From Real Time to Reel Time:
The Films of John Schlesinger

A study of the change from objective realism to subjective realism in British cinema in the 1960s

By

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Declaration

This is to certify that:

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.
Abstract

The 1960s was a period of change for the British cinema, as it was for so much else. The six feature films directed by John Schlesinger in that decade stand as an exemplar of what those changes were. They also demonstrate a fundamental change in the narrative form used by mainstream cinema. Through a close analysis of these films, *A Kind of Loving, Billy Liar, Darling, Far From the Madding Crowd, Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, this thesis examines the changes as they took hold in mainstream cinema. In effect, the thesis establishes that the principal mode of narrative moved from one based on objective realism in the tradition of the documentary movement to one which took a subjective mode of narrative wherein the image on the screen, and the sounds attached, were not necessarily a record of the external world. The world of memory, the subjective world of the mind, became an integral part of the narrative.

As the decade began, the dominating phenomenon of British cinema was a small group of films made in the Northern provinces which were dubbed *The British New Wave*. Because of the depictions of working class life in these films and a tendency to portray sexual relationships with a hitherto unknown frankness the films appeared at the time to be entirely new. However as this thesis establishes, with hindsight they can now be seen as the last vestige of that form of social realism which had dominated British cinema since the rise of the documentary movement in the 1930s, under the influence of John Grierson. As the thesis points out, the theoretical orthodoxy of such as Bazin, Zavattini, Kracauer and others assumed that such documentary realism was essential to film as a narrative art. The directors of all the films which have been accepted into the canon of the *British New Wave* had backgrounds in documentary film. The two Schlesinger films of this period, *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *Billy Liar* (1963), reflect the documentarist nature of the movement while also revealing the desire to break away from the strictures of realism. The ‘New Wave’ rubric was in fact a commercial ploy initiated by one of the main production companies involved in these films – Woodfall Films.

This form of realism was rapidly overtaken by the major cultural phenomenon to appear in Britain in the decade: ‘Swinging London’. The epithet was a pop cultural
reference promulgated by the press, but it did indicate a new aesthetic which was some distance from the Griersonian realist mode. These films most often emulated certain stylistic tics learned from the French *Nouvelle Vague* movement, the original ‘new wave’. The use of jump cuts, such fashionable characters as pop groups, models and their photographers, and a liberal rather than puritan attitude to sex made the films popular with a new, young and affluent audience if not with the critics. No major critical work has been undertaken on the films of this period, and as this thesis reveals, they are usually described as derivative. However the argument in this thesis is that these films are an important nexus between the straight realism of the past and the new, psychological realism that is established by the end of the decade. Schlesinger’s two films of this time are a Julie Christie diptych: *Darling* (1965) and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1967). The former is an archetypal Swinging London film, full of ‘new’ social types and a tendency to disrupt the narrative realism; the latter reveals the use of ‘new’ stars and new music to enhance the historical mode in a new form of historical realism which, as this thesis points out, was adopted by several directors at that time.

As the decade drew to an end the films began to take on a darker, more considered tone. The sense of fun gave way to a more internalised form of cinema, one which used non-linear time to investigate the psychology of its characters. Memory and fantasy began to intrude into the realist world of British cinema. The image on the screen could no longer be assumed to be a reliable depiction of reality, but more often was a subjective image drawn from the mind of one of the characters in the film. Gilles Deleuze is the major analyst of the way film changed from ‘movement-image’ to ‘time-image.’ While this thesis does not totally agree with some of his conclusions it does concur essentially with his argument that the language of film, by the end of the 1960s, was able to convey a subjective reality which is quite different from the assumptions of Bazin, Grierson and such. The final two Schlesinger films examined in detail in this thesis, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) reveal that the Griersonian documentary, with it assumption that the camera was an unblinking eye capturing only reality, was no longer the dominant form of narrative in British cinema. Film had become a subjective examination of a non-linear chronology investigating the internal world of its characters, not the external world in which they moved.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

1

## CHAPTER ONE: A Survey of Realist Theory

11

## CHAPTER TWO: The British New Wave

28

i. How the Idea of a New Wave Was Established in British Cinema 29

ii. *A Kind of Loving* 42

iii. *Billy Liar* 55

## CHAPTER THREE: Swinging London

68

i. How Swinging London Changed British Cinema 69

ii. *Darling* 83

iii. *Far From the Madding Crowd* 97

## CHAPTER FOUR: The New Cinema is Established

115

i. Changing Time(s) 115

ii. *Midnight Cowboy* 127

iii. *Sunday Bloody Sunday* 141

## CONCLUSION

159

## FILMOGRAPHY

163

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

173

Appendix: John Schlesinger – A Career Overview 179
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Sir Michael Balcon, production chief of Ealing Studios, saw cinema as an industry first, an art secondly, and lastly as propaganda weapon.\textsuperscript{1} It was probably inevitable that he, as a producer, would arrange the hierarchy of importance in that way. What is more important is that he saw the creative process of making a film as a tripartite act. Another way of stating this is that industry is represented by the producer, art by the director and ideology by the writer. Balcon may have considered one as more important than the other two, but in the collaborative process that is a film all three form the basis of the work that comes into being. The producer, usually, initiates the project, the writer creates a script and the director turns the script into a photographed work. That, at its most basic, is how a film gets made. However such a basic, and simplistic, description is not going to remain valid very long. There may be overlap in the functions described, there will almost certainly be more than three people in the three distinct roles; on the other hand there may be a single entity encompassing all three. What remains is that the three elements of film as described by Balcon are always all present in the creation of the finished work.

Who then is the ‘artist’ responsible for a film as work of art? According to the auteur theory it is the director. However, even from the earliest days of the auteur theory there have been dissenting voices. Among the earliest was Karel Reisz who, in 1951, spoke up for the producer as possible author and ‘responsible artist’ of a film.\textsuperscript{2} In his essay \textit{The Showman Producer} he argues that in the Hollywood studio system the producer is most responsible for the finished work. He argues that the directors who have managed to achieve an identifiable style in their films, while working within the studio system, have either reached producer status, or write their own

The directors he names are Huston, Sturges, Chaplin, Ford and Capra, but he adds ‘their number is small’. On the other hand producers such as Samuel Goldwyn, Hal Wallis, Arthur Freed and Daryl Zanuck all have an identifiable style to their credit.

The British industry, he argues, is fundamentally different in that ‘the producers tend to be concerned primarily with the financial and organisational side of production’. The aim of Reisz’s essay is to argue for a mode of production in Britain which emulates the American system and produces more ‘showman’ product. However this ignores the fact that the distinctive style of film making, which could fairly be called British, is that described by Porter and Vincent as the ‘artisanal production companies, notably the Archers (Powell and Pressburger), Cineguild (David Lean, Anthony Havelock-Allan, and Ronald Neame), Individual Pictures (Launer and Gilliat), and Wessex productions (Ian Dalrymple).’ Porter and Vincent are writing about a period encompassing the late 1940s and early 1950s, but the mode continued beyond that time. Later companies, such as Woodfall Films (Harry Saltzman, Tony Richardson and John Osborne) and Beaver Film (Bryan Forbes and Richard Attenborough) worked in a similar way. In most of these examples the three roles are not distinctly separated, hence it is impossible to give one individual the artistic value credit of an individual film.

In this thesis I have chosen to concentrate on film director John Schlesinger and the films he directed in the period 1962 to 1971. All but one of these films was produced by Joseph Janni through his production company Vic Films, another ‘artisanal’ company. The odd film out is Midnight Cowboy, which was produced by Jerome Weidman, who also produced Schlesinger’s The Day of the Locust (1975). As I have chosen the director as the focus, I have, by implication, chosen to focus on the ‘art’ of film rather than the industry or the ideology. Unlike Sir Michael Balcon, I do not think that there is a hierarchy of importance, that the three roles can be considered separately. To separate out the industry means writing film history, to separate out ideology means to write screenplay analysis and indeed this is often what one reads in film writing. However a film, to be appreciated as a whole, must be seen as an amalgam of all three. In fact a successful film is one in which none of the three is

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3 Ibid., p.164.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p.166
6 Harper & Porter, op. cit., p.35.
overemphasised. If a film is made purely as an economic unit of production, then it will have little of value; by the same token a film which is purely ideological in its intent is more often than not tiresome in its relentless didacticism. A film which is purely aesthetic in its intent may be successful but it is rarely a narrative fiction film and that is the point. Film, as a medium, can be used for didactic purposes, or it can be used for purely aesthetic purposes, but in its most popular and extensive form, film is a medium of narrative fiction using a performative mode of storytelling. In this mode none of the three elements can override the other two if an individual film is to be a successful work of art.

John Schlesinger, as director of the six films I consider in this thesis, is not solely responsible for their artistic worth. He is not an *auteur* in the sense that a writer/director such as Ingmar Bergman, or Federico Fellini, is an auteur. He may initiate a project, but he does not create it alone. He is the type of director who works in collaboration, but in whose work there is a discernible authorial voice. His best work is that which was done in collaboration with others who were sympathetic to his artistic aim. It is no coincidence that throughout his career he returned to those producers whose aims coincided with his own.

At the time of his death John Schlesinger (1926-2003) was typically referred to as one of the defining directors of the British New Wave. In fact, Robert Murphy in his obituary in *Sight and Sound* described him as ‘the last remaining survivor of the quartet of New Wave directors who shook up British cinema in the early 1960s…establishing the parameters of a British cinema that looked at rather than retreated from the realities of British society’. The implication of this statement is that Schlesinger was primarily a realist director, as were all those in Britain who were described as New Wave.

In the period 1962 to 1971 Schlesinger directed six feature films which established his reputation and also defined both his style as a director and the themes which he would explore throughout his career. The overriding theme of all the films is the search for a way to live in the new society of the 1960s. As early as 1970 John Schlesinger noted in an interview that he was interested in characters who have

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7 Murphy, Robert, 'John Schlesinger: Obituary', *Sight and Sound*, 13/9 (September 2003), p.1. The other three directors were Tony Richardson (1928-19910), Karel Reisz (1926-2002) and Lindsay Anderson (1923-1994).
constructed a fantasy that has carried them along ‘until it’s stripped away and (they) find the truth and reality of (their) own situation’:

‘It continues to be something that I’m interested in – escape from the real self into a fantasy world, or the means by which one compromises and accepts what one has got, which is invariably second best.’

The central characters in many of his films are portrayed as starting out with expectations of what society can provide for them, only to end up disillusioned. In most cases the narrative of the film is a journey to self-knowledge by a man or woman whose upbringing has led them to these expectations. What they learn is that their sense of identity as an individual is not the same as others’ perception of the individual; that is the idea of the individual created for them by society.

These basic themes may be constant in the films, but how they are portrayed, that is the aesthetic strategies employed in the films, reveal considerable change. In this respect Schlesinger can be taken as an exemplar of the changes that took place in British cinema during the decade of the 1960s. The change from the social realism of the early sixties to the psychological realism of the films at the end of the decade reveal not just a change in narrative focus, but a change in the methods by which an avowedly mainstream film maker such as Schlesinger told his stories.

How these changes came about is the subject matter of this thesis. Schlesinger began the decade as an avowedly social realist director with a background in documentary film. At the end of the decade his films used a new narrative form which focused on the internal, the psychic world of his characters. In order to explore these changes I will firstly analyse the theory of realism as it has been established in orthodox theoretical writings. This initial analysis will allow an understanding throughout the rest of the thesis of ‘realism’ as a concept and the critical conversation which has subsequently taken place around that theory. Primarily I am interested in how the literal nature of realism, the camera as passive observer, has been replaced by the idea of film as metaphoric or psychic observer. The images on the screen have ceased to be interpreted as simply the reproduction of the external world, in other

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8 Spiers, David, 'Interview with John Schlesinger', Screen, 11/3 (Summer 1970), 16.
words objective realism. New theoretical investigation has focused on the idea of film as an interpretive, subjective medium. While the earlier parts of this thesis analyse the use of realist theory in film, in the later part I focus primarily in the work of Gilles Deleuze and his concept of the time image as a method of examining the new subjective realism of film in the later 1960s. As the following summary of the thesis establishes the method of this thesis is to move from the orthodox theories of realism, through more innovative work in order to establish a framework of analysis of these new subjective films.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first is a general introduction to a major topic which underpins the more specific elements in the rest of the work. In order to understand Schlesinger as a realist director it will be first necessary to discover what is understood by the term realism. In chapter one, I will trace the term from its origins in the early nineteenth century, particularly in the work of Honoré de Balzac. I will follow its journey through the literary tradition which includes, in France, Emile Zola, and in Great Britain, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, and D. H. Lawrence. These literary precedents are important when discussing New Wave cinema in Britain as British cinema, unlike its French counterpart, has always been heavily influenced by literary traditions.

From these literary origins the concept of realism transferred easily to cinema. In its earliest form cinema was a means of re-presenting reality in photographic form. To the already existing format of graphic reproduction cinema added the element of time. The earliest theorists were preoccupied with the dual problems of cinema as a realist form and the competing fantasy element: in its crudest form this was a debate about the relative values of the cinema of the Lumière brothers and that of George Méliès. In Britain the realist aesthetic was principally represented by the documentary movement epitomised by John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings. This form of cinema which emphasises the reproduction of the ‘real’ world rather than a studio-created ‘ideal’ world is the form of cinema with which New Waves in general, and the British one in particular, have been associated. I will continue on with a survey of the major theoretical writings which have come to define realism in the cinema. What we will discover is an underlying assumption that the photographed image inherently represents the real. This idea, perhaps primarily taken from the writings of André Bazin, assumes that a photographed narrative must reflect the reality of the situation in which it is photographed.
The second chapter is an examination of the British New Wave and Schlesinger’s first two films, which are normally included as part of that movement. The first section examines the general phenomenon which was very early named the British New Wave. If the British New Wave can be described as a realist cinema movement, how should the movement itself be defined? Although the term is widespread as a descriptive phrase, very little has been written to capture some sort of definition. In chapter three I will examine the British New Wave in its historical context in order to attempt to provide that definition. We will see that the films share a realist aesthetic, but that they can also be defined by a shared production mode. The films were considered ‘realist’ because of their subject matter and style. Also, they were described as ‘independent’, as the production companies which produced the films were outside the normal financing system which was dominated by the major British distributors. The companies themselves continue on the tradition of artisanal film making which seems to have been peculiar to Britain Although the films were received at the time as progressive, I will argue that they were a continuation of the Griersonian tradition of documentary realism and were more backward rather than forward-looking.

The second section of this chapter deals with Schlesinger’s first feature film, *A Kind of Loving* (1962). Representative of the Angry Young Man/Kitchen Sink/British New Wave group of films, the film is the story of a discontented young man who has dreams of expanding his horizons into the New Society of Britain in the late 1950s/early 1960s. His ambitions are thwarted by societal pressures relating primarily to questions of class. The film is an exemplar of the debate over questions of access in the new society. It describes, as most of these films did, how the disaffected ‘angry young men’ viewed their exclusion from intellectual society principally because of the demands made on them by their socio-economic origins: family and class. Although primarily realist, and in fact, influenced by Italian neo-realism, one can see a certain influence of the melodramatic imagination in the role of the family in the repression of the individual in this film.

Schlesinger’s second feature, *Billy Liar* (1963), is the subject of the third and final section of this chapter. The film shares much with *A Kind of Loving*. It is set in the north, details the travails of a disaffected young scholarship boy, and focuses on his fluid position in society. However it differs greatly in that it portrays Billy’s rich fantasy life on screen. Although the general framework of the narrative is in the realist
mode, the fantasy element, particularly in its use of intertextual references and widescreen format, denotes a shift away from the strictly documentary approach. The film reveals a concern with the narrowness of the view of life generally portrayed in New Wave films. It also reveals a desire to break away from the literal realism of the Griersonian tradition. The fantasy elements are presented in formally adventurous modes which point forward to the new cinematic aesthetic which came into mainstream cinema at the end of the sixties.

Chapter three, ‘Swinging London’, marks the return south of the British film industry. As Alexander Walker famously remarked, when, at the end of Billy Liar, Julie Christie’s character took the train to London, she ‘brought the British cinema along with her in the baggage van’. What he didn’t add was that it left the angry young men behind on the station platform. Where the northern films were male centred the southern films are female centred. This phenomenon is part of the ethos of ‘Swinging London’. The first section of this chapter is a look at the historical context of Swinging London and the films which came to define it. By examining the wider phenomenon we will be able to see more clearly the context in which Schlesinger’s films were made.

Darling (1965), Schlesinger’s third feature and the subject of the second section of this chapter, was the first project which he initiated. The success of the first two films meant he could now take control of his projects. The film looks at the career of a fashion model in London in the mid-sixties and in the process examines both the character’s attitude to society and society’s attitude to her. Where the men in the first two films can be seen as having some control over their own destinies, Diana Scott (Julie Christie) is portrayed as having to rely on the influence of the men with whom she becomes involved. Her attempts to transcend her environment invariably end up in compromise. The only character in the film who appears to have some sort of satisfaction in life is Malcolm (Roland Curram) the gay photographer who befriends Diana.

Schlesinger’s fourth feature, and the subject of the third section, marks a major innovation in his career. Far from the Madding Crowd (1967) was his first colour film and his first ‘period’ film. Although the film was once again an adaptation of a literary work, it was Schlesinger’s choice of property. The main character, Bathsheba

(Julie Christie again), shares much with Diana Scott. She is a woman striving to make a life for herself. She becomes involved with a series of men and is frustrated in her attempts at independence. However, unlike the modern woman, she is an economically independent being. Men in her life serve an erotic purpose, but not an economic one. In this way the film engages in a dialogue with its predecessor.

The film was part of an interesting phenomenon at that time. Tony Richardson directed *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968), Karel Reisz directed *Isadora* (1968), and even Basil Dearden, the veteran director of ‘social problem’ films such as *Sapphire* (1959) and *Victim* (1961) made *Khartoum* (1966). All these films were historical narratives filmed on a grand scale in widescreen formats. It seems these directors decided that the only solution to the increasing incoherence of Swinging London was retreat to the past. On the other hand directors, such as Lindsay Anderson with *if...* (1968) and Peter Watkins with *Privilege* (1967) found the present to be a site of violence and revolt. The late sixties was becoming a time of upheaval and confusion. The films referred to all used identifiable modes, but their aesthetic strategies began to show marked developments away from classical realism.

In chapter four I examine the final years of the 1960s in Britain in which a new fully formed film aesthetic emerged from the rather freewheeling experimentation of the swinging years.. Where the Swinging London films still adhered to social realism to a degree in their depiction of a contemporary, or even past, society, there was an ever stronger element of experiment in these films. By 1968 such experiment had become the norm in mainstream cinema both in Britain and in films produced by Hollywood studios. The most noticeable element in these films was a shift away from linear time in narrative strategies. The title of the first section, ‘Changing Times,’ refers both to the social upheaval taking place, and also the non-linear narrative devices which became more common at this time. Gilles Deleuze has identified this shift as a transition from the ‘movement-image’ to the ‘time-image.’ He bases his theories on Henri Bergson’s theories of time and in this section I will examine both Bergsonian time and Deleuze’s use of it in ascertaining how cinema in the late sixties broke away from a realist, externalised and linear narrative to a non-realist, internalised and non-linear form.

*Midnight Cowboy* (1969), the second section in this chapter, is again remarkable for a number of firsts in Schlesinger’s career. It was his first feature not produced by Joseph Janni, and it was the first time he took on a project which had nothing...
whatever to do with the United Kingdom. The narrative is once again concerned with characters who do not fit within the natural boundaries of society. Joe Buck (Jon Voight), the eponymous hero of the piece has as unrealistic a self-image as Billy Fisher had back in Bradford. ‘Ratso’ Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman) also has a fantasy life rich enough to rival that of Billy. These two are without doubt outsiders in their chosen environment, but at the same time Schlesinger, as observer, is also an outsider. The film is noteworthy for its choice of subject matter but it is also remarkable for aesthetic reasons. Visually Schlesinger reflects the film’s environment by using stylistic devices from the New York underground film movement of the sixties. Of particular note is the influence of Andy Warhol’s factory films. Aurally the film is of particular interest. The music in the film is an early example of the sort of collage soundtrack which Kenneth Anger is said to have originally conceived and was most notably taken up by Martin Scorsese in the 1970s. It consists of music themes by John Barry and numerous songs by New York art-rock bands. The extensive memory and fantasy sequences in the film reveal the new aesthetic of mainstream cinema.

The final film in this study is Sunday, Bloody Sunday (1971), the subject of the third section of this chapter. The film marks a return to the United Kingdom and to Joseph Janni. This is a phenomenon which will recur in Schlesinger’s later career: a foray into American cinema is followed by a retreat into more ‘personal’, one might say ‘English’, films. I will approach this film as Schlesinger’s masterpiece. By this I mean that the film reveals him in complete control of his medium. The narrative is once more concerned with characters struggling to make sense of a less than perfect life. However, in this film Schlesinger hides nothing. The screenplay is completely honest. It conveys a sense of a moral order which, although flawed, is better than nothing. The aesthetic qualities of the film also reveal mastery. The switching between times, the editing and the use of music are all completely assured, as we will see. In fact his use of certain elements of the new cinema of the sixties in a film which is almost classical in its narrative trajectory reveals a style one could call neo-classical. With this film the journey of John Schlesinger from realist director limited by the tropes of the British documentary tradition with its Marxist trappings to a self-assured director willing to portray the compromises necessary in human relationships, without compromising himself, is complete.

The journey from A Kind of Loving in 1962 to Sunday Bloody Sunday in 1971 reveals a shift in the fundamental modes of narrative used in mainstream British
cinema. Where the decade began in a social realist tradition heavily influenced by the British documentary movement under John Grierson, by the end of the decade mainstream cinema had adopted a language involving non-linear time to express the internal world of its characters rather than limiting itself to the external world through which they move.

The primary focus of this thesis is the first six films directed by Schlesinger concluding in 1971. However his career as a director continued on for another thirty years. I have included an appendix to this thesis which provides a general overview of John Schlesinger’s entire career. As there has been no detailed analysis of Schlesinger’s work since Gene D. Philips’ monograph of 1981, I believe it is timely, and worthwhile, to provide such a summary in this thesis. Although the first decade of his career is the stage in which Schlesinger developed an identifiable style and established his artistic worth, there are films in his later career which demonstrate a refinement of his style and are worth noting, even though they fall outside the remit of this thesis.
CHAPTER ONE

A Survey of Realist Theory

This chapter sets forth the development of the idea of the ‘real’ as a concept which took root in film as part of its inheritance from literature. In literary terms ‘realism’ referred to a technique of creating a world which is recognisable but contains characters who have never lived in the physical world. However when the term came to be applied to film, there was a significant change. The photographed image was recognised as having existed prior to and independent of the captured image. This has led to a founding assertion that realism was the only valid artistic form for film as it re-presented the world at it is. At least that was the argument of those theorists who championed it. The major proponents of this theory, particularly the French theorist André Bazin, and the group of writers contributing to the journal Screen in the 1970s, emphasised the ideological aspect of realism: that it was valid because it revealed the reality of life for those parts of society which had hitherto been ignored. However, as more recent theorists have argued, as the cinema has matured, realism has become an aesthetic strategy as much as an ideological tool.

Honoré de Balzac, in his foreword to The Human Comedy, asserted that in the work ‘society was going to be the historian’ and he was merely its secretary. By the use of ‘drama, dialogue, portrait, landscape and description’ he would set forth French Society, not as he wished it to be, but as it was. The inference of this statement is that he was not a writer who ‘made up’ stories without basis in fact, but a reporter who re-presented what he had observed. At the same time he declared that he was not a historian, bound to present only what he knew had occurred, but was ‘freer’ than the historian. As a creator of fictions then he was bound to reflect the reality of society, but not to relate the actual history of that society. According to Balzac, a realist

1 Balzac, Honoré, de, La comédie humaine, Tome 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), Foreword to the work, pp. 7-20. The two quotes are from pages 11 and 10, respectively.
presents his work as if it had happened, even though it had not. That phrase ‘as if’ is the most important part of this analysis.²

As we proceed through the various attempts to provide a theoretical basis for realist practice, we will see that there has often been an emphasis on the literalness of realist work. This, I think, has been a fundamental error. Realism in art is not the same as historical reality. It is an interpretation; it is a re-presentation of the world as it would be if the events narrated had actually occurred. A history, on the other hand, is a presentation of certain events as they were perceived to occur. A criticism of history is couched in terms of whether it is an accurate interpretation of the events related. A criticism of a realist work has to do with the ability of the perceiver to accept the reality of the events described, not whether they actually occurred. A work considered ‘unbelievable’ is not a realist work; it may be acceptable as a work of fantasy or the grotesque, but not in the parameters of the realist aesthetic.

When we read Balzac, then, or Dickens, or Zola, we accept that the stories they tell are believable as a re-presentation of the nineteenth century Bourgeois supremacy which forms the context of the tales. We do not consider them as historical facts. This is not a great problem with the written word as it is so heavily mediated. We hear the narrator as we read, and we are always at a distance from the facts described. We re-create them conceptually as we read. The photographic image, on the other hand starts with a single fact: the image we observe existed at some stage in the world in which we live. From the earliest writing on film there has always been this assumption: the photographic image is a reproduction of a reality.³ The object reproduced in the photograph has an existence independent of the photograph. Thus film was inevitably interpreted as primarily a realist medium. Even a trick photograph, such as in a Méliès film, is made up of physically existent parts which have been amalgamated into one image. Nothing in the image did not exist. This is not the case in a digital image, in which the elements may never have existed in the physical world. Thus realism, as it was practiced in the cinema for most of the twentieth century assumed a reality in the image which was based on an objective phenomenon - the image captured in the photographic process.

² Or, as Aristotle put it: ‘the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that would happen…’ Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), p.16.
So it is that John Grierson can state in 1931: ‘We believe that the cinema’s capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself, can be exploited in a new and vital art form. The studio films largely ignore this possibility of opening up the screen on the real world.’ The extract quoted is from a statement of ‘first principles’ for the documentary movement and in it Grierson is revealing his own preference for a cinema of literal re-presentation. Note that in this he is already setting the documentary movement apart from the dominant film practice of the popular, fictional ‘studio film’. This dialectic is recurrent in the debate on the relative worth of ‘mainstream film’ and realist film. The studio film, by its nature being a created world, is considered less valid as a representation of reality than a documentary film which has been photographed in a context considered by Grierson as accurate in that it has not been built by the photographer, but passively captured.

During the heyday of the Hollywood Studio system it was rare for a film to be photographed in the location in which the story was supposed to have taken place. The idea that a film made in a studio cannot be realistic will recur in the debate around the British New Wave. Some directors, Tony Richardson in particular, became obsessive about never using a studio set in a realist film. The debate was never conclusively answered. A director such as John Schlesinger did not hesitate to recreate a location in the studio if it was better suited to his filmic needs. What seems to be the basis of the argument is the idea that if the image photographed is not presented as a literal re-presentation of the original artefact, then an illusion has been created. It is the fact of illusion which Grierson and his followers decry.

Again in André Bazin’s essay ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ (1945), the basis of his argument is the reality of the image captured. He is able then to make the grand statement that ‘photography has freed the plastic arts from their obsession with resemblance’. This essay is the one most commonly cited in discussions of Bazin’s theory, but he is also of interest in those essays which compare the cinema to other art forms, particularly in the two essays Theatre and Cinema and Painting and Cinema. In these essays Bazin reveals his preoccupation with the development of film as an art independent of the pre-existing arts. This is because he was very much of his generation. He is aware that cinema is a developing medium; that its tools are being modified, improved, and changed as he writes. He addressed this problem openly in

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4 Ibid., p.17.
5 Bazin, André, Qu’est-ce que le cinéma (14th edn; Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2002), p.12.
his important essay *The Evolution of Cinematographic Language*. This essay, in its final form, is a synthesis of various pieces written between 1950 and 1955. The timing is significant as the cinema of the time was no longer a single form. Cinema had developed from a monochrome image in the single ratio of 1:1.37 to a multiplicity of colour (and monochrome) processes and screen ratios. But reiterated time and again is the basic fact that film reproduces reality by the simple fact of the captured image and sound. As a result he produces almost hagiographic writing on the Italian neo-realists, and his two American heroes: Orson Welles and William Wyler. His emphasis is frequently on the glories of ‘long-take, deep-focus’ cinema and the ‘perfect objectivity’ of the neo-realists, which reveals his aesthetic preferences. Also revelatory is his assertion in the theatre essay that colour will end up being perceived as essentially ‘non-realist’.6

Of similar significance to André Bazin in the discourse of realism is the work of Siegfried Kracauer, particularly his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Beauty*, a work originally published in 1960 at the height of the New Wave, but reflective of a significantly earlier period. As a historical document it is of interest, but as a theory it is problematic. In her introduction to the 1997 edition Miriam Hansen suggests that ‘(it) might be productive to think of *Theory of Film* as contemporaneous with the magazine *Film Culture* and developments in independent film production and distribution; with existentialism in philosophy and life-style, minimalism in art and music; with Susan Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation,” Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue*, Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind*, and movies such as *Shadows* and *The Hustler*.7 In other words, the historical context of the book reveals it underlying assumptions. The New Wave aesthetic was a reflection of the assumption that film should be used to reflect reality as it was observed by the film makers. It should not be used as a form of escapist reality.

However, as the temporal context of a film recedes into the past, the ‘realism’ of a film becomes less apparent and its aesthetic re-presentation of a narrative becomes the primary critical interest. We may acknowledge that a film addresses ideological concerns of the time when it was made, but its interest to us as viewers a half century later, or even a decade later, may have nothing to do with the ‘reality’ that is

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6 ibid. p.142.
presented. To consider that film’s only function is to re-present reality is to severely limit its appeal to the viewer.

It is essential, when considering Kracauer’s ideas, to remember his context and assumptions. In his own introduction he asserts that the book’s ‘exclusive concern is the normal black-and-white film as it grows out of photography.’\(^8\) That may have been the norm for Kracauer, but very soon thereafter it ceased to be the norm. Even in 1963 Martin Ritt’s choice to make Hud in black and white was a conscious artistic choice, not a normative decision. In this respect 1956 may be considered a watershed year as it was the first time that all the films nominated for the Academy Award for best picture were in colour.

