

S

creen burn...the saturated colour film frame catches fire in front of our eyes as the

intense heat of a 2k Xenon lamp dissolves a classic film print in front of a engaged audience. Cinema as a tactile, temperamental and explosive entity. Cinema as a means of production and as a physical space. As an artist run public entertainment palace The Cube Cinema has involved itself heavily with exhibition to paying audiences. The trick of the eye has been to pull this off while, slightly more privately, creating a very unusual allotment for the artists that inhabit the cubic structure to grow their work in.

Original Cube dreams concocted in the late 90's, when (feature) film-making was heralded (again) as becoming a more accessible and cheaper medium, included the crazed notion that the worker co-operative could make enough money and accrue some DIY production power (resources have always been scarce) that would translate into films being made or film-makers being supported by The Cube. It quickly transpired that most finances, energy and equipment were going to have to be put into keeping the building open and the programming process stimulating. Film making and crewing up was bypassed and the Cube tapped into some more primal artistic exhibition activities... fancy awards, egotistical actors and long credit rolls got shunted. The cinema (a former am-dram theatre and arts centre) became a hotbed of activity, a focus for a scene...it seemed to be 'like a film' rather than be making them. This is maybe why the self styled 'Microplex' has been widely ignored by film distributors, funders, festivals and press mechanisms. Even in terms of paying artists, it has been mainly musicians that have benefited from a share of collective ticket/booze sales schemes.

This is the main public narrative. However, sub-plots, over-lapping dialogues and experimental off-shoots have always been the focus of most attention from the artists that built the Cube.

Behind closed doors, during programme drops, accountant meetings, 16mm projection lessons and poster making forays we began to exercise ideas, notions and half-thoughts that quickly became practise. That is still the way people come and go, some go quick as the workload and socialising can be a distraction to some artists who need a clearer focus and are less collaborative. The Cube has it's own distinct style of working, this direct action, hands on approach draws in a particular kind of artist, sympathiser and people that just get the bug. The building jams.

Artists of all persuasion work/exploit the organisation, that's the nature of collectives. Some people develop new work practises that become artistic once you begin to get the idea that "cube work is art" . Surveyors drop out and become projectionists, radio hams become computer jacks, students become managers, writers become programmers, film-makers become musicians, straights are bent. From the base of this one screen, 110 seat cinema all manner of field research is carried out; sound art, live art, video projector abuse, genetic crops, bicycle power, guerilla projections, living off the land, new formulas for coke drinks. It is a research space, an open source set of networks that can lead to some great works and lots of discarded ideas and schemes. The Cube does not lay claim to or brand itself alongside most of the work that evolves or comes out of the place and it's

only now, after 10 years, that we can begin to see it's influence. There are even strong indications that it has been making it's own visual and thematic impact on lots of artists, including film-makers, things have slowly come into fruition with regard to it's initial cinematic dreams, moving image is seeping out of the building in many forms.

Jack Davies, who was one of the original founders of the Cube has his first feature 'Eve' in the can. Will Pugh, who ran the production company Anxiety 8 from the Cube, was DOP on it. Ben Slater was a script doctor on it. Ben, once film curator at the Cube, has written about films for a long time, including his book 'Kinda Hot: The Making of 'Saint Jack' in Singapore'. He now finds his time spent writing for film from his Singapore base. 'Helen' the slow burning feature directed by Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy and due theatrical release in 2009 was script edited by Ben. He is working in cahoots with Esther May Campbell on script development. Esther has crewed up from the Cube, admits being totally inspired by the cinema, and her current award winning short 'September' certainly has core Cubic qualities, especially it's use of music.

The Cube's influence can also be seen in Lady Lucy's art and films. She rambled into the Cube a writer and illustrator and now is a fully fledged artist with two short films being exhibited 'Don't Do Tricks' and 'Ladies, All The Ladies'. Visual artist David Hopkinson is a Cube aficionado and instigator and collaborator in a myriad of Cube pursuits. His début screening of 'Cutting Up My Friends' at the Cube was a highlight and celebration of the creative powers channelled through this volunteer organisation. Made in and around the Cube the film has inspired other workers at the Cube to do something (not the same) but equally inspiring. François Marry, who travelled to Bristol to be close to Cube musical allies, Crescent and Movietone, has produced some of the most poetic illustrated films imaginable. He cut them in the Cube's projection room, on the avid machine. Other light manipulators who have progressed from Cube film jams, vjing and sonic experiments to pursue their muse include Rod Maclachlan whose magic lantern like installations and live shows (as Flicker) are travelling the world and Adam Faraday whose photographic portraits of the Cube and the artists that visited is a project that should be continued. Documentation is not a Cube forte, it is too focused on creation. Its growing archive of recorded music and video of live events is just shelved awaiting the vision of some arch splicer with a will to turn the past into historic gold.

