, come on, do something with the image Bruce'. But the sound was... he's almost become sort of a tekkie-fiend/sound-whiz person with all these foot pedals and things.
- DW: The sound becomes as important to him as the image. But you were saying, rather than a tradition of that type of non-camera-based work there was a tradition...
- GS: Well, I think there are national traditions. There are groups based in the States like Silt and Wetgate, I think they're called. Then there are people like Bruce, and Luis Recoder and Sandra Gibson. From what I've seen there's not as much in the States that you might expect from a country that size. In a way it's a stronger tradition here. Well, here through Filmaktion having its roots here probably, being important in the 70s. And then more recently I would say in France, it's quite strong. We went to this big event in Brussels; it was called Rencontre des Labs, or something like that. It's like where all these labs like no.w.here and Film B from Newcastle, and Metamkine and Light Lines and L'abominable in Paris; loads of them, all came to talk about how to carry on processing film, with the idea that commercial labs are gradually declining. But all these groups were centred around laboratory work because they also reacted with projectors and more a kind of spectacle thing. I think that the French thing is more of a spectacle, like Metamkine is spectacular. You get the feeling it's almost got a circus thing thrown into it. What is it?
- DW: Circus in the round?
- GS: Yeah, there's one I'm think of that's French but I can't remember the name. But they're incredibly skilled with projectors and loops and things they put in front, and mirrors. Sa Vie and others, two or three of them working together onto a large sort of canvas. Sometimes they work down in front of the audience and bounce the light off mirrors. So you see them at work and also the image behind them. Metamkine is sometimes called MTK; there's L'etna, they do silhouettes; Light Lines; Coochie Cinema; no.w.here; Exploding Cinema; Brackhage. I think they're based in Paris; Film B – Christa Waller's, Newcastle, voluntary group... L'abomiabile is George Ray basically. They've got their own lab. He does expanded work. With a narrative element, definitely; Etna. I think this is Miles McKane, I think he's a sort of based in Paris but some in the regions. Another [Paline] one; MTK might be the longest or the most in depth one.

DW: Shall I ask you some of these interview standards? How would you define Expanded Cinema?

GS: Definition is difficult. Expanded Cinema – it's the name of a book by Gene Youngblood [1970], which takes in a whole mass of stuff, I didn't really like the book but, because it was too sci-fi, visionary, techie kind of geeky.

DW: [Laughs]. Were you aware of it in the 70s?

GS: Yeah. It's actually one of the few books I didn't buy. I'd usually buy anything I could lay my hands on, but that one I sort of looked at it and just put it down again. I just didn't want to go there. Probably now I might prefer it – it's full of like enthusiastic stuff about...

DW: It's quite – Gloria Sutton calls it: "Techno Utopianist".

GS: Is that the first use of the term of Expanded Cinema? Gene Youngblood?

DW: No. Stan Vanderbeek – the first printed use of it is [probably] in Film Culture in 1966. [Jonas Mekas showed a season 'Expanded Cinema' in New York in 1964]

GS: Like we just discussed just now - there are various threads and various histories of Expanded Cinema. But the one that means most to me of course, is the British tradition, if you like. Which started with Malcolm [LeGrice], William [Raban], Annabel [Nicolson], Gill Eatherley, a few others. There were other people like David Dye around at the time. And I was slightly later; I picked up on that stuff and started to do it myself. But I think, I prefer that term [Live Cinema] because it's not too spectacular, it's not too flashy, it's not trying to just impress, and it's not sort of visionary. It's not negative things – well, some people might see them as negative but – you can see how the work's made, where it's coming from, and it's all laid out, and it's also very visually interesting and very engaging and surprising. So its kind of materialist based. You could say.

DW: OK. So it's that kind of mixture of turning a production into a kind of live – into a performance. You can see how it's made and it's also interesting to look at.

GS: Yes. The performance and the production are pretty much the same thing. So it's not like a magic show. You see [Metamkine] is a bit like watching a magic show. 'Wow, look at that'. Although it is laid out in front of you too. So, it's a bit unfair. But you know, they'll make sort of beautiful and metaphoric and lyrical imagery. But I guess with me, and those people too, there's always an interest in perception, and trying to get to the root of how we see and how we process information. So it's got a semi-sort of scientific side to it. Hard nosed exploration of what is possible with the materials in this medium. That would be one way of looking at it. It's not narrative, no. Narrative does not come into it. Well it does for lots of people, but for me it doesn't. It's all about trying to find the forms, which aren't narrative. [Laughs].

DW: So, what is the your relationship to your narrative?

GS: Well, you could say there's another way of looking at narrative in my work, which is that most of my works now seem to go back to previous works and they sort of refer to them and adapt them. [For example] a film like *Camden Road Station* actually, it's a three screen film in which the projectors just start up and after ten minutes the piece is finished; it was originally shot in '73 and then I finished it, what, 30 years later. So there's a kind of element there of narrative in its own history; and that happens a lot obviously the *[Man with] Mirror* piece, in which there are long gaps since I've finished and I've got older, and I'm still in it, and it creates a narrative. Narrative is almost like a by-product of being around a long time doing the same thing [Laughs]. It sort of becomes narrative by default.

