



Brexitannia

The first film about Brexit

By Timothy George Kelly
2017, United Kingdom, Russia, 80 min

Director's contact: Timothy George Kelly tgk@stereotactic.ru
Executive producer (Beat Films): Alyona Bocharova alyona@beatfilms.ru
Executive producer (Stereotactic): Pavel Karykhalin pk@stereotactic.ru

brexitannia.co.uk



SYNOPSIS

On or off. Yes or no. Leave or remain. Referendums divide and Brexit did so in a way never before in British history. Country versus city. Old versus young. Nationalists versus migrants. “The people” versus “the elite”. The forgotten versus the visible. Underneath all these definitions are individuals with their own unique stories that motivated this historic and at times perplexing vote, a vote motivated by the themes of our age; migration, waning empires, and the white elephant in the room; work and it’s decreasing relevance in an ever automated world.

Brexitannia is a portrait of a democracy in all it’s impossible ugly glory. A subtle bomb of a film that without judgment presents a people of the once most powerful empire negotiating their identities around a world that is changing faster than ever and power appearing further and further from their own hands.

DIRECTOR’S BIO



Timothy George Kelly is a London based Australian filmmaker. He has created music videos for artists including Grimes, Pinkshinyultrablast and Miracle Fortress.

In 2014 he premiered his first feature length documentary A City is an Island at CPH:DOX, this film later played across Canada on CBC.

FILM SPECS

Brexitannia
2017, United Kingdom, Russia, 80’
Directed by Timothy George Kelly

Produced by Pavel Karykhalin,
Alyona Bocharova, Kirill Sorokin
Original language: English

INTERVIEW

THIS FILM IS COMING OUT EIGHT MONTHS AFTER THE BREXIT VOTE. HOW DID THIS FILM COME ALONG SO QUICKLY?

I remember I couldn’t believe the referendum result especially so soon after the murder of Jo Cox. She was a pro-immigration Labour MP that was killed by a nazi a week before the vote. I just assumed people would see that this culture that was being created by the right around migration could have even graver repercussions. The year before I’d been struggling to make a film about people on zero-hour contracts. A difficult film to make because most people working shit work don’t want to talk about it and it’s also not the most cinematic topic around. Anyway, I realised that many of the themes that were informing this film could be expanded upon to make a portrait of the nation at this historic moment of Brexit, a time that everyone had an opinion about.

YOU STARTED SHOOTING WHEN?

About two weeks after the vote I got a train to Clacton-by-Sea (the only held UKIP seat in the country) and tried to interview people. It was horrible. I was there for three days and only interviewed two people. I have a simple relationship with Essex, I hate it and it hates me. I’ve travelled so much of the UK now and I’ve been to some pretty grim areas but the only place I can honestly say I dislike is fucking Essex. I’ve been punched in Essex, I’ve had trouble with cops in Essex, I’ve been kicked out of a Weather-spoons in Essex, I’ve had a flat bike tyre in Essex. All the shit stuff. Essex is just all the bad bits of Australia with much worse weather. Anyway, I returned to London depressed and exhausted from Clacton and realised I really needed people on the ground who lived and knew people in all these different parts of the UK I wanted to film in. So, I started looking for Regional Associate Producers all around the country. It was with these guys I interviewed over a hundred people in about five months of shooting. I’ve probably driven around the UK four times in as many months. I am still very confused as to what the speed limit is on the motorway. Everyone in the right lane just drives 30 miles over the limit.

YOU WERE ALSO EDITING ON THE ROAD?

No. There was a writing and editing team working in London, we’d initially write editing scripts from transcriptions I outsourced to a school teacher in the Philippines. Sahara, I’ve never met her. But now after transcribing over seventy hours of interviews about Brexit she probably now knows more about the collective feeling of the British people than the average Brit does.

AND IN YOUR OPINION WHAT IS THAT COLLECTIVE FEELING?

A massive depression. The UK is a sad sad country in my opinion. Our modern neoliberalism is an anglophone invention and the UK and the US have always been the testing grounds of such policies since Reagan and Thatcher. But compared to the US, after the post-war moment that built the welfare state with its strong trade unions I would argue that in the

UK, much more had to be destroyed to enact these policies. Thatcher not only went after people’s livelihoods but their working class culture, identities and communities too. This type of attack upon ordinary people’s lives hasn’t had a break in almost forty years, even when Labour were in power as they capitulated to the right under Blair and basically became Tories in Oasis t-shirts. From the Miner’s Strike to the reality TV show Benefits Street, there’s been a physical and cultural war upon normal people’s existence and it’s left so much of the country feeling invisible and worthless. To say this feeling and how it reacts with migration, depreciating wages and a collective moral compass is relevant to Brexit is a huge understatement.

A COLLECTIVE MORAL COMPASS, COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THAT A BIT?

