



**THE WORD AND THE IMAGE**  
THE FILMS OF  
**PETER WHITEHEAD**

**A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE WORK OF  
BRITISH FILM DIRECTOR  
PETER WHITEHEAD**

**AVAILABLE FOR BOOKING BEGINNING JUNE 2006**



## PETER WHITEHEAD

Legendary filmmaker, author, lover of some of the world's great beauties, and falconer to Arab princes, Peter Whitehead was at the heart of Swinging London and the counter culture of the 1960s. He filmed the Rolling Stones in drag, Allen Ginsberg at the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Shakespeare Company's protest against the Vietnam war, the Presidential campaign of Robert Kennedy, and the students of New York's Columbia University occupying their campus. Taken together, Whitehead's films – many of which are directly related to the United States (the Beat poets, Vietnam, student protest) – stand as an unrivaled document of the era.

Marking the 40th anniversary of Peter Whitehead's career in film, Contemporary Films (UK), Reality Films (UK) and The Maysles Institute (US) are pleased to present the first ever American retrospective of his work. An extension of the Realityfilm London retrospective of 2002, "The Word And the Image" includes rare and previously unseen material from Whitehead's extensive archive and a new interview/documentary produced especially for the occasion of this series.

The films in this series are presented in new BETA SP ( PAL or NTSC ) transfers:

**THE PERCEPTION OF LIFE** (1964, 30 mins)  
**WHOLLY COMMUNION** (1965, 33 mins)  
**BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT** (1967, 65 mins)  
**PETER WHITEHEAD: POP FILMS** (1966-69, 120 mins)  
**TONITE LET'S ALL MAKE LOVE IN LONDON** (1967, 70 mins)  
**NOTHING TO DO WITH ME** (1968, dir. Anthony Sterne, 30 mins)  
**THE FALL** (1969, 120 mins)  
**LED ZEPPELIN: LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL** (1970, 102 mins)  
**DADDY** (1973, 90 mins)  
**THE FIRE IN THE WATER** (1977, 90 mins)  
**IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE IMAGE:  
CONVERSATIONS WITH PETER WHITEHEAD**  
( 2006, dir. Paul Cronin )

We feel these singular films will appeal to a wide variety of the public, from ordinary moviegoers to enthusiasts of the pop-political counterculture of the 1960s, fans of the British Free Cinema movement, as well as experimental film lovers.



**The entire program available to venues for a flat rental fee**

For more information and booking requests please contact

**Michael Chaiken**  
**Program Director, Maysles Institute**  
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Additional materials, including screeners, stills and a bound 96-page illustrated brochure about Whitehead's life and career are available upon request.

Peter Whitehead's website  
**[www.peterwhitehead.net](http://www.peterwhitehead.net)**

For a selection of articles about Peter Whitehead and his work  
**[www.thestickingplace.com](http://www.thestickingplace.com)**

For more information on the Contemporary Films distribution and documentary library  
**[www.contemporaryfilms.com](http://www.contemporaryfilms.com)**

For more information on Reality film  
Including Marek Pytel's 'Peter Whitehead: The Complete Retrospective 1964 – 69'  
**[www.realityfilm.co.uk](http://www.realityfilm.co.uk)**

An unsung hero of British cinema, Peter Whitehead's films represent an extraordinary insight into counterculture movements of the late 1960s in both London and New York.

Born in Liverpool in 1937, Whitehead studied physics and crystallography at Cambridge University where he worked for Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA, knew future British poet laureate Ted Hughes (who later dedicated his poem "The Risen" to him) and Syd Barrett, later of Pink Floyd fame, and acted in the theater alongside Ian McKellan and Peter Cook. He obtained a scholarship to the Slade School of Art as a painter, but instead took up film-making under the tutelage of director Thorold Dickinson. He became a newsreel cameraman for Italian television in 1964, and was asked by the Nuffield Foundation to make a half-hour science documentary called "The Perception of Life" which was shot almost entirely through a microscope.



In 1965 he made "Wholly Communion", the film of the International Poetry Meeting in June 1965, which opened in London to great acclaim and later won the Gold Medal at the Mannheim Documentary Film Festival. After seeing the film, Andrew Loog Oldham, manager of the Rolling Stones, invited Whitehead to make a film of the Stones' tour of Ireland. "Charlie is My Darling" was shot with one camera over two days in Dublin and Belfast. Distribution of the film was later blocked by Allen Klein when he took control of the group's music rights.

In 1967 Whitehead made two films: "Tonite Let's All Make Love in London", in his words a "spoof of the London Scene" (even if it remains the quintessential filmic representation of Swingin' London) and "Benefit of the Doubt", which documents the ground-breaking Royal Shakespeare Company's London production US. That same year Whitehead was hailed by influential British magazine Films and Filming as "Probably the most creative and original of the young British film-makers. His approach and work could form the basis of a new independent British cinema."

In September 1967 Whitehead presented "Tonite" and "Benefit" at the New York Film Festival. While in the city he started shooting what was to become "The Fall", a two-hour film about the collapse of legal protest in America. Whitehead captured the mood on the streets of New York in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and spent several days inside the occupied buildings of Columbia University, filming the police crashing through the front door, and the subsequent mayhem and violence.

Whitehead's work documenting the burgeoning rock and pop scene of the era is equally important. He created some of the first pop promos for Top of the Pops on British television and filmed bands like The Rolling Stones, The Dubliners, Eric Burdon and the Animals, The Shadows and Jimmy James and the Vagabonds, as well as Jimi Hendrix and Nico. In 1970 he photographed and edited Led Zeppelin's Live at the Albert Hall concert, recently released on DVD.