DW: But do you think you leave the process of narrative up to the audience, in watching?

GS: No, because you're assuming that narrative is a necessary part of the viewing experience. I don't think it is. I mean, it's like saying if you listen to a piece of music you need to give a reaction to the content to understand it. You don't. People did that. They tried to make narrative pieces of music. But they weren't really necessarily that successful. So, it just depends where you're coming from and what your assumption about film is. In this kind of work, the assumption is not that it has anything to do with narrative at all. [Laughs]. Because that's always been the project I see for this kind of work. What are the things that are possible outside the narrative? Narrative is so dominant in our lives – so dominant in cinema and television and so on. Let's see what you can do if you put that to one side. What is this medium? What's it capable of doing? So you could say – yes, it wants to close the door on narrative [Laughs]. That doesn't help your project at all.

LL: It's funny you say that. I mean this idea that you try to do everything without a narrative, but every time I see a performance like *Camden Road* again. There's so much story in that, that people react to it. You know? And *[Mile End] Purgatorio* [1991]. There is some sort of strong narrative. But then, it's like you said, the audience can't help it, because that's how you can relate to it.

GS: That's true. People look for hooks. Confronted with something that's difficult. You want something; you want to be able to understand it. The narrative hook is an easy one and people bring their own narratives to things whether you like it or not. I think people have a different – what's the word? – susceptibility? No, that's not the right word. Need for narrative, or something like that. Some people see the world in narrative terms, and I've tried not to.

DW: [Laughs].

GS: My father is a scientist and he would see Maths as the root of things, you know. You could look at the world in terms of mathematics. It's just how you decide to look at the things. But – what was I going to say?

LL: The audience, you've brought a different relation to it. Although you say the way you work is not that [narrative] way, but then you look to an audience. It just – I don't know – [the audience] brings more ideas to it?

- GS: Well, you can bring ideas, *Mobius Loops* is, I hope, not a narrative. But I'm sure people will see it as a narrative. They'll see like – there's a red thing that goes up and now it's down here so maybe it's started to feel lonely or something.
There are events, which you organise in a certain way, which forms a linear programme, and you can say that creates a kind of narrative. I mean, if you came halfway through on that you wouldn't be the same as seeing it from the beginning and you would have missed the way it developed. So, there are developments. But is that the same as narrative? I've no idea. I don't think it is. Somebody might tell me it is.
- DW: Well, it might be if there's that durational aspect. There's a start and an end and that's all you need for a narrative.
- GS: What is the root of the word narrative? To narrate? I was thinking of it as to tell.
- LL: You say like *Mobius Loops*, but I had the privilege to watch you develop that piece, I thought it was a form of narrative, because as you say there's a development isn't there? But you are also consciously thinking: how do you introduce one thing to another...You know you say: "OK, I'll start slow with this, then I'll introduce this and then you get to this..."
- GS: But that's just like music. Isn't it? In classical sonata form you have theme A, which might be a strong theme. And then you have theme B, which might be a lyrical theme and then you bring in some kind of conflict and it comes to a climax, you know and it resolves. Is Sonata form a narrative form? I don't know if it is. Would it be called a narrative form? If you can describe these things in music and explain it in music and resolve that, then maybe just transcribe that to film. Maybe that's your answer?
- DW: I'm not sure, but I do think there's something to be said for narrative being this relational device, or this way of organising meaning, or organising the elements of meaning. I don't know if that sounds similar to...
- GS: I don't [like] the use of the word meaning. [Laughter]... It's always the word I'm trying to get out [of], when I teach. What about 'elements of meaning'? Elements of engagement? The way you might engage with something. I mean, 'meaning' is just a sort of closure, you know like: "OK, we've seen the piece, that's the final thing, now we understand it, that's what it meant."
- DW: I think of meaning - as you were saying - as 'moments of engagement'. I don't mean there's meaning in the film that's somehow pre-existing. I mean I can access that somehow, through watching it.
What about the idea of more than one screen? More than one projector? If you like – in a film on three screens. I think multi-screen films are interesting because you tend [to move from one to another] as you're watching them. I mean, there's an impossibility going into them. You can't watch everything at the same time. It's about the relationships between the different screens and whether that sets up some kind of narrative act perhaps?
- GS: I think that's an anti-narrative device, actually. I think the fact that there's two or three things means you can't create a linearity out of it. I mean, to complicate things, narrative cinema, so-called, has brought in lots of forms now, which seem to take that

on. I haven't seen that one by Mike Figgis - *Timecode* [2000]. That has four screens and four characters, hasn't it? And each one – a soundtrack belonging to each one in turn.

DW: Yeah, it's really the sound that drives you from one screen to another. You can see everything going on at the same time... Because of the way the sound tunes in from one screen to another. You kind of follow that. And he's edited it so that the story as it were stays with the sound.

GS: You could be perverse and decide to watch one of the other screens.

