

SURVEY ONE:

A Discussion Paper wishing to Raise, on a Pragmatic Level, the Problems of Screenings, Venues and Contexts; and on a Theoretical Level, the Issues of Functions, Ideologies and Institutionalisation.

These words form a series of notes and are not intended to present a fully rounded argument, (if such a thing is possible); they demand instead that the membership asks questions; that in so doing attempt to clarify our positions in regard to the notion of a co-operative, in regard to the work that is produced co-operatively and in relation to one another as individual agents of production wishing to extend, with the film-viewer, the activity of production into the area of available discourse.

SURVEY TWO: Historical: Specific and Abridged.

(a) 1966-70; Product - 'light shows', New American Cinema and 'the Underground': Venues - arts labs, college dances, advertising agencies, miscellaneous freak-outs; and Edinburgh.

Contexts - seminal art exhibits, events and happenings, Swingin' London and other alternatives.....

(b) 1970-73; Product - consolidated, more serious.....and someone says 'structural' Venues - the First and Second Festivals, art colleges, university film societys, Robert Street and the Dairy; and Edinburgh.

Contexts - making comparisons, learning to talk, recognising common problems, identifying personalities, particular films and becoming the critic of NAC

(c) 1973-77; Product - more consolidated, less random, less spectacular, more difficult (to make and watch), more formal, specific and often referring to other films, or just Art.

Venues - the International Arena, specific art colleges and film groups the NFT, Art Galleries, the Piano Factory; and Edinburgh.

Contexts - growth of theoretical and critical attention, some books, Studio issue, Hayward show, regular funding to individual film-makers, regular sets of meetings, the rise of the IFA and the independent film-maker.....

SURVEY THREE: Contemporary History: Recognition-the Registered Company

The persistence paid-off; quite literally, in that the BFI, GLAA and Arts Council could no longer afford to ignore the continuing activity which, quite apart from receiving serious attention from many other quarters, (who also couldn't afford to ignore the activity), was not even showing signs of petering out.....

The conditions for protection from the landlords (and the cold), the cost of some materials, some machinery, some repairs and "paid" help was.....the official founding of the Company. The reward for meeting with the conditions; some protection. The price, a drift by many film-makers toward being simply producers, whose responsibilities end by placing the film can in the Co-op cupboard or some notes in an Arts Council catalogue - a distanciation from the aspect of screening - formerly integrated and proximate to stages of production - becoming a task to be performed by individuals and groups within and without the Co-op Company.

(a) LFMC Distribution - presently described as being non-commercial but more accurately, adopting the role of an Archive involved in "passive" distribution of a non-promotional kind.

(b) the ACGB - Film-makers on Tour (selective)

Artist's Films (highly selective)

Perspectives Exhibition (extremely selective) with

(c) the British Council. Both of these groups (b and c) are state funded in order to promote British cultural activity, one within the country, the other outside. In order to promote it is necessary to select. Selection for some in practice means for others, exclusion. Exclusion means loss of resources for production. Selection can mean the sort of promotion not sought. ③

(d) Regional Arts Associations: in common with the ACGB and BFI these are bureaucratic superstructures erected by the State to stimulate interest in past/existing cultural activity and encourage the growth of replacement strains. With small budgets and often having to adopt tactics of a passive 'educational' nature viz. study week-ends, exhibition subsidies, one-off shows etc, these organisations are however, 'closer to the ground' and more open than the national institutions to not only funding eligibility but also film-maker ^{② INVOLVEMENT} representation on advisory panels.

(e) Entrepreneurial activity: this can be divided between the film-maker, the film-writer, the empresario - (i) the film-maker; though the paper proposes broadly that it is the film-maker and the film-makers organisations which should be more directly responsible for the exhibition of films and the discourse they generate, there is the danger that individual activity can be confused by the film-viewer to represent the functional activity of the group by, for instance, the presentation of mixed shows of work. The problem is one of the availability and circulation of information to do with venues, (which the Film-Makers Europe newsheet has begun to tackle), and the state of debate around the work, rather than being a reflection on the personal integrity of individual film-makers. (ii) the film-writer; with the regular appearance of critical and theoretical writing together with the existence of several books, certain films and film-makers are inevitably becoming emphasised - the application of a critical tradition to such work defines this tendency. While some writers are re-appraising their function in relation to the films, the film-makers meanwhile need to compensate for the distortive effect of having individuals appearing to represent or substitute the activities of a group. (iii) the empresario; in the same way as the individual film-maker, the substitution of artifacts (films) for their function can misrepresent the overall activity of production and screening context and reduce the work to the (earlier) level of spectacle or at least to support a particular and personal obsession. (This refers really to anyone who utilises the Co-op catalogue and responds to the implications of passive distribution.)

