



Crystal Gazing

A film by: Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen

©: Modelmark

Produced by: British Film Institute

In association with: Channel Four, Modelmark

Head of Production: Peter Sainsbury

Production Manager: Rebecca O'Brien

Production Assistant: Kim Nygaard

Production: Jill Pack

Script: Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey

Taxi Queue Monologue: Keith Allen

Crossed Line Article: John Howe

Cinematographer: Diane Tammes

Lighting Technician: Richard Johnson

Camera Loader: Nina Kellgren

Camera Assistant: Anne Cottringer

Grip: Olly Hoeben

Stills: Michael Bennett, Mitra Tabrizian, Olly Hoeben

Editor: Larry Sider

Art Director: Mick Hurd

Assistant Art Director: Annie Curtis-Jones

Costume Designer: Sue Snell

Assistant Costume Designer: Doreen Watkinson

Make-up Designed by: Sara Raeburn

Hair for Lora Logic Designed by: Trevor Sorbie

Titles: Julian Rothenstein

Music: Lora Logic

Performed by: Lora Logic

With: Ben Annesley, Charles Hayward, Philip Legg

Sound Recordists: Larry Sider, Moya Burns

Post-synch Recording: Lionel Strutt

Synching Up: Jo Ann Kaplan

Dubbing Mixer: Colin Martin

Post-synch Effects: Pauline Martin

Special thanks for casting to: Susie Figgis

Cast:

Gavin Richards (*Neil Holt*)

Lora Logic (*Kim*)

Mary Maddox (*Vermilion*)

Jeff Rawle (*Julian*)

Maggie Shevlin (*narrator*)

Alan Porter (*magician*)

Patrick Bauchau (*husband*)

Keith Allen (*monologist*)

Ben Annesley, Charles Hayward, Philip Legg

(*band members*)

Nicholas Le Prevost, James Leahy (*examiners*)

Beata Vigh-Anderson (*book thief*)

Dinah Stabb (*shop assistant*)

Liz Smith (*lady in pub*)

Roderic Leigh (*firework salesman*)

John Howe (*man on crossed line*)

Miriam Margolyes (*newsreader*)

Jonathan Eden (*interviewer*)

Beverley Sher (*woman in nightclub*)

Steven Bernstein, Marcus Bires, Nick Ray
(*cul-de-sac*)

Annette Flanders, Robert Flanders, Mark Nash
(*taxi queue*)

Judy Crighton, Robert Dayant,

Nick Johnson, Sion Tammes (*Rough Trade*)

Adrian Garvey, Karen Hazelwood, Colin Wood
(*job centre*)

Rosemary Bailey, Susan Barrowclough,
Victor Bockris, Miles, Kim Nygaard
(*Monsieur Thompson's*)

Tony Rayns, Bertha Tsang, Charles Tsang,
Wellington Tsang (*Chinese takeaway*)

Reggie Fergus, Kevin Samuels (*roller-skating*)
Jim Daly (*Elgin pub*)

Barbie Coles, Kate Cragg,
Ilona Halberstadt, Philip Ward (*nightclub*)

Ian Graham (*coach yard*)

Laura Mulvey: Thinking through Film

Crystal Gazing

Laura Mulvey on 'Crystal Gazing'

In *Crystal Gazing*, the question of narrative situation revolves around the four characters we took from Erich Kästner's *Fabian* and reinvented for our script. The atmosphere of disillusion and disorientation that has overwhelmed the book's intellectual, bohemian protagonists in Berlin in 1930 seemed relevant to the onset of Thatcherism. But through images of the future and the idea of crystal gazing, we added another dimension. Real or fantastic, these 'intimations' reach towards an indistinct temporality in which 'now', 'then' and 'to come' are entangled. For instance, during the magic act in the fifth scene, the protagonist is described in the voice-over as 'looking through a childhood window onto a landscape where the present succumbed to the future'. And later: 'They had damaged the map to dreamland and there was no way home for the blindfolded'. The four characters loosely represent different and contrasting aspects to this sense of time, varying between ruined traces of a lost utopianism to the technological advances of speculative capitalism.

Peter and I had begun, in the late 1970s, to collect newspaper articles about contemporary capitalism, gradually focusing our interest on the economics of future markets, which became the topic of the unmade project *Possible Worlds* (1978). The latter not only prefigures the multiple-narrative and character structure of *Crystal Gazing* but also revolves around ideas of the future, combining (through three emblematic characters) computer technology, market speculation on 'futures' and a utopian community. We salvaged something of this in *Crystal Gazing*; Vermilion works as a reader of satellite maps forecasting weather and crop trends. As the voice-over suggests, 'This insight into the future, bought at such a great price, would benefit only a few... through the paradoxes of the commodity market, the prediction of failure could bring good fortune and money in the bank.' (On the other hand, we lifted Vermilion's very 'modern' marriage contract directly from the Berlin/Weimar atmosphere of Kästner's novel.)

