

Walter Stabb Film Practice as research:
The Seasons in Quincy: Four Portraits of John Berger (2016)

Contextual Information

The celebrated feature documentary *The Seasons in Quincy: Four Portraits of John Berger* (2016) is the final output of a five-year research experiment in collaborative, multi-perspective, essay film-making process. A core team of 8 film practitioners and academics and a wider group of post-graduate film students, engaged with the thought and expression of acclaimed thinker John Berger in the final decade of his life, seeking to challenge the assertion that “the essay film is the expression of a single, situated authorial voice that enters into a dialogue with the spectator” (Rascoli, 2008, p.36) by breaking conventional film production norms to construct a multi-faceted portrait of its subject that embraced a multiplicity of voices and creative film making techniques through the production and post-production phases.

The core filmmaking team adopted different roles in production and post-production, with Walter Stabb recording production sound for two phases of filming and managing post-production and multiple phases of editing. This included two series of student editing workshops at The London Consortium in 2011 and Birkbeck in 2014. Each set of workshops included seminars and facilitated editing sessions with outputs feeding into the wider film project. This unique post-production process was important in capturing a diverse and varied set of creative responses both to Berger’s critical works and his response to the filmmakers who visit him in Paris and the French Alps during recordings. The students personal micro-film essay responses were filtered into the editing process and provide further layers of storytelling and voice, expanding the breadth of perspective on the subject and further enhancing a key theme of the film, individual journeys of discovery through engagement with Berger’s body of work.

Each phase of editing involved developing the respective seasonal chapters of the film, engaging with a different element and medium of Berger’s thought and incorporating primary recordings, archive and writing in the editing process. The filmmakers varied personal responses to Berger were melded and shaped by Walter Stabb, artist Christopher Roth and Dr. Bartek Dziadosz through audio and visual post-production techniques. Uniquely, at different stages of the films journey through post-production, the filmmakers would be addressing the films chapters from new positions, transgressing traditional filmmaking boundaries and hierarchies; writer to director, director to producer, cinematographer to director, sound to editor, editor to director. This innovative filmmaking approach and Stabb’s role in successfully organising, assembling and interrogating a vast amount of audio visual material, both primary recordings and archive, for the process of exploring key themes of memory, experience, storytelling, place, and time within Berger’s work and life, result in a film that provides an original multi-voiced, multi-faceted and multi-layered portrait.

The Seasons in Quincy is a film that contains a multiplicity of voices that tell stories that call upon the viewer for a personal engagement, because “The “I” of the essay film always clearly and strongly implicates a “you” - and this is a key aspect of the deep structures of the form”...“this “you” is not a generic audience, but an embodied spectator”. With the knowledge that the editor “is the ombudsman for the audience” (Murch, 2001, p.17) Stabb and filmmaking collaborators reviewed and workshopped the film’s chapters as work-in-progress in viewings at Birkbeck. Through post-production editing our audience / embodied spectator is successfully positioned into dialogue with the differing registers and voices that interweave to form the narrative. Carefully structuring and balancing the input from the

multitude of practitioners successfully engaged in the creative filmmaking process and response to Berger's work. Andrew Pulver writes of the film in the Guardian "As a collection, *The Seasons in Quincy* certainly hangs together; it's also an absolutely inspired way of approaching its subject." The cumulative voice has been shaped in the edit and the mode of address across the collective is coherent.

The film world premiered at the Berlin Film Festival, it has screened at The National Portrait Gallery, BFI, Sheffield DocFest, Seattle Film Festival and numerous other global festivals. It had a cinema release in the UK and USA and is distributed by Curzon Artificial Eye.

References:

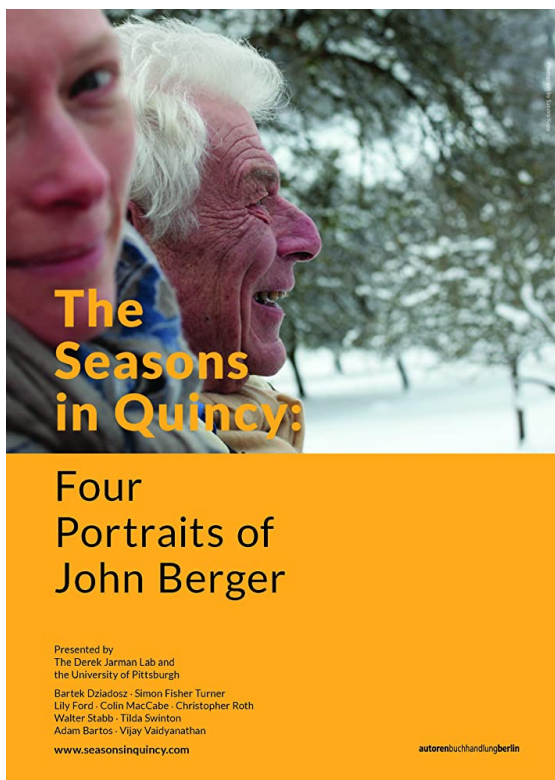
Murch, W. (2001) *In The Blink of An Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing: 2nd Edition*. Silman-James Press

Rascoli, L 2008. 'The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol.49, no.2, pp. 24-47.

Further information including filmmakers profiles: www.theseasonsinquincy.com

Screening: <https://www.curzonartificialeye.com/the-seasons-in-quincy-four-portraits-of-john-berger/#wheretowatch>

Supporting evidence:



Instagram

Search



