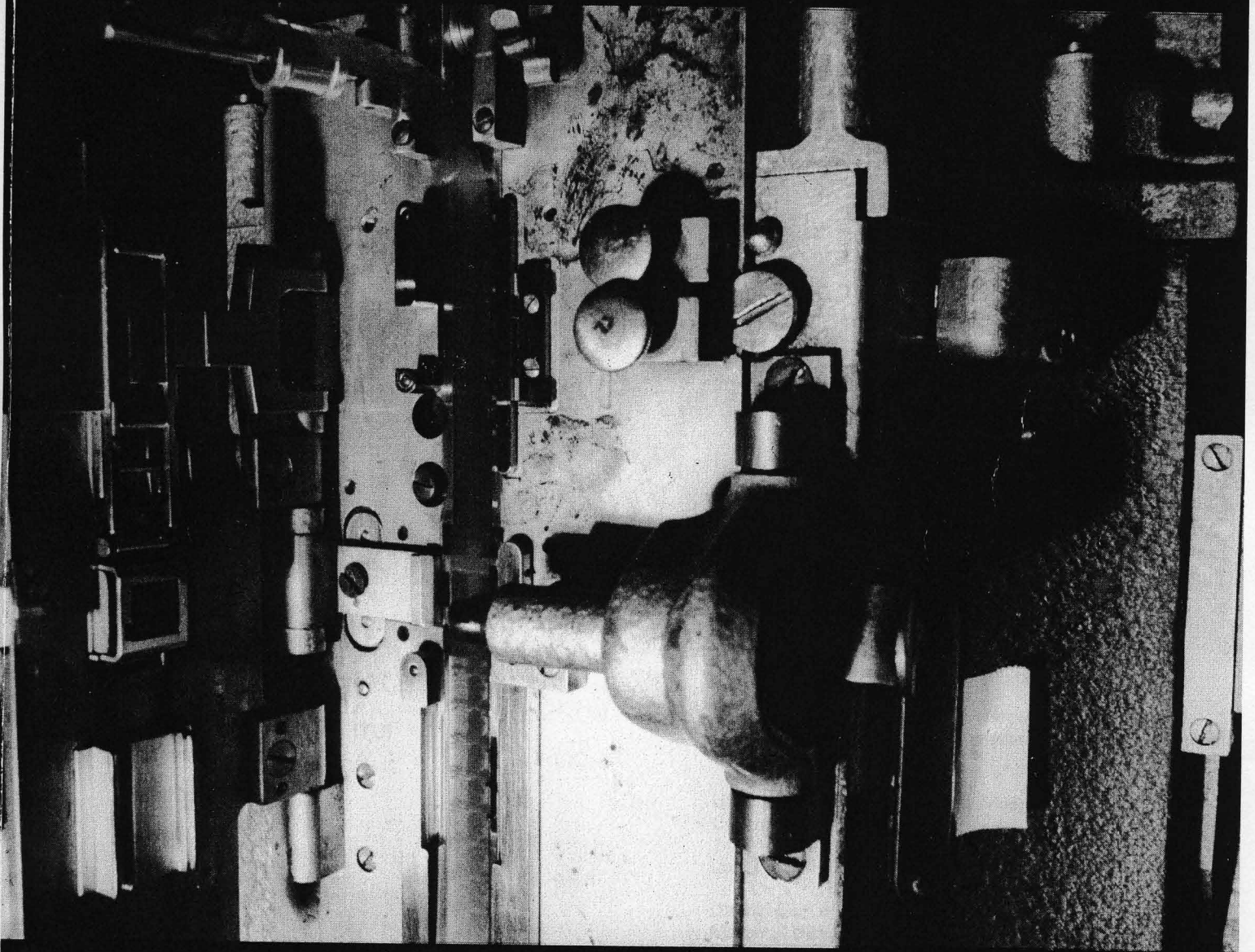


16

Experimental Film Practice
Video Art and Technology
Film and Television in Education
Young People in Film, Video
and Photography
Workshops and Production
Housewatch



the magazine from the London Filmmakers' Coop

UNDERCUT

COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

Nina Danino
Nicky Hamlyn
Michael Maziere
Lucy Panteli
Linda Reed
Guy Sherwin
Claudio Solano
Gillian Swanson
Penny Webb
John Woodman

Thanks to all those who helped with this issue.