The assumption that film is essentially an extension of photography is problematic and, I would argue, was so even then. The addition of movement/time creates differences in perception which change irretrievably the reception of the work. For a start there is a commitment by the viewer to the duration of the work. We must also remember that for Kracauer the experience of ‘film’ meant an uninterrupted, continuous viewing in a theatre. Also we need to remember his personal history in relation to cinema. For example he writes: ‘(The) cinema’s heuristic, cognitive function for a history of the present was bound up with its pivotal role in the restructuring of sense perception, of the very conditions of experience and subjectivity.’\(^9\) This, I think, is a reflection of the generation to which Kracauer belonged. They were the last generation who knew a time before cinema. For them cinema was a new way of perceiving. For those of us who came after, cinema, or the recorded moving image, was not a new way of perceiving re-presented reality. It was the standard way. Film makers grew more aware of how to manipulate film to tell stories more completely, either fictional or non-fictional, and as film developed more attributes - synchronised speech, colour, different screen shapes - it gained a more manipulable, and hence more complete, syntax. What it also did was gain the ability to remake reality into something else. It presented photographed images, not as a real world, but ‘as if’ they were a real world.

At this stage we should note a fundamental difference between the ‘Europeans’ and the British in terms of realist theory. The Europeans, Bazin and Kracauer (and others such as Sergei Eisenstein) do not dismiss the fictional film from the realm of

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. xlvii
\(^9\) Ibid. p.xi.
realism. Grierson and the British documetarists do. In this respect the British tradition recalls a central theorist of the Italian neorealist school, Cesare Zavattini.

Zavattini is the first theorist we have encountered who was primarily a screen writer. He is also the first to consider the content of the film to override the form in importance. In 1948, at the International Film congress in Perugia he gave a speech in which he outlined his own theory of what realism meant in the cinema. This congress was dominated by Cold War rhetoric, but Zavattini’s speech seems to have been genuinely felt. Liehm described him as being ‘stubborn, intolerant, and devilishly persuasive’. In this speech he described a fundamental divide in cinema between the realism of the Lumière Brothers and the unrealism of Méliès. This is a similar divide to that theorised by Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, Chapter 2: Basic Concepts. However Zavattini was more of an absolutist as he, according to Mira Liehm, ‘refused to allow any fiction and contended that the most valid cinematic form was a film based on real time that rejected all dramatic structure including artistic time’.

There is a fundamental conundrum in Zavattini’s assertions. At the time he made this speech he was known as the screenwriter for two films by Vittorio de Sica: *Sciuscià (Shoeshine*, 1946), and *Ladri di biciclette (Bicycle Thieves*, 1948). Both are acknowledged neo-realist masterpieces, and both tell a fictional tale. In fact he continued to write the screenplays for many fictional works, negating the assertions of this speech.

However, there is a fundamental idea which he does carry on in his screen writing. This is the idea that the screen should not be the sight of an artificial image particularly a sound-stage set. What neo-realism showed was that if a film is photographed *in situ* then there is inevitably a reality to the image because of the uncontrolled background. It is the importance of the background to the diegesis which Zavattini considers paramount in film. The ‘real world’ in which the film is taking place ensures that the narrative which is foregrounded cannot lie, because the spectator must be influence by the background. If the characters do not fit into this background then the spectator will not accept the narrative as truth; the illusion is revealed. The shortcoming of this absolutist idea is that the film maker may

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11 Ibid., p.104.
deliberately cause a dissonance in order to draw attention to the ideology being critiqued. This is where the literalist theory reveals its own flaw. Film may be manipulated to create an illusion, but it may also deliberately draw attention to its own illusion.

Zavattini, being a first generation film theorist, seems to assume that a film which reflects the artifice of the stage is a failed film. He does not understand that it is possible for a film’s diegetic world to be completely artificial and for it still to be a realist work. As we enter the 1950s we will see that this dichotomy persists. There are those who believe cinema is inherently literalist and any attempt at illusion is flawed, and those who consider that the fluidity of cinematic reality allows for greater depth of meaning.

While André Bazin’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* was raging against ‘le cinéma du papa’ and promoting ‘la politique des auteurs’ in Paris, a young group of writers in London was attempting a similar act in the fledgling British cinema press. Most noteworthy of these was Lindsay Anderson. Anderson had attempted to establish his own journal – *Sequence* – but when it foundered he moved to the journal of the British Film Institute – *Sight and Sound*. In his writing, Anderson began to put forward a theory of film which was at odds with the British mainstream cinema. He maintained that the studio cinema in Britain was ‘metropolitan’, that it emanated from and reflected ‘Southern English culture’ to the detriment of the rest of England (not to mention Scotland and Wales). He considered that it was ‘obstinately class-bound; still rejecting the stimulus of contemporary life as well as the responsibility to criticise’. 12 As a result he thought that the only way out was a cinema that was free from the studio system.

Between February 1956 and March 1959 Anderson, along with Karel Reisz organised a series of programmes under the rubric *Free Cinema* at the National Film Theatre. Reisz was programming coordinator there, which was convenient to their purposes. There were six programmes in all, of which three (1, 3, & 6) were dedicated to British films. Program 2 featured works by Lionel Rogosin, Georges Franju and Norman McLaren; number 4 was titled *Polish Voices* and featured, among others a film by Roman Polanski; number 5, titled *French Renewal*, featured Claude Chabrol and François Truffaut. I will have more to say about this opening up to the new

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cinema of the fifties in the chapter on the New Wave, but it is important to note here
that the group of film makers involved in Free Cinema were well aware of both
American experimental and underground cinema (Programme 2) and the emergent
new European cinema both East (Programme 4) and West (Programme 5).\textsuperscript{13}

In their own films we see an emphasis on new forms of realist narration. The first
programme featured three films \textit{O Dreamland}, a twelve minute look at the Margate
funfair made by Lindsay Anderson; \textit{Momma Don’t Allow}, a twenty-two minute film
about a jazz club in North London, jointly directed by Karel Reisz and Tony
Richardson; and finally \textit{Together}, a forty-nine minute film about two deaf-mute dock
workers in East London, directed by Lorenza Mazzetti. This last film was the only
one of the three to have a fictional narrative. However its style is definitely neo-realist
in that it was filmed on the streets of East London and the actors were all non-
professionals.

The names of most of the participants will recur in the New Wave, but for the
present I want to focus on their contribution to a theory of realism in British film. The
most notable fact is that the subject matter of the films is not what was normally seen
in British cinemas. The jazz club was presented as a normal place, not a haven for
teddy boys and other delinquents, the people at the funfair were simply recorded and
not caricatured into ‘quaint’ objects of interest. In other words the films conformed
to Zavattini’s demand of a film that did not betray any artifice. The films simply record
the events. The problem with this is that they do not construct a narrative. They are
‘poetic’ in the way that the films of Humphrey Jennings were poetic. It is no
coincidence that Anderson considered Jennings the only true poet produced by British
cinema.\textsuperscript{14} When such an aesthetic is used for narrative purposes then a conflict occurs.
Does the narrative imposition deflect from the realist portrayal? What makes the
‘realist portrait’ the earlier writers assumed to be a reality. In the growing field of
cinema studies, particularly as it became established in the 1970s, the assumption
itself began to be questioned. This was particularly so in the pages of the journal
\textit{Screen}. In the next section of this chapter I will analyse the growing theory of
Realism that this journal in particular produced.

\textsuperscript{13} The details of the programmes are from introductory notes by Christophe Dupin in an unpaginated
booklet published to accompany the DVD set \textit{Free Cinema} (British Film Institute, 2006).
\textsuperscript{14} Anderson, op. cit. p.359.
In the Spring 1972 edition of *Screen* Paul Willemen published an article titled ‘On realism in the cinema’, in which he began the debate on realism using new theories from France. His primary sources were Christian Metz and Roland Barthes. His basis was structuralist and semiotic. However what I find of interest in his article is the assumption of reality which persists. Early on he explains the concept of the diegesis.\(^{15}\) This is a term taken from aesthetic theory and means the total fictional world in a work of art. This world can either have no relationship to the real world, in which case it has no reality, or it can have ‘verisimilitude’ which means that it is constrained by those limitations which make it possible for the diegetic world to have existence in the real world. ‘In the cinema’, he writes, ‘the factor which mediates between the “real” world and the diegesis is the pro-filmic event’\(^{16}\) Thus a relationship is established between the reality of the diegesis and the real world by the physical existence of the filmed events. When a spectator views a film there is an underlying assumption that what is projected onto the screen has existed in the same physical world in which the spectator exists. Realism, in Willemen’s argument consists of a relationship between the real world and the diegetic world. If that relationship is ruptured, I infer from his argument, then the film is no longer realist.\(^{17}\)

Two numbers later *Screen* published a review of *Movie Reader, Film as Film* by Sam Rohdie. *Movie* was a film journal whose writers in the main did not subscribe to the theoretical grounds supported by *Screen*. Rohdie’s review focused on the role of realism in British Cinema and *Movie’s* ‘anti-realist’ attitude. He begins the article with a broad statement that realism has been the ‘dominant aesthetic of British art’ since the 1930s at least.\(^{18}\) He describes realism as a means to convey ‘a certain social, ethical or philosophic content’. His focus is on the content of the work, not the form the work takes. This is his disagreement with the writers from *Movie*, particularly V.F. Perkins. His major argument is that Perkins focuses on the ‘how’ of film rather than the ‘why’. There is a certain anti-aesthetic bias in his argument. The film fails totally if it does not have the ideological content that conforms to an acceptable norm. Whose norm? One assumes the writer’s norm. That Perkins argues for the

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\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) ‘realism indicates a relation between a primary object…and a secondary object the fictional world,’ ibid., p.38.

\(^{18}\) Rohdie, Sam, ‘Review: *Movie Reader, Film as Film*’, in *Screen*, Winter 1972/3, Volume 13, Number 4, p.135.
maintenance of a ‘reality’ within the diegesis is a mistake for Rohdie.\textsuperscript{19} He considers that film should disrupt its discourse to make the viewer aware of the ideological content. This is, of course, a reference to Bertolt Brecht’s idea of \textit{vefremdung}, variously translated as distancing or alienation. Rohdie assumes this aspect of the discourse because it was integral to writing at that time. In fact, two numbers later \textit{Screen} devoted an entire issue to the theories of Brecht, including their influence on realism.

The lead article in that edition was by Colin McCabe. \textit{Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses} is an initial commentary on two articles by Brecht: \textit{On Realism} and \textit{On Film}. McCabe takes as his starting point what he calls the ‘Classic Realist Text’. By this he means the nineteenth century realist novel as per Balzac and its cinematic progeny. He introduces the notion of discourse in these texts and the presence of what he calls a ‘metalanguage’.\textsuperscript{20} By this he means that included in the written text is the discourse as narrated, but there is an additional discourse which is unwritten but assumed by the narrator. The realist effect is achieved by suppressing this discourse so that the narration appears as the only reality. He describes this process as ‘annealing’. Thus in every realist text there is, he claims, an implicit discourse which the reader/spectator is tricked into accepting as real. According to McCabe (and by extension Brecht) it is the duty of the producer of the realist text to reveal this meta-discourse to the receiver in order for the text to be valid. This is acceptable so far as it goes, however when he come to apply this to a specific film he once again falls into the assumption of the passive camera eye. He writes: ‘the camera shows us what happens – it tells the truth against which we can measure the discourses’.\textsuperscript{21} In the example he gives a voice over on the soundtrack is at variance with the image presented. He privileges sight over sound, but this is not necessarily the case. In fact one of the primary factors in the new cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s was the end of the dominance of the visual as real. An unreliable narrator can present false images as well as false words. Jack Clayton’s film \textit{The Innocents} (1961) is a perfect example of this. Based on the Henry James novella, \textit{The Turn of the Screw}, the narrative hinges on whether or not there are ghosts haunting the house or they are figments of the Governess’ imagination. Clayton

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p.142.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p.10.
shows the ghosts, but we can never be sure if what we are seeing is physically real or
the vision of a disturbed mind. An unreliable narrator can present false images as well as
false words.  

There is an assumption about realism in this article which reveals its own
metalanguage. McCabe asserts that a realist text, because it has an unspoken
discourse, can brook no contradiction in its discourse. There is an assumption in his
thinking that, as the camera is the passive recorder of events which are real, the
spectator is a passive receiver of those events. He calls this the ‘petrification of the
spectator’ in the ‘reactionary practice of the cinema’.  

He is revealing in this his own
metalanguage which is that no spectator analyses a film as he watches it. He claims
that the meaning produced by a film ‘will depend on the class-position of the
reader’. This limitation of an individual human being to a single class position may
be classically Marxist, but it denies a host of other influences on that being. His or her
gender, sexuality, race, religious beliefs, to name a few factors, may override any
notion of class in his interpretation. At the end of the article McCabe reveals his own
(suppressed) discourse in a particularly bitter denunciation of Lindsay Anderson’s
film *O Lucky Man!* (1973). He describes it as the product of a ‘reactionary petit-
bourgeois intellectual’ because it does not argue for the revolt of the proletariat
against the ruling class. His suppressed discourse is that the only ‘good’ art is
revolutionary art. The article does not begin to analyse what realism is, it simply
states what, in McCabe’s opinion it should be. This is not realism, this is idealism.

In the earlier, ‘classical’ works of criticism which I have analysed in the first part
of this chapter realism was an assumption; in the second section I have examined
works which have admitted the lack of a coherent theory. These latter articles refer to
‘notes’, ‘theses’, and such. It was not until 1977 that a paper which gave anything like
a coherent theory of realism was published. This was Raymond Williams’ ‘A lecture
on Realism’. In this paper he lays out a theory which has since become the basic
structure for realist analysis in British criticism. Initially he identifies four markers

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22 This uncertainty opens up another, related debate. If we accept the ghosts as real then the film is
fantastic, if we assume them to be delusion then the film can be described as realist.
24 Ibid, p.25.
25 Williams, Raymond, ‘A lecture on Realism’, in Screen, Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 1977, pp. 61-
74. For examples of the use of this work see, Lay, Samantha, *British Social Realism: From
which denote realism in a work of art. The first of these is ‘social extension’. This means that the work deals with a social class which has not previously been the subject of art. In the eighteenth century it was the English comedy of manners, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was the realist/naturalist novel. The former introduced the bourgeoisie, the latter extended down to the lower middle-classes and ultimately the working classes. The second marker is ‘contemporaneity’. By this he means that the work takes place in the same historical period as its intended audience. This, by default, excludes any work set in a previous (or future) historical period from the realist aesthetic. The third marker is ‘secularity’. By this he means that no element of the supernatural can be admitted into the work to explain the actions of the protagonists; there are no witches, gods or ghosts as in previous times. The fourth marker has to do with what Williams refers to as the ‘ideological features’ of the work. He describes these as the ‘intentions’ of the artist in the work. There is also an element of complicitness with the audience in this ideological working. The audience is assumed to understand the realist intent of the work.

These four markers provide a theory by which realism can be limited in its application. However, in the rest of the article Williams brings forth ideas which can perhaps explain why such limitations are unnecessary if one considers realism in a wider conceptual frame. He acknowledges that in the late nineteenth century a distinction grew between Balzacian realism and a new form of writing called ‘naturalism’. Naturalism was applied by the French writer Emile Zola to his own work. According to Williams, naturalism was ‘originally a conscious opposition to supernaturalism’ and grew out of an interest in the developments in the natural sciences at the time. Work such as that of Charles Darwin led to an emphasis on the workings of nature with no metaphysical intervention.

Williams’ theory is based on a specific and very narrow definition of what constitutes a realist work. I do not agree that social extension downward is a prerequisite. There is a certain Hegelian notion of historical progression in the extension downward. One can read in this an implication that with the advent of a truly proletarian realism, then the progression of the form is ended. This Marxist view denies the ability of any new work to be realist once a proletarian drama, whether on stage or on screen, has taken place. However, it is possible for a work, such as John

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26 Williams, op. cit. pp.63-64.
27 Ibid., p.65.
Schlesinger’s *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), to be considered as realist even though it is, in fact, a reversion back up the social scale.

As I will demonstrate in the context of the British New Wave, the social extension is a factor in the perception of a work as being realist, but it is not an exclusionary factor. That a work can be set in a non-contemporary period and still be realist is something I will expand on in consideration of Schlesinger’s 1967 film *Far From the Madding Crowd*. I will simply state here that if the film re-presents the period ‘as if’ a camera were recording in documentary mode, then it can be considered realist. There are other elements, which I will discuss shortly which establish realist intent. I have no argument with the secular element as a marker of realism. It was the advent of enlightenment ideas of rationalism in the late Eighteenth Century that allowed for the growth of realism as an artistic practice. For the moment I wish to return to Williams’ opposition of realism to naturalism as an indication of the fourth marker: the ideology of the work.

This opposition confuses two separate dialectical situations. As I previously noted, Williams correctly states naturalism was opposed to supernaturalism. This is a dialectic based on the natural sciences. In this argument an ideological statement is made about belief in a metaphysical reality. For a supernaturalist a realist work can be created which incorporates such metaphysical elements. It is the intent of the artist, and his intended audience which makes the work realist. However in a philosophical sense the metaphysical work cannot be realist; it is idealist. It is created on an assumption that unprovable statements are accepted. Idealism, in this context, means that the real is not the ultimate bearer of meaning; it is simply the imperfect expression of a superior ideal. This concept has been current at least as far back as Plato. It has recently been brought to the fore again in the idea that there is no truly knowable reality, simply a perception which allows the conscious mind to function as a social subject. A realist, then, argues that there is an objective reality; an idealist argues that there is not. A realist work of art starts from the assumption that what is being re-presented has an origin in an objective reality. I find that in most theoretical writings on realism, such as Williams, an assumption is made from the start about the sort of objective reality that the realist work *ought* to re-present. Williams’ assertion, as previously noted, that social extension is essential for a work to be ‘realist’ implies

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28 See note 27.
that a work cannot be realist in the second half of the Twentieth Century if it does not conform to a Marxist ideal of a proletarian progression. In my opinion such a presumption amounts to the expression of an ideal, and such a work is idealist.

Against this assertion that there is only one form of realism, Gregory Currie has proposed three forms of Realism. The first is *Transparency*, ‘in that we see “through” (film) to the real world’; the second is *Perceptual Realism*, in which film ‘approximates the normal the normal experience of perceiving the real world’; and thirdly, *Illusionism*, because it has ‘the capacity to engender in the viewer an illusion of reality and presentness of fictional characters and events portrayed.* In semiotic terms his three categories can be roughly conflated with the Icon, the Index and the Symbol. If Realism were to conform to the first category then it could never be the vehicle for a fictional narrative. A fictional narrative is *de facto* not real. It is this error that has persisted in film theory. That cinema is a perceptual reality is acceptable. To use Currie’s example we perceive a horse in a film because we use the same perceptual tools as we do to perceive a horse in the physical world. What we do *not* do is equate a horse on the screen with a physically present horse. Currie disagrees strongly with the idea that cinema is deliberately illusory, that its mechanisms convince the audience that they actually experience the events on the screen. As he argues we do not respond to an axe murder in a film in the same way we would respond to an axe murder to which we were witness in the street. We *perceive* it in the same way, but we do not *experience* it in the same way. However a death in a documentary is experienced differently from a death in a fictional narrative. Currie does not consider the function of ‘truth’ in relation to the cinematic image. It is the possibility that the event occurring on the screen was not pretence at the time of photographing but an actuality which changes the reception of that event.

Problems arise, however when a narrative is stated to be truth, as in *cinéma vérité*, when in fact it is manipulated. Sam diLorio has recently addressed this problem in an article on the French film *Chronique d’un été* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961) which was just such a film. However it contained a proportion of staged and heavily

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31 Currie, op.cit., p. 331.
He does not seem to be aware that at the same time John Schlesinger was criticised by the Free Cinema group for just this practice. His documentary *Terminus*, also made in 1961, contains scenes which were staged rather than literally captured. Schlesinger himself estimated that the split between actualities and staged scenes in that film was about 50/50. The film was accepted as a documentary and marketed as such.

The problem is that realism as a narrative form can easily be seen as illusionistic. If the events are indeed presented as fact when they were staged, then an untruth has been made. However in a fictional narrative the form of actuality may be used to enhance the narrative. In such a case the film may be shot on location so that the fictional events are acted out in front of a real world. I would suggest that the real world in such films takes on the character of a palimpsest in the image. In its written form a text is seen in palimpsest when it has been erased and written over, but the original text is still visible through the new text. With the use of x-ray techniques, the original text may be deciphered.

In a film we may enjoy a fictional narrative, knowing that it has never occurred in actuality. At the same time we may perceive the reality of the context in which the narrative takes place. Before location filming became a commonplace, such reality was startling to the audience. It was normal for elaborate studio construction to be used, even of whole city blocks, either on the back lot or in the studio. A major example is in Vincente Minnelli’s *The Clock* (1945) in which the entrance lobby of Grand Central Station in New York was built on MGM’s biggest sound stage so that the entire scene is a set. If we compare this to Vittorio de Sica’s *Stazione Termini* (1953) which was shot entirely in the eponymous Roman railway station we can see how the filmic palimpsest works. The Minnelli film has the look of a staged work at any given moment. The hundreds of extras scurry about the set, but somehow they never look natural. We never get a glimpse through the crowd to the real New York outside. Our focus is entirely on the adventures of Judy Garland and Robert Walker. In the de Sica film we see through the narrative to the Rome of 1953. We can, if we wish, ignore the plight of Jennifer Jones and Montgomery Clift and just concentrate on the sights of Rome. The sheer novelty of the real settings was sufficient in many

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films of the time to grant them success. Many widescreen films relied heavily on this location realism as a selling point. However the sights seen in palimpsest are not confused with the events of the narrative. They are context, but not content.

Recently there has been a return to realism in critical writing, most notably in the work of Ian Aitken.\(^{34}\) In his perceptive analysis of Balzacian realism, through the lens of George Lukács, he discovers that realism, far from being invariably a means towards a ‘progressive’ end is a variable discourse dependent on the context in which the work is created. He defines three separate, though ‘interacting’, modes of realism: art which was directly oppositional, critical and, in some cases, formally avant-garde; art which depicted, rather than critiqued, society, and realist work such as that produced during the Second Empire and Third Republic of France which celebrates the society it depicts. This latter work played the same role in celebrating the authority and achievements of the ruling regime as had a compromised neo-classical tradition during the periods of the Restoration and July Monarchy. The same three modes can be distinguished in cinema throughout its history. Whether one agrees with the discourse in the work, or disagrees, one cannot deny the realism of the work unless one can demonstrate that it is a false depiction. The honesty of the work is the one defining factor in the determination of the realist aspect of the work.\(^{35}\)

Much of the writing on realism discussed in this chapter has assumed that realism is primarily an ideological discourse. The Screen writers all started from this assumption and their work ignored any other element. Aitken’s three modes also refer to the ideological position of the author of the work. However Currie’s approach reveals that in film realism can also be considered as an aesthetic strategy. A film maker may adopt a style imitative of the documentary, so that it appears that the events of the film are not fictional, but are being recorded in real time and involve people in actions that have not been previously arranged or rehearsed. Equally valid as a mode of realism is to create a world on screen in which everything is credible, there is no suspension of disbelief in order to accept the events. In order for a film to succeed as a realist work the two aspects, aesthetic and ideological, need to be coherent. A realist work is one in which an aesthetic reality is created which does not interfere with the discourse put forth by the author of the work. The spectator of such


\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 23.
a work accepts that the events on the screen, and the world in which they take place, are credible; they appear ‘as if’ the camera had simply captured a scene with no manipulation of the contents. Such a strategy may have an ideological intent, but it is primarily an aesthetic strategy in the narrative art.
CHAPTER TWO

The British New Wave

The use of the term ‘new wave’ has become so widespread that it is easy to assume that it has a fixed meaning. In its most common, and formally imprecise, use the term seems to apply to any national cinema which has come to the attention of film journalists.\(^1\) It is now fact that there are certain periods in film history which are irrevocably referred to as ‘new wave’ and in this chapter I will examine one such period and try to establish why the term has been applied and whether it has any value beyond identifying a particular period in a particular national cinema.

In the first part of this chapter I trace the phrase back to its origins. I find this a necessary exercise because the phrase itself carries a meaning which is related specifically to the moment it came into use. It is, in fact, a generational descriptor in the way that subsequent phrases such as ‘Baby Boomer; and Generation-x’ have been used. As is the case with other phrases to be found in this chapter, such as ‘angry young man’ the term has a journalistic origin. The problem is that such a piece of journalistic shorthand never had any real theoretical base to start with, and any subsequent attempts to give it such a base tend to become nothing more than catalogues of contemporaneous films with very little in common. One common aspect which does appear in analyses of these works is the idea of independence. The question to be addressed in this part, then, is what makes these films ‘independent’?

Independence, it would appear, relates to the production, or industrial aspect relating to the films. As this part deals with the film as a group then it will be necessary to establish whether they have any aesthetic or ideological factors in common as well.

On the basis of these common aspects, I will then approach the first two films directed by John Schlesinger as examples of the British New Wave and establish how they came to be made in the way they were (their production) and what they reveal about the aesthetic approach and cultural assumptions underlying the films. What will be revealed is that although the films were labelled, by producers as well as the press as ‘new’, they were in fact a continuation of specifically British cinematic traditions. What was new about them was that they were made by a new generation of filmmakers, all of whom were firmly embedded in a British tradition of film.

i. How the Idea of a New Wave Was Established in British Cinema

La Nouvelle Vague

As we saw in the previous chapter, in the early to middle 1950s a new generation of writers appeared in cinema journals. The influence of this new generation was not limited to cinema alone. In France the news magazine, L’Express, began to take note of its presence and in the issue of October 3, 1957 the magazine published a questionnaire which it dubbed a ‘national survey’. The purpose of the survey was to establish what this new generation thought. The writer of the article, François Giroud, was very specific about the limits of this new generation. The questionnaire was for young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty; in other words those born between 1927 and 1939. This was the generation who had been formed by the War and he called them ‘La nouvelle vague’, the New Wave.²

At the time of this article the major cultural phenomenon in France that reflected this ‘new wave’ was the New Novel, a literary movement which included such authors as Michel Butor, Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet. It was inevitable that when the young turks from Cahiers du Cinéma began to make films their work would be referred to as ‘le cinéma de la nouvelle vague’.

Although the Cahiers cohort is now seen as the central edifice of the French New Wave, it was the sheer abundance of new filmmakers that evoked the phenomenon at the time. Estimates vary, but Jacques Siclier, writing in Sight and Sound in 1961, is probably close to the mark. According to his estimate in the three years 1958-1960 ‘about a hundred films have been made by directors who have entered upon their

profession in this period'. As he notes in the article what was equally astonishing was that only twenty percent of those directors had served the traditional ‘apprenticeship’ within the industry. The rest had no previous experience working on established productions.

As the films of this new group emerged there were two remarkable facts about them. One was the emphasis on the director as the author of the film; this was in the spirit of the seminal article ‘de la politique des auteurs’ written by André Bazin. The other was an acknowledgement of the American cinema as inspiration. This was a response to a plea at the end of a book published in 1955 Panorama du film noir américain. It was inevitable that this phenomenon would draw attention to the work of new directors in other countries. The first place outside France where the ‘new wave’ rubric appeared was the United Kingdom.

**Angry Young Men, New Theatre and Free Cinema**

While the nouvelle vague was getting under way in France a similar generational change was taking place in Britain. In late 1953 John Wain’s first novel *Hurry On Down* was published, closely followed in 1954 by Kingsley Amis’ first novel *Lucky Jim*. The novels were the first sign of what Raymond Williams calls ‘social extension’ in British literature. The subject matter was not exactly working class, but it was not exactly middle class either. The protagonists of the new works were unattached to any class. They may have been born lower, but they had been educated upper.

The success of these novels led to a steady output of fiction set in the Northern provinces and featuring male protagonists. The most significant, in terms of both the literary movement and cinematic influence, were *Room at the Top, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Kind Of Loving*. The new writing of the ‘angry young men’ was really not so new. The hero of *Room at the Top*, Joe Lampton, was a young working class lad on the make and was not so different from the hero of Arnold

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4 Bazin, André, ‘De la politique des auteurs’ in *Cahier du cinéma*, Volume 12, Number 70, pp. 2-11.
Bennett’s *The Card* (1911), and the angry, resentful working class intellectuals denied their academic careers by a loveless marriage forced on them by an unwanted pregnancy find their spiritual grandfather in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895).  

At the same time as these novels were being published a new generation was coming to the fore in the London theatre. The general consensus was that the commercial theatre of the time was conservative, safe and aimed to please its middle class audience. For new voices to be heard, a new theatre was needed. Two significant companies came to the fore at this time: Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and George Devine’s English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square. It was at the latter that a play titled *Look Back in Anger* by first-time playwright John Osborne opened in May 1956 and announced the advent of the ‘angry young man’. The angry young man of fiction was now on the London stage, complete with his northern accent.

Three weeks after that opening a new book by a 24 year old autodidact named Colin Wilson was published by Victor Gollancz: its title – *The Outsider*. This peculiar work was a treatise on the romantic rebel as existential hero. Wilson had obviously read his Camus, his Sartre and his Dostoyevsky. The novelty of the work was not in the ideas but that he had produced them without any formal education. The book’s title became a shorthand expression for the new generation who were ‘outside’ and clamouring to be let in.

