

public house

A film by Sarah Turner

96 minutes, 2016

"Its combination of the choreographic and choral offer a dazzlingly unique form in which to make the collective cinematic"

Sophie Mayer, BFI Sight & Sound

In 2012, the Ivy House pub in Peckham was sold to property developers as part of the ongoing gentrification of South London, but the locals triumphantly saved it as the first asset of community value in the UK.

The film tells the story through a communal portrait of intertwining voices, which can be heard as a collection of individual testaments or as a folk-operatic arrangement.

This participatory documentary weaves dance, poetry and song through its multi-layered soundscape, but the Ivy House itself remains the central character, embodied and inhabited by memories beyond its current guests.



Filmmaker Statement

I am a shareholder of the Ivy House pub, I lived opposite it when it was closed in April 2012 and was involved in the campaign to save it. Back then, the pub's staff were given a few days notice of eviction and closure; our cherished pub had been sold for conversion into flats. The energy of the community ensured this did not happen: the sale was blocked through an English Heritage listing, the pub was registered as the first Asset of Community Value in the UK, then triumphantly purchased.

When the Ivy House re-opened in August 2013 it felt like an exciting disruption to a now wearily familiar cultural narrative - the needs of gentrification and capital privileged and the needs of a community sidelined. The Ivy House story has significantly rewritten this ongoing London narrative and suggests that the creative resistance of communities can propose alternative social imaginaries.

But all this came about through a deeply felt investment in the pub, not just as a public space that gives communal focus to our every day, but as a space that connects us with our past, our fictions and our present, and in so doing, allows us to think about our future. But these spaces are increasingly being privatised. Having documented key moments of the community take over for a number of years, I wanted Public House to explore how the resonances of individual and cultural memory which creates our investment in these spaces also suggests the potential to reinvent them, and in so doing, enables us to imagine a different social contract.

In order to do that I had to find a form for the film, which didn't so much tell the story, as embody it. I thought of the soundscape as a participative memory work in order to give form to the collective voice and also to move from the I, to the WE, which in many ways is what the Ivy House story represents. The soundscape is composed of the voices of many pub users – past and present – engaging in 'pub talk': memories of the space as well as their fears, dreams, desires. In key moments in the film, these individual testaments build into harmonics, creating a choral refrain through the collective voice. Through this musical tapestry the film morphs from a document of individual memories, into the pub's swing dance classes, which re-interpret the movement of the 30's in this 30's space, through to the staged collective authorship that explores different forms of encounters through performance poetry - forms of community participation that are rooted in pub culture. Developing this movement from document into fantasy, which mirrors the cultural transformation of the pub, the film culminates in a mass community assembly, which takes the creative energy of the Ivy House out of the pub and onto the streets, where we 're-imagine' William Blake's first vision of angels on nearby Peckham Rye.

"A tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars."

Ultimately, the Ivy House story speaks to the importance of the social function of pubs. What it means to be local, ideas of insider / outsider, community and participation, home and belonging, are the crucial anxieties of our age. Pubs are spaces that allow us to connect with others who are often quite different from us; the encounter with a stranger is at the heart of pub culture, and also - possibly - why we value it. What other spaces allow us to explore our own stories, both the events of our lives, and the complex human emotions which are staples of pub culture - lust, fear, desire and mourning – socially, in a public, as opposed to a private, house?

Sarah Turner, September 2016



Production Team:

Featuring: Public House was made in collaboration with some of the many users of the Ivy House Community Pub. It features their voices, poems and performances, as well as key moments in the community take over.

Camera: Sarah Turner, Matthew Walter, Nicola Daley ACS

Stills Time-lapses: Matthew Walter

Sound and Sound Design: Sarah Turner

Production and Events Manager: Harriet Fleuriot

Production and Post-Production Supervision: Matthew Walter

1st Assistant Director: Amy Hayward

Location Sound: Charlie Fleming

Choral Director: Duncan MacLeod

Movement Director: Wendy Steatham

Social Media and Community Liason : Suzy Milburn

Writer/ Director/ Producer/ Editor: Sarah Turner



Sarah Turner Bio:

Sarah Turner trained at St Martin's School of Art and the Slade School of Fine Art. She is an artist, filmmaker, writer, curator and academic. Her feature films include Ecology, 97mins, 2007, Perestroika, 118mins, 2009, (theatrically released by the ICA in 2010 and featured in Tate Britain's major survey: Assembly), and Perestroika:Reconstructed, conceived and executed as a gallery work (Carroll Fletcher Gallery, London, April/ May 2013).