DW: Exactly. And often you do. You find yourself going: "Well, I'm not actually sure Mike, that this is the most important part that is going on at this moment."

GS: [Laughs] Yes.

But you get some interesting narrative things happen through the audience. There's this film I show which is also a three-screen called *Bay Bridge From Embarcadero* [2006]; I shot it in San Francisco, and sometimes there are three images side by side, sometimes they link up to be one panorama. But also the camera is shifting slightly. So, sometimes it's quite a complex formation, with repeats of course, just depending on which part of section of vision you're looking at. And then there are people walking, and jogging and stuff like that, cars going by. There's a bunch of kids on skateboards just doing tricks. And after one screening – this bloke came up to me and said, "I know those guys on skateboards." He used to hangout with them. So, suddenly, sort of like: "Whoa!" They're not just an image but they're real people that you can talk about.

DW: And I suppose his relationship with the film was going to be very different.

GS: Exactly. And I suppose you could say that [despite] my calling it *Bay Bridge From Embarcadero*, which is a very literal description – 'the Bay Bridge from the main street Embarcadero' – how somebody sees it now will change dramatically according to whether or not they have been to San Francisco. Or if you have a specific image of San Francisco which is like the classic image of the cable cars and so on, that sort of provides a very different kind of image. So, I suppose you're going to bring a little bit of a story to it, if it's set in the real world. And, depending on your desire for narrative, that's going to play into how you read it...

DW: How did you organise the different kinds of takes of the film?

GS: Well, I shot it with one camera, and the camera could take in a scene this wide when it's projected. The camera's here. So, I had the right hand screen I would pan from here to here. The left hand screen I would pan from here to here. And the centre screen I think I could do either.

DW: So, do the screens overlap?

GS: Yes, this is something I developed over time. Initially, the piece was going to be shown for static projectors, and then bit-by-bit I've increased the amount of movement I've introduced through the projectors. So it starts with three screens that are separated by

a gap, and then as the [image] moves within the frame I start to move with the projector too. So, you get a slight confusion about what's moving.

DW: So, it's a kind of double movement.

GS: Yes, and then gradually, gradually [the projected images] come together until at the end they're all overlapping. So, it becomes like one of those complex stereo images. You can imagine if you separate the information to different eyes to could see in 3D.

DW: So, why did the mobility of the projectors become important to you? Or was it always so?

GS: No, it's something I've introduced. It just sort of looks good [Laughs]. I have to use this sort of art school phrase – 'it works'. You can see that it's interesting. It's also reproducing; what's happening with the camera is happening with the projector, so it's making a parallel. With the *Man in Mirror* piece, there's an echo between the way I'm moving the mirror and the way it's done in the original film. So, I think in formalist film - which is not what you want to talk about - it's happy if [you] can always use the same thing. It's almost like, if you start with one thing, and you develop that as much as you can, it will become increasingly interesting. That's good; you don't want to start introducing new elements, because that just waters it down.. It's a kind of minimalist approach there. Like the music of Steve Reich or someone. [Reich] may start off with a very simple pattern. But then just by shifting it slightly out of phase other things happen; but you don't start to want to introduce a completely different pattern. That wouldn't make any sense. You're just working with these very small elements to see if the eye can [pursue]. Having something where the camera is reflecting the projector or the other way round. That's consistent; it gives it what Malcolm [LeGrice] would call an integrity. It doesn't have to graft on another technique to be interesting. It's develops into something interesting.

DW: Through investigating those very basic elements.

GS: That's right. Because usually there's a lot more of interest in one little thing and you realize that you don't have to push it. You just have to take it further. Like Bruce McClure again. But it's all to do with all this complexity of light.

DW: The density.

GS: The multi-rhythms, which are happening in this very intense place.

DW: I find it quite interesting that in this tradition – the multi-screen, multi-image tradition – there's both this focussing on fixedness – as well as spreading-out of images. Typically you think of something like *Chelsea Girls*. You have that fixed relationship and they don't move. They're static. But there's also this mobile projector movement - this coming together and moving apart. What do you think about that? Why are people drawn to it? Just because it looks good? [Laughs]

GS: Yes, well, it is part of a tradition within England at least, which began, as far as I know with what Malcolm was doing. He'd moved the projectors and he'd shift the focus [*Threshold* 1973 etc].

GS: Nicky Hamlyn did a piece called *Four X-loops* [1975]. There are four loops on the wall and they go through various positions, which make different sort of graphic shapes. He did that in 1976 at the Expanded Cinema Festival at the ICA.

DW: Did you do anything in that show?

GS: Yes, I did *Paper Landscape* and one or two other pieces. I hadn't quite finished the *Man With Mirror* piece by then. And then I read shortly after that, that Expanded Cinema had ended. That's weird. I was just getting into it. [Laughter]. Who says it's ended, you know? But that prediction seemed to be true. And then in the 80s and 90s you hardly get a thing. Are you discovering much work from the 80s and 90s?

DW: Not a huge amount.

GS: No, it's all 70s and 2000s. It's extraordinary.

DW: Well, in the 90s of course, you get the gallery. The video installations become so crucial.

