

SOUTH WEST INDEPENDENT FILM TOUR 1978

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Building on the success of the Independent Film-makers Tour of the South West in the Autumn of 1977, organised by Mike Leggett, a slightly modified tour was organised for the following year. The tour was fully supported by the Regional Arts Association and by national funding bodies as a pioneering attempt to reach new and wider audiences for independent film outside the metropolis.

Eleven 'tourers' visited the region at the rate of one a week from the beginning of October. The variety of venue involved included a Regional Film Theatre, a film society, an art gallery, rural and urban arts centres and an art college. The tour was built around regular weekly screenings in the three venues, (Exeter, Falmouth and Dartington) which took the whole tour as a series: around this were the occasional screenings of the venues which had chosen a number of selected programmes - even the smaller and more geographically isolated venues were able to put on three or four screenings as an occasional series quite successfully.

All venues had the choice of two modes of booking: they could either charge entrance and pay the film hire or they could offer free entrance and pay a nominal fee-fixed at £10 per screening this year. This was made possible by the relatively high level of funding - which will continue to be necessary in the short term if the scheme is to develop.

The diversity of the venues tended to produce rather different audiences, although there was considerable variation from film to film the programme seemed to encourage some consistency and commitment to the series as a whole for a proportion of the audience. The screenings in Exeter, organised by the Film Society, and held in the Central Library attracted a productively heterogeneous audience, while the audiences at Falmouth College of Art or the Orion Gallery, Newlyn were more predictable in terms of size and approach to the work. It became clear that the institutional venues, generally possessing excellent facilities and central locations, necessitate particular attention to publicity to ensure a degree of public interest in,

and access to, the screenings.

Each venue made its own publicity with the help of general information sheets and all-purpose tour posters which combined stills from the films with space for specific details of the screenings, (see Appendix A). Some use was made of local media, including a token ten minute spot on late night local arts programme for HTV; but this approach should have been both more careful and concerted. Extensive programme material and documentation was provided for all the screenings, and the practice of giving material out at the preceeding week's screening was developed in an attempt to encourage discussion and to create the most appropriate and productive contexts for the films - stressing that they were not just a new 'product', but that in their mode of presentation they should propose a radically new audience activity 'As film becomes independent of commercial goals, it can begin to embody a world-wide view capable of breaking down the relationship of producer-consumer, opening up the possibility of a common investigation between film-maker and film watcher; thus a genuine concern on the side of the film-maker with the conditions under which the film is seen' (From the paper 'The IFA and the State').

In 1978 the tourers were:

Francine Winham - 'Rapunzel' (Susan Shapiro, Esther Ronay, Francine Winham)

Ken McMullen - Work in progress from 'Suggestions'

Ed Bennett - 'Hogarth' and 'The Life Story of Baal'

Film Work Group - 'Justine by Marquis de Sade'

East Midland IFA - Three members of the group toured with various programmes of members' films.

Berwick Street Collective - ''36 to '77'

Cinema Action - The two members of the group toured with different programmes of films.

Deke Dusinberre - 'Serial Imagery' (Films by Steve Farrer, Lis Rhodes, Guy Sherwin)

Simon Field - Films by Stan Brackhage

Paul Hammond - 'The Creative Recreation of Reality by Surrealists in Film'

(La Verifica Incerta by Baruchello and Grifi)

Guy Sherwin - different programmes of his own films including performance pieces.

The tour attempted a relatively ordered sequence of films programmed in terms of (what can be seen as) three main areas of current independent work: the first few tourers represented the development of work on/in narrative, followed by groups,

collectives and somewhat more explicitly political work, and finally by some indication of developments of in the avant-garde and in formal film-making ... Such categorisations are extremely rough and relative of course and the films resist linear programming (perhaps it would have been as interesting to see '36 to '77 in terms of the avant-garde say, or Rapunzel in group political work) but the attempt to order the sequence hopefully encouraged the production of inter-connections, differences (i.e. analysis) between the films.