Turner's short films include Overheated Symphony, UK, 10mins, orchestrated for Birds Eye View Film Festival 2008, Cut, 17 mins, 2000, was broadcast on Channel 4, and A Life in a Day with Helena Goldwater, 20 mins, 1996, and Sheller Shares Her Secret, 8 mins, 1994, both headlined Midnight Underground when they were also broadcast on Channel 4. Sarah has had feature scripts commissioned by the BFI, Film Four Lab and Zephyr Films. Amongst other curatorial projects, Turner produced (with Jon Thomson) the launch programme for Lux Cinema in 1997; Hygiene and Hysteria: The body desired and the body debased, a touring programme of artists' film and video for Arts Council England and programmes for Tate and the National Film Theatre. Sarah is currently Reader in Fine Art and Director of Research in the School of Music and Fine Art, University of Kent.

Funded: by a production award from Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN), and a research award from the School of Music and Fine Art, University of Kent.

Press:

Public House premiered in the documentary competition at the 2015 BFI London Film Festival, nominated for the Grierson award. This was a wonderful opportunity for London audiences to see a story featuring a London community in their city. In 2016, Public House has been re-edited and re-mastered in a new version for wider audiences.

Here is the post-premiere Q&A between filmmaker Sarah Turner and LFF programmer and BFI Head of Cinemas, Helen de Witt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Da8n4QU9d-8>

Sophie Mayer: Sight & Sound:

"(Public House) manifest[s its] complex conceptual framework through immediately engaging screen work. The performing body provides the medium through which cinematic experiment with multi-layered sound is projected towards the audience, a connection point that allows us to feel the film deeply.

[Turner's] is a communitarian film on all sides, with no individual star. Public House re-imagines cinema as a truly public house, reminiscent of the street-side cameras of Mitchell and Kenyon acting as an invitation to their subjects to view themselves, communally. Turner's subjects are the pubgoers and staff of the Ivy House in Peckham Rye – or possibly Nunhead: there's a classic Londoners' debate, one of the many moments in which the film's choral voiceover manages to give voice to community as united but not homogeneous. The Ivy House was the first pub to be listed as an Asset of Community Value, saved from developers by community shareholders. While the film offers a toolbox for future campaigners, it's also a participatory portrait, particularly in the poems that give the film its spine. It's the community who are truly the asset, suggests the film in post-Occupy spirit. Its combination of the choreographic and choral offer a dazzlingly unique form in which to make the collective cinematic."

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/festivals/london-2015/experimenta>

The original and longer version of the film screened at the LFF was reviewed by popular site Londonist:

"The story alone makes this slightly oddball documentary worth a look (just imagine if every community could take control of their local and turn it into such a brilliantly personal place). Turner has gone further than just charting what happened and crafted an intriguing audio-visual tapestry that takes a little while to get used to (and perhaps goes on a bit too long) but is richly rewarding and a fine tribute to the achievements of the co-op members...

There are no talking heads though we hear memories and testimonies, sometimes overlapping, sometimes looped into hypnotic incantations, one of the most memorable being a disembodied voice chanting "vodka and lime, port and lemon" while a disco ball rotates...

This 'spoken word-text-opera', as Turner calls it, is threaded through a collage of events that have taken place in the pub over the last few years (before, during and after the buy-out). The most striking are the performance art stunts and spoken word nights that were devised specifically for this film. Subjects range from life in a video shop to a friend's suicide, with the readers all being ordinary punters you might nod hello to at the bar but whose stories and feelings you'd never otherwise know. This is the magic of The Ivy House, a pub where anything goes and anyone can say or do whatever they like...

Yes, the film demands quite a lot of the audience, but if you let it hypnotise you it ends up being a far more immersive experience than the average documentary. As the camera pokes into the corners of the building you can almost smell the spilt beer and crumbs of pork crackling."