GS: Yes. And then of course, computer technology took over. There's this huge distraction if you like. Not a distraction, but this magnetic pull towards all these other things that were happening that left that kind of work, as being considered to be uninteresting or not relevant anymore. Yet it's such a good work. How you define that. [Laughs].

DW: Yes, how do you define good work?

GS: It's such strong work, I mean, you look at Malcolm's [Le Grice] early work, William's [Raban] work Annabel's [Nicolson] work – it's really strong. OK. That's obviously debatable, but get enough people [to see it] and you don't have to debate it anymore. When we went to Dortmund [to Mark Webber's series of re-stagings], you saw it – and thought this is amazing. You hadn't seen things like that before. So, why is it so – why is it such strong work?

LL: Yeah, I think it's also that the element of – I'm going to use the word analogue – like [making visible] the mechanism of things. [In digital work], like you say, there's no mystery. You can see how it's done. There was the first opening [at Dortmund], when Werner Nekes where he pulls the projector: "Woo, he's moving the projector."

GS: We all followed him outside and he projects onto a tree!

LL: So, it's the whole simplicity, but it's like fun, and the playfulness.

GS: People like live. That's a narrative thing. So, I think it's got narrative, it's got very strong human elements in it. You know when I did the show at Chisenhale or any of these shows, when we're there setting it up we make mistakes. We go forward and make announcements, like we're lacing up projectors, we say we're going to be five minutes. So, they've got [other] things to think about, not just these abstract images that we're looking at. If they were ushered in to a room and the door shut and they just saw these coloured images that come up, they probably wouldn't last very long. But in that

setting, like 160 people at Chisenhale, there's a kind of ambiance. There's a kind of [participation].

LL: I think that people think: "I could do that." It's that kind of feeling that makes that connection. This is not something difficult. Sometimes: "Oh, this is scratch on film, this is printed with Photoshop. Oh". When you show people that, you show them films and how it's done, there's no mystery; and that's how it attracts attention.

GS: Well, there's no mystery in how it's made, but then it is kind of mysterious when you see it. Because you might print-out computer columns of letters and you stick them on a film by shining a light through exposing it directly on to the film. [He's describing the film *Vowels and Consonants* (ongoing since 2005)] There's no mystery. It's done. But when you see it projected you get all this little torrortortortorr [sound of projector].

DW: You get these flying P's and B's.

GS: That's right. Good example. So, it's done in a very simple way, but then they do all these funny things, so there is a mystery there. It's the mystery of how something that's very simple and direct is converted by this machinery into something that dances front of your eyes, which is, I suppose, just the basic principle of film, and how we perceive movement.

DW: Do you think the ephemerality of it is important? The kind of instability of it?

GS: Yes.

DW: The action. You have to be there to see it. It might be gone again. Because you're not watching films that are commodified in some way – 'I can get a video of this and can watch it anyway I like'.

GS: I think so. A unique event; ephemeral, yes. And then you get these things which become almost like legendary. Like Annabel Nicolson's *Reeltime* [1973].

DW: Deeply mythical piece.

GS: Yes, it has become so. You've got Lucy Reynolds writing about it and she says there's the first generation of people who haven't seen it and can never see it now and can only read about what other people have said about it, and see tiny bits of documentation. So, she's struggling to come to terms with this piece without really knowing what it was like.

LL: There's always re-enactment but that's another thing completely.

DW: Ah, yes. That's the thing.

GS: Do you know about this bloke – this group in Sydney? Lucas Ihluin. He's started to do re-enactments of pieces.

LL: Didn't he do the *Man in the Mirror* already?

GS: They said they were going to do it. They were interested in [LeGrice's] *Horror Film*. William's *Two Minutes Forty-Five Seconds*, which they've done on video. And I think they sent William a copy. And then *Man in the Mirror* they're going to do maybe again on video. Because I think they're still frustrated. The Australians really seem to love this work from the [London Filmmaker's] Co-op's 60s and 70s. I think they see it in slightly different terms; they like to get to see a part of it.

DW: So, do they ask you for permission before they re-enact or how does it work?

GS: Yeah, he did talk to me about it. But I don't mind if people just do it. If they ask me if they can have a go at it, why not? [Laughs] It could be very different.

DW: I really want get on to talk about *Paper Landscape* and *Man With Mirror*. But there are a few things here. We talked a bit about why the live element is important to you. I guess I don't know why you like live.

GS: Because it's live.

DW: A tautology.

GS: Refer to the dead elements. Well, I think it's – sometimes I'm reminded by that sticker people had to go on the back of their cars which was 'Keep Music Live'. Do you remember that? I think that was when there was a fear that somehow the improvements in technology would mean that everyone now would just listen to their music from coming out of a speaker or something. They wouldn't need to go to a concert or go to see a band. It's similar in a way in the digital field. Like you can have everything beamed into your house, you can just watch it on your ipod or your TV. No need to go to see anything; no need to leave the house. But I think it's a way of working with analogue and using its live capabilities. It becomes a very different sort of animal from all those other kind of image moving ways on your computer or whatever – people are just looking at it now. [The moving image] is reasserting its strengths as a live event. So, I can't really say that it – it's a tautology. It's a bit long-winded having said all that, but I guess it can always be seen as a reaction to the digital thing which at this stage has become very box centred; very isolationist in a way. But it will probably go through all kinds of phases..

