

WHAT CAME ACROSS FROM THE DIARIES WAS ANDERSON'S PASSION FOR IDEAS, FOR CINEMA ITSELF, FOR FINDING NEW FORMS OF EXPRESSION, FOR LEARNING THROUGH COLLABORATION.



CINEMA OF IDEAS

Sometimes it takes a journey around the world to know what things mean at home. Last year, I went on a long-distance trip which involved travelling for many hours. I decided to take Lindsay Anderson's diaries with me as their size promised to last the journey. Anderson's a filmmaker that I'd never especially loved but had always found interesting. The diaries however were a revelation: Anderson worked with some fantastic people at a fascinating time. He lived and worked through a number of movements in British cinema and his openness of response to radical ideas and form-shifting set him apart from many of his contemporaries and from the conservative, careerist climate of British cinema today.

Reading about the genesis of *Sequence*, his battles with the BFI in the forties and fifties as well as his programming of the Free Cinema films at the National Film Theatre (with attendant queues around the block overnight) was inspiring. What came across from the diaries was Anderson's passion for ideas, for cinema itself, for finding new forms of expression, for learning through collaboration.

Anderson's diaries made me think about British film now and who fulfils a comparable role. They made me wonder where in 2007 were the equivalent movements, publications, forums, which demonstrate the same passion, vision and commitment to debating new forms of expression and engagement with cinema as an art form that *Sequence* had for instance? When I couldn't easily think of many I felt myself becoming very impatient with contemporary film culture. It seemed to me that such debates occur largely within an academic context but rarely through engagement with the industry, thus ultimately having no effect on current film making practice.

The fact that all funding for cultural activity in film is channelled through the UK Film Council which, while a valuable organisation, primarily has an economic model as its focus - to develop a sustainable industry within the UK - may also be a limit to consideration of the cultural significance of cinema. It doesn't encourage space for an everyday exchange of ideas, for cultural debate, for an exploration of work beyond the mainstream commercial model.

What I realised I wanted was something that seemed to happen easily in other art forms - debate about film itself as an art form. This is what the 'Cinema of Ideas' will aim to provide - a space which allows that cinema is not just about commerce but is a medium which vitally reflects and expresses culture. The debate at the 'Cinema of Ideas' will be non-exclusive. Events will be free and the model will be that of a conversation, an exchange, a space where anyone can contribute. All the models for this form of discussion are already in our cinematic heritage. The inspiration for creating a space for dialogue doesn't only come from *Sequence*. I have a possibly mad idea that the structure of the discussion needs to resemble the old Channel 4 programme *After Dark*, if only because a loose and 'all-comers welcome' framework can sometimes throw up surprising and illuminating things.

The 'Cinema of Ideas' will particularly encourage practitioners from other art forms to contribute to the debate. To counter our current cultural obsession with celebrity and the prioritising of the opinion of experts over lay responses, we're abandoning the tired panel discussion format, which encourages an audience only to listen to a series of 'names'. Instead, we want to encourage active participation in the debate, not continue with the few preaching to the many. We want to invite people with new projects or pressing ideas to come and discuss them and feel that there is a comfortable space in which to do so. If you have a project you're working on or an issue you'd like

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to see discussed then please feel free to email us with proposals (coi@independentcinemaoffice.org.uk). We are very interested in collaboration.

The ICO's main work is about ensuring that people living in the remotest parts of the UK can access or discover the same films as those that live in the metropolis and this dialogue also needs to reflect that. In the first instance the 'Cinema of Ideas' will happen in the new BFI Mediatheque on London's South Bank but may not always take place in London. To overcome geographical distance we'll podcast it on the COI website and people who live in rural Shropshire or Skye or Kerry or Cornwall who love cinema but can't participate physically can listen to it and make their contributions also.

This is an experiment in dialogue. It may not work but I think that those of us who earn a living in cultural organisations have a responsibility at least to try and make something different happen, something which is about celebrating the art of film itself.

Catharine des Forges is director of the Independent Cinema Office.

The second 'Cinema of Ideas' will take place on July 18th at the Mediatheque, BFI Southbank. For more information, please visit www.cinemaofideas.org.uk

Image by Tereza Stehliková