In both the novel and our film, the central character is a dreamer, who drifts aimlessly and is sacked from his job early on in the story. Neil, in *Crystal Gazing*, illustrates comic books and has invented a science fiction world of the future: 'The Cities of Alpha'. In the novel and the film, his best friend is finishing a PhD but in *Crystal Gazing* Julian's semiotic and psychoanalytic reading of Charles Perrault's fairy tale, 'Puss in Boots', revolves around the way that Puss's speech acts and actions can alter his master's future life. For Julian, 'Puss in Boots' was the founding text of modernism, the secular celebration of language as desire and language as power ... its transformation of lies into truth, fiction into fact and desire into fulfilment.

Throughout the central section of the film, Peter's writing is once again of particular importance, both in its own right and also as a reworking of his longstanding interest in the relation between word, sign and meaning. The fourth character in *Fabian* is a rising movie star who sells out to a corrupt film industry; in *Crystal Gazing*, Kim is a rising pop star. Lora Logic's music, her saxophone and most particularly her voice light up the film, bringing the culture of punk that Peter and I had wanted, but also an unexpectedly lyrical and melancholy resonance that enhances the story and its atmosphere. The gender politics of *Crystal Gazing* reflect the changing economic atmosphere of the

Richard Borthwick, Steven Brooks, Benny Green, Anne Kidd, Vanessa McKinnon (*Pontins ad*)
Alan Altrudo, Kathy Altrudo, Anna Bell, Ricardo Gomez Perez, Abigail Marshall, Alba Rebello, Mary Roberts, Carol Robinson, Valance Robinson, Magnolia Urbano (*pickets*)
UK 1982
90 mins
16mm

The screening on Mon 10 Nov will be introduced by Esther Leslie, Professor of Political Aesthetics, Birkbeck, University of London

Laura Mulvey: Thinking through Film

Riddles of the Sphinx

Tue 4 Nov 20:45; Mon 17 Nov 20:30 (+ intro);
Fri 21 Nov 18:20

Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons

Thu 6 Nov 20:30 (+ intro by academic and writer Nicolas Helm-Groves); Sun 16 Nov 12:30

Crystal Gazing

Mon 10 Nov 18:15 (+ intro); Sun 23 Nov 15:10

AMY! + discussion with Laura Mulvey + Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti

Tue 11 Nov 18:10

Zorn's Lemma + intro by Laura Mulvey

Mon 17 Nov 18:20

Laura Mulvey Symposium

Sat 22 Nov 11:00-17:00

The Bad Sister

Sat 22 Nov 18:10 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);
Wed 26 Nov 21:00

The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp

Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter + The Woman's Film

Sat 22 Nov 20:30

Le Vent d'est Wind from the East

Mon 24 Nov 18:15

Disgraced Monuments + discussion with Laura Mulvey + 23rd August 2008

Thu 27 Nov 18:10

Antonio das Mortes

O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro
Sat 29 Nov 15:10

See a selection of materials by Laura Mulvey in the BFI Reuben Library's window displays in November

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1980s as a male-centred labour force began to succumb to unemployment and casualisation while women's marginal work remained, by and large, the same.

Woven into these temporal twists are the points where 'necessity and contingency collide', the blockages that thwart Neil's progress: from wrong turnings, to the unexpected husband, to the crossed telephone line, to his accidental death. To enhance this sense of a narrative at standstill, we also inserted into *Crystal Gazing* quite arbitrary scenes, episodes and images. Some of the locations taken from our Ladbroke Grove neighbourhood have no significance for the story: the Portobello fish-and-chip shop, the Golborne Road Chinese takeaway, Elgin Books, Rough Trade, the restaurant Monsieur Thompson, the mural by Ladbroke Grove Underground Station. There were also quotations and images, such as the crystal ball, the Rings of Saturn and the Joseph Cornell box.

All these turnings, references, stories within stories and interruptions created a continuum with the principles of 'counter-cinema': narrative intransitivity, multiple diegeses, apertures formed by citation. The story of the rationale for Neil's projected trip to Mexico was drawn from an experience of Peter's when he was researching our Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti exhibition. In Mexico City, he visited Dolores Olmedo, the powerful patron of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and an important collector of their work, to solicit her support and the loan of Kahlo paintings. To Peter's horror, she explained that in order to buy 'an expensive Diego Rivera' at Sotheby's, she had pawned two Kahlos at the Central Pawn Shop in Mexico City. The ticket was held by Sotheby's, New York. Eventually the situation resolved itself, and just in time for the exhibition, but the incident had made a strong impression on us.

In some notes for *Crystal Gazing*, Peter wrote: 'London. Midwinter. 1982. Unemployment hangs like a noose round the neck of the city. Shattered dreams. Redundancy figures.... This is a story set in the Thatcher recession. But it begins far far away.... In the Cities of Alpha.' These notes reminded me of the way that a film about the Thatcher-designed economic crisis is punctuated by dream-like images and themes. Here *Crystal Gazing* has some kind of overlap with *Riddles of the Sphinx*, continuing and exaggerating the earlier film's fusion of abstract spaces and actual locations. Ultimately this combination of the fantastic, in a range of different forms, with the starkness of everyday reality is characteristic of both films and comes close to capturing something of what Peter and I loved about cinema.

Laura Mulvey, Introduction from Oliver Fiske (ed), *The Films of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Scripts, Working Documents, Interpretation* (BFI/Bloomsbury, 2023)