DW: You and your interface.

GS: Exactly. And somehow, I don't know why, it's a bit surprising; I've always enjoyed the cinematic event. Like you're in a room with lots of other people, there's a darkened space, someone looks at the screen. Concentration is complete. [But] you're not [isolated]– although Peter Kubelka would say that's why he decided [to design the XXX cinema in New York]. You've seen his system... I've never seen it but in it you're shielded from the rest of the world, and no distractions.

DW: Everyone's boxed in.

GS: I don't really like that. Some how there is something about the engagement of people around you. That's really interesting.

- DW: Would you call it a kind of community? Rather than...
- GS: Yes. I think that's probably a fact that's very important to humans. There is an event; you were at that event, and you saw it, and you have this connection with other people who are there. Or you've missed it. I think that's always in our minds we need that little bit of connectedness, we're not just operating in isolation from the rest of the world and we could have our big stack of things that we want to see and plough through them one at a time, you know. But that doesn't give you that sense of interaction or sort-of togetherness
- GS: It is odd actually. I mean, because we're going to Australia to show a little work in various festivals this summer, and it's a huge amount of work because we've got this itinerary we're working on, raising the money, thinking what to show and organising it, and setting it up. So, there's a massive amount of work behind the performance. If it was simply running a film, you'd just send the DVD in. You don't need to be there. It's so different. And yet one goes to all that trouble.
- LL: There's something about it every time when we do this. Windsor, Amsterdam – there's a kind of satisfaction – for the artist, the audience and the organiser - that you've built this up.
- GS: Yes. And the thing is that I usually show the *Man With Mirror* piece, and people always like that piece. And it's to do with ageing, I know it is, it's become something different from what it was originally. I still get people being completely blown away by it. It's always at the end of the show, because you can't do anything after that piece. Like we showed it at Windsor and this woman, one of the judges and this other bloke was just going on and on about it.
- GS: Well, there's an interesting thing. How would you date that work? I can't describe it as 1976. It doesn't make any sense. So, I put 1976 as opposed to 2008 when I last did it, or brackets, 2008. It belongs to '76 more than it does to '08. It's difficult to know.
- DW: It's one of these films that only seems to exist in projection and at the moment of projection, rather than it being an object that was produced at a certain time and fixed then. It's this unfixed, unstable property.
- GS: That's true.
- DW: I remember when I first saw it – I haven't seen it but I saw the video. And I was quite blown away, just sitting in the [British Artists Film and Video] Study Collection's viewing room just watching it. I think mostly because of the disorientation of it. And again the instability of the image. But just the support. The projection screen, which you assume is this fixed thing. Just the way [the image] was scattered around and fragmented. It was kind of – the disorientation was not intoxicating but just unlike anything.
- GS: Intriguing.
- DW: But it was so simple as well. And that's the other thing. It was quite hard at points to work out what was – where the mirror was or which way round things were. What was up and what was down. So, it's striking.

DW: How did you conceive of that piece? How did it come about?

GS: I'd seen other pieces where people were projecting themselves, as it were. The one I think of is Annabel Nicolson's *Reeltime*. She had a loop of herself at a sewing machine going round, and that was going through the sewing machine and she was sitting at the sewing machine punching holes into the image of herself, which was a kind of weird thing to do anyway. But – so, I was intrigued by that, and at that point I was just interested in the screen and different ways of using screen as an active surface. And the simplest thing I could think of would be to pick up the screen and move it. And I'm not sure where the mirror idea came from but I guess that I thought that the screen could be transparent - *Paper Landscape* does have a transparent screen. There's the idea of light - and what happens to a light when it falls onto a transparent surface it'll pass through. If you put white paper [on the screen] it will stop it; if there's a mirror it will reflect it. They were kind of formal considerations about light and the surface it hits. How much is retained or affected or passes through? And after that, having got the sort of basic idea – the thing about projecting it back onto myself doing the same thing – those kind of ideas were around a lot. Then, as I was saying earlier, that whole thing of 'don't introduce too many elements; just try and do it within the very simplest thing you can'. But also at that time it was nothing to do with my getting older of course, because I would have been the same age, pretty much when I first showed it. It was more to do with taking an outside space - a landscape; some trees on Hampstead Heath - and then projecting it into an interior closed space. So, a dialogue between what you know to be on the outside [and its] projection on the walls inside. There are elements of choreography that come into it. Once you had the basic idea that you're going to move this mirror. How do you move it? And then I was thinking about rectangular objects and their different sort of orientations; so, then it becomes a question of programming its movement. I could have started it by having the mirror facing forward. But it seemed best to reveal it gradually, you know. And things like that.

DW: So, you scripted all the movements in a way.

GS: I didn't script them. But I sort of went from this movement, to this movement.