The phenomenon even produced its own sociological study of these men. It was called *The Uses of Literacy* and was written by an academic named Richard Hoggart. What was so different about this analysis of working class life was that it was, according to the writer himself, a subject that was ‘so much part of my own origins and growth’. In some respects the work is an autobiographical meditation. In the passage in which the above phrase occurs, one gains a sense of the problem of the

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7 Humphrey Carpenter traces the epithet ‘angry young man’ from various sources. It was first the title of a ‘volume of memoirs by a middle-aged author named Leslie Paul’ (9), then the press officer at the English Stage company, one George Fearon is said to have told Osborne that he disliked his play and supposed he was an angry young man,(p.129-130); finally ‘the first person to make public use (of the phrase) seems to have been Thomas Wiseman, in the Evening Standard… on 7 July 1956, two months after the opening of Look Back (in Anger),’(p.1380).
‘declassed’ as they are represented in the fictional accounts. This is discussed directly in the chapter titled ‘The Scholarship Boys’. The original protagonists, ‘Lucky’ Jim Dixon himself, Jimmy Porter in Anger, are university graduates who either continue in the academic milieu like Dixon or, like Porter, they reject it and attempt to return to a more ‘real’ life in the lower classes. The former are the ‘declassed’ ones.\(^\text{10}\) They have moved up and are comfortable.

However it was inevitable that as more young people completed secondary education there would be a more frequent occurrence of a new type. This is the boy (Hoggart speaks entirely of male education) who has the talent to come this far, but ‘not go much further’. He is ‘at the friction point of two cultures’.\(^\text{11}\) They are stuck in a sort of no-man’s land. To begin with, at school, they were outsiders. They cannot escape fully their working-class environments. They live at home but do not feel a part of it. They no longer belong where they grew up, but do not belong anywhere else either. They are the ones who have become outsiders. They have been educated, but to what purpose?

In some of the works the protagonist gains employment on a job which was considered, at least, lower middle-class. However the difficulty of ‘classifying’ the profession is pointed out by Stuart Laing in his study of working-class representations. As he notes there was evidence that, although working-class occupations were providing greater disposable income, some occupations which had been traditionally described as petty (sic) bourgeoisie - teachers, vets, librarians, draughtsmen, laboratory assistants - had declined in earning capacity and ‘fallen to the level of skilled workers’. As a result, some have referred to a “proletarianization” of large sections of the petty bourgeoisie instead.\(^\text{12}\)

Education in Great Britain had been changed by the Act of 1944 which abolished all tuition fees at state-maintained schools and set up the system which eventually settled into the two streams of Grammar and Secondary Modern.\(^\text{13}\) This change meant that the first generation to actually experience this new system, those born in the late 1930s, were better educated than their parents, but not necessarily better off. The jobs they took, having completed their education, were those very jobs whose status had

\(^{10}\) Ibid, p. 292.
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.25.
declined. Vic Brown in A Kind of Loving was a draughtsman; Billy Fisher in Billy Liar was a clerk in a funeral parlour. They were both Grammar boys. However Arthur Seaton in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning still worked in a factory and appeared to be considerably better off than the other two. The problem of class seems to have been not that it no longer existed, but that the signs of class attachment had changed. The anger of these young men may have been prompted by an inability to belong in the way that their elders had belonged.

While all this literary work was emerging not much was happening in cinema to reflect this new generation. The only sign that a new generation was emerging in British cinema was the series of programmes referred to in the section in Chapter One on realism entitled ‘Free Cinema’. The British films which were included in the series were all filmed in locations in and around London. They focused on working class milieux and, specifically young people in those environs. There was a degree of self-promotion in the notes accompanying the films; the overriding emphasis being that they were outsiders clamoring to be allowed into the industry. As Alexander Walker noted, their claims to being different and revolutionary in method and content was not universally greeted with acclaim. Those working in the various television units considered their own work to be ‘every bit as revolutionary’.14 I think that that was the point of the exercise. Cinema in the fifties was not a realist medium any more. Television was overtaking it as the medium of choice for direct reportage. The new generation could identify with the subject matter and the style of television, but why go out to see it at the cinema? What was needed was a new type of cinema which reflected the same ideas as the new literature.

**Room at the Top**

It was inevitable that the new best selling novels would be brought to the screen. It also seemed inevitable that they would be converted into ‘suitable’ cinema fare. In 1957 Lucky Jim had been converted by the Boulting Brothers into a farce. It fitted into their continuing series of institutional satires, but was hardly ‘new’.15

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15 *Lucky Jim* had been directed by John Boulting as part of the Boulting brothers’ series of semi satirical comedies on various professions: the army (*Private’s Progress*, 1956); the legal profession (*Brothers In Law*, 1957); ‘business’ and trade unions (*I’m All Right Jack*, 1959); the diplomatic service
The film version of John Braine’s bestselling novel was the first film to herald something new in British cinema. The film was produced by the brothers James and John Woolf through their production company Remus films. Jack Clayton, the director, was part of their in-house team. He had directed one short feature for them – *The Bespoke Overcoat* – which had received generally favorable reviews and had been awarded by both the American Academy and the Venice film festival. He had served his apprenticeship as assistant and second unit director. In other words his advancement to the director’s chair had followed a conventional path.\(^6\)

The film did break free from convention in several significant ways. The film used a considerable amount of location work in Bradford in West Yorkshire. This ‘realist’ filming showed the North Country for the first time as an environment. The sheer novelty of these locations gave the film a sense of the exotic. It also contributed a sense of Williams’ ‘social extension’ to the film. Like the neo-realist films of Italy in the 1940s and the location work of the new directors in France, the film has a sense of taking place in the world, not a studio. Of course there are numerous studio sets which were filmed at Shepperton Studios, but the film has a sense of location which was new at the time.

Of equal significance to the look of the film was the subject matter and how it was approached by the British Censors. At the time all films released in Britain had to be passed by the British Board of Film Censors. This was a quasi-legal institution which functioned in a similar mode to Hollywood’s Breen Office. It was common practice for a script to be submitted to the Board before production commenced in order to ascertain what rating the film was likely to receive. In some cases, such as *Room* the producers may be seeking to ascertain if the film would be passed at all. A film which was considered too ‘adult’ was likely to receive an ‘X’ rating. As the two major chains, Rank and ABC, generally refused to screen ‘X’ films such a rating was anathema to a commercial film as it meant it would be excluded from the mainstream cinema chains. Usually the Board advised of changes necessary to avoid such a rating and the producers followed the board’s recommendations. Although this was not technically censorship, it functioned in just such a way. Such subjects as the Royal

\(^{16}\) Walker, Alexander, op.cit., pp. 45-55.
Family, the Church (and religion in general), and sex were automatically cut from scripts. It was in this environment that *Room at the Top* was made.\(^{17}\)

The Woolf brothers did not follow this normal procedure. They presented the Board with the finished film and simply requested a rating. This was not necessarily as risky as it may seem as the Board had a new secretary, John Trevelyan, who had been appointed in a desire to allow more ‘adult’ fare onto British screens. The finished film was already much anticipated and to refuse classification would have been bad publicity, not for the producers, but the Board. In the event the film was passed with an ‘X’ certificate. Its notoriety was such that it could not be ignored by the mainstream and, consequently, *Room at the Top*, became the first ‘X’ certificate film to gain mainstream commercial success. Not surprisingly the cinema chains soon changed their minds about the commercial viability of such fare\(^{18}\)

The film is best seen as a transitional work. It introduced the new realism in its content matter and its style. However it was made by an established production company using an in-house director. Also two of the lead actors, Laurence Harvey and Heather Sears, were familiar contract players for Remus. Its success made it feasible for others to enter what was seen as a notoriously closed industry. The first major company to take advantage of this success was Woodfall.

**Woodfall**

In the April 1960 edition of *Films and Filming*, a film magazine published in London, an article appeared which had as its headline ‘New Wave Hits British Film.’ The by-line for the article was ‘producer Harry Saltzman’. Saltzman, at the time, was the money part of the triumvirate which ran Woodfall Film Productions. The other two were director Tony Richardson and writer John Osborne. The company had already produced the films of Osborne’s plays *Look Back In Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959) and *The Entertainer* (Tony Richardson, 1960), although the latter had not yet opened in London. The purpose of the article was to draw attention to the imminent release of the latter film and also to Woodfall’s next film, which was about to go into production. This was to be called *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. This film represented a number of firsts: it was to be directed by Karel Reisz, who had only

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directed a couple of short documentaries as a part of the Free Cinema group; it was to star a young unknown actor named Albert Finney; and it was based, not on a play, but a screenplay by first time screen writer Alan Sillitoe, from his own best selling novel of the same name. In his article Saltzman considers two factors to warrant the ‘newness’ of the films his company was making: they were ‘realistic,’ and the company was ‘independent’. The term ‘New Wave’, itself, obviously derives from, and plays to the fame of, the French *Nouvelle Vague*. However, apart from the tag, the new French cinema was not the model Saltzman was looking to. Saltzman’s cited models were the Italian neo-realists, ‘the French in the early 50’s… (and the) Americans with *Marty*’. 

The Woodfall Production Company grew out of the success of the English Stage Company (ESC). Ensconced at the Royal Court theatre in Sloane Square, the ESC had become famous, even notorious, for its new style of theatre. Its most famous play was the aforementioned *Look Back In Anger*, which eventually went to Broadway, and the creative talents involved were determined that they would transfer the property to film. It was the success of this ‘new realism’ on the stage, combined with the ‘angry’ novels coming out of the north that led to the ‘new realism’ of the British cinema.

Since the release of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in 1960, and a series of films which followed its success, the term ‘British New Wave’ has been retained to collectively describe them. In several recent references, including Robert Murphy’s obituary of John Schlesinger in *Sight and Sound*, the New Wave has been limited to the early film careers of four directors: Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson and John Schlesinger. Apart from this list of directors, the term is a nebulous connotation, and even in such works as Susan Hayward’s *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000), the term is more descriptive than analytical, listing directors and films.

Firstly we need to establish what Saltzman meant by calling his films ‘independent’. Alexander Walker, in his survey of British cinema of the 1960s,

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20 Ibid. Note that *Marty* was the first American film to win the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1955 and was the first American film to be shown in the Soviet Union since World War II.
22 Murphy, Robert, ‘John Schlesinger: Obituary’, *Sight and Sound*, 13/9 (September 2003), 1.
defines independent British producers as ‘those who weren’t tied to American companies in Britain or the two British production-distribution-and exhibition groups Rank and A.B.C.’.\(^{24}\) Thus his view is strictly of a commercial nature. Susan Hayward, on the other hand, says that independent cinema gives ‘an alternative voice to dominant ideology.’\(^{25}\) Both statements are partially true. In fact independent cinema can be seen as combining both elements. It can give voice to alternative views because they are under no obligation to the dominating commercial interests. However, the problem that arises from this mode of production is how the films so made get to be seen.

As Walker describes it, in Britain at the time, if a film was not tied to the two major circuits then the producer had to obtain a distribution deal before any independent finance could be obtained. If the exhibitors were to accept the property, it had to be, in some way, pre-sold, most usually by the use of known names, on the production side, at least, if not on the screen.\(^{26}\) As Saltzman describes it, the property had to be perceived as ‘commercial’ if it was to be accepted: ‘the artistic content of a picture is finally in the hands of distributors and the financiers upon whom independent producers are reliant’\(^{27}\) For him, and the others involved in Woodfall Productions, the question of independence relates to the ability to decide on the content of the films made. The films they want to make are the ones he describes as ‘realistic.’

**The Spread of Independence**

From this we begin to see that the desire for independence, and the emphasis on realism, implies a criticism of the films produced by the major studios for not reflecting British society as it was at the time. This view is reinforced when one reads that Joseph Janni, producer of John Schlesinger’s films, considered that the British industry needed to be like the Italian neo-realists:

‘I began looking around for subjects that would interlock the human and social themes and persuade us we were seeing parts of life

\(^{26}\) Walker, *op. cit.*, p.72.  
\(^{27}\) Saltzman, *op. cit.* p.11.
that in Britain we knew very little about, though in Italy they had become the foundation of a national cinema’.\textsuperscript{28}

The artists involved, then, are arguing that their films will provide a discourse on the national condition of Britain which is absent from films which were currently being made.

The property that Janni found, and bought in manuscript, was *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. He presented the property to Rank for development, but they were not interested.\textsuperscript{29} In the end he sold the rights on to Woodfall. This episode reinforces Saltzman’s view that the stories that his company and Janni’s operation were interested in producing did not interest the majors in England at that time.\textsuperscript{30} Once the film was released, and was successful, the two teams found it easier to make their films and get them shown. The new stories were beginning to be seen. The ‘compact’ between producers and consumers had been validated when it had been demonstrated that the consumers (the audience) accepted, and indeed sought out, the new realism on the screen. The acceptance of this realism could last so long as the audience accepted it.

The success of *Room at the Top* had signalled a new approach to this material. It was filmed on location in accents that did not come from the Home Counties, and sex was a major preoccupation of the characters concerned. Joe Lampton (Laurence Harvey), the working class lad on the make, was unlike any hero in British film at that time.\textsuperscript{31} He was followed by *Look Back In Anger*’s Jimmy Porter (Richard Burton) in May of that year. The two films had taken works from the new literature of the 1950s, but they had been turned into star parts. Richard Burton had been a leading player in Hollywood films since *My Cousin Rachel* (Henry Koster, 1952) and Laurence Harvey had been on British screens as a major presence for a similar amount of time. Both films were considered independent and had first time directors; therefore I consider them to be the first evidence of the New Wave in Britain.

\textsuperscript{28} Walker, op. cit., p.135.
\textsuperscript{29} Janni had previously produced a number of financially successful films for Rank including *A Town Like Alice* (Jack Lee, 1956) and *Robbery Under Arms* (Jack Lee, 1957). These films had shown his propensity to avoid ‘metropolitan’ subjects in his storytelling.
\textsuperscript{30} Walker, op. cit., p.110.
\textsuperscript{31} The norm at the time was ‘The Middle-class Boy-next-door’ personified by Dirk Bogarde ‘the idol of the Odeons’ or Kenneth More in such films as *Genevieve* (Henry Cornelius, 1954) and *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas, 1954), as described in Spicer, Andrew, *Typical men: the representation of masculinity in popular British cinema*, London; New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001, pp. 88-94.
Richardson’s next film, *The Entertainer*, is similarly problematic. It is adapted from an Osborne play and was filmed on location in the provinces, but the lead role was played by Sir Laurence Olivier in a career changing move; he had been a theatrical knight and Oscar winner since 1947. This essentially classical actor was moving into the new realism. Although these films were signs of something new in terms of subject matter, they were still essentially successful literary properties turned into star vehicles. It was not until the success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* that the New Wave could be said to have properly arrived.

All the works I have named so far are derived from literary works set in the Midlands or North and all were filmed on location and all can be identified as an ‘independent’ production. The only non-independent film generally included in the British New Wave was *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963), which was financed by Rank. However the producer on the film was Karel Reisz, working on his first project away from Woodfall Productions. It is also usually cited as the last New Wave film. Mainstream acceptance brings an end to the phenomenon.

Apart from *Room at the Top* and *A Kind of Loving* (John Schlesinger, 1962), all the films mentioned are associated with the core Woodfall group. As we have seen, there is even a link between Janni’s production company, which produced the Schlesinger film, and Woodfall in the form of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. We can infer from this, I think, that what has become known as the British New Wave, as announced by Harry Saltzman in April 1960, is a cycle of films made on location in the Midlands and further north, which were based on works from a 1950s literary phenomenon describing the discontent of certain working class men. They were directed by a group of men new to feature films and (always excepting Jack Clayton) with no previous links to the major studios at the time of their debuts.

As the British cinema was entering the 1960s, its newest phenomenon was a group of films which appeared to be new but were, in fact, looking back to a discourse which as we have seen, had been around, off-screen, for the better part of half a century. What was different, was that they had come to the screen with their sexual behaviour and their geographical location intact.

When one examines the writings about these films, it is the landscape which seems to receive the most attention. Terry Lovell’s ‘Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism,’ and Andrew Higson’s ‘Space, Place and Spectacle’ being prime
examples. From the latter we learn of what, since 1963, has been referred to as ‘That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill’. This refers to the establishing shot, somewhere near the beginning of all of these films, which lets us see the depressing vista of a grimy Midlands or Northern manufacturing or mining centre, usually with sooty train running through it. It is the equivalent of the more descriptive passages of the realist novels of Hardy, Bennett and D. H. Lawrence. The purpose of these shots is not so much the possessive (our town), as an introduction to the exotic. As Higson writes: ‘For the London-based critics, films like (A Taste of Honey) are a magic journey to the exotic working class places of the Midlands and the “distant” North’.

One should also note that all the directors of these films were themselves on an excursion into foreign climes, and such an establishing shot may have been as necessary to them as the introductory shot of Mount Kilimanjaro was for Brian Desmond Hurst in the opening scenes of Simba (1955). It is there to reassure us (the audience) that the film really was set in Kenya and not the back lot at Pinewood or Shepperton Studios. If one compares these opening ‘real’ shots with the first shot of the (obviously) model slum in Love on the Dole (John Baxter, 1941) one sees why the realism of the British New Wave was new.

The problem was that new cannot remain new. Once the parameters of narrative and style were set, what could be done with it? The films discussed all end in a kind of stasis. For all his raging against the system, Jimmy Porter ends up in exactly the same situation at the end of the film as he was at the beginning, except his ‘best friend’ Cliff has moved on. Joe Lampton (Room at the Top), Arthur Seaton (Saturday Night…), and Vic Brown (A Kind of Loving) are all married and ‘settled,’ or rather resigned to their respective fates, at the end of their individual narratives. Even Colin, the rebel of Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner (Tony Richardson, 1963), makes a gesture that is futile in its nihilism. It is essentially a negative gesture. He deliberately loses a race, and changes nothing in his social or psychological narrative. All the narratives end in a mood of either frustration or, in the most common trope, resignation to married life. The hero has been ‘trapped’ by one of his girlfriends into

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33 Higson, Andrew, op. cit.
34 Ibid., p.10.
marriage and sees all his dreams disappear. We do not progress beyond this stage of anticipation of a frustrated life.\textsuperscript{35}

Meanwhile the society of which they were supposed to be the realistic representatives was itself changing. In the month after the release of \textit{Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner}, two significant events occurred in the popular culture of Britain, and indeed the world as it turned out: the Beatles had their first number one hit with \textit{Love Me Do}, and \textit{Dr. No} (Terence Young, 1962), the first James Bond film, opened. It is only in retrospect that seemingly unrelated events gain a common significance, but the pattern that was to emerge over the next twelve months, culminating in The Beatles’ concerts in London in October 1963, points to the end of ‘looking back’ and the emergence of a new view, one which looked out to the rest of the world rather than in to a past that was irretrievably lost. It is in this environment, both social and psychological, that Schlesinger’s first two films were made. The realism of the New Wave was still the primary stylistic trope of \textit{Billy Liar} but, as we shall see, the retreat from reality within this realism was the first sign of the flight to fantasy that became the hallmark of the second half of the sixties in British Film.

\textbf{The Fantasy Cycle}

One of the earliest attempts to analyse what had happened in the 1960s was published before the decade had officially ended. Christopher Booker’s \textit{The Neophiliacs} appeared in 1969. The author was the founding editor of the satirical magazine \textit{Private Eye} and the book was an attempt to make sense of what had just happened. Alexander Walker, when he published his history of British cinema in the 1960s acknowledged the influence of Booker’s thesis of the development of a national ‘dream fantasy’ on his own analysis of the trajectory of British film in that decade.\textsuperscript{36} As I consider that the fantasy cycle which Booker describes is valuable I will give a brief description of it and how I see it reflected in the films of the British New Wave.

\footnotetext[35]{Although the films end at this point, the literary narratives commonly do not. Joe Lampton returned in \textit{Life at the Top} (1962) and Vic Brown, the hero of \textit{A Kind of Loving}, reappeared in \textit{The Watchers on the Shore} (1966). The former was filmed, but the latter was not. It seems that the authors acknowledge that their narratives were incomplete. The trajectories were similar: the marriages failed and they went to London. Only Billy Fisher, in his sequel \textit{Billy Liar on the Moon} (1975), remained in the Provinces.}  

\footnotetext[36]{Walker, op. cit., p.192.}
Booker describes a five stage cycle: 1. the Anticipation Stage; 2. the Dream Stage; 3. the Frustration Stage; 4. the Nightmare Stage; and 5. the Death Wish Stage.37 The five stages are obviously a structure which Booker wishes to employ as a subtext to the social changes in British Society. However as we have already noted, the films of the new realism all end in a sense of resignation or, more accurately frustration. They have come to the third stage, but there is no desire to follow the trajectory through. They are, in fact conservative, in that they want to imply that there is no alternative to the ending provided. If the protagonists were to proceed to the final two stages, they would experience what Booker calls an ‘explosion into reality’38 Perhaps it was this sense of incompleteness that led to the fading of the New Realism in the face of the excitement of the ‘swinging’ films which acknowledged there own fantastic reality. The New Wave was a moment in British film which introduced a new generation of directors, writers and performers. However it showed a tendency to incompleteness which, as the decade progressed was rounded out by the fantastic in the films of Swinging London. The progression of John Schlesinger through this decade is a template for this cycle.

ii. A Kind of Loving

Stan Barstow’s first novel, A Kind of Loving, was published in 1960. It appeared in the wake of such other ‘northern realist’ novels as John Braine’s Room at the Top and Alan Sillitoe’s Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. Like them, it was immediately classified as an ‘angry young man’ novel. Barstow is a native of Yorkshire, born there in 1928. The novel is a first person narrative and the protagonist, Vic Brown, has much in common with the writer. The novels of this particular group were seen to be ‘realist’ because the authors were of the country and from the class about which they wrote. In this respect these writers were the heirs of a British tradition which included Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett and D.H. Lawrence. The central unifying feature was that they were authorised to write about the lower classes because they were from

38 Ibid, p. 72. See also pp.76-77. The five stages also recall the five act structure of the classical and Shakespearean Stage. See for example Bradley, A. C. Shakespearean Tragedy, Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2007, p.35 for a description of this structure.
them. It was not possible to criticise these writers for condescension or caricaturing as they knew of what they wrote. When the novels, including this one, were adapted for the screen, it was expected that their documentary aspect would be carried over into the new medium. It also meant that those interested in producing the films would be inclined towards a realist form of cinema.

*A Kind of Loving* was optioned by an independent producer named Joseph Janni. Janni came from a mixed, but predominantly Italian, heritage and was educated at the University of Milan. While there he directed a student film for an annual competition. Among the students involved in the production were the future composer Nino Rota and the future directors Luigi Comencini and Renato Castellani. The financial matters to do with the film were looked after, in Alexander Walker’s words, ‘by a student of accountancy at a nearby institute’, Carlo Ponti; the leading actor was a young man named Vittorio de Sica.\(^39\)

Alexander Walker devotes an entire chapter of his work *Hollywood England* to Janni with the title ‘The Anglo-Italian Job’. In it he describes Janni’s early career producing ‘conventional’ films for the Rank organisation. He had some success with films such as *The Glass Mountain* (Edoardo Anton, Henry Cass, 1949) and *White Corridors* (Pat Jackson, 1951). The latter is particularly interesting as its hospital setting is in a Midlands town rather than a major London hospital. Googie Withers is the doctor heroine who strides the eponymous corridors with some authority.\(^40\)

As we have seen, Janni’s first attempt at bringing what he always referred to as ‘the new realism’ to British film was an option on a manuscript of an as yet unpublished novel with the title *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. He took out an option for £1000, but was unsuccessful in raising financing. He eventually sold on the rights to Woodfall for £2000, and continued his search for an appropriate, realist property.\(^41\)

Eventually he managed to gain a two-picture deal involving the writing team of Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall. The pair had achieved success on the London stage with their joint adaptation of Waterhouse’s novel *Billy Liar*. Janni optioned the play and also engaged them to write a screen adaption of the Stan Barstow novel. Walker’s

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\(^{40}\) Ibid. p.108.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p.110.
description of the kind of film which Janni’s Italian compatriots were now making, and which he wanted to bring to the British screen is worth quoting in full:

(He) knew his old school-friends were enviably active in creating a national cinema committed to putting on the screen an image of real places, ordinary people and all aspects of daily life in which the individual’s predicament was central and the plot merely a means of facilitating the director’s social comment.\(^{42}\)

This would appear to be Janni’s working definition of his idea of ‘new realism’. It is obvious that he is taking the Italian neo-realist movement as his direct inspiration. As he told Walker: ‘I began looking around for subjects that would interlock the human and social themes and persuade us we were seeing parts of life that in Britain we knew very little about, though in Italy they had become the foundation of a national cinema’.\(^{43}\) It was the producer Janni who was determined to bring realism to the screen. It was he who gathered together the team which he thought could do it. So it was that with the appropriate Northern writers, he hired the talented young director named John Schlesinger from the BBC current affairs program Monitor, who was making a name for himself as a keen observer of British life.

Schlesinger had been a name director in documentary for some years. As long ago as 1958 Peter Baker in The Sunday Express had described how ‘(Schlesinger’s) documentary films have the assurance and style of a Master’.\(^{44}\) His observational ‘essays on film’ had drawn Janni’s attention and he considered his style appropriate for the ‘new realism’ he wanted to bring to fictional cinema. The story of A Kind of Loving was just such an observational essay on contemporary life.

Vic Brown (Alan Bates) is a draughtsman in an engineering works in a Midlands town. He has been to Grammar school on a scholarship and lives at home with his father, a worker with British Railways, his mother, a housewife, and his younger brother, who is also a Grammar School boy. His older sister has recently married and lives in a new housing estate. Vic is a representative of the new phenomenon

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p.109.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., p.109.
\(^{44}\) Peter Baker, the Sunday Express, 9 November 1958. The clipping is in Schlesinger’s Scrapbook of A Kind of Loving, BFI Special Collections reference JRS/2/3.
discussed in the preceding section, the scholarship boy, rising out of the working class, but not yet established as middle class.

At his sister’s wedding he noticed that one of the onlookers was an attractive young girl from the typing pool at his works. He begins to take more than a passing interest in her and one night on the bus home from work he gets up the nerve to ask her for a loan as he has no money for the fare. Ingrid (June Ritchie) has been equally interested in him.

Vic and Ingrid begin to see each other on a regular basis and eventually Vic convinces Ingrid to have sex with him. She becomes pregnant and they marry in haste. After the wedding they live with Ingrid’s widowed mother (Thora Hird) in a lower middle-class housing estate. The house is not big enough for the three of them and Ingrid’s mother resents Vic and the circumstances of the hasty marriage. The friction comes to a head when Ingrid has a minor accident at home and loses the baby. Ingrid’s mother does not contact Vic to tell him of the accident and he is appalled to be told by the neighbours when he arrives home from work.

After Ingrid comes home from the hospital their relationship deteriorates, until one night Vic goes out on a bender with a former work colleague, Conroy (Jack Smethurst) a divorced man. When he returns home drunk an argument blows up and Vic leaves Ingrid. He moves in with his sister and brother-in-law as his mother will have nothing to do with him. His sister berates him for his lack of feeling for Ingrid. He confesses that he never really loved her and only married her because of the pressure from his family to do so.

Vic and Ingrid attempt to reconcile. She acknowledges the undue negative influence of her mother and that they will need to live on their own if their marriage is to succeed. They begin to look for somewhere to live and commit to at least try to find a ‘kind of loving’ on which to base their life together.

Although the film is based on a novel which had been lumped into the ‘Angry Young Man’ bin by reviewers there are significant differences between it and the other films labelled New Wave. The three central characters in the film, Vic, Ingrid and Ingrid’s mother, Mrs. Rothwell are in many ways dissimilar from those in previous New Wave films. It is worth examining these characters first to establish how they function as representative types and exactly what assumptions underlie these portraits. As I previously noted the initial films featuring ‘angry young men’ tended to look back (whether in anger or not is moot), to a discourse which had been
established considerably earlier; this film heralds the advent of the 1960s as it looks forward. It is in this respect that Schlesinger differs from the other directors of the New Wave, he was never backward-looking. I believe this has to do with certain personal aspects of his life which will become clear as my analysis progresses.

Vic Brown, we have seen, is employed in a local works as a draughtsman. His father, on the other hand works for the railways. We understand that Vic has been a scholarship boy at the local Grammar School. As I previously noted, he is an example of a new sociological phenomenon. The Uses of Literacy by Richard Hoggart had been published in 1957, three years before Barstow’s novel. As we saw in the previous section, this was a work of social observation, sociology of a sort, but it was new in that the author was not an objective observer. Like the authors of the ‘angry’ novels Hoggart was from the working classes, and his book carried the weight of authority of personal experience; its effect was profound. As Alan Bennett noted ‘it was reading Hoggart forty years ago that made me feel that my life, dull though it was, might be the stuff of literature’. The scholarship boy’ is described by Hoggart in chapter 10: ‘Unbent Springs: a Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious.’ The scholarship boy does not refer to those who successfully ‘declass’ (p.292) themselves, that is continue on to University and leave the working-class for good. The term refers to those for whom the uprooting is troublesome. They are bright enough to complete the grammar school education, but go no further. They are stuck in a sort of no-man’s land. They have lower-middle class jobs, but cannot escape fully their working-class environments. They live at home but do not feel a part of it. Worst, at school, they are equally outsiders. They no longer belong where they grew up, but do not belong anywhere else either. Equally problematic is the kind of job they take. It may be thought that having taken a job as draughtsman, Vic has moved up. As previously noted, Stuart Laing has established that such was not the case. As I pointed out in the previous section, he writes that there was evidence that, although working-class occupations were providing greater disposable income, some occupations which had been traditionally described as petty (sic) bourgeoisie - teachers, vets, librarians, draughtsmen, lab. assistants - had declined in earning capacity and ‘fallen to the level

45 Bennett, Alan, Untold Stories, London: Faber and Faber, 2005, p.402.Dominic Sandbrook states that ‘there is little doubt that The Uses of Literacy…was on of the most significant books of its period’ in Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, London: Little Brown, 2005, p.170.

of skilled workers’. So Vic, as a draughtsman, may have status within the works as a ‘professional’, but his income is not sufficient for him to move up socially. This explains why his married life is such a struggle financially. It is significant that the film is sufficiently realist for such things to matter in its appreciation. At a distance of almost fifty years, there is much in the film which was assumed at the time but which needs explanation now.

