



ART IN THE MAKING

Every Day Except Christmas + Enginemen

+ intro by Patrick Russell, Senior Curator, BFI National Archive

A new wave of documentary art and an affectionate appreciation of the hard-working. Tonight we explore Lindsay Anderson's landmark Free Cinema film, alongside Michael Grigsby's record of the life and work of locomotive crews based in Manchester when British Rail was changing from steam to diesel. These more polished examples of Free Cinema show a maturity in filmmaking yet retain the stylistic and tonal signatures of earlier films by this loose collective.

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Lindsay Anderson on 'Every Day Except Christmas'

I have been reproached on the one hand for not giving more 'information' about the people in the film; and on the other for not making a more explicit social comment. I have nothing against information films, and no doubt there are some very interesting ones to be made about Covent Garden (statistics, dates, weights, wages, etc). But this is not the kind of information I wanted to give about these people – and about people in general.

Similarly with social comment. I feel that at the moment in this country it is more important for a progressive artist to make a positive affirmation than an aggressive criticism. (The criticism will be implicit in the affirmation anyway, if it is a genuine one.) In aggressive criticism there is too often a sense of inferiority. The Left in Britain suffers too much from such complexes of opposition. I want to make people – ordinary people, not just Top People – feel their dignity and their importance, so that they can act from these principles. Only on such principles can confident and healthy action be based.

I am extremely grateful to the Ford Motor Company, through whose remarkable and liberal policy of sponsorship I was able to make this film without restriction; and particularly I wish to thank Karel Reisz and Robert Adams for their encouragement and their continuously indulgent support. Equally I would like to thank Leon Clore, of Graphic Films, through whose generosity *Every Day Except Christmas* was able to end up as something considerably more ambitious than was at first envisaged.

Abandoned by the community, at the mercy of publicists and government departments, British Documentary can only exist through the enterprise and sense of responsibility of people like these.

Finally: I have used the first person a lot in this note. But none knows better than I that this film owes its life, and whatever merit it may possess, equally to the devoted work of my collaborators – most particularly to Walter Lassally, John Fletcher and Daniel Paris. For their complete understanding of the spirit of the venture, for their unfailing support, and for the splendid quality of their contributions, I am deeply grateful.

Lindsay Anderson, from the *Free Cinema 3* booklet, May 1957

A contemporary review

Twelve hours in Covent Garden market. The lorries roll in from the country and are unloaded; throughout the night the market men work to display the flowers and vegetables they have for sale. There are pauses for chats and cups of tea, visits to the cafés. Early in the morning the buyers arrive, and gradually the market is emptied of its goods, until only the straggling scavengers are left to salvage the remnants, and the market men begin to look forward to the next night's work.

Lindsay Anderson's documentary – a remarkably enterprising example of sponsorship on the part of the Ford Motor Company – has become widely known since it received the Grand Prix at last year's Venice Festival of Shorts and Documentaries. It is a film of enormous technical skill: highly sophisticated poetic passages alternate with candid camera scenes as close to life as the people in *Housing Problems*. As a lyrical documentary it is clearly in the line of *Song of Ceylon*, and as good as anything since Jennings. Its real importance, however, is in its attitude – its intentness upon – the dignity of labour and workers and of the interdependence of our society, of which a market like Covent Garden is a highly significant symbol.

It might be objected that on a purely literal level the film is not true, the real Market is often a quarrelsome, sulky place, where the hierarchies of over-elaborate organisation snarl and bite; certainly it is not always this industrious ideal, largely manned by laughing young heroes. But this is not a significant objection; what is evidently the important thing for the director of this film is to make people feel proud of what they are and what they do, and this can often be infinitely more useful than to hold a mirror to all their imperfections. There are many forms of the creative treatment of reality; and social criticism may be positive, as it is here, as well as negative. It would be hard to over-praise Walter Lassally's sensitive photography or Daniel Paris's musical score.

Monthly Film Bulletin, March 1958

Enginemen

A film record of enginemen on the footplate and in the canteen at the Newton Heath locomotive sheds on the outskirts of Manchester, filmed during the early hours of a wintry morning. There is very little commentary, other than the men themselves speaking out on the changes being brought about in their lives by extensive dieselisation on British Railways.

This strongly individual example of Free Cinema is the first effort by a group of young television technicians from Manchester, led by Michael Grigsby. The drastic conditions under which the film was shot has resulted in a frequently harsh screen image, and the sound recording was limited by the slim resources available. For all these limitations, the film has a heavy rhythm, a stark beauty and its own interior compulsion to liberate rather than restrict one's imagination. That the director's affections for iron, steam, wheels and wintry sky have been so nourished and poetically expressed under primitive conditions of filming is nothing less than a miracle. And the motive force behind this muscular slice of life, captured from a most elusive environment, is tremendously impressive. It seems ironic that the blurred soundtrack, with its elliptical snatches of canteen discussion and disembodied interview, should draw attention to what is actually the film's most striking virtue. It records, but does not explain: for the film, simple and unaffected, is its own explanation.

Monthly Film Bulletin, May 1959

EVERY DAY EXCEPT CHRISTMAS

Director: Lindsay Anderson
Production Company: Graphic Films
Sponsor: Ford Motor Company
Producers: Leon Clore, Karel Reisz
Assistants: Alex Jacobs, Brian Probyn, Maurice Ammar
Screenplay: Lindsay Anderson [uncredited]
Director of Photography: Walter Lassally
Editor: John Fletcher
Music: Daniel Paris
Music Performance: Happy Wanderers
Sound: John Fletcher
Commentary Spoken by: Alun Owen

UK 1957
40 mins

ENGINEMEN

Written by: Michael Grigsby
Production Company: Unit Five Seven
Made with the assistance of: British Film Institute Experimental Film Fund
Presented by: British Film Institute
[Produced by]: Michael Grigsby
Written by: Michael Grigsby
Photography: Andrew Hall, Ewan Halleron, Eric Harrison
Graphics: Ian Thompson
Editor: Christopher Faulds
Sound Editor: Michael Sale
Technical Advice: Bertram Farbridge, Jack Miller

UK 1959
21 mins

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Art in the Making: Every Day Except Christmas + intro by BFI curator

Steven Foxon + Enginemen

Tue 13 Dec 17:45

Projecting the Archive: This Man Is Mine aka Christmas Weekend + intro by film historian Carole Sharp

Tue 13 Dec 19:35

Woman with a Movie Camera: The Babadook

Thu 15 Dec 18:15

Film Wallahs: Nirvana Inn

Thu 15 Dec 20:50

Seniors: Dead of Night + intro

Fri 16 Dec 14:00

Experimenta Mixtape: Secret Santa Edition

Fri 16 Dec 18:20

African Odysseys: The Woman King + intro & Q&A

Sat 17 Dec 14:00

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