



**EXPERIMENTA FOCUS: STEPHEN DWOSKIN**

# Times For

Dwoskin's first feature-length film is an intense, sexually charged journey to the end of the night, inspired by James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and conceived as an attempt to paint with film. A classic of the transatlantic underground scene of the early 1970s, its cast includes Dwoskin's fellow expatriate Carolee Schneemann, performance artist and director of the legendary *Fuses*. Entirely without dialogue, *Times For*'s soundtrack of loops, drones and found-sound is a tour de force of tape experimentalism, composed by Gavin Bryars.

*Times For* will be followed by a discussion of performance and the avant-garde milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s between actor Jenny Runacre and writer Dr Sophia Satchell-Baeza. This will include a screening of Jenny Runacre's scene from Dwoskin's 1972 film *Dyn Amo*.

## '7. *W s/t*. BREAKING THROUGH THE FLESH BARRIER

Relate SD to G. Bataille (from Surrealist and permissiveness angles), W. Reich (body-psychology), general 1960s libidinology.

*Times For* (1970) loving. Camera follows boundary-layers, edges, of bodies, spaces, touch, orifices. What sex is your eyeball? tongue? instep? fingertips? nipples? Limbs and looks wound around like skeins of wool. Aquarium of bodies commingled, degenderised, desocialised, hyperfantasised into insubstantiality.' – Raymond Durnat

## Stephen Dwoskin on 'Times For'

Alan Power, who was backing a lot of independent work at that time, gave me something like £1,000 to make it; he was in real estate, and we shot it in an empty house he had. It was an extension of a short film, though it wasn't intended to be. It was based on an idea which I'd originally done tests for in New York when I first started to make films. One of the greatest influences on me, in terms of the use of time and characterisation, was Joyce's *Ulysses*, and I always wanted to do something based around the notion of Nighttown. I didn't want to do it literally – which was what the theatre was doing, or what Hollywood was doing – I was involved in metaphor and Alfred Jarry and that school of thought. So what you have in *Times For* is a guy travelling through women, as it were, as in Nighttown it's Bloom in the whorehouse observed by Dedalus.

A criticism of the film is that the four sections are very distinct, because I was learning and I didn't quite grasp how to use time properly. So it did have this weakness of attempting to use feature time, but without really understanding it. I still like the film in a lot of ways, because it was also working in another area which I continued later with *Central Bazaar*, which was trying to use colour in film in a painterly, non-verbal way. I was trying that, and at the same time, trying to do a narrative. I never left the narrative idea of trying to express something, though I'm often put down as a Structuralist because some of the shorts are structurally conscious. The idea was not really to do with Structuralism, but to do with getting back to silent films – which is another area I love – getting rid of rhetoric, the verbal part of film. It wasn't an economic decision not to use sync on *Times For* – Alan was willing to pay for

sync if I'd wanted it – I was trying to explore the visual permutations of something. This is linked to the painterly mentality, but never losing the thread of trying to tell a narrative – which I don't think has to be linear, and that's why Joyce intrigues me. But I think the habit of making short films was still in my system, and I didn't have the experience of working at that length. I find it difficult now, after half-a-dozen features, to make a short film. They really are two different ways of thinking in terms of time. They require different disciplines.

**Stephen Dwoskin interviewed by Clive Hodgson, National Film Theatre**

'Once upon anytime in a world like now, any man wandered into an island of women. Their succulent presence, like many Circes, drew his fantasy. He follows. He seeks a kingdom, but as I foretold you, we're all spirits, and are melted into air, thin air: and, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capped towers; the gorgeous palaces; the solemn temples, the great globe itself, yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve, and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a track behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep...

'*Times For* is a larger entry into dream reality. An unfulfilled man renders himself to the unrealised sensuality of four women. In his drifting search he fails and fades in the same loneliness as the women. The film is the reality and a metaphor for the intensities of sexual experience.' – Stephen Dwoskin

An original and solid work of erotic cinema.