Another aspect of Vic’s life which is important to note is how his education has changed his own world view. Because of his education, his view of the world is wider than that of his parents. The film does not emphasise this as much as the novel had. In fact one of the major changes made by the scriptwriters was the elimination of a major sub-plot. In the book, Vic takes a part-time job to supplement his income. This job is in a music store owned by a Mr. van Huyten. As a part of the job Vic is introduced to classical music by his employer. This strand of the narrative allows Barstow to write extensively on Vic’s appreciation of ‘high culture’. As well as his appreciation of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, Vic is a reader of modernist literature, including James Joyce. John Hill sees this change as a change of emphasis from ‘high versus low art’ to ‘traditional versus mass culture’. Although this is correct, Vic is nonetheless shown to have desires to experience more than just the Midlands. In the film he is shown to be interested in his brother-in-law’s copy of *Ulysses* and seems to have no difficulty with its modernist experiments. Before the marriage he expresses a desire to see more of the world, even if it is only the brothels of Paris. It is this desire for more experience which is curtailed by his forced marriage to Ingrid.

Set against Vic’s expansive view is Ingrid’s more inward-looking view of her community. Ingrid’s characteristics present her as a representative type. She is a typist in the works, and would appear to have had a minimal education. We are not given as much background detail for her as we are for Vic. Her world is presented as limited and primarily domestic. Most critiques of this depiction take their cue from John Hill. He argues that all the New Wave narratives are primarily masculine in their viewpoint and that the women in them are presented in a subordinate role. As he points out in discussing this point, the source novels were usually written as a first-person narrative.

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by a male protagonist.\textsuperscript{49} This male protagonist is usually interpreted as a quasi-autobiographical figure and tends to be resentful of the restraints marriage, or the prospect of marriage, put on his ambitions. This is the case in the present film, but the reason for portraying Ingrid as such is, I think, central to the argument of a realist work. It would not have been usual for a woman of her education to be any different. To have portrayed Ingrid as questioning would have made her a feminist model, but would not have been realist. A viewer in 1962 would not consider it realistic for Vic’s girl friend to be any other way. Her education was limited and so were her choices.\textsuperscript{50}

This is not to say that no-one criticised the film for its attitude to women. Penelope Gilliatt, in her review in \textit{The Observer}, noted that ‘if (the film) had the candour to say so its real theme is not social discontent…but the misogyny that has been simmering under the surface of half the interesting plays and films in England since 1956’.\textsuperscript{51} The point is valid. However what Gilliatt does not acknowledge is that without extensive social change, women’s role in (then) contemporary society leads to no other view.

As with Vic’s circumstances, so with Ingrid’s; we must look at the assumptions current about a life like hers. Firstly her job was not considered to be a life-long pursuit. In the early scenes of the film, the girls of the typing pool are constantly assessing the boys from the offices as suitable mates. There was an assumption then that when a woman married that was the end of her working life. In fact all the women in the film who are married do no work outside the home. Vic’s mother is always shown doing housework of some kind; his sister Christine has ceased employment now she is married; and finally there is Ingrid’s mother known in the film, as in the novel, only as Mrs. Rothwell. She has no other identity than her marital status. In the film this economic status (or lack thereof) is made clear very late in the narrative when Vic decides that since they need extra money to become independent then perhaps Ingrid would have to consider going back to work. The way this information is presented makes it obvious that this is not a normal situation. It would require a social change not then evident for it to become the norm. In this respect the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.163.  
\textsuperscript{50} Such ideas were perpetuated by journalists and academic writers. For example, John Newsom was an ‘educationist’ who published a book in 1948 entitled \textit{The Education of Girls}. Dominic Sandbrook quotes him from 1963: ‘(girls’ education should follow) broad themes of home making….the whole field of personal relations in courtship, marriage, and within the family.’ Sandbrook, Dominic, \textit{White Heat: a history of Britain in the swinging sixties}, London: Little, Brown, 2006, p.650.  
film, in a small way asks its audience to consider such a change. Schlesinger and his writers, look forward to a society where such is not the norm.

Of all the women in the film, Mrs. Rothwell is the most problematic. As played by Thora Hird she is a narrow-minded woman who is convinced that England is going to wrack and ruin because of ‘the unions’. Her world is entirely bound by the four walls of her house. It is all she has. Again there is a major change to the character in the adaptation from page to screen. In the novel Mr. Rothwell is a travelling salesman who is absent most of the time. In the infrequent episodes where he is at home he intervenes in the disputes between Vic and his wife. He is a voice of reason. His character is eliminated from the film and Mrs. Rothwell is a widow.

As with Mr. van Huyten, it is entirely possible that the character was eliminated for purely practical reasons. The two characters are limited in their narrative functions and their elimination allows for a decrease in the number of characters (and therefore actors to be paid), as well as streamlining the narrative in the screenplay. However the elimination does change the emphasis in the film as the Rothwell household has become an entirely feminine institution into which Vic intervenes. Again, we must look at her circumstances and question certain assumptions that the novel, and thereafter the film, have made about her.

We are never given the cause of Mr. Rothwell’s death, nor what income she lives on. She is not poor, we are sure of that as she lives well. The film seems to be written on the assumption that its audience will not question her source of income; otherwise some remark about her pension would have been made. In 1962 it was not unusual for women of Mrs. Rothwell’s age to be widowed for the simple fact that so many men died in World War II. The little we are told about her reveals that as a young woman she had a romantic streak, fed by Hollywood cinema; this led her to name her daughter after Ingrid Bergman. At the time of Ingrid’s birth (apparently 1942, possibly 1943) Bergman was current in two highly romantic and exotic melodramas Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942) and For Whom the Bell Tolls (Sam Wood, 1943). How such a romantically inclined woman has become such an embittered and embattled middle-aged widow is a question the screenplay does not ask. The writers have assumed that the audience do not need to be told why Mrs. Rothwell is so bitter, she has simply been written as caricature.

However I think that if we analyse her behaviour we discover a very insecure woman who has lived precariously and is afraid of losing what little she has. This is
emphasised in the film by her status as widow. If her husband were present, then her behaviour would have even less justification. The film, to this extent, softens Mrs Rothwell from the monster of the novel. Her bullying of tradesmen is nothing more than an attempt to cover up her own insecurity. To refer to her as ‘dragon-like’ as Robert Murphy does is to overlook what has forced her into this position.\(^5^2\)

Mrs. Rothwell’s insecurity is further revealed in the scene of Vic’s drunken escapade. On his return, she takes Ingrid into her bedroom and locks the door. Vic becomes violent at this behaviour and begins to beat on the door demanding that his wife return to her ‘rightful’ place. His frustration is portrayed as being caused by the behaviour of the two women and could be interpreted as a reaction to ‘castration’ by the women, but equally it is an example of male violence within the domestic environment. I interpret it as a conflict between two equally insecure and frightened individuals over the possession of the one secure thing in their lives: Ingrid.

Throughout the film the main narrative thrust is the frustration caused by obstructions place in the way of Vic and Ingrid’s relationship. In a lengthy scene Vic and Ingrid are out on a date. Unfortunately a third person, one of Ingrid’s girlfriends has attached herself to them and is not about to let go. The girlfriend, Dorothy (Patsy Rowlands), is another insecure type. It is obvious she fears being abandoned, and it is equally obvious that Ingrid feels sorry for her. Vic on the other hand, has no sympathy for her at all and ends up losing his temper and arguing with Ingrid. This fight is meant to show the incompatibility of the pair, but I think it reveals a certain demanding streak in Vic which is equally caused by insecurity.

Although the script of the film does not openly raise these questions, Schlesinger’s direction certainly does pose them. In this, his first fictional feature, Schlesinger reveals a tendency to provide visual hints by way of references to external facts which the contemporary audience of the film would be expected to connect to. These references in his films may prompt an aware viewer to question the surface reality of the film. In one shot of the film in which Vic and Ingrid are walking past a cinema, the film on show there is *Victim*. This film, produced by Michael Relph and directed by Basil Dearden, was one of a series this pair made dealing with current ‘social problems’. In this case the social problem was homosexuality. The film starred Dirk Bogarde and Sylvia Syms as a barrister and his wife whose life is disrupted by a

blackmail case which ultimately leads to the revelation that the Bogarde character has had an affair with the boy in the case. Schlesinger’s biographer describes the choice of this film for the marquee in the shot as a ‘subtle little nod’. 53 John Hill, on the other hand interprets it as anything but subtle: ‘In A Kind of Loving, Ingrid becomes the ‘preying mantis’ described by Conroy; Vic, her ‘victim’ (seen under the cinema advertisement for the film of that name)’. 54 Conroy, as I have previously noted, is divorced and embittered about the whole institution.

My own view is somewhere between the two. I agree that the film has been deliberately chosen by Schlesinger, but I do not think it is as subtle as Mann believes, nor as overtly misogynist as Hill perceives. The argument of Victim is that society has forced homosexuality underground and forced some men to hide in a marriage of convenience. Such a marriage is damaging to both partners. The film was widely written about and well-known. Anyone in the audience at the time would be aware of the reference and know that the film was about a marriage based on false pretences. In the context of A Kind of Loving it is a prompt to the audience to be aware that marriage is not necessarily seen by the film’s director as the solution to any problems.

Schlesinger was a man who was at ease with his own homosexuality and never considered it a problem; his biographer describes his as ‘secure’ and grounded’ in his sexuality. 55 The problems that this young couple face, like the problems faced by gay people at the time, were created by society’s demands for a certain morality. Again the inference to be drawn is not that the couple should change, but that society should do so. There is no looking back to a better, golden age in this film.

Another example of Schlesinger using purely visual references has led to some controversy. There is a scene in which Vic and Ingrid are walking in a rather dreary park in an elevated situation. They sit on the bench in a wooden shelter and, as they kiss, the camera pans away from the couple onto the graffiti written on the walls of the shelter. All the graffiti are messages of love, and reveal that not only are Vic and Ingrid not the first to take refuge there, but that it appears to be a regular haunt for couples who wish to be intimate and have nowhere private to go.

The controversy over Schlesinger’s choice of camera movement began early. V.F. Perkins, editor of the journal Movie, berated Schlesinger for what he called ‘a

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54 Hill, op.cit., p.157.
55 Mann, op. cit., p.123.
meaningless closeup’.\textsuperscript{56} This assessment was taken up by Gene Phillips in his monograph where he countered that ‘Schlesinger focuses his camera on the graffiti to make the significant point that Vic and Ingrid, like the bygone lovers represented in the amorous inscriptions imbedded in the shelter wall, really have no place where they can be alone together’.\textsuperscript{57}

Some critics have attempted to read the emphasis on landscape in the New Wave films in general as a change from purely descriptive, as in the Griersonian documentary, to an authorial intrusion in the fictive world of the film. This intrusion fails, as the reality of the landscape has its own meaning which the filmmaker cannot control.\textsuperscript{58} As we see with Perkins’ revelation, sometimes a critic can see no meaning at all. As my own interpretation would seem to agree with Phillips it may be said that it is inevitable that I would disagree with Perkins on this point. However my argument is that Perkins was unable to interpret Schlesinger’s purely visual marker to the social conditions which repressed this young couple. This was a simple shot which reveals that the couple are not unique. It would appear that Schlesinger’s powers of observation were greater than Perkins’. It is not the landscape which is providing meaning in this shot, but the director, who is pointing out that the narrative of the film may be about one couple, but it could be about any number of couples. As with his earlier, purportedly non-fictional film Terminus, the couple singled out for observation is not unique.

An observant critic would have noted that from the very beginning of the film this documentary approach was being used. The opening shot of the film is a ‘townscape’ shot of a row of terraced houses with an empty allotment in the foreground on which many children are playing. We hear the sound of an ice-cream van off-screen and the children run towards the van as it enters the shot. The camera moves in towards the van, but is sidetracked to the portico of a church as a wedding party comes out. The camera then remains on the wedding party and the ice-cream van is seen no more. As is often the case in a documentary the opening moments of the film seem to generally observe a community, only settling down onto a single narrative thread after some

\textsuperscript{56} Originally published in Movie, the article ‘The British Cinema’ is reprinted in Cameron, Ian (ed.), \textit{The Movie Reader}, New York: Praeger, 1972, p.9.
\textsuperscript{58} The classic articles arguing this point are Andrew Higson’s ‘Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the ‘Kitchen Sink’ Film’ and , Terry Lovell’s ‘Landscape and Stories in 1960s British Realism’, both originally published in \textit{Screen}, but since reprinted in Higson, Andrew, \textit{Dissolving views : key writings on British cinema}, Cassell, London ; New York, NY, 1996.
time. It is as if the film could quite easily have passed over the wedding party onto some other detail of the town and some other narrative thread. This is the form of realism which Schlesinger uses. The characters may be involved in a drama which appears unique to them, but he often reminds the audience that their predicament is not necessarily unique.

This opening sequence continues in observational style. We see shots of the wedding party, the drivers lounging around, and the casual spectators. We also hear snatches of sound. The drivers are listening to the races on a transistor radio; the spectators comment on the dresses and the flower girls and page boys. The spectators were local women recruited for the shoot on site. Schlesinger asked them what they would normally say at such an event and had them repeat their comments as the cameras rolled.\(^59\)

It is only gradually that the wedding party emerges as the focus of the film. This happens as the photographer lines up the party in various compositions for the wedding album photographs. As he does so the credits are displayed and the film’s fictional emphasis takes over. This scene is also the only time in the film that Schlesinger indulges in a formal experiment. As the camera lens clicks and each photo is taken, there is a slight jump cut. The pose of the photograph is retained momentarily, but we are made aware, from this slight jump, that we are viewing a photograph, not an objective scene. This is the only formal ‘experiment’ made by Schlesinger in this film. The rest is filmed unobtrusively in objective, classical style.

Is this then an ‘interrupted narrative’ as B. F. Taylor calls it in his recent work on the British New Wave?\(^60\) Taylor engages with the continuing critical debate about the role of townscape and landscape in New Wave films; a debate which was initiated by Perkins’ misconception. He ends the chapter by suggesting that these criticisms need to be reconsidered.\(^61\)

I think the problem is that there has been an overemphasis on these landscape shots. For a start, they do not dominate the films’ narratives. It would appear from the

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\(^59\) In Schlesinger’s cuttings scrapbook for *A Kind of Loving* there are numerous clippings from local newspapers citing the ‘accuracy’ of using locals in the film. A paper called *Tonic* reported that ‘(Schlesinger) approached three head-scarfed women carrying children and asked them what they would say if this was a real wedding.’ Other papers report the use of local caterers and dance bands. (BFI Special Collections reference: JRS/2/1.)

\(^60\) Taylor, B.F. *The British New Wave; A certain tendency?*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2006, p.108.

\(^61\) Ibid., p.121.
emphasis place by Higson, Lovell and others in their wake, that the films grind to a halt every so often for a picturesque view. I have never been able to accept this interpretation. Not being English, these shots function for me in the same way that a shot of the African veldt or Siberian tundra do. They give the film its context; they are markers of realism. The filmmaker, by showing the landscape, is simply alerting the viewer to the fact that this is ‘real’ as against ‘studio’ work. I think this point needs to be made as it was quite normal at the time for a film to be made with extensive streetscape sets, all of which were studio ‘back-lot’ locations. Many writers trying to interpret these shots are overdetermining their value. The problem is that they are too close to the originals. They do not see that for anyone not English these shots are markers of nothing more than geographical location.

Critical debate on these films and this one in particular, has been overridden by a sort of cringe by British writers. This can be traced back to the notorious remark by François Truffaut that the terms British and cinema were incompatible. So much of British writing on British cinema takes this defensive attitude. I for one do not see anything wrong with a brief establishing shot of the physical environment in which the film takes place. The shots do not function in the way that ‘travelogue’ shots function in widescreen, Technicolor films do. In those films the location shots are pure spectacle, they are there for the viewer to admire. A monochromatic shot of a smoky valley is not there for spectacle it is there to establish a background of realism wherein the characters live; it is the underlying layer of the palimpsest which is a fiction within a real landscape. Like the Italian neo-realist, the French Nouvelle Vague and even the American Independents of the 1950s, the new British realism used the real world as background for a fictional world.

Schlesinger, in this his first fictional film for mainstream cinema has revealed himself as primarily an observational director. He has continued on with the style of

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62The remark was made by Truffaut in his Hitchcock book: Truffaut, Francois, *Hitchcock* (Revised edition), New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983. It was originally published in 1967. On p. 124 he says ‘To put it bluntly, isn’t there a certain incompatibility between the terms “cinema” and “Britain.”’ This remark has become a piece of film folklore. Unfortunately it means that any discussion of British cinema, including this one, seem to need to deal with it. Pick up any book on any subject relating to British cinema, turn to the index and Truffaut will be there, at least once, even if it is only to deny the accuracy of his statement. What never seems to be mentioned is that he prefaces the remark with the proviso: ‘What I’m trying to get at – and I’m not sure I’m right about this and it’s hard to define just what it is – is that there’s something about England that’s anticinematic.’ That so many British critics have latched onto the statement without the proviso seems to smack of a certain cultural cringe, that is, a belief that anything from the French side of the channel is automatically more valid than anything from the English side. I don’t believe that this is necessarily the case.
film making which he used in his documentaries for television and the cinema. As with the other directors labelled as ‘new wave’ he relies on the reality of the background to confer reality to the fictional overlay which is acted out in the foreground. Schlesinger had his own term for this technique. He called it ‘laminating’: layering the fictional elements over a background of recognisably real elements.\(^{63}\) This is the core of his realism. If the characters can be accepted as living within this already existent world, then he has succeeded in his aim. He has also succeeded in Janni’s aim. As Alexander Walker put it: ‘The film fully achieved its producer’s intention of transferring to the English screen the Italian neo-realist cinema’s grasp of the unstressed reality of life.’\(^{64}\)

Formally the film does not use any new techniques to tell its story. It simply presents the young couple in their environment without overt comment. Schlesinger, like the other new directors, is a visitor to this environment and, after researching the region he has presented another person’s story in as honest a way as he knows. The result is a film which, like the all the best realist cinema, could equally have been a non-fictional documentary. In a classical fictional film if the dramatis personae were removed from the screen, the background world would still be an artificial, and consequently not believable, environment. Remove the dramatis personae from *A Kind of Loving*, and an accurate portrait of a Midlands town remains, and remains credible. It is in this sense that realism is the foundation of John Schlesinger’s films.

**iii. Billy Liar**

Where *A Kind of Loving* was firmly based in a realist mode, using traditional techniques of the Grierson documentary, Schlesinger’s second feature was broader in scope, both literally and metaphorically. *Billy Liar* is in many ways a transitional film. Although firmly bedded in the realist mode, it frequently enters into the imagination of its protagonist, Billy Fisher (Tom Courtenay), allowing the spectator to see the stream of Billy’s consciousness as he creates his fantasy world. The importance of fantasy in this film is evidence of the growth of Booker’s fantasy cycle in the 1960s.

\(^{63}\) Mann, op.cit. p. 33  
\(^{64}\) Walker, op.cit. p.119
and the lessening of the realist grip in the cinema at this time. Where the earlier film limited its references to a world, and a culture, outside the Midlands, *Billy Liar* constantly looks outward to the world at large. At the same time the environment in which Billy’s adventures of one weekend takes place is in the process of being demolished and replaced, the 1950s is disappearing around the Fisher family and the 1960s is finally coming into being. Equally significant is the form of the film. Although it was shot in monochrome to signify realism, Schlesinger chose to use the cinemascope format in order to give a wider scope to the fantasy element of the film. As well as giving scope to the fantasy, the widescreen allows a broader vision of the world than was normally given in New Wave films.

As with *A Kind of Loving*, *Billy Liar* first appeared as a novel of provincial life which was published in 1959. The author was a young journalist named Keith Waterhouse. It was a great success and Waterhouse used this success to leave Leeds and take a job with *The Daily Mirror* in London. Also working in London was his childhood friend Willis Hall. Hall had had a varied career ending up in Malaya with the British Army. On his return from Malaya he found employment writing for the BBC. He had success regionally with a play about the British army in Malaya called *The Long and the Short and the Tall*. Its success was sufficient for it to open at the Royal Court Theatre in 1959. The director of the play was Lindsay Anderson and the cast included two unknown young actors, Peter O’Toole and Robert Shaw. Hall suggested to Waterhouse that they adapt *Billy Liar* into a stage comedy. It opened at the Cambridge Theatre on 13th September 1960. Again the director was Lindsay Anderson. Billy was played by Albert Finney. In the four years since *Look Back in Anger* it was no longer necessary for a ‘new realist’ play to open outside the West End: *Billy Liar* was a commercial success. During the run Finney left the play and he was succeeded by Tom Courtenay.

In the four years between the appearance of the novel and the release of the film version there had been noticeable changes in society and these are reflected in the various incarnations of the hero, his family, his friends, and the town in which they lived. In the novel and play Mr Fisher is a haulage contractor, in the film he owns a

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65 As described in section i of this chapter.
66 Schlesinger recorded a commentary for the film for the American Criterion DVD edition. He notes his choice of scope early in the commentary.
radio rentals business. In the novel Billy has been educated at the local technical school. In the play and film his father refers to his education at ‘Grammar School’.

The protagonist of *Billy Liar* is a young man named Billy Fisher (Tom Courtenay), a clerk in an undertaker’s office, Shadrack and Duxbury, in the fictitious Yorkshire city of Stradoughton. His exact age is never specified, but he is in his late teens or early twenties. He lives with his family in a suburban house. His family consists of his father (Wilfred Pickles), his mother (Mona Washbourne) and his grandmother (Ethel Griffies). During the course of the narrative we learn that the reason he has been educated at a grammar school is because he won a scholarship. He is the first of his family to have had an ‘education.’

Early in the film we learn that Billy, like most of the previous ‘angry young men,’ has two women with whom he is involved. It seems to be a trope of these narratives that the hero is involved with a ‘sensible’ girl whom it is assumed he will marry and ‘another woman,’ usually already married. In Billy’s case, the sensible girl is Barbara (Helen Fraser), who works in an office, while the ‘other woman’ is Rita (Gwendolyn Watts), a waitress in a café. Neither is married and Billy is engaged to both. These characters, family and fiancées, along with Billy’s boss at the undertakers, Mr. Shadrack (Leonard Rossiter), are Billy’s adversaries in the film. They constantly berate him for not conforming to their own expectations. Against these ‘foes,’ Billy has two allies. The first of these to be introduced is Arthur Crabtree (Rodney Bewes), a co-worker at the undertakers. Billy and Arthur also work together creatively, having written a pop song entitled ‘Twisterella.’ Then there is Liz (Julie Christie), the only person in Billy’s life who understands, and takes part in, his fantasies.

From these basic details, it would be easy to assume that the film has nothing new to say about the life of a young man in the provinces. However there are significant differences in this narrative that reveal a moving away from the backward-looking 1950s to a more forward looking 1960s. The first is Billy’s age. To talk about the age of a fictional character requires a number of considerations. Firstly, when was the character originally created? In *Billy Liar’s* case this was in 1959 with the publication of the novel by Keith Waterhouse. Next we need to consider whether or not the narrative is historical or contemporary. In this case the novel and its subsequent

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68 The locations for the film were shot in Bradford, see Mann, op.cit. p.211.
69 The four actors playing the members of the Fisher family were all in the London production of the play.
adaptations are set ‘in the present day.’ If we take Billy’s age as being nineteen years, then he was born around 1940. This makes him considerably younger than any previous ‘angry young man.’ In fact, he does not belong to the same generation as the original models, namely Joe Lampton and Jimmy Porter. Lampton is a World War II veteran, Porter would have been a teenager during the war. Billy’s knowledge of the war would consist of vague childhood memories, if any at all, and the series of films produced throughout the 1950s which mythologised that period, for example *The Dam Busters* (Michael Anderson, 1954) and *Reach For the Sky* (Lewis Gilbert, 1956). In fact, Billy is part of that generation which were the first to be labelled ‘teenagers.’

The teenager, as portrayed in 1950s cinema had always been a ‘problem.’ From the archetypal Hollywood *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) to the British ‘social problem’ film such as *The Violent Playground* (Basil Dearden, 1958), the teenager was portrayed as a threat to society. As Robert Murphy has remarked *Billy Liar* shows empathy to young people which had been previously lacking.70

This change of attitude may have been delayed in the cinema, but it had been the subject of discussion ever since the publication of Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957. In that work, the writer analyses the lifestyle of what he calls ‘the juke-box boys’ whose life is limited to ‘sensation’.71 These were the characters previously portrayed on the screen. As with Vic Brown, Billy Fisher is a ‘scholarship boy’. As we saw in Vic’s case, they are bright enough to complete the grammar school education, but go no further. They have lower-middle class jobs, but cannot escape fully their working-class environments. They live at home but do not feel a part of it. Worst, at school, they are equally outsiders. They no longer belong where they grew up, but do not belong anywhere else either.

It is this sense of ‘floating’ between classes which is the unique element of Billy Fisher’s world when compared to other working class heroes. Where Vic and his ilk seek some sort of role in the new society, Billy’s solution to not belonging is to invent a world in which he truly belongs. In the novel, Billy says he has ‘two kinds of thinking (three if ordinary thoughts were counted) and I had names for them ….No. 1

thinking was voluntary, but No. 2 thinking was not’. Where ‘No. 2 thinking’ was obsessive, ‘No. 1 thinking’ involved his daydreams about a fantasy world, which he calls Ambrosia; they are a conscious effort to override his anxiety at his unsatisfied life. Billy considers Ambrosia to be true home. It is a country which has been at war and Billy Fisher is a war hero in that country, just like Richard Todd and Kenneth More in the war films at the local cinema. Schlesinger uses the resources of cinema to actually show Billy’s fantasies on the screen, so we see the Ambrosia that Billy imagines. It is no accident that all the significant male characters in his fantasy look like Billy and all the women are portrayed by Liz, the only person in his life to share his fantasy.

In the Ambrosia fantasies Billy withdraws from reality, which he finds completely unsatisfactory, into his inner life, where he finds refuge. However, he also creates two other kinds of fantasy which we see on the screen. The first of these is an alternative life in the ‘real’ world in which he is forced to live. In one version of these he imagines himself as the son of rich parents; this is obviously no more than an idle wish. In another type he creates an alternative life history which is a wish for an alternative future. An example of this is his daydream of being sent to prison for misappropriating office funds (something which he has in fact done), but in the fantasy he writes a memoir of his rehabilitation and becomes a successful and famous author. Where the Ambrosia fantasies are presented by a wipe to signify the dissolution of reality into a total fantasy, the ‘alternative’ life fantasies are entered by a direct shot-reverse-shot edit which confuses them with the ‘real world’ of the diegesis. At their most extreme, and most angry, they can be fully integrated into reality such as an early scene in which the family are seated at the breakfast table. Billy is shaving nearby, and to stop their ceaseless chatter he turns on his family and, with a cut to a reverse-angle shot, his shaver has changed to an automatic weapon with which he opens fire on his family. This wish is so intense to Billy that it appears on the screen.

This retreat from reality into fantasy marks a new phase in the way young people’s rebellion is portrayed, both in literature and on the screen. Unlike the social realist mode as exhibited in A Kind of Loving, in which the social context is emphasised, Billy Liar reveals a tendency to examine the psychology of the character, to reveal his

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inner being, rather than simply focus on the external world and its influence on a character’s life. That Billy has an internal world, a creative one which he manipulates, can be attributed his education. He has been taught to think in the subjunctive rather than exist in the indicative mode. What we have established then is that Billy’s education, and his ability to create alternative worlds has divorced him from his social environment. Billy has, in a way, dropped out of his society while remaining at home. He does not conform and he does not live his life with the people who surround him. He distances himself from them, even though externally he appears to be part of the social environment. In a society in which class is all, to leave one’s class is to emigrate in spirit, if not in body. In a way, Billy has emigrated from Yorkshire to Ambrosia. Internally, Billy is demolishing the environment in which he lives; externally the same thing is happening.73

I noted in the first section of this chapter that in the New Wave films the built environment, highlighting the novelty of the location shooting, was emphasised by the establishing shot of the town. This was usually followed by a descent into the town which then became all enveloping of the characters. We have seen that there is a tendency to overdetermine the symbolic value of the environment. This urban setting becomes a symbol of the entrapment of the characters in their environment. In fact, as John Hill points out, ‘practically all the … new wave films’ contrast the ‘naturalness, that is freedom, of the country with the ‘social and economic pressures embodied in the city’.74 In Billy Liar, on the other hand, the urban environment itself is changing. John Schlesinger deliberately chose to film many external scenes against building sites, especially those where demolition was going on in preparation for urban renewal. Bradford was chosen ‘for its newly renovated city centre, a deliberate move away from the usual cobble and chimneys’.75 Robert Murphy comments on the way Billy ‘inhabits a world which is being rebuilt around him. Old buildings are being torn down to make way for offices and supermarkets, and if this brave new world is welcomed only half-heartedly there is little nostalgia for the past’.76 I don’t know that

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73 He has become a stranger to the country in which he grew up. This brings to mind an assertion made by Julia Kristeva in her work Strangers to Ourselves (1991). She writes, when analysing the emigrant, that ‘had he stayed home, he might have become a dropout, an invalid, an outlaw’. Kristeva, Julia: ‘Strangers to Ourselves,’ in The Portable Kristeva: Updated Edition, Kelly Oliver (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p.270.
75 Mann, op. cit., p.211.
76 Murphy, op. cit., p.26.
the film is in fact half-hearted about the renewal. Billy’s fantasies of himself as war hero take place in those demolition sites. His Ambrosian war can be seen as a desire for the demolition to proceed, just as the War caused much demolition in the towns of southern England. One of the major changes from the previous incarnations of *Billy Liar* that Schlesinger incorporates into the film is the opening of what appears to be Bradford’s first supermarket. This scene is one of the very few in the film that does not centre on Billy. In fact Billy is entirely absent from the scene. The focal point of this new consumerist world is Liz.

Our introduction to Liz is presented in an oblique manner. Billy’s friend Arthur points her out in a lorry passing them in the street. She is, Arthur says, ‘that bird that wanted you to go to France with her.’ Arthur’s line about France alerts us to Liz as a symbol for the outside world, the world which is now open to Billy if he will only go out into it. Billy’s look softens. It is apparent that she is someone very dear to him. At this stage Schlesinger uses the soundtrack to link two disconnected scenes. As Billy enthusiastically describes the life Liz leads the camera cuts to a medium shot of Liz in the lorry while Billy’s voice continues on the soundtrack. When he finishes speaking the camera stays with Liz. We see Liz alighting from the lorry in a street which is, significantly, mainly demolition sites. Her entrance into the film is different to anything that we have seen before. Liz is demonstrably different to the other women in the film. Her hair is loose and she is dressed casually.