DW: So there are four set movements?

GS: Not really four. You have three dimensions. I think they all have – you've got this frontal plain, then you've got the, [reverse?] Then you've got the left/right angling. I don't know how you would call that. Then you've got the up there angling. Those are the three sections and then after that, I improvised how they would relate to each other, so obviously you use the space around. When I'm projecting it I'm able to – I'm also watching what's happening in the mirror so, people are always a bit surprised that I can keep it more or less in sync [with my filmed self] but it's actually very, very easy. [Laughs]. Because I'm seeing little glimpses on the mirror – off the mirror - to see what's on the wall behind, and I can time it exactly to that. So actually that's one of the pieces and also the landscape one, where I can keep in time very well. It's easier to perform than some of the projector pieces where I tend to go too fast. I get in a muddle. With this one I've got a very strong guideline as to what rate to do it at.

DW: It's almost like as your performing it as you're watching it, you're part of the audience. This act of watching your own work. Would you say?

- GS: I'm not watching much of it. Just the very edges. I can see a hand coming at a certain rate and it's going up and then I'll do the opposite movement. So, if it's going that way then I'll go the opposite way or something. So, that I could follow it exactly. I could have this hand holding the mirror up here and I could do exactly the same with my own hand. And then it wouldn't be that interesting because you need the sight confusion. And then you get the squeezing and expanding of the white shape, which I didn't actually realise until I saw it back. That's one of the nicest things about making work is that things happen that you don't anticipate.
- DW: Is imitation kind of important in that?
- GS: Imitation of what? You mean just one action imitating another?
- DW: Yes. I was thinking about Marilyn Halford's pieces where she would be imitating or kind of trying to imitate herself. [*Hands Knees and Boomsa Daisy* [1973] *Grandmother's Footsteps* [1974]]
- GS: Yes, she was another one who did that sort of thing. Yes. I wouldn't call it imitation. I would just call it a reiteration. You know, again taking a musical analogy a pianist starting in the key of E and might come later back a fifth above or something like that. I don't think that's imitation. I think I can see with Marilyn's work, you might call it imitation more, where there's sort of – again I think it's probably a human element isn't it? Something like one person reacting to another, you could call it kind of an imitation.
- DW: But what with the mirror piece the mirror being a kind of device of mimesis. By holding the mirror up there's a copy of what there is, or a reflection of what there is.
- GS: That's something that hasn't really been mentioned but men looking into mirrors is a bit of an odd one anyway, isn't it? [Laughs]
- DW: Well, you mean we tend not to?
- GS: Not so much nowadays but you know, men holding up mirrors to themselves. I guess it's not a very manly thing to do. Is it?
- DW: No, I guess not. It's hard to know what's not manly and what is manly.
- GS: Well, you associate women with mirrors but you don't associate men with mirrors.
- DW: Yeah. As a kind of cultural act or action in a way. Maybe it's just the idea. And then I think reflection has that kind of existential heritage to its work. Male writing or male kind of that self-examination maybe.
- GS: Reflection. Yeah. I see what you mean. But if you said: "Woman with mirror." That has a particular – and that's quite a sort of cliché image in a way. Man with a mirror is not a cliché image. Breaks the stereotype and all that. It's a male gaze.
- DW: It relates I guess to filmmaking and the filmmaker is typically involved in some sort of observation of the world or some sort of watching or looking. But through that piece

you subvert that, and the watching becomes, you don't know who's watching who, or where the watching is.

GS: That's true

DW: So, *Paper Landscape* came first?

GS: Yes.

DW: And how did that come about?

GS: Well, I think I've partly explained that already. You know I was interested in the screen and screen materials. You know, I was trained as a painter so, I was used to stretching canvases and painting and you know the kind of feeling that the paint was actually painting in the landscape. Sometimes I apply the paint from behind the polythene screen and if the image was already on the screen it would – brush strokes would almost be like painting with green paint. The other elements to that are like cutting through the screen: walking up to the camera, going up to the distance and disappearing into the distance and creating an illusion of depth. I think illusion is a very important word when I'm thinking about this. You know, film is an illusionistic device par excellence. Now Peter Gidal would only talk in terms of material. The material aspect of the film is only interesting in relation to the fact that film is an illusion as well. It's got two things at once; it's an illusion and it's material. And that's what really interesting about it. So, rather than deny the illusionary aspect of the film, which I think is sort of Peter's idea, I'm presenting that in all it's illusionary-ness and then I'm masking it and destroying it too – and so it's a kind of dialogue between the image and material. That's the interesting thing with this kind of work. But also I think all my work has that development – [a] flicking between an illusion and material. It's not both things at once, the tension flips from one to the other.

DW: I'm always intrigued by the way you cut [the screen with a knife, when the filmed figure disappears] at the horizon line.

