

WOMEN'S WORK IN DISTRIBUTION

P. O. Box 172 Telephone 01-341 1439
London N6 6DW (Wednesdays - Fridays)

10th November 1981

David Curtis
ACGB, Film Office
105 Piccadilly
London W.1.

Dear Dave,

Enclosed is a sort of application for two programme length packages of films, as per our telephone conversation today.

I say 'sort of application' as it comes from Lis Rhodes and myself, however due to deadlines the words are mine, not hers, although we have met and discussed the programmes at length. Ideas which have been thought about have been rather hurriedly and schematically set down, in order of convenience as notes rather than how we would actually write about them and the statements do not necessarily reflect Lis's views (or my own for that matter).

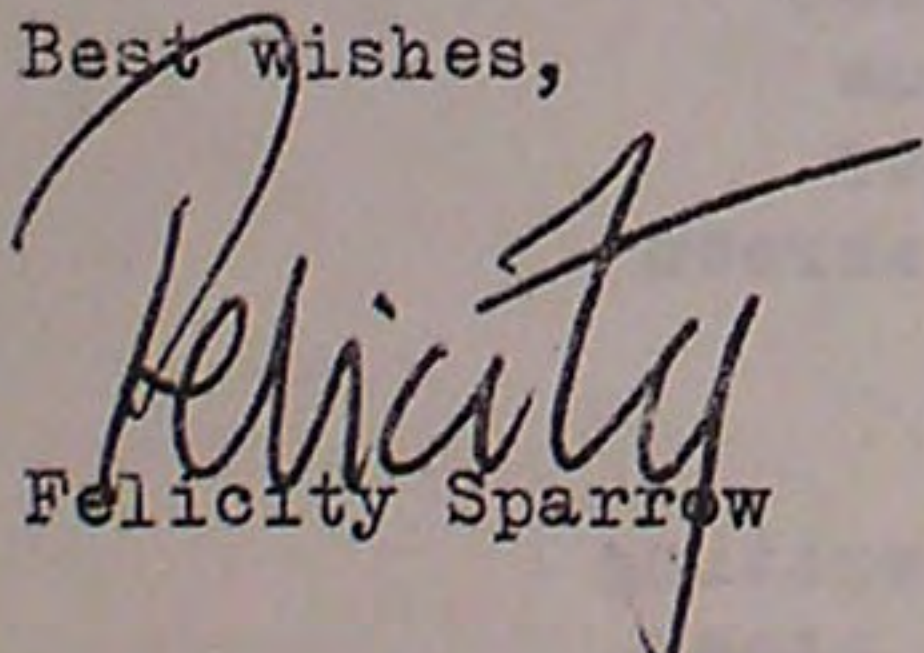
Although I have talked briefly with the other women filmmakers concerned about the programmes, we would like to work closely with them in compiling the notes. This would be to enable other women to accompany and talk about the programmes, as something they were involved in, rather than ^{as} the 'authorship' of someone else.

As mentioned over the phone, the films listed are all available from Circles now although in most cases extra prints will probably be needed if they are to be kept spooled up in their programme packages. Of the non-British films, I have cleared copyright for this country and prints can be obtained very cheaply.

If the programme packages go ahead I think they have a very wide audience potential and I would be keen to set up programmes with discussion rather than leave it to the Arts Council's mailing list.

Can't think of more to add just now as it's rather late, I've been typing all day and my brain is getting scrambled. Please ring me if you want more information or clarification on any points.

Best wishes,


Felicity Sparrow

c.c. Lis Rhodes

HER IMAGE FADES AS HER VOICE RISES

A series of programmes of short films by women working towards another, different telling of history compiled by Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow:

1) Objection Please: how we got out of pictures (Programme 1)

A HOUSE DIVIDED by Alice Guy 1913 (10 mins) silent
THE SMILING MADAME BEUDET by Germaine Dulac 1922 (25 mins) silent
OFTEN DURING THE DAY by Joanna Davis 1979 (15 mins) opt. sound
LIGHT READING by Lis Rhodes 1979 (20 mins) opt sound

The above title (working title only) came out of irritation over an article by Noel Burch with a similar sounding title. The passage in question had the sub-heading 'Women' and goes "The issue of women and cinema during the early period clearly provides a research area of paramount importance ... One of the world's very first directors of narrative films was a Frenchwoman, Alice Guy. But the fact that she was Léon Gaumont's secretary - and, it is generally assumed, his mistress - suggests that her case was less a precocious example of feminine achievement in the industry, than a sign of the slight importance which the budding industry attached to the function of direction ('even a woman can do it!')....."

The programme and notes are not intended as a reply to the above crass, misogynistic tokenistic, ignorant statement. A different history takes into account this and similar biases which need correction.

Within the above programme there is a narrative/historical link in terms of form, content and subject matter. The films would not necessarily be programmed in their historical sequence as their common concerns may be better illustrated by juxtaposing current work with early films. All four films were 'independently' produced, with very different audiences in mind. Some ideas to be developed might be:

- a) A HOUSE DIVIDED
A domestic comedy based on marital misunderstanding.
Traditional form (story/fixed camera) and roles of women:
her image is object - wife, maid, secretary, mother-in-law -
in relation to the smooth running of the family/household.
- b) SMILING MADAME BEUDET
Melodrama on the theme of Madame Bovary - now the whole
institution of marriage is questioned through the eyes of
Mme Beudet and her attempts to escape the suffocation of
provincial married life. She is subject of her story but
still her image is defined as object: his wife. The form
(editing, closeups of people and objects) suggests the depths
of her feelings.
- c) OFTEN DURING THE DAY
Personal and social comment on the minutiae and obsessiveness
of housework - a more open domestic situation than previous
two. She is off-screen but we hear (and identify with) her
voice; her image is foregrounded but marginalised on the screen
in the final scene.
- d) LIGHT READING
Discourse/dialogue - SHE-as-multiple-subject, reading, writing
and making a film, perhaps reflecting on the story of the other
films. A more introspective voice, 'abstract' images - her
image has gone her thoughts and voice take over.

2) Another story to tell (Programme 2)

WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA by Esther Ronay 1973 (20 mins)
SHADOW OF A JOURNEY by Tina Keane 1980 (20 mins)
RITUALS OF MEMORY by Pat Murphy 1977 (15 mins)

+ another short
film ?

Three very different stories - with different visual and verbal treatments by the filmmakers - dealing with 'events' in public and personal history, told this time by women. The programme would also comment on different narrative structures within film:

a) WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA

Direct interviews with the women who remember the miners' strikes in South Wales, their strength and unity and the part they played within the common struggle. They are on screen and talk to camera.

b) SHADOW OF A JOURNEY

Story of the Highland clearances in Harris told in the oral tradition - mother to daughter to grand-daughter, told in English for the first time so the story is first translated then read. Documentary soundtrack contrasts with abstract images of shadows on the waves from the ferry going to the island, perhaps reflecting other journeys, to Newfoundland as a consequence of the story's events, as well as going back there today.

c) RITUALS OF MEMORY

Personal and family memory explored via the family photograph album, viewed in retrospect by an adult now cut off from that environment. Images fade in and out of each other, each memory triggers off and merges with another. Fragments of conversations, letters and newspaper cuttings interweave personal memory with outside events in Belfast.

As with the previous programme the films all intertwine with each other. This would be developed rather than writing about each separately: memory - both public and private, women's stories and history.