Where, until now, the film could be compared to an Italian neo-realist film such as *I vitelloni* (Federico Fellini, 1953) this scene brings to mind Jean Seberg’s entrance in Godard’s *A Bout de Souffle* (1960). After she alights from the lorry she skips down the street humming a tune. On the soundtrack the tune is taken up by a jazz group with the main melody played, in syncopated rhythm, by a flute. In one shot we can see a couple of young men in the background looking on admiringly, broad grins on their faces. We are not sure if they are extras in the film, or simply passers by, caught in the spontaneity of the filming of this sequence.

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78 Although several shots of Christie skipping down a shopping street are obviously Bradford, the shots in which she is seen in front of demolitions are not. On the audio commentary recorded by Schlesinger for the Criterion DVD he reveals that these shots were done later as he wanted to reinforce the notion of the past being demolished. They were shot in Tottenham Court Road, London.
I have previously pointed out the dichotomy of Barbara and Rita, a reiteration of the familiar Madonna/whore trope of classic cinema. Liz is a departure from this format. She has also developed considerably since she was first introduced in the novel. The only physical description we get in the novel is that she is ‘scruffy Liz – woodbine Lizzy’. This description is given by one of Billy’s co-workers, Stamp. He also refers to her as a ‘bint’. It is left to our imagination to picture Liz. It appears she is a wild, unkempt creature whom only Billy finds attractive. In the play, a stage direction gives a significantly different interpretation of Liz:

Although Liz is about the same age as Barbara and Rita she has more maturity and self-possession. Although she is dressed casually and is, in fact, wearing the black skirt we have heard so much about, she is not as scruffy as we have been led to believe. She is also wearing a white blouse and suede jacket. She is not particularly pretty but is obviously a girl of strong personality.

We learn in all three works that she is sexually active, that she works when she wants to, but leaves on the spur of the moment. She has just this morning returned from some time in Doncaster. The role of Liz was originally to be played by Topsy Jane, who had played opposite Courtenay in the film Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner (Tony Richardson, 1962). However she became ill early during shooting and a replacement was required. Julie Christie was rapidly cast and with her casting the character of Liz was inevitably changed. According to Alexander Walker Schlesinger ‘at first feared Christie might be “too gorgeous” for Liz the provincial swinger’. Liz has evolved from the ‘scruffy’ girl of 1959 to the ‘gorgeous’ girl of 1963.

In this, her first scene, she happens on the supermarket opening and is invited by the TV star officiating to help him ‘cut the ribbon.’ She does so and is photographed for the local paper. The TV celebrity opening the supermarket is ‘Danny Boon’ (Leslie Randall), a London comedian to whom Billy has written applying for a job as joke writer. Where Billy is never successful in his attempts to reach Danny, Liz has no trouble at all. Liz does not come to the fore again in the narrative until the film reaches its climax at the dance. For now the camera follows the pipe band around the supermarket, retreats out into the street and, as the music floats over the soundtrack

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80 According to the Oxford English dictionary ‘bint’ is a derogatory term for ‘woman or girl’.
82 Walker, op. cit., p. 166.
there is a cut to councillor Duxbury (Finlay Currie) in his office at the undertakers as he listens to the pipe band. The narrative has successfully navigated its way back from the carefree environment of Liz to the prison-like surrounds of Billy.

This sequence is entirely original to the film; it has no equivalent in either the novel or the play. At the time it was noteworthy as the introduction of a new star; in retrospect it can be seen as a harbinger of a new type of British film. As we saw with A Kind of Loving, there was concern even then with the ‘angry young men’ and their simmering misogyny. The ‘problem’ of being saddled with a pregnant fiancée was used as the excuse for the entrapment of the creative male and his subsequent curtailment by bourgeois society. Liz is entirely different. She is not a ‘burden’; she is not concerned with ‘trapping’ a man into marriage. She is a foretaste of the free woman of Swinging London. The contrast between her life and that of both Barbara and Rita looks forward to the 1960s as they finally come into being. Most significantly, she does not assume the need of a male to support her for the rest of her life.

Having returned to Billy, the narrative focuses on Billy’s attempts to resolve his problems with both Barbara and Rita. Billy has managed to promise marriage to both women and can see no way out. His fantasy life in Ambrosia is his only escape, meaning that there is no escape. Billy’s fantasies may be amusing, and they may reveal a creative mind at work, but as solutions to his problems they have no use. They reveal his awareness of the restrictions placed upon him in the society in which he is trapped, but not a will to action. In fact they betray a desire to avoid action by retreating from the problem at hand. In an interlude in which he is free from all interruptions and can indulge in another extended fantasy, Billy reveals some interesting aspects of this fantasy world. He is walking past a football stadium where a game is in progress and the crowd can be heard. Billy immediately converts this into the roar of a crowd at a large-scale celebration for the successful completion of yet another war. Billy is the General/dictator of Ambrosia now, and Liz can be seen standing by his side. One of the Che Guevara-like colonels standing behind him is the comic Danny Boon.

As Billy delivers a victory speech in Churchillian phrases and Churchillian tones the film cuts between obvious process shots of Billy on the podium and close-ups of ‘real’ people in the football crowd. In this short fantasy two things are happening. It is revealed conclusively that Billy’s fantasy is essentially fascist. All his fantasies
involve him as a war-like dictator and if anyone causes him pain they are gunned down. This persistently violent wish, first seen in the early breakfast scene, is a disturbing revelation. If we accept that all Billy’s fantasies are the repressed frustrations which could at any time be released, then he is essentially a violent young man and potentially dangerous. Although the film is a comedy this is a subtext which reveals the serious basis of Billy’s problems. He is essentially angry, and that anger is currently repressed. His fantasies reveal that if released, that repression could easily turn to violence. The only reason why we do not believe for a moment that such a thing could happen is because of Tom Courtenay’s performance. His physical bearing is always slightly hunched and he wears a soft expression at all times. We do not see him as a violent man. In the audio commentary on the Criterion DVD of the film Courtenay himself comments on this fact. The role had originally been played on stage by Albert Finney, and Courtenay asserts that Finney’s physique, being ‘broader’ would let one believe that Billy could become violent. Had Finney played the role in the film it would not have been as gentle a comedy as it is. 83 Billy may be a late representative of the angry young men, but we see that as the sixties opens out the anger has become less of a threat than it was as the 1950s closed.

At the same time Schlesinger, the documentary director, is revealing that film reality itself can be manipulated by such a dictator to his own ends. Realist film may claim to represent a world ‘as if’ it were real, but, Schlesinger reiterates, by revealing the process that a realistic shot can be easily manufactured.

All through the day, Billy has been able to keep his fantasy world and the real world separate. He may be caught out in a lie, but he does not reveal his inner truths to anyone. That is, until he finally meets Liz at the local dance. All the narrative elements of the film (except the Fisher family) come together at the Roxy Ballroom. 84 At the dance the band plays Billy and Arthur’s song, ‘Twisterella’ and the band leader announces that Billy is going to London to work as a writer for Danny Boon, the TV star who opened the supermarket that day. Billy is not happy that this has been made

83 There have been two other significant incarnations of Billy Fisher. Jeff Rawls played him in two series of situation comedy written by Waterhouse and Hall. They were broadcast on ITV in the winter 1973-74 season and winter 1974-75 season. As well, a musical version, Billy, opened at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in May 1974. The score was composed by John Barry and Michael Crawford played Billy in his first outing in a stage musical. Both actors are physically slight and continue the trend to a physically unthreatening Billy Fisher.

84 Rita calls it the Roxy when she demands that Billy meet her there at 7:30, but when we see it, it is clearly called ‘the Locarno’.
public by Arthur, the only person he has told of this particular fantasy. His reaction reveals that he knows very well that this fantasy will not become a reality any time soon, and that he is uncomfortable with this collision of his fantasy life and the real world.

He retreats from this confrontation with the real world to a tryst in the park with Liz. He reveals to her his Ambrosian fantasy and invites her into this world. He asks her to live with him in isolation in a house in the country with a secret room in which they can build a model Ambrosia where just the two of them can play. Liz counters with a proposal that the two of them catch the late night train to London. Billy says that going to London is hard. Liz retorts: ‘No it’s easy. You just get on a train and four and a half hours later you are – in London’. The choice is set for Billy. He has been revealed to all as a fantasist and Liz has offered him the method to change that fantasy into reality. However, Billy’s preference is to retreat into his fantasy world and take Liz with him. He does not equate Liz with the real world as he does Barbara and Rita; she is a fantasy figure as much as the TV star is a fantasy figure. If he goes to London he is going to have to face up to a reality which he is not prepared to accept. He agrees to meet Liz at the station, but I think we are aware already that Billy cannot leave the fantasy world he has constructed inside his Midlands reality for the bigger fantasy of life in London.

At this stage of the narrative realism of the sort practised by the New Wave cinemas intrudes with the death of Billy’s grandmother. The scenes played out in the hospital and at home show a retreat by the film into the familiar world of drab lower-middle class/working-class society which has been the milieu of all these films till now. It is in this environment that the anger contained in Billy finally rises up to reveal why he is so unsatisfied. His father tells him he ‘wants to be grateful.’ Billy’s resentment at last breaks forth. ‘I even had to be grateful for winning my own scholarship.’ he shouts at his father, ‘And now I’m suppose to be grateful to Shadrack and stinking Duxbury!’ Hoggart’s plight of the scholarship boy is at last expressed: why should he be grateful for having been changed into an outsider, adrift from the class he was born into, and not welcome into the class he has been educated to?

At the infirmary, Billy sits with his mother and for the first time in the film, as Schlesinger notes in his commentary, the rhythm slows down. Mrs. Fisher tries to tell

85 Waterhouse & Hall, op. cit., p.56.
86 Ibid., p.60.
Billy where he has gone wrong, and that she worries that if he leaves he will come to no good. The scene is shot in one long take, with the two characters facing each other on the cinemascope screen. There is one last attempt by Billy to escape this ultimate reality by retreating to Ambrosia; he imagines a funeral for his Ambrosian grandmother, a combination of Marie Curie and Alexander Fleming, but it fades to a whimper; it isn’t amusing in the face of death, just desperate. However, if instead of going to London with Liz he stays in Stradhoughton, he has nowhere outside to go, his only resource is his inner life, his fantasy world.

At the same time as this narrative dilemma is happening in the film, it can also be seen as a choice being made by the meta-narrative of cinema: to stay in the Midlands with Billy or go South on the train with Liz. The final scenes of the film play out this choice. Billy meets Liz at the station and they board the train. He makes an excuse to leave the train and goes to a vending machine to buy some milk. Liz, by her look acknowledges that, even though she has committed to going to London, Billy has not. He makes one last pathetic attempt at lying to himself as much as everyone else by running after the train when it has safely left. It’s as if he needs to say ‘I really wanted to be on it, but I missed it.’ That there will be more trains tomorrow reveals how desperate this self-deception has become. That Liz is aware of his failure is established when the camera pulls back to reveal Billy’s suitcase waiting for him on the platform. She had put it off the train before it left for London; she knew what he would not admit. The last we see of Liz is her face against the window with a disappointed look for Billy.

Billy leaves the station to return home. It is only a matter of minutes before his stooped walk changes into a military stride, the music starts up and behind him in the street is the Ambrosian army. This is not a scene in Ambrosia, a scene of fantasy divorced from Stradhoughton. Ambrosia has broken through into Billy’s real world. He has left Stradhoughton, not for London with Liz, but for Ambrosia with himself.

Billy was the last of the angry young men. He revealed in his narrative the futility of their anger. It never took any of them anywhere. They all remained static in their chosen environment. The narratives soon revealed their repetitive nature. The irony of this choice is that it was imposed onto them by a group of writers who all ‘got out.’ That Braine, Osborne, Sillitoe, Waterhouse and others used the first opportunity of success to leave the environment they wrote about reveals not just the filmmakers’
attitude to the place, but the culture as a whole. The end of the film left a choice: stay with Billy in his Midlands stasis, or follow Liz to London.

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The British New Wave was essentially a descriptive term for a group of films which had the following aspects in common: they were directed by newcomers to feature film; they were based on literary works, plays or novels, which were commonly ascribed to ‘angry young men’; they were produced by companies which had no direct links to the two major British organisations (Rank and ABC) and hence could be referred to as ‘independent’. However the films themselves revealed very little that was new. As far as content was concerned there was a certain frankness about sexual matters which revealed a liberalised censorship regime, but the subject matter was squarely in the British tradition of naturalism inherited from Hardy, Lawrence and Bennett. The episode was short lived because the works concerned all ended in stasis. The heroes of these works found no solutions and were trapped in a life which was a reflection of the past. As a consequence the films themselves were formally unadventurous; they reflected the Griersonian tradition of documentary realism which was central to the British filmic tradition. Surrounding these men, as we saw in Billy Liar, was an emergent society which was no longer looking back, but looking forward. While these films reflected the 1950s, the 1960s was well and truly under way and if the men were left behind in the Midlands, the women were all heading south to London where the new catchwords were not ‘angry;’ or ‘class’ but ‘affluent’ and swinging’.
CHAPTER THREE

Swinging London

In this chapter I return to the metropolitan cinema. The prominence of the Northern films in critical writing has led to a certain neglect of those film makers who remained in the metropolis in the early 1960s. The first section of this chapter combines a brief overview of what was happening back in London while Woodfall and company were up North, with the developments that took place following the New Wave. What becomes apparent is that while the Northern films were backward looking and direct inheritors of earlier British traditions, the films which came out of London, were far more experimental and forward looking. In formal terms they are more deserving of the ‘new wave’ epithet than the earlier films. A new style emerges in which there is a tension between sound and image, and time begins to fragment.

Film is no longer a rigidly linear, social realist medium; psychological aspects of new narratives demonstrate that film can be used to reveal the internal working of the human mind. This is particularly so in the remarkable series of films written by Harold Pinter and directed by Joseph Losey, as well, on a lighter note, in the films directed by Richard Lester. In the second section a close examination of John Schlesinger’s Darling (1965) will be used to demonstrate the way a realist film uses these new techniques. In the final section I will analyse Far From the Madding Crowd, Schlesinger’s first colour film and first film not set in the present. This latter film reveals how the new techniques which have come to be present even in a mainstream film produced by a major Hollywood studio have widened the language of film from the classical idiom that had dominated film up to the 1950s.
i. How Swinging London Changed British Cinema

The critical emphasis on the British New Wave has detracted from what was happening more broadly in the British film industry. As we have seen much has been written to establish the credentials of what was essentially the work of one Production Company – Woodfall Films. However there were other companies at work whose output could be just as easily included in the descriptor ‘new realist’ as anything from Woodfall. So when Alexander Walker described the ‘British film industry’ catching the train south with Julie Christie, he was hyperbolically referring to just a small part of it. The rest of the industry was continuing on its own merry way. What was significant about the Northern films was that they had left London. By 1963, even Woodfall was ready to come back home.

In the period of the British New Wave films – 1959-1963 – the growth in new realism was being noticed in the British Film industry generally. Although Woodfall was primarily made up of people from outside the industry, other production companies were initiated by insiders. A prime example was Beaver Films. This was a company set up by actors Richard Attenborough and Bryan Forbes. Attenborough wanted to develop a career as a producer and Forbes had ambitions as a writer. The latter had had success with his screenplay for The Cockleshell Heroes (José Ferrer, 1955), and other light fare.

The first film under their new production company was The Angry Silence (Guy Green, 1960). The film created some controversy with its depiction of a wildcat strike and a hero, played by Attenborough, who is ‘sent to Coventry’ for refusing to conform. Peter Hutchings, in a rare study of the wider presence of realism in British film at this time, notes that Penelope Houston, writing in Sight and Sound, gives a description of this film which could easily be mistaken, out of context, for praise for a Woodfall film. The film, obviously, is not Marxist in its politics, but it is, nonetheless realist in its intent. There is some clumsiness in its plotting, particularly the mysterious agitator from London who instigates the strike, but, as Hutchings writes: ‘it can be seen as a clearer successor to Room at the Top than any of the New Wave

1 In this chapter, unless otherwise noted, all biographical details of producers, directors and writers are taken from Macfarlane, Brian (ed.), The Encyclopedia of British Film, London: Methuen/bfi, 2003.
films’. Of particular note is the film’s use of location settings. The engineering works is credited as a firm in Ipswich and many scenes were shot on the shop floor. Unlike the Woodfall films, this film is engaged with labour as a social condition. It is interesting that where complaints have been made about the absence of actual labour in the New Wave films, this ostensibly ‘right-wing’ film is most concerned with it. John Hill complains about the ‘virtual absence’ of labour in the new realist films; Terry Lovell claims there is a ‘resistance...to the representation of labour’. Why no avowedly left-wing film so vividly represented labour is an unanswered question. The answer lies in Raymond Durgnat’s assertion that, in his experience, when working-class audiences viewed *The Angry Silence*, they were sympathetic to the ideology of the film.

As well as Beaver Films, more mainstream production outfits were adopting the new realist mode. The veteran production team of producer Michael Relph and director Basil Dearden had been known since the mid 1940s, originally as part of the Ealing Production Company. Since the mid 1950s they had worked increasingly on what John Hill has dubbed ‘social problem’ films. In the ‘new realist’ period they produced films which addressed such then current debates as unruly youth (*Violent Playground*, 1958), race (*Sapphire*, 1959), homosexuality (*Victim*, 1961) and even minority religious beliefs (*Life for Ruth*, 1962). All the films used a generic mode, police procedural being the most popular, in which to address the issue. However what is most noticeable is the tendency to use identifiable locations in the filming and a more open attitude to sexual activity.

Perhaps the most surprising example of new realism was the film *The Wild and the Willing* (1962). It is this film which simultaneously announced the unarguable fact that the new realism had achieved mainstream status and, very likely, was the film that revealed that the style had already achieved generic predictability. It was produced by Betty E. Box and directed by Ralph Thomas. As with the Dearden/Relph setup they were a semi-independent production company with a distribution deal with Rank. According to Robert Murphy when the film was released, it ‘attracted critical

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3 Ibid.
6 Hill, op. cit. Chapter 4 is devoted to the Dearden/Relph films.
derision (though large audiences). Set in a Northern University town (locations were shot in Lincoln) it is an uneasy amalgam of Richard Hoggart and Terrence Rattigan. The central ‘young character’ is a scholarship boy (Ian McShane in his first film) and his antagonist is a don (Paul Rogers) whose wife (Virginia Maskell) is unfaithful, usually with an undergraduate, preferably a rough one. The film is entertaining in a slightly hysterical way but its need for a dramatically closed structure reveals its inherently conservative values.

What The Angry Silence and The Wild and the Willing reveal is that the new realism introduced to British film by the Woodfall School of film making was not inherently radical. It was able to be adapted to either progressive or conservative use. They also revealed that any stylistic exercise or aesthetic approach can very rapidly turn into generic shorthand or lazy cliché.

As we have seen with Schlesinger’s Billy Liar there was a tendency to move away from the social realism of the kitchen sink drama into a psychologically focused form of realism more suited to a new phenomenon in British society - affluence. Underlying the narrative trope of the working class lad who is seeking social mobility is the fact that in reality the austerity of the post-war period was giving way to a society with more disposable income. By 1964 a new attitude to wealth and class was being reflected in a new style of film which was set in a new style of London; the adjective used most frequently to describe both the city and the films was ‘swinging’.

As with the phrases ‘kitchen sink’ ‘angry young men’ and ‘la nouvelle vague’ the epithet ‘Swinging London’ was a journalistic invention. What it referred to was the growing affluence of a certain set of young people in London and what they did with their increased level of disposable income. What was most remarked on was not that there was a ‘set’ of young who defined the dominant style, but that they were no longer the ‘establishment’ set of previous decades. The primary impetus was the growth in importance of popular music as a cultural phenomenon. The most obvious example was The Beatles, but, there were many other groups who were influential at the time, groups such as The Kinks and The Who. As well, there was the new phenomenon The Photographer, and his accessory The Model. According to Dominic

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7Murphy, Robert, Sixties British Cinema, London: British Film Institute, 1992, p.54.
Sandbrook this combination of ‘creativity and consumer affluence’ or ‘style and shopping’ was ‘at the heart of what came to be known as “Swinging London”’.  

In the 1920s, Evelyn Waugh’s ‘Bright Young Things’ had been the offspring of the moneyed classes. They were able to indulge their whims due to inherited wealth. The new class at the centre of Swinging London were ‘self-made’. The earliest example of this was the fashion designer Mary Quant. She had opened her first shop in the King’s Road in 1955. However, it was the three photographers, Brian Duffy, Terence Donovan, and David Bailey who epitomised the new class. All three were of working-class backgrounds and had made considerable fortunes by the time they were in their mid-twenties. They were sufficiently celebrated to be the subject of a major feature by Francis Wyndham in the Sunday Times Colour Supplement in May 1964.  

Perhaps the climax of the Swinging London phenomenon was the publication in December 1965 of David Bailey’s Box of Pin-ups. This was a set of thirty-six photographs of people who, according, to Bailey, were ‘glamorous’. On the back of each photograph was a text written by Francis Wyndham. Wyndham, Bailey and the designer of the box Mark Boxer, had all worked together on the Sunday Times Colour Supplement. Included in the box was only one person who could be considered Establishment - Lord Snowdon, husband of Princess Margaret, the queen’s sister; however he was equally important as Anthony Armstrong-Jones the photographer. The rest were photographers, models, actors, a film producer, pop singers - and the Kray Brothers. The latter were three siblings, Charlie, the oldest but least known and twins Reggie and Ron. These East London thugs had achieved notoriety, not just for their standover tactics, but also for their nightclubs. They were often photographed for the society pages of newspapers with visiting celebrities such as George Raft and Judy Garland. They were included, according to Wyndham, because ‘to be with them is to enter the atmosphere (laconic, lavish, dangerous) of an early Bogart movie’. Their inclusion, then, was related to a popular culture image of glamour, not anything they had actually done.

By April 1966 Swinging London had made it to the cover of Time magazine. The edition of 15 April featured a travel story by Piri Halasz titled ‘You Can Walk Across

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9 Ibid., p. 241.
10 Ibid., p.228.
It on the Grass’. Apparently the editors of *Time* thought the title referred to London’s parks. The cover featured a montage of photographs and the copy: ‘London: the swinging city’.\(^{13}\) The image of Swinging London was now set. It was a city in which a new class, who were frequently described as class-less, were the leaders of society.\(^ {14}\) However there was also a tendency to describe them as ‘the new aristocracy’.\(^ {15}\) They may have been lower-class in their origins, but their ambitions were definitely ‘upper’. When films began to appear depicting this new class, they were inevitably dubbed ‘Swinging London films’.

Charles T. Gregory notes that one aspect of ‘Swinging London’ films is the ‘death of the angry young men film movement’.\(^ {16}\) The heroes of the new, metropolitan films did not exhibit the ‘lack of self-pride, style and direction, as had their northern proletarian cousins’.\(^ {17}\) A prime example of the new hero is Jimmy Brewster (Alan Bates) in *Nothing But the Best* (Clive Donner, 1964). According to Gregory this film should be read as a comic/satiric remake of *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959). As Gregory put it the earlier film ‘exaggerates’ for melodrama while the later film ‘diminishes’ for satiric purposes. ‘Yet both tell the same story’.\(^ {18}\) Jimmy Brewster, like Joe Lampton, wants to better himself socially. However, in his opening line he reveals a pleasure that Joe Lampton, the dour moralistic Northerner never would understand: ‘Face it’ he says looking down into the camera, ‘It’s a filthy stinking world…but there are some smashing things in it.’ The voice is not that of a young man who is angry at the world, nor does he aimlessly throw stones at it; he sees the main chance and he takes it. The film is more than just comic it is in a new tone, which Gregory describes as ‘black humour’.\(^ {19}\) According to Gregory mainstream critics were dismayed by this tone and denied the film any validity. Their major complaint was that the hero would go to any lengths to achieve his aims without any overlay of moral message. His acts include fast talking his parents into moving to Australia – no working class parents to cruel his pitch – and murder. It is this latter, the murder of his mentor Charlie Prince (Denholm Elliott), which most upset

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\(^{13}\) Levy, op. cit, pp.200-203.
\(^{14}\) Sandbrook, op. cit., p.257.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p.258.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p.60.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p.63
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p.67
commentators at the time. Prince is a down-on-his-uppers upper class rogue, who teaches Brewster all he knows and is rewarded by being strangled with his old school tie (of course). Of equal interest is Brewster’s love interest, Ann Horton (Millicent Martin), whom Gregory describes as ‘completely amoral’.20 I’m not sure that ‘amoral’ is the right word as to be amoral implies that the character is unaware of any moral system. The characters in this film are well aware that there is a system of morals in place; they simply choose to ignore them. In this respect the film’s satiric purpose is not really new; Thackeray’s novels are full of such immoral people. Neither Barry Lyndon, nor Becky Sharp would be dismayed by the actions of Jimmy Brewster; Joe Lampton, on the other hand, would be aghast. Robert Murphy considers Nothing But the Best ‘one of the seminal films of the decade’, and I would agree.21

The creative talent behind the camera were indicative of the London-based new generation, who, though separate from the Woodfall/Northern School, were just as active in changing British cinema in the early sixties. Clive Donner had started as an assistant film editor at Denham Studios in 1940 (at the age of sixteen!). His first feature as director was The Secret Place in 1957 for the Rank Organisation. Immediately before Nothing But the Best he had attracted attention for his work on the screen adaptation of Harold Pinter’s play The Caretaker. This was the first Pinter play to transfer to the screen, and also Pinter’s first screenplay, although he had previously written for television. The screenplay for Nothing But the Best was by Frederic Raphael. Raphael was an American-born, but British-raised and Cambridge educated writer. What we see with this group is the return to prominence of London-based artists, and, a distancing from the social realism of the north to a less politically driven, more psychic narrative.

Already we see that, where the Northern film remained steadfastly ‘documentarist’ in their form and content, the new films coming out of London began to play with the medium. This is evident in terms of formal experiment, in this case the use of direct address to the camera, but also in content, in the switch from an objective narrative using traditional dramatic technique to a style of ironic, satiric voice, which emphasises comedy over drama.

By now even Woodfall had returned to the south and begun to play. Tony Richardson’s Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner had its première in London in

20 Ibid.
21 Murphy, op. cit. p.122.
September 1962. In that purportedly social realist film, Richardson revealed a desire to become more ‘nouvelle vague’ than ‘new wave’. His use of under cranking to speed up motion and the breaking up of the chronology of the narrative reflected the influence of his French colleagues. In his next feature, *Tom Jones* (1963), all the new cinematic tics came into play: fast-motion, direct address to the camera, pseudo ‘silent-film’ acting. Although the film is a period piece, set in an eighteenth century rural neverland, its spirit is intrinsically that of Swinging London. Nothing in the film can be described as critical of social values and the moralistic tone of the Northern films has completely disappeared. The screenplay was again written by John Osborne, although he had completely lost the haranguing voice of *Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer*. This loss of anger by one of the seminal ‘angry young men’ makes the change of tone all the more remarkable.

The next three films produced by Woodfall all showed a disdain for the Northern Realism which had made its name. *The Girl with the Green Eyes* (1964) was an Irish idyll directed by Desmond Davis from a screenplay by Edna O’Brien based on her own novel. It featured Rita Tushingham in the eponymous role of Kate Brady and Lynn Redgrave as her friend Baba Brennan. Davis was like Donner in that he had worked his way up within the industry and his career arc had more in common with the likes of David Lean than Tony Richardson. *One-Way Pendulum* (1964) was a return to the Royal Court theatre. The absurdist play by N. F. Simpson was directed by Peter Yates. Although Yates had worked with the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre his cinema career was decidedly more mainstream. He had worked as assistant director on such varied fare as *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (Mark Robson, 1958), *The Guns of Navarone* (J. Lee Thompson, 1961) and *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (José Quintero, 1961). His directorial debut was the Cliff Richard musical *Summer Holiday* (1963). As Brian McFarlane notes ‘such pop musicals, disdained by established directors, provided opportunities for a younger generation’22 As well as Yates, he notes Michael Winner, John Boorman and the director of Woodfall’s next film, Richard Lester.

The film was *The Knack…and how to get it* (1965). Lester, unlike Yates, had no background in theatre, and, unlike Davis, had no background in the cinema industry. Like John Schlesinger and, later in the decade, Ken Russell, his background was

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22 Macfarlane, op.cit., p.748.
television. Unlike them, however, he came from the ‘light entertainment’ side of television rather than the documentary stream. The film could fairly be said to display all the signs of having been influenced by the *Nouvelle Vague* although the stylistic elements of the film had always been in Lester’s bag of tricks and owed as much to the British nonsense tradition as to the French cinematic tradition. In fact he had first come to prominence with a short film *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film* in 1960. This had been made in collaboration with, and starred The Goons (Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan) of radio fame. His first feature film was a teen musical *It’s Trad Dad!* in 1962. It starred then popular singer Helen Shapiro. The film featured numerous musical acts and was notable for its surreal tricks.23

After directing another, minor comedy *The Mouse on the Moon* in 1963, Lester was hired by The Beatles to direct them in their first film *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964). The film included sequences that recalled the Goons film and the same nonsensical style of humour. The screenplay was by Alun Owen, a Liverpool writer who had been working in television and was a part of the ‘new realist’ northern school. As if to reinforce the fact that cinema was definitely ‘moving South with Julie’ the opening scene of the film is the Beatles’ train journey South from Liverpool to London. Apart from the Beatles, their management and ‘Paul’s grandfather’ (Wilfred Brambell), the train seems to be entirely populated by ‘dolly birds’ in mini skirts, also headed to London. The film was, naturally, an enormous success and Lester moved immediately from it to *The Knack*...