GS: I don't always do that. I never found the right way to cut the screen. Sometimes I've tried to cut around the shapes, and sometimes I just slash it through quite quickly. One time I did it in Paris where I took so long cutting through the screen that the film ran out and it was clear leader by the time I'd broken through the screen. I thought it was a disaster but it didn't work out too badly in the end. So, it just depends. I would slash it quite quickly sometimes, and very early on I did that. It's partly trying to cut it in such a way that I can get through [the screen] and not get covered in paint. [Laughs] One of the problems, I think I start the cut at the point where I've run off and disappeared into the distance and that's where the knife goes in. I move from that position.

DW: Were you interested, or have you been interested in that kind of early filmmaking? The Cinema of Attractions - like Lumière and Méliès and things like that. That kind of primitive filmmaking? Was that an influence?

GS: [In what way?]

DW: It's Tom Gunning's term. He was interested in this pre-narrative form of filmmaking where it's much more about the spectacle of these early illusionists.

GS: Yeah. I'm sure there's quite a lot of connection there. I mean you get the feeling with the Lumière's, it's slightly – it's like setting up a still camera, only you've got one minute of movement. You make something that moves and the interest is in the movement, and there's not really enough time to tell the story. There's a boat that goes out to sea, people go through factory gates and I'm sure there would be people in the film, the first viewer's would have recognised, if it was shown at the factory: "Oh, that's me." But I think in a way that's just a fascination with the movement and the simplicity of the materials that are used, and actually used the same instrument to record and to project the thing. So, that's even simpler than it is nowadays. And the projectionist in the room, like cranking the projector. The whole performance element. There's probably a lot in common there. More so than say with Méliès, who was trick photography. There's probably a lot in common.

DW: Where you thinking about that at the time?

GS: With the *Short Film Series* [1976 onwards], probably. And Short Film Series is a very important part of my work; almost like a thread running through. I think the fact that [I confined myself to] one reel is probably [a conscious] influence. I didn't know as much then as I know now about the way these things would have been presented; the understanding came a bit later. I think from my point of view, they did one reelers and that's all I did. And Warhol did one reelers. It's just this material thing. You stick the roll of film in the camera, and that's the amount of time you've got, so that's three minutes. You work with that constraint, (which is quite a decent amount of time).

DW: Two minutes forty-five seconds

GS: Yeah. Ah, but I keep the leader in, you see. And the leader is a bit more than 100 ft. It might be another ten feet.

DW: I asked you about performance, why performance is important to you. There's a hidden question in there about the presence of the artist.

GS: I'm being slightly surprised to find myself performing. Not that I ever thought of myself as a performing artist. I think there's one thing where I've made a number of normal films, which were for one projector and one screen. And to go touring with those, it gets really boring after a while. You're not actually doing anything and seeing the same thing again and again; it's really not interesting. So, live performance can make it more interesting for you as a presenter of your own work.

DW: Hmm. Is there something in the idea that it's never the same twice, is that the interesting thing? The chance element.

GS: Yes, definitely, yeah. I wouldn't want it to be the same twice. I wouldn't want to perfect it otherwise it'd be dead. I think one of the worst jobs you can be is to be an actor in a repertory theatre or something like that. Having to repeat the same thing again and again and again [Laughs]. No. Mind you they probably say it's always different.

DW: It makes you think about the Ian Breakwell piece, *Repertory* [1973], where the camera is circling the theatre.

GS: Oh yes.

DW: It's a kind of narrative.

GS: Yes, I mean the narrative thing. I'm not sure I've talked enough or managed to nail that one in terms of my work. I'm just wondering if there's any other way that one can look at the work in terms of the narrative.

DW: I think there's something in the kind of ceremony or gesturing with a piece like *Man With Mirror*, which I find quite interesting. Most – all gestures in a sense, they have narrative in a way. Lots of human gestures do. We read each other physically often.

GS: Yes.

DW: But again it's just another way to conceptualise narrative.

GS: I wouldn't call it gestures. They might resemble gestures and that might trigger something in the viewer. I don't see it as gestures. I can see it as a kind of choreography. You know, akin to dance, or something like that. But an abstract form of dance. Not a narrative form of dance. [Laughs]

DW: But that's interesting because a gesture is like a coded movement, isn't it? So, if I wave. That is what I mean by gesture, and that is kind of like a language – like a speaking tool when I'm trying to say something. Is that why it's not a gesture, because you're not trying to communicate?

GS: Yes. I'm just moving a mirror around. It's not a gesture. I mean if you saw two people holding a large mirror walking down the street and hang it into a window frame or something, you wouldn't think they're gesturing or that's a gesture. They're just moving it from A to B. [Laughs]

DW: But there's A and there's B.

GS: It's just functional. Oh! And the A and the B makes it a narrative?

DW: I don't know.

