
The House is Black + Face of Our Fear

THE HOUSE IS BLACK

Forough Farrokhzad, 1963, Iran, 22'
digital (35mm transfer), Farsi, English subtitles

THE HOUSE IS BLACK is the only film made by the highly influential Iranian modernist poet, Forough Farrokhzad, commonly known in Iran simply as Forough. Commissioned by an Iranian leprosy charity with the aim of raising awareness of the condition, Forough was invited to stay at, and produce a film within, the Bababaghi Hospice in northwestern Iran, the last remaining leper colony in the country.

The film was produced by the Golestan Film Unit, run by the Iranian filmmaker Ebrahim Golestan who was also in a relationship with Forough at the time. Whilst Golestan was instrumental in Forough being able to make the film as he asked her to direct the commission, he has been clear that the end result and its humanistic approach were determined by Forough herself.

Forough and her small crew lived in the colony for twelve days, allowing her to come to know the inhabitants as individuals beyond the condition they were collectively living with. She ended up adopting one of the children in the colony, Hosein Mansouri, who later translated Forough's poetry into German.

The focus on individual lives in THE HOUSE IS BLACK does not lend itself to broad polemic, instead centring everyday moments with poetic verses spoken over them. Yet with this focus on the humanity of her subjects, Forough still plants the seeds for implicit critiques of institutions including medicine, society and faith which fail to acknowledge that same humanity.

Forough had experienced a not-dissimilar form of clinical institutionalisation in her own life, being admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she endured electroshock therapy.

This was to be Forough's only film as she was killed in a car accident in 1967. As with her poetry, THE HOUSE IS BLACK did not benefit from official distri-

bution in Iran, especially following the 1979 Islamic Revolution but continued to circulate underground, contributing to Forough acquiring the status of a defiant, modern icon within Iranian culture.

The film also found an international audience including winning the documentary prize at the 1964 Oberhausen Film Festival. Access to the film remained limited however, with few prints available to screen and those that were lacking some verses of poetry and featuring inaccurate translations.

This version is a restoration produced by the Cineteca di Bologna in 2019. Both existing prints were used and Golestan was consulted to ensure the missing verses were accurately re-integrated.

FACE OF OUR FEAR

Stephen Dwoskin, 1992, UK, 52'
digital, English

FACE OF OUR FEAR was commissioned by Channel 4 to be the first film in their 'Disabling World' season, airing over a week in March 1992.

For Dwoskin, this provided an opportunity to build upon over a decade of research and work on representations of disability in Western media. It was a culmination of projects starting with 'Carry on Cripple,' a pioneering season at the National Film Theatre which Dwoskin co-curated in 1981 and 'Diary of a Wheelchair' an unrealised project that was rejected by a number of broadcasters.

The essay film draws on a range of footage from across art and cinema alongside excerpts of skits performed by disabled participants to reveal how the struggles and discrimination faced by disabled people are not due to the way their bodies operate but have been created by centuries of stigmatisation and isolation of divergent bodies.

In this sense, FACE OF OUR FEAR sits within the social model of disability which was beginning to be widely used by activists and academics at this time, especially following the publication of Mike Oliver's 'The Politics of Disablement' in 1990.

The social model argues that disability is not innate but the result of a society that has not seen bodies outside of the norm as being worthy of accommodation in many aspects of life. In other words, one is not born disabled but made so by the way others have configured the world in which one is to live.

Whilst Dwoskin was a filmmaker and disabled, using crutches, and later, a wheelchair, following childhood polio, the label of 'disabled filmmaker' is not easily applied to his career. He did not seek to minimise his disability, addressing it in a number of films but much of his most influential work has little to do with the topic, at least explicitly.

Dwoskin addressed disability and illness in a number of other films, including 'The Sun and the Moon' (2007) and autobiographically in 'Trying to Kiss the Moon' (1994) but many of his best known films, including the underground early shorts from the 1960s and 70s speak primarily to other subjects, most famously his intense studies of the female face.

These other films are also more formally experimental than FACE OF OUR FEAR, however they share a concentrated focus on the body, the theme which best encapsulates Dwoskin's prolific and varied filmmaking career.

About *treatment*:

Treatment is an irregular series of film programmes curated by Siavash Minoukadeh that uses film to explore how the tools and institutions of care and health have engaged with, and often worked against, individual subjecthood.

Whilst science and medicine have been able to provide major improvements to the length and quality of our lives, this series will examine the moments and spaces in which the rationality of science has come into contact and conflict with human tendencies and desires to be unpredictable and messy.

The films in this series treat their subjects in a personal sense, having a specific attitude towards them, but they do not 'treat' their subjects in a clinical sense, trying to fix and homogenise divergence.

Given the recent focus on care in many areas of culture, Treatment aims to ensure that the discussion of this topic is necessarily complex, messy and ongoing, avoiding broad strokes which can apply an added moral burden on both those seen to need care and those tasked with providing it.

Thanks to:

Carmen & everyone at Cineteca di Bologna; Hanan & everyone at LUX; Damien and everyone at Close-Up for their help in making this screening possible.

— further reading & references —

an account of the restoration process of THE HOUSE IS BLACK:

Ehsan Khoshbakht, *The House is Black - Which Version to Screen*, Notes on Cinematograph, 2020.
<https://notesoncinematograph.blogspot.com/2020/03/the-house-is-black-which-version-to.html>

an English translation of a selection of Forough's poetry:

Forough Farrokhzad, trans. Sholeh Wolpé, *Sin: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*, University of Arkansas Press, 2010.
<https://www.uapress.com/product/sin/>

Forough's cultural impact on pre-revolution Iran and beyond:

Joanna Scutts, *Feminize Your Canon: Forough Farrokhzad*, The Paris Review, 2020.
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/11/19/feminize-your-canon-forough-farrokhzad/>

on FACE OF OUR FEAR as a culmination of Dwoskin's investigation of disability:

Henry K. Miller, *Dwoskin Project Blog #21: Diary of a Wheelchair*, LUX, 2021.
<https://lux.org.uk/dwoskin-project-blog-21-diary-of-a-wheelchair/>

a contemporary reflection on FACE OF OUR FEAR by a disabled critic:

Sam Judd, *LIFF 2022 – Face of Our Fear (1992)*, Set The Tape, 2022.
<https://setthetape.com/2022/11/11/liff-2022-face-of-our-fear/>

on Dwoskin's practice across his career:

Raphäel Bassan, *Stephen Dwoskin: une autopsie du désir*, Dérives, 2004 (french).
<http://derives.tv/stephen-dwoskin-une-autopsie-du/>