Based on a play by Ann Jellicoe *The Knack*...related the events in one day in the lives of four young people, three men and a woman (or in the parlance of the time a girl). The narrative is essentially a romantic comedy; the couple Colin (Michael Crawford) and Nancy (Rita Tushingham) meet, fall in love and, by the end of the film, she has moved in with him. The other two men are Tolen (Ray Brooks) and Tom (Donal Donnelly) who are boarders in Colin’s house. Of the four characters only Colin is established as having a job; he is a school teacher and we see him briefly at his school. Tolen does not seem to have any occupation and neither does Tom.24

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23 It is many years since I have seen it, but I distinctly remember a situation in which rubber bands were stretched across a road to stop an escaping van!

24 Pamela Church Gibson thinks that Tolen is a water-ski instructor based one scene and that Tom is an artist because he is always painting walls white, but there is no textual evidence for these assumptions. See Church Gibson, Pamela, ‘From Up North to Up West? London on Screen 1965-1967’, in *The London Journal*, Volumes 31, Number 1, June 2006, p.94.
is a significant narrative event, this time beginning the film’s narrative arc for one of its central characters.

The ‘knack’ of the title is Tolen’s ability to seduce any woman he desires; a knack he has learnt from his (never seen) idol Rory McBride. Colin is unsuccessful with women and would like to learn the knack. If the film had been directed in realist mode it would have been very thin indeed. However it constantly dismisses the narrative to indulge in scenes of play. The opening scene, under the credits appears to be a day in the life of Tolen: a string of ‘birds’ wait on a staircase up to his room. One leaves, another enters. We briefly see Colin peering out from his bedroom, apparently trapped by the never-ending parade of women. The sequence ends as the credits end and there is a cut to a close-up of Colin’s face: ‘It’s not like that’, he says to the camera, ‘it’s an exaggeration.’ Immediately the film has established itself as not realist. Images may appear real but may equally be the visual image of a character’s imaginings. We are warned by the opening sequence not to assume the reality of anything in the film. As well as the ‘anti-realist’ imagery, the film’s soundtrack equally plays with reality. There is an intermittent ‘Greek chorus’ of older people commenting on the behaviour of the young.

Essentially the film has only two ‘real’ characters, Colin and Nancy, and everything else in the film, including Tolen and Tom, is seen from their view, or inside their imaginations. To take anything in the film as documentary reality is to misunderstand the new language of the cinema which Lester is using. This includes the so-called ‘rape’ scene in which Nancy rejects Tolen’s advances in a garden and immediately cries rape. The following sequence once again contains the ‘Greek chorus’ and, as the camera follows Nancy back to the house, pursued by the men, her cry of ‘rape’ is repeated on the soundtrack. However only occasionally do the sound and the image synchronise. The sequence is neither a realist record, nor a subjective imagining; it is a cinematic fantasy. One could even argue that Tolen and Tom are in fact aspects of Colin’s psyche, his id and superego in Freudian terms; his shadow and anima in Jungian phrase. What is essential is to resist reading the film in any realist tradition.

It would appear from these two films that Swinging London was a source of material for light films which emphasised the comedic or romantic element of the new society. However there was always a more sombre depiction of society which was just as prevalent as the comedic view. Even The Knack has an undertow of
uncertainty in Colin’s inability to adapt. The resolution of the film relies on the tradition of romantic fulfilment to belie any fragility in its characters’ lives.

In most films of the time which examined the new society there is an air of uncertainty. In 1964 (the year of *A Hard Day’s Night*) there were already signs that classlessness and affluence were not necessarily a solution, but the beginning of new problems. In this mode was *The Pumpkin-Eater*, a film directed by Jack Clayton based on a novel by Penelope Mortimer. The screenplay was, again, by Harold Pinter. The social milieu in this film is the creative world of Swinging London; the central couple are Jake (Peter Finch) and Jo (Anne Bancroft) Armitage. He is a screenwriter, she is – a mother. The secondary couple are a film actress, Beth Conway (Janine Gray) and her husband Bob Conway (James Mason). Jake is Jo’s third husband and he is having an affair with Beth. This all sounds mundane, but in the hands of Pinter and Clayton it has become a revealing deconstruction of a woman’s mind.

Jo is the centre of the film and Clayton has adopted a subjective form to convey the events of the film. In the first scene Jake is leaving to go on a shoot in Morocco; Jo wanders distractedly round the house, snatches of dialogue are hard. Eventually the camera moves so that Jo’s face, in profile is on the left of the frame. The rest of the scene fades to a white screen, and then fades back in to an earlier time and a younger, happier Jo. The older Jo is looking at this scene as she fades and the flashback scene begins.

Later in the film Jo breaks down in the food hall at Harrods. Throughout the scene, as she walks through different departments in Harrods, the camera view changes from observing Jo, to her own view of the merchandise, and other people walking in and out of the frame and hence out of her view. However the changes are made by lap-dissolves rather than cuts so that the spectator is able to see both Jo and her view. Finally the camera moves from extreme close-ups of Jo’s distraught face to uneven, blurred glimpses of customers and staff looking on with concern. There is no attempt to give an objective view, as an avowedly realist film would do, the film’s makers want to convey internal emotions through external views.

At the time of the film’s release there was much argument over Clayton’s use of then-new forms to tell the story. As Neil Sinyard writes in his monograph on Clayton, there is something familiar in the critical response to this film. Either a filmmaker is ‘attacked for lack of ambition… (or he is) berated for pretentiousness and artiness.
when striving to be more experimental and difficult’. In fact Clayton is using the new language of film in the same way that Antonioni, in *L’avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961) and *L’eclisse* (1962), Resnais, in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *Muriel* (1963), and others were using it. For him to be criticised for using this language is as unfair as to criticise an author for using stream-of-consciousness prose after Joyce had published *Ulysses*. The *Pumpkin-Eater* is a film about the psychological state of its central character; it must use these new techniques to tell this new story. What seems to disconcert the critics is that British filmmakers are no longer limiting their films to Griersonian documentary subjects, but are, like their colleagues across the channel, daring to make films about psychological, even philosophical themes. For what is Jo’s breakdown but an existential crisis? Her identity is mother and wife. What if this is not enough? Unlike the angry young men, or the free young women, she has no escape; she has no train to London.

When Clayton asked Penelope Mortimer what her novel was ‘about’, she wrote a letter in reply. ‘When you first asked me what the book was about’, she wrote, ‘I said money.’ She then continued, ‘It boils down to the conflict between and the fusion of reality and fantasy; and perhaps what results from some kind of uneasy balance between the two.’ The film is about money; at least it is about affluence and what that may mean. That it finds the affluent society unsatisfying is not surprising. That it should use such new and formally adventurous ways of saying this is. For the rest of the decade this ‘uneasy balance’ was played out in the cinema of Swinging London.

The years 1965-1966 were the high point for films featuring the new London society. The films which have become the generic models were all released in these years. Pamela Church Gibson’s list comprises *Darling* (John Schlesinger, 1965), *The Knack, Morgan: a Suitable Case for Treatment* (Karel Reisz, 1966), *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1965), *Georgy Girl* (Silvio Narizzano, 1964) and *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966). What these films have in common is the depiction of young people who are at large in the ‘permissive’ society. The only film in the group which has an overtly ideological stance is *Morgan*, which deals with the problems of a man whose Marxist ideology is compromised by the affluence of his wife. His solution,
however, is not revolution, but a retreat into insanity. The twin ideas of resolution - of escape, or revolution - have disappeared from the intellectual landscape of these films. If these films were the only manifestation of Swinging London, then the cinema of the time would be seen reflecting what Christopher Booker has called ‘a collective dream.’

There were other films which, like The Pumpkin Eater, were also set in and commented on, the new society of Swinging London. Harold Pinter wrote two screenplays which, in hindsight, appear to be a chronicle of the shadow side of Swinging London. The films, The Servant (1963) and Accident (1967), were both directed by Joseph Losey. Both were adaptations of novels. Pinter’s characteristic elliptical dialogue fitted well with Losey’s elliptical film style. As was the case with The Pumpkin Eater, these were films which dealt with the interior of its characters. In The Servant, a game is played out in which the classes are literally at war with each other within the confines of a Chelsea house. The film may be read as an allegory of the class struggle, but if it is then the triumphant proletariat are no better, and possibly worse, than the defeated bourgeoisie. In Accident the film is concerned entirely with the sexual activities of an Oxford don and his immediate circle. Nothing is what is said and the most significant events in the film occur off-screen. This is not a cinema of action and movement, but of inaction and time.

In his two volumes on the cinema Gilles Deleuze theorises that from the late 1950s into the 1960s there was a change of cinematic expression. His first volume, Cinema 1: The Movement Image, details the structure of film before this epistemological change and the second volume, Cinema 2: The Time-Image, examines how cinema functions after the change. This transition is present in those films made in London in the mid 1960s which, as we have seen, do not comply with the classical strictures of chronology in their narratives. Social realism requires that the narrative reflect the serial nature of lived existence. The psychological realism of these new films follows the random chronology of thought. As with Proustian time, a character may be prompted by a stimulus in the present to recall a moment in the past. In the new cinema that moment is shown without explanation. The screen portrays the inner screen of the mind, not the outer screen of the physical world.

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28 Booker, op. cit., p.9.
Equally important is the assumption that the photographed image is a reproduction of the real. In his preliminary remarks Deleuze asserts that: ‘Phenomenology is right in assuming that natural perception and cinematographic perception are qualitatively different.’\textsuperscript{30} This is in direct contradiction to that theory which derives from André Bazin which asserts that the photographed image is a reproduction of the real world, and has no value if it attempts to alter that reality.\textsuperscript{31} Sam DiLorio has recently argued that the 1961 film \textit{Chronique d’un été} (Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin), can be read as a moment when cinema ‘moved away from phenomenology’. The film is a well-known example of what its directors called \textit{cinéma-vérité}; this phrase asserts that an ontological reality exists in the film. However DiLorio has established that certain scenes which purport to be the record of actuality were, in fact, scripted and ruthlessly edited to give a specific meaning to the event in the scene.\textsuperscript{32} As we have seen with the new society film of London in the mid-1960s, images on the screen are no longer presented on an assumption of realism. Even in \textit{A Hard Day’s Night} there is no assumption that the four characters ‘John, Paul, George and Ringo’, although played by four young men with the same names are meant to be accepted as real. That Wilfred Brambell is constantly referred to as ‘Paul’s granddad’ breaks any notion of documentary reality. At the time Brambell had been playing Albert Steptoe in the top rating television comedy \textit{Steptoe & Son}. His fame as that character breaches any identification that may have come if an unknown actor had played the role. To read the film as if it were a documentary is to misread the signs within the text. As the decade progressed British film, which had been dominated by the Griersonian paradigm of realism, was breaking free into a form of cinema in which neither sound nor image could be accepted at face value.

In 1966 the break with realism became obvious in films by such varied directors as Richard Lester, Roman Polanski, Michelangelo Antonioni, Joseph Losey and Karel Reisz. That all these directors were working in London reveals the health of the industry at the time. Lester had two film released that year: \textit{A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum} and \textit{Help!} The former was a film adaptation of a Broadway musical by Stephen Sondheim, but was dominated by Lester’s style rather than

\textsuperscript{30} Deleuze, op. cit.(1986), p.2.
\textsuperscript{32} DiLorio, Sam, ‘Total cinema: \textit{Chronique d’un été} and the end of Bazinian film theory’, in Screen volume 48, Number 1, spring 2007, p.35.
Sondheim’s score; the latter was the second Beatles film and was just as surreal. Neither film had anything direct to say about current society, but both reflected the hectic rush towards fantasy that Booker has described. Roman Polanski’s *Cul de Sac* was equally surreal. Where his previous film *Repulsion* (1965) was set in a recognisably West End milieu, this new film was set outside the city and seemed to be in a nowhere which could perhaps be seen as the interior of Polanski’s mind. Antonioni’s film *Blow-Up* has retained the most enduring reputation of any film of that year. David Hemmings as a swinging photographer in Swinging London was obviously modelled on David Bailey, but the film’s lack of classical narrative arc and refusal to guide the audience in its journey gave the film a decidedly not-real view of the West End.

The reason for Antonioni’s presence in London was that his muse, Monica Vitti, was there to star in Losey’s film *Modesty Blaise*. This was an attempt to transfer the pop-art aesthetic of such artists as Bridget Riley to the screen. The film was decidedly surreal, but unfortunately the film does not leave realism far enough behind to be effective. Rather than surrealism, its dominating aesthetic was camp, and Losey was not sure in his grasp of that most slippery of styles. As we have seen only Reisz’s *Morgan* was overtly political and even that film retreated into fantasy.

This is not to say that social realism disappeared entirely. It retained a stronghold in television drama. Ken Loach began his career with the realist television series *Z cars*, he achieved greater notice for his television film about homelessness *Cathy Come Home* in 1966, and since then has remained a stalwart of social realism in British cinema.

However the major directors who had come to prominence in the new realism were all retreating from contemporary commentary. As I noted in chapter one, Raymond Williams, some ten years after this period, asserted that there were four defining criteria for realism: social extension, that is, the presence of classes not hitherto represented; a contemporary setting; an emphasis on secular action, and finally an ideological intent. This set of criteria automatically denies any film set in the past (or the future for that matter) realist intent. However, this is not necessarily the case. Some British directors in the years 1967 to 1968 seem to have turned from the fantasy

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34 Williams, Raymond, ‘A Lecture on Realism’, *Screen*, 18/1 (1977), pp.63-64.
of the present to a more solid realist representation of the past. The success of David Lean’s *Doctor Zhivago* had shown a market for such lavish films. Basil Dearden directed *Khartoum* (1966), a large scale film about General Gordon and the siege of the eponymous city. John Schlesinger, as we will see chose Thomas Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1967) as an escape from the present. Tony Richardson ended the decade with two historical subjects: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968) and *Ned Kelly* (1970). All these directors had begun the decade as proponents of realism in its traditional form. They now carried their realist methods into films about the past. The resources of film were being used to recreate the past as wholly as possible. The films were done as kinds of documentary and the mise-en-scène was as important as the narrative in the intended cinematic affect.

As the 1960s progressed the dominance of social realism began to lose its grip on British film. One reason for this was that the basic language of film was changing. Film was no longer dominated by the generation which had grown with the classical cinema. The new generation, starting in France, but soon spreading, were as much interested in the psychological realism that film could present as in social realism. The newer directors were not limited by the idea that film could only present actuality; in the new language of cinema it was just as able to present thought as well as deed. There was confusion among older writers, I believe, because they took literally what the new artists meant as metaphor; the images on the screen had to be interpreted by the spectator. British filmmakers were as adventurous as any of their ‘continental’ comrades during this decade. The break from the grip of realism allowed the emergence of a new generation of adventurous, flamboyant film makers whose images and sounds were fantastic, as was the society in which they were created. It also allowed directors like Schlesinger to expand their vocabulary away from their Griersonian roots.

**ii. Darling**

Schlesinger’s third feature film was the first in which he was involved from the very beginning. He initiated the project, and worked on the script with the credited writer. As early as November 1962, the *Evening Standard* was able to report that Schlesinger and Janni ‘are turning their attention – and the new realism technique – to
the upper class and hope to provide a genuine aristocratic film to find comparison with the best proletarian film. He had been reluctant to repeat himself in his second film and was determined not to do so again.

In the opening scene of *Billy Liar* we catch a glimpse of broadcaster and journalist Godfrey Winn at work on the program ‘Housewives’ Choice’. During a break in filming Winn recounted a piece of gossip from London. A ‘model’ had been set up in a flat in Park Lane by a syndicate of men. She was the sole asset of the company and was for the exclusive use of the men involved. The woman had terminated the contract by jumping to her death from the balcony of the flat. Schlesinger thought the story would be an interesting basis for a film and he and Janni commissioned a scenario from Winn. The scenario was then given to Frederic Raphael the writer of *Nothing But the Best*.

The initial intention was to make a tragic film about a woman who has become a commodity in the new, affluent society and the inevitable results of such a commodification of a human being. However as they began work on the script the Profumo affair reached crisis point. This was in June 1963. John Profumo, the Secretary of State for War had become involved in a scandal which included a model, Christine Keeler, and an attaché at the Soviet embassy, Yevgeny Ivanov. Although Keeler did not suicide, the narrative events of the film began to be too similar to the events of the ‘Profumo scandal’ for comfort. Schlesinger and Janni decided to switch from tragedy to ironic comedy. At the same time the central character changed from commodity to consumer. This change, which was supposed to avoid any charge of similarity, in fact, brings the character closer to that of Keeler. A central artefact in the case was a note written to Keeler by Profumo. It began: ‘Darling, In great haste and because I can get no reply from your phone—’ the letter became known as the ‘Darling’ letter. The next Schlesinger film’s title was *Darling*.

The first item in the scrapbook which Schlesinger kept during the production of the film is a pair of newspaper articles. The articles, in the *Sunday Telegraph* of June 16,
1963, were: *Britain’s Dolce Vita*, by Douglas Brown and ‘All sorts to make an affluent world’, by Antony Bladen-Gregg.³⁹ The former article asserts that ‘The new dolce vita …is a phenomenon of detribalization. It is not only sexually but socially promiscuous.’ The latter article lists the ‘types’ to be seen in the new society. They include: New Style Tycoon; Impresario; Demi-mondaine; Unsuccessful model; The Entrepreneur, and Not-so-young Man-about-town. All these character types appear in the film. As Joseph Janni asserted in an interview: ‘the neo-realistic film in England has been concerned with Northern provincial life. We want to bring the same observations to bear on the rich.’⁴⁰ It is significant that both Janni and Douglas Brown continue the Italian comparison rather than relating to the French as the Woodfall filmmakers were wont to do. Federico Fellini’s 1960 art house hit *La dolce vita* had become a shorthand expression for that style of life which was supposed to be lived by a newly affluent European society which was sinking into a despond of existential despair.

Throughout these discussions about the new film the emphasis on the ‘new realism’ is of interest. Although Raymond Williams asserted that a work must be ‘socially extensive’ in order to be considered realist, those involved departed from this idea.⁴¹ For the men involved in the creation of this film realism is an aesthetic style, not an ideological mode. Hence a work is considered realist because it reflects, and comments on, society as it is rather than an idealised version of society.

In *Darling*, John Schlesinger and his scriptwriter Frederic Raphael present to us the life of a London model, Diana Scott (Julie Christie) who, like Joe Lampton, is determined to reach the top. Effectively the narrative portrays Diana’s life as a progression of relationships with men from whom she thinks she may be able to derive some advantage. The men, in succession, are her first husband Tony Bridges (Trevor Bowen); the reporter she leaves him for, Robert Gold (Dirk Bogarde); a business executive Miles Brand (Laurence Harvey); a gay photographer Malcolm (Roland Curram); and finally, her second husband, the Italian Prince Cesare della Romita (Jose Luis de Villalonga). The film was shot in black and white which, as Carrie Tarr among others has noted, ‘(suggests) the serious approach of a TV

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⁴⁰ The interview is contained in the Evening Standard article at footnote 1 above.
⁴¹ See chapter 1, page 21 of the present thesis.
Adding to this documentary feel is the stylistic device of Robert’s street ‘vox pop’ interviews and television programs interspersed through the film. These not only portray him at work, but also are the narrative device which introduces Diana to Robert at the end of the opening sequence. It is this aesthetic strategy which gives the film its claim to realism, but it is a new form of realism which is departing from the traditional Griersonian dictates. Rather than approaching the film as a simple, direct record of the events described, as he did in A Kind of Loving, in this film there is a constant undercutting of events. As we will see, occasionally Diana’s description of an event and the image of that event diverge. The viewer is not presented with a cohesive world view, but with a view which is, at times, incoherent. The viewer must decide which is the ‘real’.

The film begins with a credit sequence over a large billboard on which a poster of Diana is being pasted over a previous poster for ‘world hunger relief.’ As the sequence ends the poster, now complete, and having erased world hunger, announces ‘my story’ in ‘Ideal Woman.’ This short sequence, complete with a musical accompaniment which is a very ‘cool’ jazz theme, must leave us in no doubt that we are no longer in the world of the social realist British New Wave film. Where such a film would focus on the original problem, and perhaps tear away the façade of glamour to reveal it, the reverse is the case here. The literal covering up of poverty by glamour, the ‘cool’ music and the fact that Diana’s story is appropriate for a magazine for an ‘ideal woman’ should leave us in no doubt that the traditional, Griersonian form of realism is not the main theme of this film. Already there is a tension between form and content. The form, documentary style, and the content, the fairy tale life of the model who marries a prince, will be at odds throughout the film. We have also moved on from Billy Fisher's fantasies: where Billy remained in a realist world with his daydreams as an alternative reality, Diana’s intent is to pursue a dream and make it a reality. The film itself is the fantasy.

The first sequence after the credits reveals how this fantasy works. The film’s voice over narrative begins immediately the credits cease, and a journalist states that he wants to be assured that we will be presented with Diana’s life in her own words. As she begins to describe her early life the film dissolves to actual vision of her as a child; vision which is, in fact, impossible. A ‘crocodile’ of schoolgirls is seen walking

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through a London park while Diana protests at the ‘normalcy’ of her childhood. Suddenly, as the children come neared the camera, she interjects ‘Oh, this is me’, there is a cut to a closeup of a little girl and the image freezes, while Diana’s voice continues on. The voice is commenting on the image, but is the image possibly a memory, or is Diana looking at a scrapbook while talking to the journalist? In any case what we are seeing is imagery invoked by Diana’s memories of her childhood. As with other films at this time, especially those designated ‘swinging London’, the image is not being presented as a literal re-presentation of reality. Instead, we must be aware at every moment that ‘reality’ in a film is constructed. It is for this reason that the film cannot be said to be ‘realist’ in a Bazinian sense. Unlike the New Wave films, if the fictional characters are taken out we would be left with an empty set, not a documentary of West End London in 1964. The film is not an objective portrayal of a realist environment. Unlike A Kind of Loving, in which the scenes were all objectively presented, in this film we are aware from the beginning that there is an element of subjectivity at play. Whose subjective view it is can not always be determined. Sometimes it is Diana’s, but at other times it is not. There is a presence in the film which is not seen. That presence, the subjective viewer who can concur or differ with Diana’s view, can be described as a subjective narrator, or perhaps the Director.

Although the film has left behind the milieu of the Northern provincial films it does reveal, at this early stage, its close connection to Billy Liar. We see Diana walking down a London street, swinging her handbag and being, as she says, ‘very Chelsea’. It is a repetition of her introduction in the earlier film. This is an example of Schlesinger’s technique which I call ‘external reference’. As I have previously noted Schlesinger had a penchant for inserting references to other films. We have already seen this in A Kind of Loving with his reference to the film Victim. In this instance the reference back to his own film causes a continuity of memory even though the two characters, Liz in Billy Liar and Diana in Darling are not the same person; the psychic continuity of Julie Christie as star is reinforced.

What is happening here is an example of the construction of a star persona. As Richard Dyer describes it, the establishment of a star’s persona over time involves a continuity of character such that, a star’s appearances in different films can be likened to a serial: ‘Because stars are always appearing in different stories and settings, they

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43 P. 50 of the present thesis.
must stay broadly the same in order to permit recognition and identification. At the
time Julie Christie as ‘star’ was a work in progress. Once she had been cast in the lead
role in *Darling*, such continuity became a way of reinforcing the persona of the
nascent star. As Dyer also notes the star’s persona is reinforced by aspects external to
the films themselves. The star’s lifestyle is just as important to the star persona as the
films. In this respect the character of Diana may be presented in a critical light, but
this will be overridden by the persona of Julie Christie. As Christine Geraghty writes
‘the critical attitude of the film to its heroine was echoed by the contemporary quality
press critics… (yet) the impact of Julie Christie in the role was enormous.’ As we
proceed through the analysis of the film it will become apparent that this conflict
between character as written and persona as perceived creates a psychological tension
in the film which is never successfully resolved. For this reason the film ‘fails’ in any
realist intent. The Director may use the form of a documentary, but it can never
convince while a star is on the screen.

Diana is spotted by a camera crew and invited to be interviewed for a television
programme. The interviewer is Robert and the subsequent ‘who me’ scene for
Robert’s street interview recalls the scene of the supermarket opening in *Billy Liar*.
This deliberate echoing of the earlier film once again reinforces, not the character Liz,
whom we have seen was very much Billy’s fantasy creation, but the star, Julie
Christie. These non-narrative links between the two films emphasise the continuity of
the two films. Even though Diana is not Liz, there is a thematic link; one can imagine
that Liz, having arrived in London would head for the sort of life that Diana is living:
Chelsea, modelling, art school. Diana, however, has been born and raised in this
milieu.

As we become accustomed to Diana’s inevitable dissatisfaction in each
relationship, we notice a pattern emerging. She begins in a fantasy, sinks to reality
and boredom, and looks for a way out. This recalls in miniature Christopher Booker’s
five phases of fantasy as detailed in his book *The Neophiliacs*. As I noted in Chapter
Two such a progression was being reflected in the cinema of the time. Booker lists
five stages through which a society passes in this process: 1. Anticipation; 2. Dream;

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47 See p.41 of the present thesis.
3. Frustration; 4. Nightmare, and 5. Death Wish, or ‘explosion into reality.’ These stages, he argues can be applied to anything: ‘whether in life or in art, whether the evolution of a James Bond film or a strip-tease act or a revolutionary movement or a piece of music such as Ravel’s Bolero or a trend in fashion’.48

In this respect Darling is a description of the progress through Booker’s phases. The film presents the breakthrough into fantasy that the angry young men never achieved. The new wave films, as we have seen, usually end in a state of anticipation, and the characters remain in stasis. They have not changed; although the society around them was doing so. Inevitably, in each of Diana’s relationships, there is an ‘explosion into reality.’ For example, when she meets Robert near the beginning of the film she is a not very well known photographic model. She compares her current situation as ‘professional bosom’ with Robert’s more cerebral occupation, which he calls being ‘a professional question mark’. She immediately fantasises a life with Robert, and as we see, ruthlessly pursues it.

In her voiceover narration she protests strongly that she had no intention of breaking up a marriage (no fairy tale princess would ever do that), but in the images and dramatic situations we see, she is portrayed as overly possessive and given to childish tantrums. She protests in her voiceover that if ‘anyone had told me that (I was breaking up a family) I would have been horrified’. Diana’s monologue is written in the style of a magazine article, but the images continually contradict the words. The film is providing, at this level, a critique of the fantasy of the average magazine article. The image accompanying this statement is of Diana spying on Robert and his family and looking particularly annoyed. The next scene is the two of them moving into a Chelsea flat. This sequence leads one to suspect that self-deception was Diana’s primary talent. Against Diana’s protests of innocence, the actions we see lead us to believe that either she is naïve in the extreme, or is engaged in an act of deception, either of the interviewer, and hence the audience, or of herself.

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48 Booker, Christopher, The Neophiliacs, London, Pimlico, 1992 (Originally published 1969), p.71. Booker does not attribute this schema to any source. The book is without a bibliography, and so far as one can gather, the construct is his own. I have not found any similar structure in psychoanalytic writing. However the five stages are curiously reminiscent of the classical five act structure of drama. According to the Encyclopædia Britannica this ‘pyramidal outline’ (Introduction, Development, Climax, Anti-climax, Dénouement) was defined by one Gustav Freytag in Die Technik des Dramas (1863), although the structural basis goes back to Aristotle at least. As Booker is an alumnus of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, such an inclination to classicism is only to be expected.
When she discovers she is pregnant, the prospect of a child begins another fantasy: ‘it seemed lovely, then I realised it meant the ruination of my career…’ she says. She realises the limitations this would put on her freedom and quickly arranges an abortion. The aftermath of the abortion is an ‘explosion into reality’. She decides to leave Robert and retreats to her sister’s family home. Family life in the suburbs very rapidly turns into a nightmare for her and she returns to Robert. However, the relationship stops being one of glamour as Robert works and she becomes bored. At the same time she shows her possessive side as she becomes jealous when Robert visits his ex-wife and their children. She begins to look, not for something to occupy her, but for another fantasy to replace the failed one.

She attempts an audition, but realises she has no talent to succeed there. She then retreats to Miles Brand with the only talent she has – her sex appeal. She wavers between a realistic view of herself and the desire to alter that view into something more attractive. The desire always wins. Reality is not Diana’s preferred mode of living. With Miles she travels to Paris where, once more she begins to build a fantasy about living a life with people who are ‘emotionally inquisitive’.

The sequence includes a party scene which prompted many, including the British censor, to compare the film with La dolce vita. The party is made up of two long sequences. In the first sequence the guests observe a couple of professional performers engaging in sex. Diana is visibly disturbed by this. We see a montage of various Paris nightclubs superimposed over Diana’s face, then her face fades and another woman’s face comes into focus; the camera draws back and we have changed locations. The party has moved to another location where the guests play a game called ‘home movies’, a game which is, in the words of the host ‘une espèce de cinéma vérité un peu existential’ – ‘a kind of quasi-existential cinéma vérité’. In the game a participant is trapped in the beam of a projector and asked questions. The ‘victim’ is made to answer as one of the other members of the party. The scene is meant to represent upper class decadence as did the party scene in Fellini’s film. However the purpose of the scene is not to shock, but to show Diana’s growing confidence in her ability to deceive herself.

Diana’s self-deception recalls Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of mauvaise foi (bad faith) as analysed in Being and Nothingness. Bad faith is that state in which a human

being would deny the essence of its being by constructing a non-existent alternative being. Unlike a lie, which is to another person, bad faith is entirely internal. As Sartre states ‘the first act of bad faith is to flee what it can not flee, to flee what it is’.  

Throughout the film Diana flees from her present situation in which reality is beginning to intrude to another in which she can once again construct a self-view which is not-real. That it is not-real, that Diana continues to self-deceive cause the film to become a narrative of self-deception, and, at times to present this self-deception as a reality which is only subsequently revealed as not the objective reality of the world in which it takes place. Thus the film’s diegesis is not always an objectively real world. The viewer must at all times interpret the narrative to discover whether or not the events portrayed are objectively or subjectively presented.