Undercut acknowledges financial assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain

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This issue of Undercut was brought together with the intention of outlining the various ways of working currently in film and video.

In the seventies film work was concerned with the notion of film as material and making visible the production process. This position attempted to resist what it saw as the 'ideological determinacy of technology', that is, the constant hold on language and meaning inherent in the medium itself.

The opposite is true of this decade, marked by the advent and accessibility of new technologies (particularly in video and installation), embraced with varying degrees of questioning. In response to this, much new work does not locate itself exclusively in the use of one medium or production method but rather takes from different formats and practices,

often using a mixture of super 8, video, 16mm and tape-slide in its construction. Nor is the moment of production located at a specific level as can be seen in the Housewatch project (from which photo work is published in this issue) which takes the site of exhibition as the vital element in its construction.

It is ironic that alongside this explosion of technology and the fragmentation of mediums there has been a dismantling of many film and video courses, a return to more traditional forms of art in institutions, and the gradual disappearance of funding sources both for individuals and workshops. In this issue these ideas are discussed more or less directly, several pieces relating in particular to film and television in education, workshop practices and funding.

Chausse-trappe (The trap)

Yann Beauvais

Art is

A screen, an image. The image on the screen is not the film frame. A distinct distance separates them. Our screen, our image is thus contained. But the container tends to disappear in favour of the contained. This effacement is magnified at the centre of the screen, where events and action are distributed, divided. To such an extent that a flicker film reveals the pulsating mechanism which unevenly distributes light across the surface of the screen, dividing it into four zones. In the centre is a dead zone, neutral, which seems to allow for the eruption of luminous events. This flow of luminous energy between the four quarters eclipses, by its very rotation, the edges of the image. The edges disappear in favour of this intense flow. The frame becomes a dead zone of representation. This zone shines dumbly, unquestioning — and yet it keeps its cutting edge.

Two screens revitalize at least two edges: those that meet.

Two screens direct, brutally, a dialectic of presence.

Simultaneous presence delayed, replayed, redoubled, homogenous, heterogeneous. Two screens can contradict each other in various multiple ways, suggesting new signifying chains as well as raising aesthetic problems that others have been able to grasp by using musical models as a paradigm. The look flows, weaving patterns across the surface of representation, choosing elements and lines of force which sometimes fold back into the totality of the image-composition. A temporal potential realised through spatial means. Reinforcing displacement by the condensation of two images (or more) into a totally new one.

Something serious

A similar paradigm is used in *R* and in its 2-screen twin *R*. The central part of the film is based on a transcription of a Bach invention for two voices.

The two screens underscore this paradigm in so far as one is always the simultaneous reflection of the visual development of the other, regardless of the position of the reels (left or right) — the technique of inversion of a theme so often used in music.

The use of the mirror deliberately sidesteps the question of the reality of representation. It no longer has any importance now that we're in the domain of the reflected image, of imitation. It's impossible to determine which is a reflection of which. The two images reflect one another in a constant back-and-forth, mimicking to a certain extent the development of the (fake) pans which comprise the film (shots taken every 5° along a 180° arc). The pans metaphorically evoke, if only superficially, the keyboard. The progression wasn't, isn't, the same: in one, range changes pitch; in the other, space is revealed and extended. They have nothing in common, their development isn't the same — one leads to growth, augmentation; the other, a spatial glissando. *Sans Titre*, 84, employs photos of the highly symbolic Art of Triumph which are then cut into vertical, horizontal and diagonal strips. The individual photos carry little interest, they represent just a brief moment in a series which moves in two directions. The serial aspect of the photos invokes time, shaping time which subverts the still photo. Every one of these photos — grouped into four different series (one series which circles the arc, shot from 24 positions according to a 24-pointed star inscribed on the ground, plus three series approaching the arc from three different avenues) — is

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Back issues

No 1 March-April 1981

Bridge: *John Wodman*

The Critic as Modernist: *Paul Willeman*

Art and Psychoanalysis: *Mike O'Pray*

Belgravia: *Karen Knorr*

A Dialogue: *Stuart Hood & Noel Burch*

Photo Quiz: *Maureen Paley*

Problematising the Spectator Placement in Film:

Malcolm Le Grice

(Re)making it New: Independence and Film Forum:

Philip Corrigan

Visions and Revisions: *Peter Milner*

13 Most Beautiful Women and Kitchen: *Peter Gidal*

A Drama: *Mitra Tabrizian*

Notes from a Video Performance: *Catherine Elwes*

Indictment: *Anne Darlington*

Photomontage and Text: *Dick Clark & Alex MacGregor*

Psychoanalysis and Cultural Practice: *Gillian Swanson*

An Interview with Sally Potter: *Gillian Swanson & Lucy*

Moy Thomas

Photo as Fetish: *Roberta Graham*

An Introduction to 'Song of the Shirt': *Sylvia Harvey*

Broadcasting, Independent Cinema and the Future:

Simon Blanchard

Philosophy of Apes: *Nicky Hamlyn*

Video Noir: *Vida*

No 2 August 1981

Shadow of a Journey: *Tam Giles, Peter Wollen*

The Current British Avant-Garde Film: Some Problems

in Context: *Peter Gidal*

Talking to Paul Burwell's Music and Performance: *Anne Bean*

A Drama: *Mitra Tabrizian*

About 'India Song' and Marguerite Duras: *Bruno de*

Florence

Cinema of the Body: *Maria Klonaris & Katerina*

Thomdaki

Among Godard's Forms of Thought: *Rod Stoneman*

Film Co-op Summer Show: *O. Burn*

Documentation in Sand: *Nick Collins*

On Patrick Keiller's 'Stonebridge Park': *Nina Danino*

Brechtian Cinema: Review: *Nickey Hamlyn*

Understanding Medea Part Four: *Mick Kidd*

No 3/4 Double Issue March 1982

'Taxi Zum Klo': *Stuart Marshall*

Evidence of Struggle — Problems with 'Indian Song':

Trista Selous

Photo-Montage/Text: *Peter Kennard*

Ryszard Wasko Interview: *Michael O'Pray, Marilyn*

Raban, William Raban, Al Rees

Practices Against Film: *Michael Maziere*

Three French Friends: *Anne Rees-Mogg*

the reality referred to is actually and completely accessible through the viewing of the film, in spite of the fact that the form in which reality is presented is maintained by the use of conventions on an artificial and superficial level of construction.

The belief in the relative transparency of the medium presents a problem in that it puts forward that the appearance of items in the film are to be taken as an adequate picture of reality. It passes over the fact that they owe their form to the manner in which the producers of the work have used the cinematographic process.

An aspect that concerns us here is that conditioned responses are easily acquired. It is also necessary to point out that if it is assumed that a filmed sequence represents an equivalent for, or functions visually in a similar way to, perception of reality, the choice of criteria upon which a cinematographic proposal may be constructed is greatly reduced.

The various artistic traditions incorporated into film practices gave rise to confusion in understanding the operational differences prevalent in the organizational structures of language and images. One of the aspects of the dissimilarities of these two different means of expression causes a particular problem for work in film. The relation between a sign and what it refers to is not the same in the two systems of communication. In visual work the marks inscribed are essentially motivated. The rendering of the characteristics forming their material appearance has a function in relation to the physical or conceptual reality that they present, represent or to which they refer. Language studies show that the inscribed material form which the linguistic sign takes, is on the contrary, from the phonetical, morphological and semantic points of view, relatively arbitrary. In this way a sign in language is to a greater extent a symbol, a conventional sign of signal, depending for its meaning on acquired habits and general rules. The study of a linguistic sign's mechanisms becomes complex at the interpretative level due to the association of ideas that affects the meaning attributed within a context.

In the case of a visual image, the symbolic feature plays a minor part and it is the character and qualities present in the perceptible material of the work that renders it significant. Meaning is structured by the viewer with reference to the conceptual framework determined by the material received by the senses but also in relation to material experienced otherwise in living a physical and social existence.

The problematic nature of the image has been rendered singularly manifest by the relation of contiguity that is a feature particular to the cinematographic procedure. By being formed in the process of recording the trace of light patterns on the film's surface, the photographic image determines and defines a relationship of contact with reality. The contact in question materializes by means of the image thus formed; both a physical relation of proximity at a point in time (in this way the image is linked to the circumstances of its production) and a conceptual approach within the context of the proposal (in this way the image is related to the decisions taken by its producer).