In the early 70s Whitehead quit filmmaking and spent ten years in North Africa, Pakistan and the Arctic as a falconer. The following decade was spent in Saudi Arabia where he built and ran the largest private falcon breeding center in the world, the Al Faisal Falcon Centre. This came to an abrupt end with the Gulf War of 1991. Since 1987 Whitehead has written several novels, including "Tonight Let's All Make Love in London" and "The Risen".

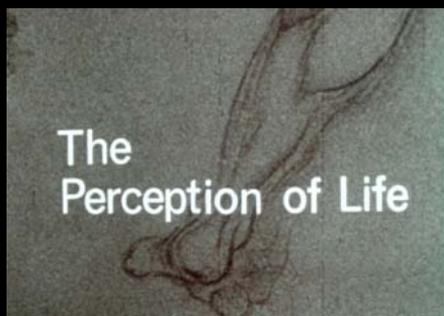
Rarely seen – either in the 60s or more recently – and freshly rediscovered by audiences and historians in Britain, Whitehead's films have been the subject of retrospectives and lectures across the country, and have been acquired by the National Film and Television Archive in England.



# THE FILMS:

## THE PERCEPTION OF LIFE

An extraordinarily beautiful and simple science film about the history of biological ideas which shows how they expanded as technology improved. Filmed in museums and in the Cambridge University labs where Whitehead had been a student, *The Perception of Life* was filmed through microscopes used by scientists from the 17th to the 20th century, including the electron microscope in the MRC unit where Francis Crick discovered the structure of DNA.



## WHOLLY COMMUNION

The documentary that effectively launched Whitehead's career, *Wholly Communion* captures the historic event at the Royal Albert Hall on 11 June 1965 where an audience of 7,000 witnessed the first meeting of American and English Beat poets. Among the performers featured are Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Alexander Trocchi, Gregory Corso and Adrian Mitchell.



## BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Peter Brook directs the Royal Shakespeare Company in US, a semi-improvised work protesting England's unseen and unacknowledged role in the Vietnam War. Containing sequences at public meetings and interviews with the actors (including Glenda Jackson) and Brook himself, the film is an agit-prop time capsule that has gone virtually unseen in this country since its premiere at the New York Film Festival in 1967. Wrote *Variety* of the film, "...for Americans interested in current theatrical trends it could be a must, since it's their only current opportunity to see one of the most adventuresome and controversial stage productions of the last few years."



### **PETER WHITEHEAD: POP FILMS**

Whitehead's work with The Dubliners, The Small Faces and, above all, The Rolling Stones was the very inception of the artful, experimental and daring pop promo. This program includes the films Whitehead made with The Jimi Hendrix Experience ('Hey Joe'), Nico ('I'm Not Sayin'), The Stones ('We Love You'), the first ever footage of Pink Floyd with Syd Barrett performing live and in the studio, and some rare surprises from the director's extensive archive.



### **TONITE LET'S ALL MAKE LOVE IN LONDON**

One of the few film-makers trusted within the perfumed gardens of the 60s rock illuminati, Whitehead was allowed unparalleled access into the centre of the pop circle to capture the moment for his kaleidoscopic film. With contributions from the likes of Mick Jagger, Michael Caine, Julie Christie, Lee Marvin and David Hockney, Tonite presents a dazzling and intimate record from the very core of the 'in-crowd.' With music by Pink Floyd, among many others. "Not a documentary in any ordinary sense," said Variety, "but rather an impressionistic view of the 'land of mod' as seen by a sympathetic participant."

### **NOTHING TO DO WITH ME**

On 23 November 1968, several months after returning from the United States where he had just completed shooting on his film *The Fall*, Whitehead philosophises to camera in this remarkable autobiographical document.





## **LED ZEPPELIN**

Recorded at London's Royal Albert Hall on 9 January 1970, Whitehead's work is an exemplary example of what a concert film should be. No titles or credits, just 100 minutes of the British band at their peak, including a thirteen-minute drum solo by John Bonham. Shot three months after their second LP had been released, the film highlights Whitehead's expert on-the-hoof camerawork and inspired editing.



## **THE FALL**

Considered by Whitehead to be his most important film, *The Fall* is an extraordinary piece of filmmaking, an extremely personal statement on violence, revolution and the turbulence within late sixties America. Filmed entirely in and around New York between October 1967 and June 1968, it features Robert Kennedy, The Bread and Puppet Theater, Paul Auster (fresh-faced as a Columbia student), Tom Hayden, Mark Rudd, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Arthur Miller, Robert Lowell, Robert Rauschenberg and The Deconstructivists.

Richard Roud, co-director of the New York Film Festival wrote of the film,

**“...an attempt to come to grips with today,  
both in terms of its content as well as of its form...”**





## **DADDY**

What began as a documentary about French sculptress Niki de St Phalle finished up as a fantasy about a woman's attempts to exorcise the influence of her sexually domineering father. Alternately gothic and surreal, de Saint Phalle and Mia Martin are the two protagonists in a kind of 'Let's Get Daddy' charade, acting out their fantasies on the poor unfortunate patriarch, as played by Rainer Diez.



## **THE FIRE IN THE WATER**

In this alchemical allegory, a filmmaker reviews his brief movie career in the highlands of Scotland while his girlfriend explores the countryside alone. With Nathalie Delon, The Animals, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Jimi Hendrix, David Hockney and John Lennon.



## **IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE IMAGE: A CONVERSATION WITH PETER WHITEHEAD**

A newly filmed interview with Whitehead, plus clips from his films and television appearances, archived interviews, and a wealth of still images.





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**Contemporary Films**

**REALITY**

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