One modification of the 1977 Independent Film-makers Tour involved the inclusion of film programmes accompanied by a speaker other than the film-maker to introduce and discuss the films. This enabled the scope of the tour to be slightly extended, allowing the inclusion of American and Italian work. It also allowed speakers to select a combination of short films by different makers around specific questions. Also it can be argued that audiences often behave in a different and sometimes rather restrictive way in a discussion with the person who has the (culturally given) position of the maker ... However the number of 'other' speakers made up only a small proportion of the tour as our main commitment remains to enable film-makers to reach and work with new audiences directly.

One other innovation this year was the work carried by Ken McMullen showing work-in-progress (mag-stripped rushes) from a film with the working title Suggestions. In fact the sections of this quasi-narrative film were at the stage before final assembly and there were several lively and productive discussions at the screenings on the possible organisation and general direction of the material. This sort of screening seemed particularly relevant to a place like Bristol where a workshop (the Bristol Film-makers' Co-operative) is getting under way, as was the visit by East Midlands IFA: their screening being seen not just in terms of seeing new films from another region, but also of sharing, discussing experience of workshop production and organisation: a form of exchange useful to the development of both groups.

The initial funding for the tour's organisational costs (publicity, documentation, organiser's fees and expenses) came equally from the Arts Council, The Production Department and Film Availability Services of the BFI, and South West Arts. Subsequent subsidy - the tour running costs (tourers were paid travel expenses, film hire and a fee of £25 per screening) was divided

among the three national funding bodies in terms of their designated areas of concern which more or less fortuitously coincided with the three areas outlined in the programming ideas.

The figures involved in funding the tour in 1978 can be broken down into:

1) Organisational costs (Budget estimates)

	£
Publicity	125.00
Documentation	150.00
Fee to organiser	375.00
Travel (and subsistence)	200.00
Final Report	100.00
Contingency for assistance (report from '77 and advice for '78-'79)	75.00
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Total	1025.00
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2) Operational costs (Estimates)

	£
Conversion - extra subsidy on film hire	700.00
Tourer Travel (@ 11 x £30)	330.00
Screening Fees (@ 44 x £25)	1100.00
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Total	2130.00
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Organisational and operational costs : £3155.00

3) Funding (Operational costs: Estimates)

	£
Arts Council - Organisational costs	300.00
Operational costs (Grant for Field, Dusingberre and Hammond)	500.00
Operational costs (Sherwin and McMullen)	250.00
Production Board - Organisational costs	300.00
Operational costs	500.00
F A S - Organisational costs	300.00
Operational costs	180.00
S W A - Organisational costs	125.00
Operational costs ('Conversion')	700.00
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Total	3155.00
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All operational costs are approximate - for instance the sum for travel is calculated on a rough estimate of £30 per tourer, in practice this varied a great deal from tourer to tourer depending on the mode of transport and number of venues involved.

Taking the total cost of the tour at the rough figure of £3000, dividing it by 44 (Screenings) and an average audience of 40 (cf. Appendix B - Selected Venue and Tourer Report Sheets) we arrive at an approximate sum of £1.70 subsidy per head.

This is a relatively high per capita cost compared with the Arts Council Film-makers on Tour Scheme - estimated at £1; although it compares well with the £2 per capita subsidy for the NFT (calculated at an average attendance of 400 per night) not to mention the notorious £8 per capita for opera at Covent Garden.

In fact the South West Tour and the Arts Council scheme run at roughly the same level of cost efficiency. The organisational cost of Film-makers on Tour is presumably absorbed in the Film Department's overheads. The higher per capita figure reflects the organisational cost of the relatively autonomous (devolved?) South West Tour, which is a more ambitious project in terms of programming different areas of film-making and in the provision of extensive documentation/publicity for the connected series of screenings.

Under present costing and funding arrangements there is no way that this organisational cost can be recouped - the maximum payment that a venue (charging entrance) ever makes only covers the cost of film hire. Given the persistence of certain socio-cultural conditions in which these activities take place it is unlikely that this situation could be changed in the near future. In the meantime one can argue for Film Tours as a basis for the consistent and coherent programming of independent work and as a strategy for increasing and extending its audience in the regions outside London.

A number of anomalies were inherited from the attempt to modify and extend the Arts Council Film-makers on Tour scheme to involve and integrate other areas of independent film and thus other funding bodies. The existence of separate and individual systems of funding in the different institutions led to rather

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over-complicated book-keeping (at one point there were five different modes of subsidy operating - cf. Appendix C).

