

A Listening Eye: The Films of Mike Dibb
Part Three: Conversation Pieces

Week Four

Available to view 19 - 26 March 2021

For the 11th and final week of *A Listening Eye*, we meet the acclaimed nature writer Roger Deakin in his restored Suffolk farmhouse, poet Charles Tomlinson also at home, and his friend, fellow poet Octavio Paz; and we celebrate Mike's abiding love of Latin American culture with three full length documentaries examining the sounds, images, voices and creativity of a complicated continent.

Available to view 19 - 26 March:

Made in Latin America: Dreams of a New World, 1989, 60'

Made in Latin America: Remembering The Future, 1989, 60'

Made in Latin America: Mexico City's popular culture 1989, 60'

Octavio Paz, 1989, 50'

Charles Tomlinson's Words and Images, 1976, 15'

A Day with Roger Deakin, 2007, 50'

Made in Latin America

A major 8 x 60' BBC series (1989) for which Mike was the Executive Producer and a Director of three of the films... *Made in Latin America* consisted of eight different thematic journeys through the diverse cultures of a fascinating and complex continent. Eschewing commentary except when essential, the series was presented through the many voices, images, music and ideas of Latin Americans themselves. Mike directed these three:

Dreams of a New World

Ever since Christopher Columbus first attempted to describe this continent, previously unknown to Europe, Latin America – as it eventually become known – has been a part of the world whose own complex reality had often been confused with the fantasies projected onto it from outside. The very concept of 'utopia' was created as a result of Europe's encounter with this new world and, ever since, utopian images have pervaded the historical development of the continent. In conversation with leading writers, painters, historians, and filmmakers, this first film explores these imaginative dreams, with their frequent opposed and brutal realities, from the search for El Dorado to the nineteenth-century struggle for independence. Interviewed here are, among others, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Juan Liscano, Germán Arciniegas, Eduardo Galeano and Diego Risquéz.

Remembering The Future

As 1992 approached, the countries of Latin America, along with Spain, pondered how to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World, a moment that saw the beginning of the end of the Aztec and Inca empires and the start of the largest human and cultural genocide in history. This film takes the pulse of Latin America in the late 1980s, with a focus on the three countries of Venezuela, Cuba, and Colombia. Artists, writers, and musicians who feature include Juan Liscano, Miguel Von Dangel, José Gamarra, Eduardo Galeano, Gabriel García Márquez, Rigoberta Menchú, Miguel Barnet, Manuel Mendive, Pablo Milanés, Beatriz Gonzalez, Jorge Child, Oscar Jaramillo, and María Mercedes Carranza. As the film draws to a close, the themes of violence and repression come to the fore, culminating in footage of the assassination of Luis Carlos Galán in August 1989.

City Limits – Mexico's popular culture

Using as its focus Mexico City, the largest Latin American city of them all, this film deals with popular urban culture: those that make it, those who consume it, and those who have written and thought about the different forms and meanings it can take. It includes conversations with the writers Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Montivais, and Elena Poniatowska, and with Lourdes Arizpe, former director of the Museum of Popular Culture. The film considers how the Mexican cinema of the 1940s transformed the Revolution into popular mythology and examines the contemporary appeal of the culture industry's most potent weapon, the massively popular soap operas called *telenovelas*, asking how this TV culture co-exists with the different strands of more indigenous cultural forms still finding a place in the city. The film goes behind the scenes at Televisa, visits old-style big-band dance halls, listens to songs of urban low life, watches young people dancing packed into the cramped spaces of mobile street discos, observes traditional art forms and festivals with endless variations, often humorous and satirical, on the objects and icons of social and religious life from the Day of the Dead to the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Please find an essay by Mike on the series here:

<http://www.mikedibb.co.uk/article.php?if=stand.txt>

Octavio Paz

Filmed across two days in Octavio Paz's apartment in Mexico City, this documentary was constructed from two separately filmed sequences that were then interwoven (and to which images were subsequently added) during the edit. The first consisted of a long conversation (conducted by MD from behind the camera), in which Octavio talked eloquently in English about his life and work. The second consisted of a carefully chosen selection of his poetry, read by him in Spanish.

Words and Images

*The chances of rhyme are the chances of meeting,
In the finding fortuitous, but once found binding.*

These two lines, quoted by the poet Charles Tomlinson in this short film about him, in a way testify to the equal importance of chance encounters and improvisation in the making of documentary films, where (hopefully and with luck) fugitive filmed moments of action or conversational insight can later find fortuitous connections and new meaning during the process of editing. In this film, shot on location in Gloucestershire, the poet and painter Charles Tomlinson reads and discusses some of his poems and is filmed making parallel black and white

'wash' paintings, inspired by the surrealist technique of 'decalcomania'. Charles Tomlinson was also a close friend (and collaborator on two poetic projects) of the Nobel prize-winning Mexican writer Octavio Paz, about whom I subsequently made a film 30 years later.

A Day with Roger Deakin

The material for this was originally filmed and recorded by Mike and Danny Nissim (on a disappointingly sunless Autumn day), as the basis for a short promo-sequence with which to demonstrate to a Channel 4 commissioning editor how naturally and beautifully Roger talked about wood, with a view to the making of a series with him about it... which alas then didn't happen. When sometime later Roger was diagnosed with the brain tumour that tragically killed him, we decided to put together everything we'd filmed in and around the beautiful Suffolk farmhouse that Roger had personally restored. The resulting 50' encounter, assembled in collaboration with the film editor Shelagh Brady, is our way of remembering and celebrating Roger's life and work, and the wonderfully illuminating conversations that always took place when one was with him.