As a result of this self-deception Diana never becomes a solid character within the narrative. One moment she is the seductive child-bride, the next she is a glamorous model at ease in society, then suddenly she switches to manipulative, possessive bitch. This fluidity in her character stops her from being the character who is the solid centre of the narrative. She is not someone with whom the audience can identify. However, as we will see, the star persona of Julie Christie was something that some members of the audience could identify with. The tension between Diana the character and Christie the star begins to detract from the efforts of the film to construct a realist narrative; the fantasy overcomes it.

As a result of this ‘shape-shifting’ quality in Diana, and the character/star tension there have been conflicting interpretations of events in the film. One of the most distinct conflicts concerns the episode on Capri with Malcolm. Malcolm is a photographer whom Diana meets through her work as a model. It is to him she retreats as a friend when her relationships with both Robert and Miles have foundered.

The character of Malcolm is significant, both within the film and in British film in the 1960s. The British censor paid most attention to the party scene and the problem of voyeurism in the film. There is no mention of homosexuality as a ‘problem’. Four years earlier the ‘problem’ had been very much to the fore. In 1960 two films on the subject of Oscar Wilde’s trial had been released in the wake of The Wolfenden

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Report. Lord Wolfenden had reported to parliament in 1957 that the laws criminalising homosexuality (among other things) should be eased. Public debate on the ‘problem’ ensued. The Wilde films were allowed by the censor on the grounds that they were about ‘something that was historical fact about a real person and the real details relating to homosexuality appeared very largely in the clinical atmosphere of the Court’. 

Basil Dearden and Michael Relph’s film Victim (1961) was something altogether different. One of their ‘social problem’ films, it dealt with the real problem of homosexuality, which was blackmail. The film openly argued that the only part of society to benefit from the legal restriction was the petty blackmailer. Since then there had been A Taste of Honey (Tony Richardson, 1961) and The Leather Boys (Sidney J. Furie, 1963) which had also treated homosexuality as a problem for society.

In Darling, on the other hand, the only character who does not appear to have any problems is Malcolm, the gay photographer. Malcolm never expresses any discontent with his sexuality. It is not a ‘problem’ for him. When he and Diana get drunk together he does complain that ‘nobody loves me’, but this does not seem to be a constant state. Diana decides that as soon as she has finished filming a commercial in Italy the two of them will go on a holiday together. Perhaps the reason for Malcolm’s ease is what Schlesinger’s biographer describes as his ‘secure, grounded, homosexual sensibility.’ Because of this, according to his partner, Michael Childers ‘John thought if gay characters weren’t going to be seen in other people’s films, he’d put them in his.’ Although nothing explicit is ever said in the film, Malcolm’s presence is a reminder that Diana need not live her life the way she does. When Sartre produces an example of a person living in bad faith, he chooses a homosexual who is in denial. He assumes that guilt is inevitable in any homosexual and denial is a natural result. Where the earlier ‘problem’ films reiterate this assumption, Schlesinger breaks free of this discourse. In his films the ‘problem’ is with the assumption, not the individual.

The ‘escape’ with Malcolm is once again an example of Diana fleeing an unsatisfactory reality for a preferable fantasy. On Capri with Malcolm she will have ‘peace, quiet (and can) get away from everything.’ What she doesn’t say is that with

51 The films were The Trials of Oscar Wilde (Ken Hughes, 1960) with Peter Finch as Wilde, and Oscar Wilde (Gregory Ratoff, 1960) with Robert Morley as Wilde. The films were released virtually simultaneously.
52 Aldgate, op. cit., p.135.
53 Mann, op. cit., p. 123.
54 Sartre, op. cit., p.86.
Malcolm she does not have to have sex, as she is well aware that he is gay. Also she
does not seem to comprehend him as competition. In an earlier scene Diana had
begun to ‘chat up’ a film director in her usual opportunistic style. When the director
introduces his wife to Diana her eloquent look reveals what she thinks of other
women when she is after prey. She never considers that this could happen with
Malcolm. So when Malcolm does take off with a waiter from a bar she becomes
annoyed at the betrayal. Once again the fantasy of the relationship is betrayed by the
intrusion of reality. Robert Murphy blames the breakdown in this relationship on
Malcolm for ‘sneaking off for a nocturnal rendezvous’.

Christine Geraghty explains
the failure as being ‘destroyed by Diana’s jealousy’. A third explanation is that the
relationship has changed from companions to competitors. Diana is annoyed that
Malcolm has scored when she hasn’t. She calls him a traitor. When she returns after a
night with the same Italian boy as Malcolm she looks up to their hotel room in
triumph. These conflicting readings reveal the fluidity of Diana’s character in the
film. The constant changes in her attitude do not make her an easy figure to read. The
audience, like the men in the film, tend to project their own fantasies onto her.
Murphy thinks that Diana’s motives are genuine – ‘she does try to be good’ he
writes. Geraghty thinks that she is the reverse, not very good at all. The men in the
film appear to have the same problem. They all assume she is what they think she is
and treat her accordingly.

It is at this stage we need to recall that what we are watching is a work of fiction. I
remarked in the British New Wave chapter that the life created for the Angry Young
Men in the novels, plays and films always ended in stasis. The lives of their creators
on the other hand did not. The Lamptons, Seatons, Fishers are all condemned to
remain in the provinces while the authors who created them all promptly left. This
was not unusual, as Alan Bennett (himself Leeds born and bred) remarks in his
memoir: ‘Making good’ meant getting out… there was always a sense in which
success could be summed up as a one-way ticket to King’s Cross.

At least Diana has been allowed to escape from her origins in Sussex. What she is
not allowed to escape is the prevailing morality of the time. She is, we must never

56 Geraghty, Christine, ‘Women and Sixties British Cinema: The Development of the “Darling” Girl’, in
57 Murphy, op. cit. (1992), p.124
58 Geraghty, op. cit., p.158.
forget, the fictional creation of three men. If they are represented at all in the film, it is not through Diana, but through the men who use her. It is significant that Diana’s own words are the narration, but they are undercut throughout the film by contradictory imagery. The men are treated differently. As Alexander Walker has noted, the three principal male characters ‘are all by profession and inclination, image-makers’.\(^6\) Robert is involved in television programs which create images of contemporary society, Miles and Malcolm work to create fantasy images of women to sell products. It is through them that we are given ‘accurate’ assessments of Diana’s character, particularly Robert.

If any character can be said to represent the authorial voice in the film it has to be Robert. His voice is the voice of established morality. That he is played by Dirk Bogarde adds to his authoritative voice. Again it is the star persona of the actor concerned which intrudes to give an extra dimension to the character. Andrew Spicer has described the changes in the persona of Bogarde the star in his work on masculinity in British film. He had begun as a troubled youth, but had reached his apotheosis as a representative of the ‘middle-class everyman’ alternating with the ‘debonair aesthete.’\(^6\) Bogarde had played the lead role in *Victim* in 1961 and recently gained attention as part of the ‘new’ cinema for his lead role in *The Servant*. In the former film it was his very ordinariness and ‘middle-classness’ which was used to reinforce the argument for homosexual law reform. That such a respectable man could be ‘one of them’ was part of the argument. The latter film used the tension between his persona as known by the audience and the decadence of the events portrayed to create its air of unease.\(^6\)

In the present film, the Bogarde persona is that of the respectable middle-class man led astray by the seduction of the glamorous model. His remarks about Diana can be moralistic and self-serving, but he is presented as a figure of sympathy. He says to Diana that her idea of fidelity is ‘not having more than one man in the bed at the same time.’ He continues: ‘You’re a whore baby, just a whore.’ What he is omitting to mention is that he left his wife and children to live with her. If she is a whore then

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\(^{62}\) Although Bogarde was himself gay, this was not generally known at this time. Even when he began to write his volumes of autobiography he did not publicly acknowledge his sexuality. His persona, particularly at this time, remained resolutely heterosexual.
what is he - her pimp? By the end of the film, Robert is presented as a figure of sympathy. He slumps forward in despair in his car after he has forced Diana to return to her Italian Prince. His attitude is supposed to be ‘realistic.’ At this stage the established persona of Bogarde holds more authority than the emerging persona of Christie. When she declares ‘You used me.’ He retorts ‘You used me. It’s a moot point.’ His ‘realism’ is supposed to be a breakthrough into reality for the two of them. It is he who is forcing her to face up to the reality of her situation. She cannot stay with him; she must go back to the life that she has made for herself with the Prince. But how realistic is such a conclusion to the film?

What we see happening here is that an attempt to tell a story in realist mode has been tripped up by the fantasy elements it is employing. The narrative is essentially a fairytale, but the moralism of the social realist mode precludes a ‘happy ending.’ It is as if the men who created her could not conceive of her as a truly independent woman. Her sexual freedom does not allow her happiness and, in fact, generally causes unhappiness to the men with whom she is sexually involved. It is interesting that there is one exception to this fact. The Italian Prince seems to have no sexual interest in her at all. She is simply another beautiful decoration for his castle and is left there alone when he departs for a visit to Rome. One can only presume that he has a mistress there. It is this rejection by her husband that prompts her to return to Robert. It is significant that at this stage of the narrative her record of success has ended. Both the Prince and Robert reject her attempts at sexual seduction.

Diana’s situation, and function, at the end of Darling is similar to that of Liz at the end of Billy Liar. The man (Robert in this case) stays behind, she is sent off to a new life elsewhere. She disappears from the narrative. She is the object of desire, but she seems to become the representative of a desire which can never be achieved. Thus the film ends in absence. Diana is no longer physically present in the narrative. She is a photograph on a magazine in Piccadilly Circus while nearby an old woman sings ‘Santa Lucia.’ Carrie Tarr describes this ending as ‘ironic’ as the singer is ‘a “real” person’.63 By implication Diana is not, and never has been. In my opinion the

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63 Tarr, op. cit., p.48.
juxtaposition is used to contrast the old realism with the new fantasy of how life is lived. The interpretation is open.\textsuperscript{64}

The result of this absence is that Diana, as a dream figure, can be interpreted any way the spectator wishes. We have already seen a divergence of interpretations in the Capri sequence, but the same is true for the film as a whole. Writers who have analysed this film note the divergence between authorial intent and spectator reception of the film. I will quote Moya Luckett as representative of this phenomenon: ‘the popularity of Julie Christie’s star image both transcends the pessimism of Darling’s narrative closure and creates a series of associations between viewers … and out-of-the-ordinary girls like Christie herself or the character she plays’.\textsuperscript{65} In other words, the viewer’s interpretation conforms to the fantasy of the princess rather than the reality of the call-girl.

Had the film been a realist version of the events the ‘explosion into reality’ would need to have been shown. Since in the original anecdote this explosion lead to the fulfilment of the death wish, perhaps the authors, in their retreat from reality were revealing more than they intended. Alexander Walker thought so:

‘Locking “Darling’s” fate into her manipulation by (the) three image-makers was a more accurate picture of what was happening in British society than the makers may have realized’.\textsuperscript{66}

Diana Scott was created by three men, Joseph Janni, John Schlesinger and Frederic Raphael. As we have seen, they drew their inspiration from the then current phenomenon of The Model, a social type that was being written about in the press as the major female type in the new society. The newspaper articles were attempting to analyse the changes that were taking place in British society, especially in relation to the class system. The film was an attempt to portray what role this particular type of woman was playing in this new society. An initial compromise was made by the creators by not ending the film with Diana’s suicide, as had happened with the woman who had originally inspired the film. Had the film ended with her suicide, it would have to be interpreted as a critique of the commodification of the female body in this

\textsuperscript{64} The singer was a Mrs. Meg Thomas, 49 years old, who had been busking around Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square for twenty five years according to the Evening News of 22 September 1965. (BFI Johns Schlesinger collection JRS/4/15.)


\textsuperscript{66} Walker, op. cit., p.283.
society. As Carrie Tarr has pointed out the problem is that, although Diana does not become a solid character with whom the audience can identify, there is no ‘alternative controlling male discourse’ within the film.\textsuperscript{67} This led to a curious phenomenon. The narrative of the film conforms to a traditional morality in which a promiscuous woman is punished for her deeds; however the film also functions as a star vehicle which overrides the ideological text. Christine Geraghty notes that ‘the impact of Julie Christie in the role was enormous’, so that ‘the possibilities of interpretations which work against rather than with the ending are to be found in the characterisation and star image rather than the working out of the plot’.\textsuperscript{68} It appears that with the new generation of viewer the Griersonian assumption of passive reception of ideological message has ceased to be. The mediated image of Julie Christie as a free and successful woman overrides the fictional misery of the character Diana. This is the reason that the busker at the end of the film is seen as being ‘more real’ than the model-cum-call-girl at the centre of the narrative. Diana is a fairytale princess, not a realist role model. Realism has lost its authority in British cinema when the audience ignores the ideology in favour of its own interpretation.

\textit{iii. Far From the Madding Crowd}\textsuperscript{69}

Having directed three successful feature films in a row, it was probably inevitable that Hollywood would be interested in John Schlesinger. When the third film was nominated for five categories in the 1965 Academy Awards, and managed to win three of them, it would have been surprising if Hollywood were not interested. In the mid-sixties British directors were seen as having the ability to handle large-scale works, and at the same time confer artistic integrity to their works. In the light of the

\textsuperscript{67} Tarr, op. cit. p.65.  
\textsuperscript{68} Geraghty, op. cit., p.104.  
\textsuperscript{69} A note on the film: After its initial unsuccessful screening in New York, MGM re-edited the film without Schlesinger’s consultation. This version, running some twenty minutes shorter than the original has, since 1968, been the only version available in the United States. (see, Phillips, Gene D., \textit{John Schlesinger}, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1981, pp.88-89.) Outside the USA the only readily available version in recent years has been a Region 2 DVD released by Universal which has a severely cropped image with inferior definition. In 2009 Warner Bros. released a DVD which restores all the missing footage, plus the ‘Overture’ and the ‘entr’acte’; in other words, the film as it was originally presented. It is also in the correct Panavision ratio of 2.35:1. The DVD is labelled as Region 1 but is in fact engineered for Regions 1, 2, 3 & 4: effectively making it playable world-wide. This is the version of the film referred to throughout this chapter and is the only currently available edition which can regarded as Schlesinger’s film as originally conceived.
success of David Lean’s *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), this was a not unreasonable conclusion.

In fact, Schlesinger had intended for his next film to be based on a novel titled *Midnight Cowboy*. It was to be another small-scale, black and white film made in the realist style that had established his reputation. The only difference was that it was to be shot on location in New York rather than Yorkshire or London. He had assumed that Janni would produce it, and was surprised when Janni grew reluctant. An American named Jerome Hellman had been courting Schlesinger since the success of *Billy Liar*, and so the two joined forces to produce Schlesinger’s first American film. There were delays in sourcing funding for the project and, as a consequence, Schlesinger was cajoled by Janni into another project to capitalise on the burgeoning star-power of Julie Christie.\(^{70}\)

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer approached Janni with a proposal to produce a prestige ‘roadshow’ film, in the style of their previous hit *Doctor Zhivago*. MGM had so far missed out on the British boom, having refused the James Bond franchise, and even *Darling*.\(^{71}\) MGM proposed a four million dollar budget for a suitable ‘prestige’ subject. The choice was to adapt a novel by Thomas Hardy. Having considered *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* first, Schlesinger finally settled on *Far From the Madding Crowd*.\(^{72}\) The choice has to be considered eccentric at the least. However, as we saw in the section on Swinging London, Schlesinger was not the only director to tire of the mores of contemporary life as a subject. To retreat from the urban to the pastoral, from the present to the past, was a temptation to succumb to.

The choice of a Thomas Hardy novel may not seem to be so odd in the early twenty-first century, but in the late nineteen-sixties it was a very unusual choice indeed. MGM considered the idea of *Tess* as attractive, as for them, it was a remake. MGM had produced a silent version in 1924 starring Blanche Sweet as Tess.\(^{73}\) Although there had been several television adaptations of Hardy in the 1950s and even a couple of non-English language adaptations, there had been no cinematic


\(^{71}\) Murphy, Robert, *Sixties British Cinema*, BFI Publishing, London, 1992, p.265: ‘While United Artists were exploring new trends and recruiting new talent, MGM preferred to rely on films which determinedly turned their back on the brave new world of the 60s.’ the irony in that situation being that ultimately MGM took over UA and now owns the Bond franchise as well as the Woodfall films released under the UA banner.

\(^{72}\) Mann, op. cit., p.264

\(^{73}\) Phillips, op. cit., p.79
adaptation of a Thomas Hardy novel in English, either in Britain or in Hollywood, since the introduction of sound.\textsuperscript{74} This meant that a Hardy film was not a generic exercise, but an attempt at something new; an exploration of nineteenth century melodrama using the forms of new cinema as developed in the 1960s. As the film is an interrogation of this specific type of novel, it is necessary to outline how the narrative of the novel functions before examining how this is adapted into a film of the new cinema.

\textit{Far From the Madding Crowd} was the first of the so-called ‘great Wessex novels.’ It appeared in serial form in the Cornhill Magazine in twelve instalments from January to December 1874. Its immediate success led to its publication in volume form in December 1874.\textsuperscript{75} The narrative centres on a young woman named Bathsheba Everdene. In the early chapters she is courted by a shepherd named Gabriel Oak, but she refuses his proposal of marriage. Oak has recently taken a lease of his own and, by going into debt, has managed to start his own flock. Due to a somewhat deranged sheepdog he loses his sheep when the dog forces the entire flock over the edge of a disused quarry. Oak leaves the locality to look for work at the farmers’ exchange in Casterbridge. Meanwhile Bathsheba inherits a farm of her own in the same area. There she becomes a farmer in her own right, to the bemusement of her labourers and domestic staff. She is courted by a neighbouring farmer Ralph Boldwood. In a parallel narrative, one of Bathsheba’s staff, Fanny Robin, is engaged to a sergeant in the local barracks, Frank Troy. In one of Hardy’s accidents of destiny, Fanny attends her wedding appointment at the wrong church in Melchester, and Frank, humiliated at having been jilted at the altar, rejects Fanny out of hand. She leaves the district and, for several episodes, the narrative. Frank meets Bathsheba by accident and proceeds to court her as well. He seduces her by a flashy, and erotic, sword display, and shortly thereafter they marry. Gabriel Oak, who has become the ‘factor’ of Bathsheba’s farm, keeps his own counsel. Boldwood, on the other hand, becomes disturbed at his rejection and at what he perceives to be an unsuitable and unstable match. Hardy describes instances of his growing irrational behaviour. Troy proves to be as morally lax as Boldwood has thought. He takes to drink and gambling, and Bathsheba is in danger of losing the farm because of his debts. Fanny now returns

\textsuperscript{74} Wright, T. R., \textit{Thomas Hardy on Screen}, Cambridge University Press, , Cambridge, UK, 2005, p. 4
and dies in the local workhouse. Bathsheba orders the coffin to be brought to her farm as she considers herself responsible for the poor girl’s funeral. There she discovers that Fanny died in childbirth, as did the child. She realises immediately that the child is Frank’s. In a fortunate coincidence Troy, distraught at the death of Fanny and his child, soon goes missing, presumed drowned off the Wessex coast. Boldwood immediately resumes his courtship of Bathsheba, but she demurs on the assumption that Frank is not drowned but simply missing. She is right in this assumption. Hardy describes an incident at Greenhill sheep fair where Troy reappears in a travelling tent show. He spies Bathsheba and Boldwood, but manages to avoid being spied by them. At a Christmas celebration at Boldwood’s farm, at which Bathsheba is to announce her decision, Frank reappears and demands she return home with him. Boldwood, finally unable to control his mind shoots Frank dead. He is convicted of the murder, but his sentence is commuted on the grounds of insanity. He is incarcerated for life as criminally insane. Gabriel at first intends to emigrate, but finally consents to marry Bathsheba and they live together on the combined farms of Boldwood and Everdene.

This outline of the events of the novel reveals a certain similarity to the narrative arc of Darling. As Alexander Walker noted in his summation of the film ‘it was in essence the same story as Darling relocated in the nineteenth-century countryside instead of the twentieth-century metropolis’. What Walker does not note is Bathsheba’s independence. Where Diana needs a man for economic support as much as anything, Bathsheba does not. It is an irony not generally noted that the modern woman of the sixties is economically dependent on men while this nineteenth century woman has no such need. As we have seen, Diana’s only asset was her body; at no time in that film was there any consideration that she might be able to live independently of men. The narrative thrust of Far from the Madding Crowd is based on the pursuit of Bathsheba by men, the exact reverse of the previous film.

There is an assumption in the narrative that Bathsheba will marry, and indeed that a woman should marry. However the reason why she should marry is not the conventional reason. As any reader of Jane Austen or William Thackeray is aware, the primary basis of marriage in a nineteenth century novel is economic security for the woman; her choice of husband is primarily that security. She is fortunate if there are additional benefits, but they are not the primary concern. What is remarkable

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about Bathsheba Everdene is that her choice is always based on the erotic power of the man in question.

Much of the criticism of this adaptation has been based on its inability to convey Hardy’s poetic view of nature. In his study of the theory of adaptation, Brian McFarlane refers to two different functions in the process. The first is ‘transfer’ which is what happens to those parts of the novel which can be readily turned into a screenplay, in other words the events that make up the narrative. My summary of the narrative above is an example. What I have not summarised from the novel is those qualities which cannot be transferred directly and must, in McFarlane’s terms, be truly ‘adapted’, that is change from the qualities of print to the qualities of film.\(^{77}\)

When critics complain that the film is not ‘faithful’ to the original work, what is actually being stated is that the critic’s interpretation of the novel is not the same as that of the creators of the film. As McFarlane puts it: ‘(Any) given film version is able only to aim at reproducing the film-maker’s reading of the original and to hope that it will coincide with that of many other readers/viewers.’\(^{78}\) In other words adaptation is an act of interpretation, or criticism of the original. It is necessary to identify what that interpretation is, and what the intention of the adapters is in their interpretation. In a classical film, such as that produced by the studios in the 1930s, the intention was usually to be ‘faithful’ to the original work. As film tended to be not much more than acting out scenes from the novel, such an interpretation tended to highlight the ‘transfer’ elements. In the new cinema of the 1960s the director, in collaboration with his writer ‘adapted’ the spirit of the novel in order to both interpret and comment.

In this case, John Schlesinger and Frederic Raphael have taken the narrative of Hardy’s pastoral and used it as a comparison piece to their previous portrait of a woman. Alexander Walker seems to have taken the film as a repetition or variation of a theme; I see it as a dialectical response to the dissatisfaction expressed in the former work. Diana Scott’s problem was that sex was her only economic weapon in her struggle for security in Swinging London. Bathsheba Everdene has economic security and is able to seek erotic fulfilment. If the film is read only as an adaptation of Hardy’s novel then it will be limited in its function. I believe that the film, in its discourse and in its method is something else. In order to appreciate the film it is


\(^{78}\) Ibid., p.9
necessary to view it in its own context, not simply in comparison with the source novel as all writers on this film have tended to do. Schlesinger complained that perhaps he had been ‘too faithful’ to Hardy, but I think that the problem has been that his critics have been too faithful to their interpretation of Hardy at the expense of Schlesinger’s.\(^79\)

The film begins with an overture of some three minutes duration. At the time of its release an overture implied a prestige production. In theatrical presentations, the curtains remained closed during the overture and the lights were dimmed. This practice was meant to recall superior theatrical productions, and was intended to give an aura of high art to the film about to be presented.

In the present case the overture is dominated by a pastoral theme reminiscent of the works of Ralph Vaughn Williams. Vaughn Williams (1872-1958) was a champion of ‘English music’ and did much work on the English folk song. As well as the dominant theme there are passages of music which convey impressions of drama (much percussion) and comedy, but the pastoral theme overrides all and is the dominant theme as the overture ends in a full orchestral declaration. In the opening shot, as the credits begin to appear, the camera pans across a cloudy sky, down to a seascape with a small island off the coast of Dorset. We hear a solo flute playing the already familiar pastoral theme. A grassy cliff comes into view. There is no sign of humanity in these first moments of the film. We are veritably ‘far from the madding crowd’. As the credits come to an end the theme is taken up by oboe and strings, a bird’s call is heard and finally the full orchestra plays the fully developed theme. All this crescendo development reinforces the ‘Englishness’ of the music and the scene. The camera finally comes to rest on a hill top with a small hut, a flock of sheep and dogs shepherding them; there is a shepherd as well. There is a cut to a close-up of the shepherd and we recognise him as Alan Bates, one of the stars of the film. It is important to note that we do not initially recognise him as the character Gabriel Oak. We will shortly learn that that is the character he is playing, but our initial sight is of the actor in costume. I emphasise this because the actor’s previous cinematic persona is what we initially confer on the man on the screen and it is one of the functions of the director to either override that persona or use it as shorthand to convey meaning.

\(^{79}\) Phillips, op.cit., p.90
When, at last we hear a human voice in the film, it is the shepherd addressing one of his dogs. He repeats orders to one of the dogs which runs rapidly around, ignoring the shepherd’s directions. The camera cuts to a close-up of the shepherd. ‘You mad dog’ he says. The significance of this statement will become clear shortly after. It is the first instance of a recurring element in this film. Frederic Raphael’s screenplay is not direct in its approach to dialogue and the conveying of narrative information. The writer and the director expect an attentive audience, and we shall see that information may be given, not in direct dialogue, but in comments made by secondary characters, or in non-verbal audio or by purely visual means. This is an instance of the new cinema’s new language. Unlike a classical narrative in which important information is reserved for formal dialogue to ensure that the audience understands without having to interpret, Schlesinger, like most ‘new wave’ directors, conveys information by various means.

As Bates’ voice continues on the soundtrack, the camera cuts back to the cliff top with the sea in the background. A horse and rider appears in the distance, there is a cut to medium close-up and we recognise Julie Christie. We also notice that she is astride the horse, not riding side saddle. She waves and calls out ‘Mister Oak’, then rides on. The view returns to the man we now know as ‘Mister Oak’ and we see him smile fondly as he watches the woman ride away. The camera-view now cuts back to horse and rider in extreme long shot; in fact the shot is a landscape painting in movement. This is another stylistic element of this film. The director of photography, Nicolas Roeg, frames the widescreen shots in ‘landscape’ as befits the shape of the screen.

In this opening scene of just over six minutes, including the overture, we have been given information by the musical style, the emptiness of the landscape in which the camera has to search some minutes before finding signs of life, and a line of dialogue which appears to be of little moment, but, after the incidents in a later scene, will need reinterpretation. There has been no overt exposition, but the viewer knows that the shepherd Oak is fond of an attractive young woman who is of such independence that she rides astride and alone on the Dorset moors.

As the oboe continues the theme there is a cut to the shepherd Oak carrying a lamb; he is silhouetted by the late afternoon sun. The continuity of the music implies a continuity of narrative, that is, having seen the woman, Oak has come to visit with a gift. We see her in the window of the cottage he is approaching. Again information is
given to us indirectly. In a long shot we see her hiding behind the cottage. On the 
soundtrack we hear a knock and a woman’s voice calling: ‘Bathsheba’. Now, after a 
lengthy time, we are given a conventional dialogue scene in which detailed 
information is given about a narrative point. That point is that Oak has come to 
propose marriage to Bathsheba.

The unconventional continuity of the film is shown again in the following 
sequence in which Oak attempts to convince Bathsheba of the rightness of their 
mariage. The two are outside the cottage in a field. The editing is, at first, a 
conventional shot/reverse-shot set-up; that is Bathsheba is shown speaking, there is a 
cut and Oak is shown replying and so on. However midway through the conversation 
there is a cut to Bathsheba listening as we hear Oak’s voice as he says: ‘I know I can 
make you happy’ there is a cut back to Oak as he continues after a pause, ‘You shall 
have a piano....’ but the location is different. We notice that he is now leaning against 
a brick wall. There is a cut to a wider view and we see that the two are now in the 
dairy and Bathsheba is milking while the conversation continues. This ‘jump-cut’, 
made familiar by the French directors of the nouvelle vague, signifies that the 
conversation is not being shown in its entirety, but enough to let us know the gist of 
Oak’s argument and Bathsheba’s response.

I have analysed this opening sequence in such detail because the scene introduces 
not just the narrative, but also the style of the film. We have been given information in 
such a way to inform us that it is essential to pay attention to all the elements of the 
film. This is not just a ‘screen play’ in which the dialogue is the primary source of 
information; all the elements of the film, both audio and visual contribute to the 
meaning of the film. This is a film made using new forms of communication, a new 
language of cinema. The film may look classical, but it is behaving in a decidedly 
unclassical way. The various elements of classical cinema, mise-en-scène, music, 
editing are being used in a new way which requires the audience to interpret, rather 
than simply passively watch.

The end of this sequence, and of Oak’s courtship, comes with Bathsheba’s final, 
succinct reason for not marrying him. ‘It’s no use’, she says, ‘I don’t love you.’ She 
now turns the argument towards him, he needs to be ‘prudent’ and marry a woman 
with money. But he confesses that he knows this but cannot bring himself to be 
prudent. She repeats once more her reason, she does not love him. He responds at last,
‘Very well, then I shall ask you no more.’ He turns to leave and the oboe once more takes up the pastoral theme and we return to wide shots of shepherd and landscape.

In this conversation the film leaves pastoral romance and enters the realm of melodrama. By this I do not mean that it has taken a sensational turn to a drama of events, but that it reveals a ‘melodramatic imagination’ as described by Peter Brooks in his book of that name. Bathsheba’s protest that she does not love Oak, and therefore cannot marry him, reveals an underlying moral principle to her actions. The plot of the film, revealed in this conversation, is based on a moral truth. Bathsheba does not believe that marriage is an economic contract, for her, but that it can be for others. It is her moral imperative that drives the plot and causes the consequent narrative of the film, as it did the novel. In this respect the film’s dialectic with *Darling* becomes apparent. The contemporary film is based on a life lived in bad faith, as we have seen. ‘Bad faith’ may just as easily be described as immorality as it acknowledges a moral structure but refuse to accept it. Where Diana Scott denied morality, Bathsheba Everdene accepts a morality which she perceives and explains in terms of love. She cannot marry if she does not love.