Studies attempting to correlate the structure of film image sequences to that of word articulating systems have not really clarified the questions posed by the cinematographic image. Some of the terms used in linguistics are prescriptive in the sense that they incorporate inappropriate conceptions appertaining to their origins. An example is the notion that all signs

refer to known objects and that thought can only take place in signs so defined. This conception has led to the idea that conscious reflection belongs to the domain of conventional signals such as those usually associated with written or spoken language. This is why other theoretical models, such as assuming the film frame as the smallest unit of a film sequence in an attempt to correlate the functioning of a single frame to that of a word in a sequence, also prove to be inadequate. In experimental film-work different features within a single frame can be processed perceptually in very different lengths of time depending on the characteristics of the content of the images. In some areas of film-making, parts of a single frame function in relation to concerns of diverse nature. The organization of elements both within the frame and throughout the duration of the sequence is affected by the fact that none of the frames are completely processed by the time they have left the screen. This aspect of the problem allows for items to appear together on the screen when they are situated on separate frames of the film. For some types of work taking into account the perceptual process and the mechanisms of the cinematographic apparatus, there is a considerable gap between what is visible in a single stationary frame and what is perceptible in the image on the screen. The only correlation to be made here between language and images is that just as the isolated word gives little information about the sentence to which it belongs, so is the unconnected image incapable of conveying the sequence of which it is a part. The difficulties that arise when trying to prepare and present photographs printed from the frames of a film make this point very evident.

It is important to note that problems regarding the image in experimental film practices have not been resolved either. In opposition to the dominant representationalism prevalent in traditional cinema, some film-makers choose to present a personal version of visual experience. While making evident some possibilities of the physical manipulation of the material, the necessary theoretical work, questioning how this development advanced film practice was not carried out.

Another proposal came from film-makers who were aware that, in the effort to maintain verisimilitude, traditional cinema had not developed some of the possibilities relating to the operational mechanisms of the cinematographic procedure. In this case theoretical work was more developed, if inconsistently, and work was accomplished in different directions. However, although the images were carefully selected or composed, the criteria for their choice were often related to how useful they were for activating the intended process. The characteristics of the image were ideal objects selected to obtain maximum operational efficacy. In the sense that attention was concentrated on the procedures used, problems concerning work on the visual image partly remained.

The predominance given to written and spoken language today accentuates the importance attributed to utility, efficiency and the interest given to narrating, describing or recording the activities valued socially at this time. This would seem to be one of the reasons that the visual element in cinematography has been a neglected area of enquiry. Notwithstanding, this tendency has to be resisted in order for the possibilities of visual work by means of the cinematographic image to be extended.

Rose Lowder

HOUSEWATCH

introduction & exit in three steps

1. via the street

briefly
the house
watched
the flea
jump
the dog
dance
&
the pedestrian
sing

up up up
& & &
down down down

whilst together we observed the moment when god
lost his shoes to the night

2. via the neighbour

afterwards
Mrs Indostar
listened
carefully — to any sound that might have indicated the
return of Jack — who with bright teeth & loud music
left nothing to the imagination — other than shards of
broken glass

3. via the news

lies lies lies
after our arrest
the future seemed uncertain — however we quickly
learned not to say yes to just anyone — indeed we
took vertov's oath of silence in our struggle with the
romantics.

footnote

the concept of house watch is cinematic in an
architectural sense — our objectives an attempt to
elevate the position of the pavement artist to a more
radical posture — for & against 'the pedestrian' in art
& the urban environment

notes from 'The House Watch Journal' Nov/Dec 198

House Watch — A Dog's Dance

Outline of a new architectural/film concept, that utilises several loops & rear-
projection — shown via the windows of an ordinary terraced house in London.
Projecting three film-loops simultaneously at 18 frames per second.

8.30pm — Start Projectors — Dog's Dancing

up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,

8.33pm — Start Music

up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,

8.38pm — Fade Out Music

up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,
up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down,

8.40pm — Turn Off Projectors — Dog's Dancing

From 'Notes Towards the Pedestrian in Art' Tony Sinden 1985

WOOF!

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with the

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an' in art

Dec 1985



ARCHITECTURE