**Jonas Mekas**

Steve Dwoskin's *Times For* has not been given the critical attention which it demands. It is a highly complex film which relies for its intensity on a high precision of editing. This attenuated study in eroticism is based on a reliance on the frustration/satisfaction syndrome so essential to traditional pornography. But Dwoskin's film-work probes into the skin/psyche of his 'players', four women and one man in a claustrophobic framework. His camera is a never-static instrument of his intrusion into the fantasy/reality of the relationships he is dealing with and forming. The surface of his subjects/objects, as well as a psychological reckoning through physiognomic perception, relates to Dwoskin's involvement in peeling layer upon layer of pretence from human interaction, exposing the raw nerve of sexuality. But the film is by no means manipulative in the sense of a voyeuristic fantasy-involvement on the viewer ... heavy latent eroticism is merely the carrying force of an obsessive personal viewer's investigation, one that subjugates the filmmaker and audience to torture analogous if not heavier than that which his subjects must bear. *Times For* is one of the few erotic masterpieces.

**National Film Theatre programme notes**

An enthralling balance of objectivity and involvement; in other words, splendid cinema. Exactly how he manages this so brilliantly is the key to the director's craftsmanship, but his understanding of the human body as a sensuous animal, and the pure excitement of sexual extravagance, is as remarkable as his ability to capture it on film and relay it directly to a straight audience. It is a superior piece of original cinema due to the sensitive camera-work of its creator.

**Peter Buckley, *Films and Filming***

Dwoskin's strength is in not needing reference to (through) other media. His visual force is in his sensitivity to undefinable but nevertheless existent human time. When he edits, each sequence fits so perfectly to the preceding and following that his films can be seen in silence, and lose nothing. Each cut is so precise as to point to absolute editing-genius in terms of timing, gesture, continuance. This editing, both in camera and after filming, is, though, never pretentious or precious. It is pure: based on the potential of each shot, and what comes before, and what follows. It is this awareness of potential in each shot which seems, for Dwoskin, poetically/unconsciously determined rather than rationally. For him, it works. And he is at his strongest when using sound (composed by Gavin Bryars) as effective silencer, not as complement to the montage. When he uses it melodically in *Times For* he is allowing his close-by but usually avoided tendency towards sentimentality (kitsch in short) to reign. Thankfully the first ten minutes and the last 25 are more abstract (i.e. concrete!), a seemingly one-tone repetitive organ sound, continuous, finally subliminal, hypnotic. It is archetypal for the state of our involvement at that moment: continuous, complete, infinite.

I am here not attempting to verbalise the structural build-up and the inferable narrative sequence. For me it is the dialectic, sustained, powerful, that matters. Five people: a man, four women. Their actions, however real or artificial, are part of the human intensification Dwoskin is searching for and finding (and making). The complex relationships between people (touch versus thought, versus self, versus loneliness, versus other versus body versus self...) visually real (on film) hits home through Dwoskin's ability to connect movements, to catch moments, to allow the ugly-beautiful its existence; to form, to reinvent it.

The gaudiness of colouring all the more makes us look through to essences. *Times For*. And then we return to life outside the film, outside the fantasy. Time for...

**Peter Gidal**

**Jenny Runacre** has worked extensively in film and theatre, for such directors as John Cassavetes, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Fuest, Nicolas Roeg, Ridley Scott, and Derek Jarman. In 1995 she returned to art school and obtained a MA in Conceptual Fine Art Practice from Central St Martins School of Art. She is currently working on a book discussing the directors she has worked with, and fringe theatre in the 1970s and '80s, titled *I Think You're Nuts*.

**Dr Sophia Satchell-Baeza** is a writer and editor. She has written for publications including *Sight and Sound*, MUBI's *Notebook*, and *Another Gaze*, and is working on a book about light shows, psychedelic art and the counterculture.

---

#### **TIMES FOR**

*Director/Scenario/Photography/Editing.* Stephen Dwoskin

*Producer.* Alan Power

*Music:* Gavin Bryars

*Cast:*

Maurice Colbourne, Verity Bargate, Carmel Court,

Sally Gidal, Carolee Schneemann

UK 1970, 76 mins

#### **BECOME A BFI MEMBER**

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)