(f) other Institutions such as art galleries, television, regional film theatres and the education industry: raising problems similar to the above and additionally seeing themselves as being completely autonomous and above the necessity of close collaboration with the film-maker. We have already seen how television in particular can, with the help of attractive screening fees, place the work in a completely inappropriate context, viz; BBC 2 Student films series, Open University 20thC Art etc

First Picture Show

SURVEY FOUR: Contemporary Future; Colonisation?

Where are films from the Co-op to be shown?

To what kind of audience?

What context for their screening is envisaged by the film-maker working with the venue organiser?

Is discussion as positive evidence of response and contribution to the discourse an essential or desirable part of a screening?

Are we, as film-makers, conscious of intentions and purpose in making films or are we engaged in the production phenomena of a broadly based cultural nature?

Questions as endless as these could be, have not been dealt with by the membership: certain individuals have produced papers; national organisations of a diverse make-up have held meetings often abstract from actual practice. The Co-op membership, massively strong by comparison, has given little time to reflect on the implications of their skills and enthusiasm.

1. In England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the creation of new audiences and venues by film-makers have financial support schemes waiting to be utilized.

2. In Europe similar support schemes exist in addition to those offered by the EEC.

3. In other parts of the world film-makers are made very welcome, often without recourse to state subsidy.

4. Education, as an institution, is not ignoring as it used ^{to} the mediums of mass communication, and is more often, though not sufficiently, attending to the findings of experimentalists. Education as a concept, within a few years is to be radically re-defined as an activity within society rather than simply being something of an imposition on its younger members, (bought about by forces engendered by the, only recent, formalisation of education itself).

5. The collapse of the British film industry and the confusion around state subsidisation of film culture will lead in the immediate future to the formation of the British Film Authority. Already a consensus of IFA (without Co-op) activists have been consulted at Ministerial level.

6. The proposal to utilize the forth TV channel for the founding of the Opne Broadcasting Authority indicates (without actually promising) that such channels of dissemination need to be used for purposes of other than just entertainment and profit. Similar shapings are in evidence among other world-wide broadcasting authorities. (5)

But before we, of necessity, engage in this 'loaded market' environment, we need to establish clearly the kind of exhibition conditions needed for the work to succeed. The work necessary to reach that state can be seen in relation to the work which has produced the excellent production conditions that now exist; there is no less, no more to do than that but it remains as essential.

SURVEY FIVE: Planning and Intentions

Three main headings for this seem to emerge;

1. What role/function/purpose do film-makers see the work falling into - obviously a clear idea of this will help answer the remainder.
2. Means by which the creation of an audience and additional venues can be found, revived, rediscovered?
3. Means by which the 'discourse' can be recorded for purposes of recall, feeding-in, disseminating through the expansion of an existing publication or through the invention of a new one?

The mechanism by which this could be carried forward would be for the expansion of the already existing 'screenings committee' responsible for vetting Arts-Council Perspectives plans. It would, as a committee, discuss the outcome of today's general meeting and pursue on behalf of the membership, our present distribution and exhibition practice, investigate alternatives and present a report with policy recommendation for adoption or rejection at the next AGM. Clearly since many listed in the catalogue could not be involved at the present in any discussion which might change the conditions of distribution, the committee could simply assess the viability of film-makers based at the LFMC expressing collectively their wishes as producers who, in common with other film-makers, distributing through the Co-op catalogue. In other words Distribution would not actually be breaking agreement but a group of film-makers (the much heralded Collective?) could, in effect, be promoting some of the work therein contained. It remains to be seen just how large that group might be.....

3 meeting before AGM

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