GS: No. I think it's functional. Functional in terms of the artwork. I mean in terms of how you use the potential in a piece; the elements in a piece to engage an audience, in a sense, to educate the audience. So, that's where a narrative could come in. I know that Malcolm does that too. You don't start with all the elements in the piece, you introduce them gradually. I mean musicians do this, again Steve Reich or someone like that, bringing one thing and then bringing something else. Malcolm usually talks about 15 seconds before there's a change to the next thing. If you look at something like his *Matrix I* [1973] think he's using that principle. If you wait longer than 15 seconds people lose interest and walk away in a gallery situation. So, you've got to keep adding something and adding something, you know. And gradually it develops into something

quite complex. Then it's got a sort of history of development, which you can call a narrative. So someone like Frank Zappa – you give him certain sounds and he can organise them into something that makes a coherent piece. Well, that's again to do with the art of how you organise your materials, anticipating how somebody is going to access them. You have to have in mind how they receive that information in a way they can make sense of it. I suppose you could start the piece with a climax of all the parts. And then move with the bits you have in common on to small thing. You could have that kind of form.

DW: Diminishing form?

GS: I think, yes. I was going to say like John Coltrane and jazz players. He sustains a very high level of activity throughout. It's not like he builds it up...with a climax and sustains a climax throughout the piece. So, there are different kinds of forms to discuss, still formal considerations.

DW: Yes. Narrative is a kind of order, isn't it? An organisation?.

GS: Well, it's that tabling of the forms for the viewer's easy comprehension. And often it means a kind of educational process. Educational in the sense of – (you haven't seen *Mobius Loops*, have you?) – in *Mobius Loops* you have to introduce the idea of serialism before you introduce the colour or projectors. It would just be difficult to start that piece with lots happening. Because you've somehow got to warm people up to the idea and add to it. So, it's a vaguely educational process. Each piece has that inscribed into it in some way.

DW: It's like a learning process.

GS: Yes, within each one. Because each piece has it's own unique set of determinates. It's not like you say, well there's one set of rules which applies from one piece to another. They all throw up kind of unique forms and so each one has to be a sort of learning process.

DW: Is Expanded Cinema a term you use. Or would use?

GS: Er, no. I'd like to persuade you to use the term 'live cinema' when I'm showing my work, *Light Show with Live Cinema*.

DW: But it seems very much of that expanded tradition ...

GS: Expanded? No, it doesn't seem quite right. 'Live', I like. The word cinema I like for a lot of people it has – it suggests sort of mainstream go to the movies. It is – etymologically, is the best word ..It's about movement. That seems to be the right word to use.

DW: There are two questions related to that. The term I keep coming up against, which I find interesting and difficult is the term 'cinematic'. Would you would apply that word to your work?

GS: I don't know what it means – cinematic.

DW: Well, cinematic suggests the space of cinema, which you seem to be interested in. The space of the auditorium, and the space of watching. The context of seeing.

GS: Well, some things are good in relation to the cinema. I mean for example, *At the Academy* [1974] make sense in a cinema. I would say that relates to a cinema or you know. Or a traditional cinema viewing environment because it's the countdown leader, which one you used to see in front of films, you don't see anymore. That's the context in which you should see it and it makes a sense to show it in that context too. But certain films of mine are much better to see in that context too – like *Short Film Series* is best seen in a cinema type environment. Whereas obviously the more, expanded pieces [Laughs] are better used are much better suited to – most of them – a lot of them are better suited to a gallery environment now. Although something like *Camden Road Station* could work in a cinema so long as it's got a wide enough screen. Sometimes the sound is quite critical. I mean the cinemas have much better sound, usually. Galleries can be weird, or awful or extraordinary, like the Chisenhale is so echo-y; it's such a vibrant sound. When I was setting up with Lynn, we were at opposite ends of this wall and I'd say something to her like: "Move the projector now," and she couldn't hear what I was saying. And we were the only two people in the room. So, I guess half of my work, works best in a cinema environment and half of it in a gallery environment.

DW: Do you give much that much of thought to the distinction between cinema and gallery. I was talking to William [Raban] about this, and he's quite – there are things like *Two Minutes Forty-Five Seconds* when he finds when he shows in a gallery make no sense because they are...

GS: He needs an audience of some kind, yeah.

DW: Yeah. They're a subversion of that environment. But also, the kind of institution of the cinema, itself seemed important to him.

GS: Well, actually it's very interesting question in a way, because this kind of work, which has always fallen between stools – although it's incredibly strong work - it's not somehow ticked all the right boxes for either cinema, exhibition or gallery. So, it's been ignored by both. But in a way it's always pitched itself in relation to one or other or both. When I first got into it, the driving thing was against Hollywood, against narrative, so that was the main impetus of the Film Maker's Co-op. It was this anti-illusionist project; very much against sort of mainstream cinema. And although one or two people did use the gallery like David Dye and Filmaktion I suppose, [others] kind of rather ignored the gallery. I'm not sure if it was anti-gallery. It probably was anti-the commercialism gallery. So with two forms of commercialised practice – it fell between them. I mean they don't work to create a space between us. Because that's why David [Dye] was ignored - because he wasn't commercial. And [his work] didn't have any commercial potential. But I think a lot of terminology has come from trying to create a space as a reaction against both cinema or the gallery. And now I suppose you could say [a reaction] against digital – those sort of environments.. So, my term 'live cinema' might be partly a reaction to the term digital, which is not very live. It can be, but in the way 99 per cent is not live at all.

DW: But the galleries Filmaktion work was being shown in – were often non-commercial public galleries.

