

Ivens revisited...

Fifteen films in the footsteps of Ivens

Over the years a remarkable number of filmmakers have found inspiration in Ivens' films, and based on this, they wanted to trace some of the people involved, revisit locations and find out what had happened in the years after filming. Next to the many interviews, reports or documentaries on Ivens' complete work and life (like *MENSCHEN AM PULLSCHLAG DER ZEIT*, *ER FILMTE AUF FÜNF KONTINENTEN*, *TOO MUCH REALITY*, *DE ONVERGETELIJKEN: JORIS IVENS* and *TÉMOINS DE JORIS IVENS*), the revisited films are a special category. These kind of films 'in the footsteps of Joris Ivens...' were, and are, especially useful to present social and historical developments in the 20th century. For once the personality and life of Joris Ivens takes a back seat to the actors, or in most cases the non-actors (the workers, the people) who featured in his films. In most cases the current situation was, or is, being compared to that presented by Ivens in his films. What was the relationship between the artistic reality shown by Ivens and the political reality - did Ivens show 'the truth' and what happened with the ideals he presented?

1 MASTERS OF THE RAIN

Marion Michelle, 1968, 25', colour, sound, Bulgaria.

Revisit of *THE FIRST YEARS* (1947-49)



Marion Michelle, Bebe Slavka and Bai Todor during the shooting of *MASTERS OF THE RAIN*, 1968

The film, initiated and broadcast by Bulgarian State Television, opens with the happy reunion of Marion Michelle, the director of this documentary, and the people of Radilovo in Bulgaria. Michelle had written the script for *THE FIRST YEARS*, and in 1947 she was assistant director to Ivens when he had filmed in the village. On her return she screened *THE FIRST YEARS* again, and the camera captures the excitement of the families watching themselves as they had been twenty years earlier. Children shouting happily when they spotted their parents as young people, while the older people were seen laughing and crying at their younger selves. The story shows the changing landscapes of the country where the crops were being irrigated. In the past, harvests had been ruined by drought, but in the 1960s enormous sprinklers were introduced to assure the peasants of a safe and sound crop (hence *MASTERS OF THE RAIN*). During the first few years of the socialist society, the peasants were still dependent on nature. However *THE FIRST YEARS* had already shown a poet from the village, who found a well under the field and the nearby dam in construction could provide water to start irrigating

the fields, predicting that this was the way of the future.

2 RAILROAD TURNBRIDGE

Richard Serra, 1976, 19', silent, bl/w, USA. Related to *THE BRIDGE*, 1928



The iron beams of the lift bridge in Rotterdam, film still *THE BRIDGE*, 1928 © Joris Ivens Archive / EFJI.

This film is not a genuine 'revisit' as American artist Richard Serra, well known for his minimal art sculptures made of corten steel, did not actually visit the lift bridge in Rotterdam. However, he was so fascinated by Ivens' *THE BRIDGE*, showing the rhythms of metal beams, that he decided to make a film with a similar approach about the early 20th century railroad bridge in Portland (Oregon). Like Ivens, Serra worked without a script, just using the handheld camera as an extension of his arm, to make a study of movement. He used fixed camera positions to show the gentle opening and closing of the bridge, while boats and landscapes pass by. The work pays tribute to the bridge as a feat of engineering, but it also stresses the unity between life and art by suggesting how this engineering is echoed by

cinema. Serra stated, "The bridge enabled me to examine movement in filmic structure [and] the filming became a way of concentrating certain iconic elements of bridge structure'.

3 TOETS (TOUCH)

Tom Tholen, 1967, 17', colour, sound, The Netherlands

Revisit of *ROTTERDAM EUROPOORT* (1966)



Joris Ivens, Eduard van der Ende and Marceline Loridan during the shooting of *ROTTERDAM EUROPOORT*, 1965 © Joris Ivens Archive / EFJI

In 1964, Joris Ivens was asked by Rotterdam City Council to make a film promoting the largest harbour in the world. For Ivens, this commission was a welcome opportunity to strengthen the vulnerable relationship with his homeland and reconnect with 'Dutch' themes, like the Flying Dutchman. Meant as a publicity film, *ROTTERDAM EUROPOORT* (1966) became a skilful, artistic documentary with fictional scenes and incorporating new camera techniques, so that it turned out to be useless for publicity. Therefore, the disappointed producer Joop Landré turned to Tom Tholen, the sound man on *ROTTERDAM EUROPOORT*, to revisit the locations and produce an almost complete remake, even excluding the artistic elements. Although *TOETS* (1967) contains many similar shots to the original, it completely lacks the beauty, imagination and dramatic editing of *ROTTERDAM EUROPOORT*. However, Landré was clever enough to use Ivens' name on the opening title and the same graphics as its original, probably without permission.

4 A CHACUN SON BORINAGE (TO EVERYONE HIS OWN BORINAGE)

Wieslaw Hudon, 1978, 83', bl/w & color, Belgium

Revisit of *BORINAGE* (1934)