The tourers were divided up between funders -

Arts Council	:	Dusinberre, Field, Hammond, McMullen, Sherwin
Production Board	:	Rapunzel, Bennett, Justine, Berwick St.
F A S	:	Cinema Action, EM IFA

The Production Board and F A S paid their proportion of the organisational costs and fees and travel for the designated tourers. Unlike the Arts Council 'their' tourers were only available on the basis of entrance charge/payment of film hire. It was immediately clear that this would reduce the tour considerably as most venues would not be able to afford Production Board and F A S tourers on that basis. This problem was remedied by SWA's contribution of £700 for 'conversion' costs - providing the extra cash to make up the difference between the £10 venue fee and the cost of film hire and making all tourers available on the free entrance/fixed fee basis. This seemed appropriate in that SWA was only involved in funding the cost of the tour's publicity (£125) at that point. However, it should be noted that SWA provided the organiser with facilities (telephone, typing, photocopying) and that comparisons between the funding provided by various institutions cannot be made on the assumption of equal resources.....

The Arts Council, after paying its proportion of the organisational costs, funded two tourers (McMullen and Sherwin) by applying their pre-existent Film-makers on Tour scheme within this tour. On this basis these two tourers were paid a fee of £30 and travel for each screening - unlike the other film-makers who were paid a fee of £25 and travel and (their proportion of) film hire. Given that the demarcation lines set up by the funding bodies are extremely relative and arbitrary and that film-makers, such as McMullen and Bennett, frequently cross them - this anomaly between different levels of tourer support must be eradicated in future tours.

One further problem involved the ineligibility of three tourers (Field, Dusinberre and Hammond); although they were presenting films from the avant-garde constituency served by the Arts Council scheme, because they were 'lecturers' not 'film-makers' they could not be included in it. This necessitated a special application to the (Artist's Films) Panel for a separate grant to cover this important aspect of the tour.

Proposals for the rationalisation and simplification of procedure.

- 1) There should be an initial meeting between tour organisers and the four funders (Arts Council, Production Board, F A S, Regional Arts Association) to discuss the project and agree on the proposed programme of tourers, without formally dividing up/designating responsibility for the tourers.
- 2) The Tour organiser then holds discussions with venues, and the Tour is costed (cf. draft tour costing form - Appendix D).
- 3) Funders could then approve the costing and grant aid the tour by dividing the total cost proportionately. All grant aid should be paid to the RAA which would administer these funds, together with its contribution, and provide the accounts at the end. There would need to be some flexibility to the funding procedure to allow for the possibilities of under- and over-spending which may occur as the costing involves elements (like Film-maker travel) which it is impossible to calculate with sufficient accuracy in advance.

In addition there are a number of possible changes which we are considering in terms of improving the next South West Tour:

- 1) Venue response has been very important in analysing the last tour (cf. Selected Venue and Tourer Report sheets - Appendix B); it is hoped to increase the participation of the venues in the organisation of the next tour by holding a one-day event at which the Tour Reports will be discussed, films screened and proposals for the next tour debated.
- 2) It is hoped that educational/institutional venues will ensure that tour screenings are held at a time and in a place which is accessible to the general public, and that sufficient publicity (advertisements in local papers, posters in the Library) is made to reach that public. If necessary extra publicity funding will be made available to facilitate this.
- 3) A South West Arts weekend school on Independent Film is planned shortly after the Tour; this would be publicised through the tour venues in the hope of

attracting a number of people who would participate in a school leading to a more extensive examination of the themes and issues related to the tour programme.

- 4) The next tour programme would attempt to construct a central thread or theme which would be evident in many of the different programmes. The questions around Feminist Film Practice could be raised in terms of different modes of film work and would also have the possibility of engaging a specific audience.
- 5) Rather than the separate documentation on each tourer utilised in the past a booklet combining material on all the films with one or two general/overview articles would be a more effective form of documentation.

In these final notes as in the Report as a whole it is important to avoid constituting a rigid format for future tours from our experience in the South West. Any model proposed must be flexible enough to be adapted to regional specifications. An area with a greater number of workshops than the South West for instance might want to utilise the tour model for exchanges with other workshops; regions with more 'educational' venues might want to include more international/historical programmes etc.

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