<http://londonist.com/2015/10/an-audio-visual-tapestry-about-london-s-first-co-op-pub>



Praise for Perestroika:

'In her remarkable film *Perestroika*, the British artist-film-maker Sarah Turner reinvents the genre for the present day: the 'landscape film' under the sign of extinction. The terrain covered is not British but Russian, more specifically Soviet and post-Soviet. *Perestroika* consists largely of footage shot on two train journeys 20 years apart from Moscow to Lake Baikal in Siberia, the first between 1987 and 1988 and the second between 2007 and 2008...The ambition on display here is laudable in itself, but what really distinguishes *Perestroika* is its search for a form to address the way the mind baulks at the idea of extinction, reflexively seeking the solace of disavowal and avidly misrecognising disaster as normality. As physically immersive as anything you're likely to see at a 3D multiplex, *Perestroika* sets its coolly minimalist structure against a visceral emotional tone to produce a work unlike any other in current British cinema'.

Chris Darke, Sight and Sound

BFI | Sight & Sound | **Film of the month: *Perestroika* (2009):**

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/film-month-perestroika>

'Films like Sarah Turner's *Perestroika* don't come along very often. It's an elegy, a fictional documentary, an intimate travelogue through very difficult memories. Narrated from the point of view of a woman called 'Sarah Turner', a ghost, someone who is suffering from retrograde amnesia after a cycling accident, it follows her railway journey back to Siberia where, twenty years earlier, her best friend was killed.

There are many ghosts here, flickering and lighting up the darkened avenues of loss and mortality: the ghost of Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993); the ghost of Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989); the ghosts of so many artist films that have striven to find a voice that could mesh personal with political concerns as troublingly and movingly as Turner does here. Elegantly photographed, sound-designed to precise and goose-bumping effect, this is a rare and haunting work of memory-gleaning."

Sukdev Sandhu: The Telegraph

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/7978145/Perestroika-review.html>

"From the clatter of the train through the sounds of insomniac grief to the 'wonderful life' of our burning seas, *Perestroika* confronts that hallucinatory real, and makes crisis visible by layering personal and political griefs. It brings the viewer numbed by statistics and news footage back to life – and makes the heart race."

Sophie Mayer

BFI | Sight & Sound | The tracks of time: **Sarah Turner's '*Perestroika*' :**

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/tracks-time-sarah-turner-s-perestroika>

'Sarah Turner's challenging art film is a stream of consciousness memory-jogger, says Peter Bradshaw

"It is the kind of film that is arguably better viewed on the wall of an art gallery, but the concentration that comes from watching these images in a cinema gives the movie its distinctive bleak power – a rising sense of alienation, even panic, as we stare, endlessly, at

these glimpsed images of cities and people whose meaning is withheld from us. Perestroika is a difficult, challenging and experimental piece and not for everyone. But it is conceived with intelligence and arresting intensity.'

Peter Bradshaw: The Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/sep/02/perestroika-review>

Peter Bradshaw's best films of 2010: Our film critic makes the nominations for his own personal Oscars in a widely underrated year for film:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2010/dec/01/peter-bradshaw-best-movies-2010>

Perestroika

'from the artist and video maker Sarah Turner, takes us on a journey. Two journeys, dovetailed. The narrating "heroine" – Turner's own voice – is barely seen. We hear her stream of consciousness as she and we travel towards Lake Baikal on a trans-Siberian train. The changing view from the windows constitutes 90 per cent of the visual imagery. At first the film seems ponderous with mission: we hear something about "an ecological consciousness-raising trip", something no less jargonish about a "document of process". But wait. The blurry passage of the landscape, the blurry elision of time... Turner made this trip 20 years before, or did she, with a best friend who died. Is she reconstructing? Re-imagining? Are we in a drama or a documentary?

The voice continues with its litanies, yet also adds fillips of insight: pithinesses about memory, subjectivity, truth, illusion. Finally – weathered and a little worn like real train travellers – we tumble into a present bright and lurid with stillness. A ruined hotel. A lake as big as a sea. And a death, never explained but by now as momentous to us, and as engulfing, as a black hole. What begins as a travelogue with philosophical trimmings turns into a puzzle picture worthy of Resnais or Antonioni.'

Nigel Andrews. Financial Times

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/aa68b7b2-b5e1-11df-a048-00144feabdc0.html>