



Cinema Born Again: Radical Film from the 70s

Resistance

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A film by: Ken McMullen

Production Company:

British Film Institute Production Board

Producer: Chris Rodrigues

Built from work by: Stuart Brisley,

Marc Chaimowicz, Ian Kellgren,

Anna Kolpy, Arnold Linken, Leslie Pitt,

Brian Eno, Rod Kedward, Terry James,

Paul Cheetham, Elizabeth Richardson

Production Manager: Ian Kellgren

Script Adviser: Rod Kedward

Camera: Mike Harvey, Colin Napthine

Video Mixer: Jeff Firth

Video Transfer: Piers Bedford

Graphics: Una Campbell

Music: Brian Eno

Cast:

Stuart Brisley

Marc Chaimowicz

Anna Kolpy

UK 1976

90 mins

We're pleased to welcome director Ken McMullen and artist Stuart Brisley for a Q&A following this screening.

Resistance is a 16mm colour feature film. It assembles fragments of raw material (archive film, performance, music, historical and psychological contradictions) and attempts to make a whole. The French Resistance provides a historical context.

Any medium possesses the ability to resist an idea and the more complex or highly developed a medium the more emphatically it forces its compromises. Mistakes or accidents can be seen in two ways. Either as failure to defeat this resistance or as openings through which one can see the battle that is being carried out. The more common approach is to pre-structure the idea and the use of the medium to fit into travelled paths. For example, by conforming to political or artistic ideology, taste values or technical standards. Alternatively one can allow the idea and the medium free play and by concentrating on objectifying the flaws work towards eventual integration.

Twenty hours of psycho-drama shot on one inch video tape produced the performance material. The participants spent a week in an isolated location working through and re-analysing the material as it was produced. This period was very intense. Aspects of the performers' own personalities merged with the fictional roles imposed on them.

The surface of the archive film is a 'memory screen', the flattened breast of history to which the performers are attached. Just as the breast is a part-object with which an infant experiences a loss of identity so here the detached images of the past represent a moment in time when they were at one with the historical flux.

The first half-hour of the film is fragmentary and exploratory. The second part deals with political betrayals in the period immediately before the war and the third part deals with the breakdown of one of the political activists and of the medium itself.

Although the film deals only intermittently with the Resistance, it does describe quite faithfully the way in which ex-resistors render up their past in terms of ready-made mythologies.

Resistance is a film asking questions, e.g.:

1. To what degree is history a statement of wish or conscience?
2. What is memory, what is history – and is there any relation between the two?
3. What is the relationship between a film that records an event and the reality of that event?
4. How far is film a product of conscious and unconscious censors?
5. What is the contribution of psychoanalytic or Marxist techniques in helping to understand the forces behind the course of events?

But the film does not provide ready-made answers to these questions. In the end all that the film offers is the momentary security of living with the fleeting, surface sensations. If answers must be found, then they will be found through the work done by the spectator in connecting fragments, in splicing together events, memories and fictions.

Production notes

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Cinema Born Again: Radical Film from the 70s

Rupture and Dissonance + discussion

Fri 10 Apr 18:10

From the Underground: Times For

Fri 10 Apr 20:40

Bending Time's Arrow: Six Reels of Film to be Shown in Any Order + Clocktime

Trailer

Sat 11 Apr 15:30

The Body Politic: Resistance + Q&A

Sat 11 Apr 17:30

Framing Feminism: Rapunzel, Let Down

Your Hair + discussion

Sat 11 Apr 20:30

Cinema Born Again Seminars

Wed 15 - Wed 29 Apr

Wednesdays 19:00 - 21:00

Agitation: Occupy! + Skinflicker

Thu 16 Apr 18:00

Freak Scene:

Exit + Solar Flares Burn for You

Fri 17 Apr 20:40

Visual Pleasure at 40:

Laura Mulvey in Discussion

Tue 21 Apr 18:20

Theory and Practice:

Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons

Tue 21 Apr 20:40

Parallel Cinema

Thu 23 Apr 18:20

New Political Cinema:

Nightcleaners + Q&A

Fri 24 Apr 20:45

Supported by The Paul Mellon Centre
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When *Resistance* was screened at the 1981 Hyeres Film Festival, the audience couldn't believe that it was made with a mere £6,000 advance from the BFI. They thought a nought had been dropped in the translation. At that screening, Ken McMullen put his hand over the projector when the date of making came up. That too was doubted: could this film have been made in 1975 when the issues it raised – a critical questioning of history, betrayal and dissent within the Communist Party – were just being opened up with the coming of the first socialist government in France since the war?

Resistance takes its starting point from a real event. In 1948 five former heroes of the French Resistance found themselves in various states of nervous breakdown. They had problems of readjusting to so-called normal life. They were plagued by memories of betrayal, crises of guilt for those who had died, rancour of rivalries created before the war had even begun. Taken through therapy by an analyst, they were encouraged to re-enact their traumas as psychodrama.

The record of this was found by the historian Rod Kelward, who was then writing a book on the French Resistance. As preparation for the making of the film he read it out in twice weekly instalments to McMullen's friends: two professional actors, and the artists Stuart Brisley, Marc Chaimovicz and Anna Kolpy, each of whom was paid £50 for their co-operation.

Then the scene shifted to a remote farmhouse in Devon. For a week the participants were herded together and the psychodrama was re-enacted under the guidance of Dr Arnold Lincoln, the University College psychiatrist, a familiar figure to ex-Slade School of Art students like McMullen. His presence was a vital ingredient. As the days passed, rivalries similar to those of the original case histories emerged, particularly between fellow performance artists Brisley and Chaimovicz. History came to life, complicated by the personal, political and psychological factors that make history lived so messily different from the calm of history written.

During that week in Devon, 24 hours of action were videotaped, shot and played back in hourly instalments. Other interpretations of 'resistance' were built up. Through the psychodrama, as the cast submitted themselves to delving and probing beneath the surface of their roles, there emerged an understandable resistance to exposing their own unconscious motivations.

The end result, after 14 months of editing, was a complex collage of archive film, an historic photograph of a woman waiting for assignment, video material refilmed on 16mm black and white film and then reprocessed on colour film stock and refilmed again, plus a directly filmed denouement. Over this is an equally complex sound track by Brian Eno, and male and female voice-overs which further cast doubt on what is seen. It is as if the film itself resists the ideas it is meant to convey.

Caroline Tisdall, *The Guardian*, 14 January 1982