

**A Listening Eye: The Films of Mike Dibb**  
**Part One: The Play of Ideas**

**Week Two**

**Available to view 15-21 January 2021**

For the second week of *A Listening Eye*, we focus on a range of innovative and arguably genre defining arts documentaries made during the 1970s and 1980s (and one from the 2000s), including collaborations around cricket with **CLR James**, culture and society with **Raymond Williams**, and Dibb's own extended filmed journeys, on such subjects as drawing (with **David Hockney**, **Jim Dine**, **Ralph Steadman** and others), Art and Psychoanalysis (with **Peter Fuller** and **Bob Natkin**), and the image of Black people as represented in Western art.

**Available to view 15-21 Jan**

*The Country and City*, 1979, 60'

*Beyond a Boundary*, 1976, 60'

*Naturally Creative*, 1986-7, 90'

*Seeing Through Drawing*, 1977-78, 120'

*Reflecting Skin*, 2004, 50'

**The Country and The City** (Where We Live Now)

This film formed part of "Where we Live Now", a BBC2 series, made up of five separately directed one hour films, each presented by a different writer. For several years I'd been wanting to make a film with Raymond Williams, but it was only in 1973, when I read his brilliant analysis of "The Country and The City" - as historically expressed in English literature and social thought - that I realised I'd found the right subject for a film. But it was to be another 6 years before I luckily found a place for it, in the BBC series "Where We Live Now", for which the executive producer was Christopher Martin.

And, although I could now go ahead, it remained a challenging project to take on, given the density of the book on which it was based, and much research was still needed to find the best and most resonant locations, one of the most important being the right country house. And, while the historical importance of the country house and its associated literature was fully documented by Raymond, he had no single one in mind. And thus it was by chance that I discovered the perfect place, while driving to Cheshire on a family visit to my in-laws!

Tatton Park was a hitherto private property that was deliberately opening up its history to public gaze and thus an ideal hub around which Raymond and I could explore many themes from the book. Furthermore we were given the freedom to use, not only the house and its surrounding estate, but its many paintings and rich archive; as well as to film some of its outdoor events (particularly those celebrating old country pursuits, including sheep trials) as illustrative material with which to support many of the historical arguments and quotations we wanted to deploy.

Indeed Tatton was just 20 miles from Manchester and very near Knutsford, where Elisabeth Gaskell had lived. And it was clearly the house, a visit to which was vividly described in one of her novels, from which we were able to quote. Humphrey Repton (referred to by Jane Austen and satirised by TL Peacock) had designed the estate and ornate gardens, and the destruction of the local cottages needed to make this possible was explicit in Repton's well preserved drawings at Tatton, along with fascinating earlier ground plans showing the transformation of this typical piece of English land over the centuries, culminating with the moment when it was ruthlessly 'stolen' by acts of enclosure, to the exclusive benefit of several generations of the Edgerton family that lived for decades in this 'country' house, built by money made in 'the city', and later sustained by profits from the industrialised new conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool, linked as they were by the ship canal, of which Lord Edgerton happened to be the chairman!

But the film begins where Raymond Williams himself was born and brought up, the Welsh valley near Pandy, which is also the landscape of his first novel "Border Country". It then moves to other locations, including Cambridge, The Lake District, the Wye Valley, Farnham, Tatton, and of course London. And its many quotations range from Genesis to Oliver Goldsmith, John Clare to William Cobbett, Wordsworth and Dickens to Engels and T.S Eliot.

### **Beyond a Boundary (Omnibus)**

...With the Trinidadian writer CLR James, based on his classic book about cricket.

### **Naturally Creative**

This feature length documentary explores the origins of human creativity, in collaboration with the writer Peter Fuller.

*With the critic Peter Fuller, Mike Dibb has made an outstandingly effective documentary about the very well-spring of imagination. In NATURALLY CREATIVE Dibb gathers a number of thinkers and juxtaposes their views with minimum fuss and intrusion, creating (because the thinkers are well-chosen) a rich stew of rumination...the film is provocative, generous and enthralling.*

**W Stephen Gilbert, *The Independent*, 28 November 1987**

*Ambitious in scope, expressive imagery and pot pourri approaches to its biology/creativity equation, Mike Dibb's quietly audacious major documentary attempts to signpost the 'natural' need for art and culture. Utilising everything from prehistoric cave paintings to the importance of play and the geometric beauty of fractal computer art, Dibb, together with art critic and author Peter Fuller, imparts a galvanising intellectual freshness to the otherwise arch 'rich tapestry of life' cliché...triple recommended.*

**John Lyttle, *City Limits***

### **Seeing Through Drawing**

At the time the longest arts documentary the BBC had ever shown, this film is about the fascination and meaning of drawing; why we draw, what we draw, what has been drawn and how drawing differs from painting or photography. During the course of it David Hockney makes two drawings of one of his favourite subjects, Celia Birtwell. The caricaturist and illustrator Ralph Steadman is seen at work in his studio, as well as drawing some of the regulars in his local pub. And the American Jim Dine, well-known first in the 60' as a pop artist, completes this trio of contemporary artists, all of them preoccupied by drawing and talking freely, not only about their own approach but about the work of other artists they admire.

The film also includes unique archive film and photographs of Matisse and Giacometti, as well as quotations from the notebooks and letters of major European artists from Leonardo da Vinci to Degas and Van Gogh. But, of course, drawing isn't restricted to artists. It's probably something we've all attempted at some time in our lives, whether our childish scribbles or adult doodles. So, in this film, we watch how children's drawings change and develop over the years, look over the shoulders of street artists outside the National Portrait Gallery, observe a student art class at Camberwell School of Art, conducted by Frances Hoyland, and share the problems and pleasures of making landscape drawings with members of an adult education class on Hampstead Heath.

The film also includes important contributions by the art historian Philip Rawson, curator of the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art in Durham, He has been concerned with drawing all his life and written one of the major books about it. He discusses many aspects of the subject (from Stone Age hunter art to modern conceptual drawings) in an informal conversation stimulated by and focussed around a viewing of sequences throughout the film.

### **Reflecting Skin**

Bonnie Greer explores the image of Black people as represented in Western art.