What is the relationship between the cube and these artists? Spending so much time in a atmospheric, large screened cinema surrounded by cinema lovers seems to engulfed them in the magic of light, how it moves through the air and cuts the darkness. There is not that careerist, media obsessed fixation amongst Cube workers that you notice at other centre's, schools or hubs. A large (cinematic) image, rather than computer screen, is the fixated means of exhibition. I recently watched two Cube projectionists at the Cube's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary mic up the 35 and 16mm projectors and loop film and abuse them in a fashion that comes with being very comfortable with the cinema apparatus. There are also a sense of romance and magic that comes with growing up in a cinema and a organisation that constantly is fighting bigger forces and ugly fashions.

In terms of budget (the film world seems obsessed by the subject) The Cube is a bum's on seats enterprise and punk in it's ability to turn limited means into an aesthetic. Despite its programme being normally pigeon-holed as 'art film', 'weird' or 'experimental' it is, on not very closer inspection, a much broader church. The programme is inspired by those that abide in the premises and naturally is has a powerful cultural influence on them to. The antics at the cinema often blows up rigid definitions of artistic practise. X-Men or Anne McGuire, independent environmental crusades or celebrating The Smiths are all well

within the remit. To understand the content and style of the Cube you have to note that when the cinema showed Warhol's 'Chelsea Girls' it actually covered the costs of paying MOMA and shipping it from New York. The cinema was rammed, absinthe from The Idler helped matters. No funding! The visual artists and film-makers that have grown up around the Cube share a sense of abandon about budgets and don't ever quite fit in narrative/drama or straight-laced documentary productions but neither do they get pushed on to the avant-garde, art-as-art gallery circuit.

Feedback, appraisal and collaborators run deep at The Cube. Artists such as Kate Rich and Heath Bunting, have been working from the building for years and are experts in cracking down on artists when they seem to have overstepped their mark or are making wrong turns. Support goes hand in hand with proper socialisation and the Cube is an ever morphing team that gets on with it. Film-making relies on such basic qualities. No alter worship just a bunch of auteurs, 10 years of them.

...

10 years is a long time and the cultural landscape The Cube operates in (especially locally) has changed much in this time partly due to the Cubes own efforts. The Cubes DIY and inclusive cultural player agenda and its freedom from the restraints public funding usually engenders (typically prefigured ideas and prefigured outcomes within a prefigured context of understanding and assessment) has had a wide and infectious impact on creative groups and individuals across Bristol. But now however, the times have caught up with the Microplex and it finds itself increasingly asking whether it has any relevance. The Cube needs to dream again and re-invent, un-model itself to keep it workers engaged, its programme inspired and it's doors open.....

Any week nowadays you can find an assortment of 'screenings' of films and programmes in numerous venues, cafés, pubs, clubs etc. city wide, many operating in ignorance of the need for licences and rights clearances. This is a response to the cheapening of necessary equipment namely video/data projectors and the need for pubs/clubs to widen their attractions (you can't smoke and drink is expensive) but more than that it reflects the shift away from consumerist modes of activity (going to the Cube to 'see' something) to a more DIY, self-managed, self-resourced and self-controlled system, operating through word of mouth networks and specialised interest circles. There is a fear they are running into self-self-congratulatory dead ends.

Next to all these screenings we have a plethora of small music venues, some almost entirely structured around the types of music available as live performances these days. DIY galleries and Art event spaces are also enjoying a period of increased activity in Bristol. All these tendencies could be read as responses to the changing landscape of culture in Bristol and the influx of newly inspired and active people willing to take risks and challenge static ideas. If then the Cube once had a pioneering role what role does it have now? And what will inform this review besides the obvious need to survive? It can no longer rally against the lack of exciting or experimental events, it seems surrounded by them.

Production was once a word encapsulating many dreams early in the Cubes history. The business of a Cinema was thought sufficient to provide funds for creative projects. Of course in practice it wasn't so the notion of production was extended to mean anything we did. Maybe now it's time to mutate to make the cube more a 'large studio', a platform for integrated production/entertainment programmes. More 'William Morris' less 'Downtown Movie Lounge', more 'Open University' and less 'Kids From Fame', more 'Joan Littlewood'

less 'Dogma', more space for independent research and longer runs and developments. If the organisation's missions are reinvented they will be departed from but something will happen. The Cube makes things happen.