I don’t know. The complexity of knowing what to do in a world whilst having to be complicit in participating in a structure where you know parts of your phone was made by slaves, your government illegally bombs countries, the third page of the most sold newspaper still has women’s tits all over it, the NSA has access to all your selfies, Julian Assange hangs out with Nigel Farage, almost everything you’re taught in life is only taught if it is likely deemed useful in gaining employment but there isn’t enough work and you’ll never own a home anyway and the only pervasive commonality we seem to have with everyone else is a deep cynicism towards almost everything. And anyone who doesn’t have that cynicism is deemed a weirdo. And the only people who seem to have a voice are the professionally outraged. Right-wing tabloid culture as life, basically. Navigating around a world of supposed ethical poverty. How does one tell good from bad when there is a tiny Rupert Murdoch inside your brain?

DO YOU THINK YOUR FILM IS CYNICAL? WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE EXPECT FROM IT?

We live in deeply cynical times and there are cynical people in Brexitan-nia but I don’t think that necessarily means the film itself is cynical. I do honestly love humans and I do like most of the people I interviewed. I have such a curiosity towards peoples hearts and heads. Especially normal genuine people, with all their contradictions and insecurities. I grew up on a farm in Australia, there’s no space for bullshit in those types of environments. I interviewed three different low-level politicians for this film who never made the final cut because these people aren’t real. As soon as the camera turns on so does their script, it’s quite curious to watch, it’s how I imagine watching AI will be like in the future, real looking but not real enough to have any authenticity. Normal people are less guarded and wonderful things are much more bound to happen. One of the most confirming comments I’ve had on the film so far is that I didn’t throw anyone under a bus. There are quite a few stupid and blatant racists in the film, there was plenty of opportunities to really manipulate the footage for shock value but we didn’t do it. The characters are presented in a simple fashion, given room to speak and then the film just moves on. Some people have found this lack of judgement upon the “bad” people as problematic, I think it just asks for a bit more emotional intelligence from the audience than the average activist documentary, which this film is not. I hate this type of documentary that tells you what to think. It was never made to be an

activist film for Leave or Remain, it’s a sociological portrait of a country, or an attempt at one anyway.

WE’VE SPOKEN MOSTLY ABOUT THE FIRST PART OF THE FILM ‘THE PEOPLE’ BUT THERE IS A SECOND CHAPTER WHERE THE FILM CHANGES TO INCLUDE MANY THEORISTS INCLUDING NOAM CHOMSKY AND SASKIA SASSEN TITLED ‘THE EXPERTS’. WEREN’T YOU WORRIED ABOUT PUTTING THESE PEOPLE ON SOME KIND OF HEIRACHY AND POSSIBLY MAKING THE ‘THE PEOPLE’ LOOK FOOLISH?

Yes of course I was worried, but it didn’t end up being a problem because I chose really smart theorists and really smart people don’t blame or demomise individuals. They look for reasons why individuals might act in certain ways and talk about structures and systems and mythology, they know the uselessness of personal attacks. On paper separating ‘The People’ and ‘The Experts’ does seems problematic but within context of the film it ends up working, it’s also a great play on the anti-expert and “will of the people” rhetoric that went on within the referendum. It’s also hilarious having a section called ‘The Experts’ that immediately has master expert Noam Chomsky explain why all these people don’t want anymore experts

Also I included the theorists because we are undoubtably at an intensely important political moment and these theorists in this film aren’t just talking about what we’ve just seen in the first chapter, they’re talking about things way ahead of the collective curve. The scene with Saskia Sassen talking of this third type of migrant, one we do not even have a word for yet, is so important in terms of us trying to understand this new moment Europe and the world is finding itself in. Concepts like this are made by experts life works and if they find influence, which Saskia’s already has and will continue too, they help guide culture and society for the better. We definitely still need experts like Saskia Sassen.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE MEETING CHOMSKY?

His office is about four rooms which are constantly revolving with students or people meeting him for very short amounts of time. Bev Stohl is his assistant/gatekeeper and kept bursting out laughing in my face whenever she saw me because I apparently look like Jim Carrey. I started reading Chomsky’s stuff when I was 16 and it was really influential on me as a kid and I’d also flown all the way to Boston for this one thirty minute interview. For an hour I’d only seen him through half open doors and then Bev pushed him into the room and her smile drops and she looks me dead in the eyes and says, “You’ve got thirty minutes, not a minute more.” I was so nervous I couldn’t remember what happened in the interview once it was over. I backed up the memory cards and then went and immediately got drunk. He’s great in the film though!

CAST & CREW

Featuring
Noam Chomsky
Saskia Sassen
Guy Standing
Nick Srenicek
Heidi Mirza
Federico Campagna

Produced by
Timothy George Kelly
Pavel Karykhalin

Executive Producers
Alyona Bocharova
Kirill Sorokin

Cinematography by
Timothy George Kelly

Written by
Luke Neima
Charlotte Kühlbrandt
Timothy George Kelly

Editor
Steven Carver

Original Score
Ivan Merkulov

Sound Recordist
Jaja Kewlto

Sound Mix
Alex Turkunov

Associate Producer
Lev Maslov





CPH:DOX SCREENINGS:

22/03	21:30	Nordisk Film Dagmar Q&A with director + producers
25/03	12:00	Kunsthal Charlottenborg CPH:MEETINGS on Brexit
26/03	17:00	Vester Vov Vov

BEAT

STEREOTACTIC