According to Brooks this kind of melodramatic rhetoric is ‘the emphatic articulation of simple truths and relationships, the clarification of the cosmic moral sense of everyday gestures.’ By invoking such a moral imperative the world portrayed by the film has gained a level of meaning beyond the material. According to Brooks this is a function of melodrama in a post-enlightenment world. ‘We may legitimately claim,’ he writes, ‘that melodrama becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era.’ His argument is that in a secular world tragedy disappears, as there is no higher power directing the lives of men. Instead, melodrama, with its basis in a moral imperative originating within the characters, takes the place of tragedy in expressing the need for a morally stable universe. However if a moral truth is followed and leads to disaster, as in the present case, can there be a satisfying ending which reinforces the moral stability of the universe? The alternative is to conclude that there is no such moral stability and that it is an arbitrary choice made by humanity to impose meaning on a meaningless existence. It is this interpretation of

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81 Ibid., p.15
the ‘Hardyesque’ that the film reveals in its narrative and it is this aspect of the modern that reveals the film’s mid-twentieth century heart.

This short digression into the realms of melodrama is necessitated by Schlesinger’s adherence to Hardy’s narrative and his moral universe. Although the primary focus of this thesis is formal, the formal changes taking place in film are being used to give a fuller exploration of the moral, that is human, universe of narrative cinema. Schlesinger and his contemporaries are searching for ways to convey more than just dialogue. They are seeking to convey feeling, intuitive emotions, rather than addressing the audience didactically. Where social realism tells the audience what to think, in this style the audience is invited to interpret for themselves the moral universe which the film portrays. This psychological aspect requires a style of film making which refers more to the internal world of its character than to the external world in which they act.

I noted that when we first saw Alan Bates on the screen we did not identify him as Gabriel Oak. However some members of the audience would recognise him as such, because of their familiarity with the novel. Equally Julie Christie would be immediately recognisable to such viewers as Bathsheba Everdene. As James M. Welsh has noted on the question of adaptation the adaptor must either assume: ‘1) that the viewer probably will not know the original work and therefore needs to be guided carefully through the narrative, or 2) that the viewer probably has read the original work and key motifs and mutually understood distinctions and nuance of character can therefore be telegraphed to the audience without a great deal of preparation and cinematic development’. However, as we have already seen, Schlesinger and Raphael do not necessarily see any need to ‘guide’ the viewer. In fact it is possible to completely change the narrative experience of the viewer from that of the reader, as is demanded by the different medium involved. In the next sequence just such an adjustment is made.

A gentleman in top hat approaches the door of Bathsheba’s cottage. We see Bathsheba getting onto a cart with some belongings, including a caged bird. Her aunt says some words of farewell and the cart drives away in a misty long shot with Bathsheba’s aunt standing alone by the cottage. We are given no explanation for this scene. We can surmise that Bathsheba is leaving, but not why she is leaving. In an

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82 Welsh, James M., ‘Hardy and the Pastoral, Schlesinger and Shepherds: Far from the Madding Crowd’, Literature/Film Quarterly, IX/2 (April 1981), p.79
otherwise positive analysis of the film Fran E. Chalfont writes that ‘(One) of the film's
early scenes can be criticized for its lack of what for some viewers may be essential
expository dialogue.’ As we have already established, the style of the film is not to
directly inform the audience and one can argue that, in fact, the audience may be
deliberately misled. The framing of the shots, the misty weather, and Bathsheba’s few
belongings could lead a viewer who is not familiar with the novel to equate the scene
with some such event as the early chapters of Jane Eyre, or a Dickensian scene in
which an orphan is sent away out of necessity. We simply don’t know, unless we have
already read the novel, that she has inherited a farm. In this way the film functions in
two completely different, but equally successful, modes. For those members of the
audience who are familiar with the novel they look forward to the farm, as indeed
they look forward to all the events of the narrative. For those who are not familiar
they have been presented with a narrative puzzle which is being used to engage their
interest in how it will be solved.

It is possible to assume that Bathsheba has been forced out because of hard times.
As the next scene shows the catastrophe of Oak’s sheep and his own departure, such a
rhyming narrative of the two protagonists would seem a reasonable assumption. We
are informed, as indeed Oak is informed, of Bathsheba’s good fortune only when he
hitches a ride on a cart and overhears two farm labourers discussing their new
mistress who was left a farm by ‘old Everdene’. Once more the information has to be
gleaned from the film, it is not stated directly.

In the sequence prior to Oak’s cart ride, we are given what is a major set in the
film. This is Casterbridge on the day of the hiring fair. In this scene Schlesinger
establishes the film as aesthetically a realist work. Until now the film has played in
small groups and rural settings and as such has not portrayed the society of the time to
any extent. In Casterbridge we have a whole town on the screen, in the same way as
the town of Bradford was a major element of Billy Liar, and London of Darling. The
major difference is that the town presented is not a contemporary setting.

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83 Chalfont, Fran E., 'From Strength to Strength: John Schlesinger's Film of Far From the Madding
Crowd', in Norman Page (ed.), Thomas Hardy Annual No.5 (Houndmills and London: Macmillan,
1987), p.72
84 In fact the puzzle retains Hardy’s own technique. Chapter VI begins with Oak hearing that Bathsheba
has left the district. She ‘had gone to a place called Weatherbury….whether as a visitor or permanently,
he could not discover.’ The criticism of Schlesinger could be seen as a criticism of Hardy!
If we are to agree with Raymond Williams and his criteria for realism as described in the chapter on realist theory, then this film cannot be realist as it is not contemporaneous.\(^{85}\) However that statement is only valid when considering realism as an ideological tool. Realism can also be used in cinema as an aesthetic strategy, and that is the case here. When Oak arrives at Casterbridge to seek work we are presented with an existent community. He walks into the town and it is presented to us, not as a set but as a place. In a classical Hollywood literary adaptation, say *A Tale of Two Cities* (Jack Conway, 1935), the city of Paris is presented as a set on the back lot with a cast of many hundreds of extras in costume. We are aware of the artificiality of the set as we can never see beyond it. We are able to see down the streets of Casterbridge in this film as the location filming lends a verisimilitude to the setting.

In Schlesinger’s method, realism means creating a world within the film which is not artificial. The characters in the film walk in a setting which has a reality outside the film. The diegesis of the film is presented as if it existed in reality, that is, not as a film set. As a result of this realism there is solidarity to the world presented. This form of realism can best be described as historical realism in that the world presented is not a contemporary world presented in an unmediated way. A contemporary realism need not concern itself with ordering the mise-en-scène of the film. The characters walk through an already existent world. In historical realism, the world is one that has existed since the time in which the film is set, in this case a town representing Casterbridge. However the people within it must all, of necessity, be characters dressed in period costume. According to Schlesinger he hired Dorset people to play all the extras in the film, and some of the minor roles, as they looked right and their accents were right. He also hoped that by mixing Dorset people with the professional cast of actors their accents would become more accurate. This habit of mixing in local people was one he had first acquired on *A Kind of Loving*.\(^{86}\)

Realism, in this respect, means that the film presents a world, as if it existed outside the diegesis of the film; a world recreated, but not contained. Although the primary focus of the film is the telling of the story of Bathsheba Everdene, and the three men who love her, that is only the narrative focus of the film. The film also functions at a non-narrative level as a depiction of daily life in nineteenth century Wessex. It presents to the viewer both the narrative and the environment in which the

\(^{85}\) Williams, Raymond, ‘A lecture on Realism’, in Screen, Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 1977, p.63.

\(^{86}\) Phillips, op.cit., p.82.
narrative takes place as of equal interest. That is because film, as a visual medium is able to present both aspects simultaneously and equally. To criticise this aspect of the film is to criticise it for being a film and not a novel.

As well as the settings in which the film is photographed, the music used in the film also contributes to its overall realism. As I noted above the score of the film plays a significant role in the conveying of meaning in this film. The score, as I previously noted, is heavily influenced by the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams wrote several film scores himself. According to his writing on film he identified two forms of film music: the first is that form known as ‘mickey-mousing’, that is illustrative musical effects synchronized with specific events in the film's physical action and secondly ‘(music which ignores) the details and (intensifies) the spirit of the whole situation by a continuous stream of music.’ This latter is the principal style of music used by Bennett in the film. He does indulge in some ‘mickey-mousing’, particularly in the scene in which Troy seduces Bathsheba with his swordplay. The major pastoral themes which dominate the film’s score are examples of the ‘spiritual’ use of music.

However Richard Rodney Bennett supplements this orchestral element with a new form of film music not noted by Vaughan Williams. There are four folk songs used in the score. The first two are heard at the shearing supper. The first, *The Seeds of Love*, is sung by Joseph Poorgrass, to the amusement of the assembled company. At the conclusion of this song, the company requests that Bathsheba sing. She agrees to do so if Gabriel will accompany her on his flute. The song she sings is *Bushes and Briars*. This song has great significance in the history of English music. It was collected By Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1903 and was the song which is said to have begun his interest in English folk music. In the context of the film the lyric adds to the events taking place as Bathsheba sings. The singer expresses hesitation in declaring love in case the lover ‘would say nay/If I showed to him by boldness/He’d ne’er love me again.’ As she sings this we see Boldwood (Peter Finch) riding up to call on Bathsheba and begin his wooing. The song is a caution as we have already seen that Bathsheba is quite open in her nay saying to wooers. The use of folk songs

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88 See the website of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society at [www.rvwsociety.com](http://www.rvwsociety.com), particularly the timeline.
to express sentiment contributes to the realism of the setting as the songs are of the
time and place.

The third song is *The Jolly Tinker*. This is a bawdy song about a tinker who is
always visiting women at home and ‘unblocking holes’. It is sung by Frank Troy
(Terence Stamp) at the wedding feast and adds to the depiction of his unruly nature.
The song has an added significance in that its refrain of ‘toor-li addy’ reveals its Irish
origin. It is not a West Country song, as are all the others in the film, but has been
brought in by Troy, the soldier who has seen the world. The implication is that the
song is just one example of the elements from outside that Troy has brought into this
Eden. Troy is the serpent of Genesis whose role is to disrupt the moral paradise of
Wessex.

The fourth song is *The Bold Grenadier*, another West Country song of the perils of
courtship. Unlike the other three songs it is not introduced diegetically into the film.
The first three are sung by characters within the diegesis and reflect their own
characters; this fourth song is heard as a disembodied voice commenting on the action
on the screen. After Bathsheba has opened the coffin and discovered that Fanny is not
alone in the coffin, Frank enters the room. ‘Who is it?’ he asks. He looks down, sees
Fanny and the child and leans to kiss her. Bathsheba protests, ‘Kiss me…I’m your
wife!’ He responds, ‘In the sight of heaven you are my very wife, my darling Fan.’
Bathsheba reiterates, ‘I’m your wife!’ Troy, continuing to gaze into the coffin says,
‘I’m not morally yours. This woman is more to me than you ever were, or are, or
could be.’ This is too much for Bathsheba, who runs out of the house and wakes up
next morning in the wood.

This evocation of a moral universe which overrules the validity of human law
reveals once more the melodramatic imagination which underpins the tale. As the
camera draws back from a closeup of Fanny’s tombstone, ‘erected by Frank Troy’, we
see him planting flowers on her grave. It is raining. The beautifully clear voice of Isla
Cameron begins to sing *The Bold Grenadier* as a montage of images of the sad and
mournful Everdene Farm at Weatherbury reveals that Gabriel cannot return within
and the women all look out. As he walks away from the farm, Cameron sings the
Grenadier’s reason for not marrying the ‘fair maid’: ‘I’ve got a wife at home in my
own country – Two wives and the army’s too many for me.’ Frank has already
revealed that he has a moral wife and a legal wife and that as he mourns the moral
wife he cannot stay with the legal one. As Cameron repeats the first verse, we see
Frank walk down to a beach, undress and swim out to sea. We lose sight of him and the camera returns to the beach to a shot of his clothes in a pile and his footsteps into the sea. The song has revealed his emotional state – ‘two wives and the army’s too many for me’ – and, we assume, he has gone out to end it all. The significance of music in this film is a new technique for Schlesinger. The songs are not simply ornamentation, but a commentary on the film. He will use this technique to even greater effect in his next two films as his style becomes established.

The final sequence of the film, in which the narrative is neatly sewn up, appears to follow the novel faithfully. However there are several significant elements which need to be addressed. The first is the fate of Farmer Boldwood. For some reason, Hardy considered the execution of Boldwood for the murder of Troy to be too harsh. He has the sentence commuted to life in an asylum for the insane. This compromise is based on Boldwood’s unstable mental state throughout the novel. However in the film Boldwood, especially as played by Peter Finch, does not reveal a constant state of mental unbalance. We learn early on that the women of the district consider that ‘he has no passionate parts’ as he shows no interest in women at all; he is ‘married to the farm’. It is not until the climactic scene at the Christmas party that Boldwood appears to lose control. Until then he has been seen as a man who is steady in his work, methodical in his courtship of Bathsheba and not taken to emotional outbursts, unlike Troy. His violent act is more of a shock in the film and so is intended to be unexpected. As a result his end comes close to tragedy in that his one spontaneous action in the film leads to death for two of Bathsheba’s suitors.

As we have seen with Schlesinger, nothing is given directly. We do not see a judge delivering sentence. Instead we see the stoic Boldwood in his cell and the gallows being erected outside. The link is obvious; nothing more needs to be said.

Schlesinger’s understatement in such scenes has been a cause for criticism. For example Neil Sinyard berates him for not providing dialogue in the scene where Troy courts Bathsheba at Weymouth. ‘The sound of the sea’, he writes, ‘drowns out a crucial conversation between Bathsheba and Troy at Weymouth for no discernible reason, other than an inability on screenwriter Frederic Raphael’s part to imagine what they might be saying to each other.’ Dialogue in this scene would have been superfluous. Schlesinger and Raphael trust their audience enough to understand what

is taking place between the two characters. As with Boldwood’s final scene it is better left to the audience’s imagination than to didactically direct their thoughts.

The final scene of the film is another example of Schlesinger’s subtlety getting the better of those viewers not attuned to his understatement. As this is a romance it is only fitting that Bathsheba and Oak marry in the final sequence. However, Schlesinger chooses to add a coda to the film in which the happy ending is subverted by a single image. We see Bathsheba and Oak seated in their sitting room. The scene is an exact reproduction of Oak’s description at the beginning of the film, in his statement: ‘Every time I look up, there you shall be, and every time you look up, there I shall be.’ We have heard him reiterate this statement at the beginning of the wedding sequence. In other words they shall live together in a hermetic relationship with nothing to intrude. However after a moment the camera begins a slow pan as we hear the jingle of a clock. It is the elaborate mantel clock which Troy had given to Bathsheba as a wedding present. The clock face is in a tower at the back of a town scene. A train puffs across a bridge in the centre and on the left at the top of castle turret is a small soldier in redcoat blowing a bugle. This is the scene which was cut from American prints, and its significance is still easily missed as can be seen by Keith Wilson’s opinion of its ‘relative dispensability.’ He considers that it ‘makes no contribution…to an understanding of what makes the characters act as they do.’

I interpret the presence of the clock to mean that the past, which we have just seen, is still present. Its little soldier recalls Frank Troy and, the remembrance of Frank inevitably recalls Boldwood. The married couple are present, but the past is also present. The camera draws in to a closeup of the soldier to the exclusion of all other elements. Frank may be dead, but he is ever present, and it was Frank who said in bitterness that ‘all romances end at marriage.’ The end of the film is, on the surface, artificially happy, but Schlesinger is aware, as he will reveal in his next two films that the past is ever present and cannot be denied.

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In this chapter I have maintained a focus on the central years of 1960s. The period was dominated by the Swinging London phenomenon as the British New Wave films were dominated by Northern realism. The films made during these years, 1964 to

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1967, reveal a certain level of experimentation with form but still adhere to primarily realist concepts of film narrative. The narratives may be playful in their use of the medium but they are concerned with the dilemmas of young people in coping with a new society in which moral values have begun to float. Although we have seen some attempts to develop a more complex film language in the way that the French and Italian cinemas had done in the preceding years, it is apparent that there is still a certain hesitancy to break with the Griersonian dictates of social realism which had been so successfully exploited by the films of the British new wave. Much of the hesitancy can be attributed to critical disdain for British attempts at auteurist flourishes. Examples of this disdain were seen in the reactions to the film directed by Joseph Losey and Richard Lester. The emphasis on directors in this period reveals that the films of the metropolitan cinema in the mid 1960s bid fair to claim the title of ‘new wave’ for themselves.

As *Billy Liar* had revealed a reaction against northern realism, the withdrawal from the contemporary and retreat into historical subjects reveals a dissatisfaction with the new society and also a desire to penetrate the objective gaze with a new subjective reality, one in which linear time is revealed to be an illusion, in cinema at least.

In the films directed by John Schlesinger in these years we see the beginnings of the end of Griersonian dominance. With *Darling* Schlesinger successfully broke from strict realism. He often has the image and sound at odds with each other in order to reveal the tension between Diana’s self deceit and the reality of her actions. The compromise taken by the film’s makers in not having Diana suicide as her real life model had done may be read either as a betrayal of realist principles or it may be read as an acknowledgement of the unreality of the character’s own self-perception. It is significant that the film makers do not impose their own moral judgement on the character. This is in itself a major break from the moralist nature of old style social realism.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd* the retreat from the present is used as a means to question the values of such as Diana by contrasting her with the nineteenth century heroine Bathsheba Everdene. Since both characters are played by the same actress the dialectical element of the argument is made apparent. The film uses the Hardyesque melodrama to highlight this opposition between the two characters, but also draws attention to the lack of choice available to Diana as compared to Bathsheba. That this was not generally noted at the time simply reveals, once again, the habitual prejudice
expressed against any British-based film maker who aspired to work in similar fashion to his European counterparts. The film can now be seen as an experiment in classical narrative using new forms of cinematic language. The editing and use of music in the film both display new forms, even if the plot does not.

Both films retain a linear narrative form and neither successfully enters the psyche of the central character. For the new film language to become completely successful two things were necessary: a complete break with Griersonian documentary time and the engagement of the director’s gaze with the internal world of characters he portrays.
CHAPTER FOUR

The New Cinema is Established

i. Changing Time(s)

“I do think this is a beginning of a new upsurge in British films,” he wrote in his diary, but added, with considerable foresight, that there was a limit to social realism: “We have not yet started in any way to explore the techniques used by Antonioni, Resnais, Godard and Truffaut.”

John Schlesinger in 1962.1

Schlesinger, it seems, was aware from his first film that the language of cinema had been changing since the war and was now not limited to that style of realism which had dominated British cinema since the advent of sound. His own films had been very much in the traditional British style of Griersonian documentary as we have seen. However, from Billy Liar on he began to experiment with form, if not adventurously, then at least intelligently. In the final two films in this study we will find an exploration of form in relation to content that has hitherto not been a distinctive element of Schlesinger’s films. The techniques he refers to were a new way of expression, a new language, which was beginning to be used by film makers.

Gilles Deleuze in his two volumes entitled Cinema 1 and Cinema 2 has identified a change which is the basis of this new language. Volume one is subtitled The Movement-Image and Volume two is subtitled The Time-Image. In these two books he establishes a theory that the change from classical cinema to modern cinema, a change he locates as being post-world War II, is based on a change of perception of the world. He derives this theory from the writings of Henri Bergson. In this section, I will use Deleuze’s theory to examine the change that was initiated by the film makers

Schlesinger refers to, and others, and how this influenced film making in Britain and the US during the 1960s. My argument is that what started as an experiment in new expression became part of the vernacular of film by the end of the decade. As a result Schlesinger in *Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, uses the time-image as a basic tool of film. He is not experimenting, but speaking in a mature language available to all film makers by this time. We will begin with a brief overview of Bergson’s theories as used by Deleuze.

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was a French philosopher who wrote on matters concerning memory, time and the relations between the two. His primary concern was that in any perception of the present the past impinged through memory. ‘There is no perception,’ he wrote in *Matter and Memory*, ‘which is not full of memories.’² His argument was that in the length of time it took to perceive any phenomenon, no matter how brief, there is a duration long enough to invoke memory in the continuation of the perception: ‘However brief we suppose any perception to be, it always occupies a certain duration, and involves consequently an effort of memory which prolongs one into another a plurality of moments.’³ Thus we live, not in the present, which is always changing, but in a past which is continually being revised as we live. It is this continuous revision which is the activity of memory in constructing a conscious personality:

‘(If) there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present, and may even take its place. For if they have survived it is with a view to utility; at every moment they complete our present experience, enriching it with experience already acquired; and, as the latter is ever increasing, it must end by covering up and submerging the former.’⁴

However memory differs from direct perception not in quantity but in quality in that it is the re-presentation of the absent. In a subsequent work, *Time and Free Will*, Bergson contemplates the question of the difference in quality between our direct perception of the physically present (present tense) and our recalled perception of the physically absent (past tense). He considers that this is not a matter of degree but of

³Ibid., p.25.
⁴Ibid., p.70.
quality. A memory is not equal to but less intense than a present phenomenon, it has a different quality. What is present we perceive in space, what is past we perceive in time: ‘(We) distinguish two kinds of quantity, the one intensive, which admits only of a "more or less," the other extensive, which lends itself to measurement.’

Although Bergson never directly wrote about the concept of time in film, his basic concepts were taken up by Gilles Deleuze in his writing. We can see at once that there is one difficulty when contemplating time in film. Images of both the present and the past are physically present in the same qualitative manner on the screen. Where Bergson argues that there is a difference in quality between memory and the physically present, there is no such difference between a shot which is of a diegetic present, and one which is a flashback to another time. How the two are differentiated in order to convey the difference in quality is what makes the difference between what Deleuze calls the ‘action-image’ and what he calls the ‘time-image’.

The change from the classical system to the modern cinema post-World War II, according to Deleuze, is a change from a cinema based on action to a cinema based on seeing. Rather than the action being the basis of the film it is the perception of the image which is the focus of the film’s creation. In other words the film is not based on the transcription of words into images, but is the capture of a moment and the replaying of the moment. Classical cinema took its cues from the naturalist aesthetic of the novel and, more particularly, the play. Hence when a character, as on the stage, describes a memory the cinema, in its classical form, dissolves from the words into a visual recreation of the description; this is an action described.

In modern cinema, such a flashback is still possible, but another, more usual form is the recollection-image, in which a character’s memory is triggered by something and a memory is recalled; this memory is then inserted into the narrative. When the memory concludes the film then returns to the character. This is not a narrative device because it does not cause a change in the direction of the narrative, but it does add to the viewer’s knowledge of the psychology of the character.

What is happening in such a sequence is that the linear narrative is interrupted while the camera reveals the image that is being prompted as a memory. As we saw with Bergson, such images are the involuntary memories which return from the past to the present to help us shape a meaning of the unfolding narrative of the present. When the sequence returns to the present, there has been no ellipse of time. If we deleted the recollection-image the two shots which surround it would be continuous. This is not the same with a flashback. In a flashback the linear time between the framing shots has elapsed by the amount of time it has taken to narrate the past events. According to Deleuze this difference is the case because the past is not past. As he writes: ‘Bergson’s major theses on time are as follows: the past coexists with the present that it has been; the past is preserved in itself, as past in general (non-chronological); at each moment time splits itself into present and past, present that passes and past which is preserved.’

The major problem with this new form of cinematic time is that time, in the Bergsonian sense, is non-linear while time, in the cinematic sense, is rigorously linear. In the above example of the recollection-image, the elapsed time in the film is the same as the elapsed time in the memory-shot. However in the diegesis, as we noted, no time has elapsed. This was, in fact not a new idea in post-war period but the resuscitation of a method that had been used in poetic, non-narrative cinema before the war. A prime example is in Jean Cocteau’s 1930 film Le sang d’un poète (The Blood of a Poet). After a short prologue in which the author declares that this will be ‘a realistic documentary of unrealistic events’, we see a shot of a very tall, brick chimney. It begins to collapse, but instantly there is a cut to other events. Some fifty minutes late, after a series of increasingly surreal images, the film returns to the collapsing chimney at exactly the moment it left it. The implication is that all the ‘thoughts’ we have just seen have taken no more time to think than the gap between the last frame of the chimney in the opening shot and the first frame of the chimney in the final shot. Cocteau’s film was not a narrative film, and such a shot is not seen again, to my knowledge, and certainly not in a narrative film, until the advent of the films of Alain Resnais in the late 1950s.

Deleuze claims that Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941) is the first film in which a direct time-image appears, but I think he is incorrect in this assessment. He writes that

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8 Ibid., p.80.
‘each witness jumps into the past in general and at once installs himself in one or another coexisting region.’ However this is not how the film functions. There are two narrative strands to the film. In the first strand, a reporter, in the wake of the death of Kane (Orson Welles), seeks to find the meaning of his last word: ‘Rosebud.’ In order to do so he undertakes an investigation by seeking out witnesses who can provide first-hand testimony and, perhaps, reveal the meaning of ‘rosebud’. Each of these interviews dissolves into an extended portrayal of part of Kane’s life. These portrayals make up the second narrative strand of the film. In essence, the originality of the film lies in the method in which the editor, Robert Wise, presumably under Welles’ direction, intertwines the two strands. However these representations of Kane’s life are not in themselves memories.

The first episode comes from the diary of Walter Thatcher (George Coulouris). We see the written words on the screen: ‘I first encountered Mr. Kane in 1871’ and the scene dissolves into a snowy landscape with a boy and a sled. This technique was by no means new; in fact it was a standard means of introducing a literary adaptation. Producer David O. Selznick was particularly fond of the device and used it in his two Dickens adaptations, David Copperfield (George Cukor, 1935) and A Tale of Two Cities (Jack Conway, 1935). This device reveals that the events portrayed are in fact written and the cinema has turned prose narrative into audiovisual representation. It is not a direct portrayal of a memory, but an interpretation of the prose.

The four subsequent episodes are all spoken narratives. Each one follows on from the previous episode to form a continuous, largely linear chronology of Kane’s life. Episode one (Thatcher) is Kane’s early life; episode two (Bernstein: Everett Sloane) details the establishment of the newspaper empire; episode three (Leland: Joseph Cotten) reveals the course of Kane’s two marriages and the political scandal that ends marriage one to Emily (Ruth Warrick) and begins marriage two to Susan (Dorothy Comingore); episode four is Susan’s narrative of her marriage to Kane, and episode five is Raymond (Paul Stewart) the major domo’s story of Kane’s life after Susan’s departure. The five episodes only rarely overlap in time. Bernstein, at the end of his narrative jumps forward to 1929 and the winding up of the newspapers after the Wall St. Crash. Leland’s tale ends after Susan’s disastrous opera début and Susan begins prior to the opera, but soon overtakes and passes the end of Leland’s narrative. The

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9 Ibid., p.102
link between the end of Susan’s narrative and the beginning of Raymond’s is classic continuity editing. Susan walks out the door of Xanadu into a blackout signifying the last she saw of Kane, Raymond’s begins with Susan walking along the terrace immediately after the end of that scene.

If one were brave enough to re-edit the film one could take all the biographical episodes and link them together in the first half and simply place the investigation in the second half. In other words removing the structure of the reporter and the interviews does not remove the meaning from the biography. These scenes are not memory they are narrative. In fact in Leland’s section there are at least two scenes of which Leland can have no direct memory; one in which the rest of the staff discuss his situation when he is not in the room, the other when Kane and Bernstein have a discussion over his unconscious body. These are not his own memories and cannot be seen as direct-time images.

The major reason why the flashbacks are not recollection-images is that when we return to the diegetic present after the flashback we are intuitively aware that time has passed, sufficient time for the tale to be told. If the flashback were omitted, an ellipsis between the before and after shots would be needed to indicate that time has passed. This is unlike the example I described above of a recollection shot.

It is Alain Resnais who begins to assert film as memory, beginning with the short films Night & Fog(1955) and Toute la mémoire du monde(1956), and developing the method in his early features Hiroshima mon amour(1959) and L’année dernière à Marienbad (1960). An example is an early sequence in Hiroshima mon amour. At approximately nineteen minutes into the film there is a brief shot inserted. We see a shot of ‘him’ (Eiji Okada) lying prone on the bed; this is followed by a reverse angle shot of ‘her’ (Emmanuelle Riva) looking at him. Her eyes cloud and there is a cut to close-up of a bloodied hand; the camera pans up to the body at the end of the arm and her lying on top of the dead soldier, kissing him; then a cut back to her face. The insert lasts four seconds. It is a momentary memory recalled involuntarily by the sight of him lying asleep. It is not a flashback in that the clip could be omitted and the diegetic time would be continuous. What we see is her memory, triggered by the sight of his body, the past intruding into the present to complete the meaning of the moment.

Again at approx. thirty-nine minutes she states ‘Non, il n’était pas français.’ and again there is an involuntary memory recall. We see her memories; they, as Bergson
states, different in quality from actuality. However, as film is linear, and we experience it in the present then we must intellectually establish the difference between the two times.

Finally, in the last 15 minutes of the film, we are given an alternative style of recollection-image. This is in the form of an interior monologue as she wanders the streets of Hiroshima alone. Things she sees prompt memories; we see the memories as she sees them. What we see are moments of time retrieved by her. They are not ‘real’, in a Bazinian sense; they are Bergsonian moments of time.

In *Hiroshima mon amour* the time-images are of recalled events from the character’s prior life. In *L’année dernière à Marienbad*, Resnais, with his script-writer Alain Robbe-Grillet, adds a new layer with the imagined image. In the latter film the protagonist describes events, which we see, but the woman denies the events. Hence we are never certain that what we see on the screen is an actuality or an imaginary image. All we know is that the images derive from the mind of one of the characters in the film, but we never know if they can be described as ‘real’. As a result we cannot assume a cause and effect relationship between one image and the next. As Deleuze describes it: ‘in Resnais’ cinema: events do not just succeed each other or simply follow chronological course; they are constantly being rearranged according to whether they belong to a particular sheet of past, a continuum of age, all of which coexist.’

Such formal innovation may appear to many to have been the province of French cinema but there were soon signs of formal innovation in Britain as well. As we have seen, social realism, as typified by the New Wave/Kitchen Sink dramas set in the North, were the most visible signs of innovation in subject matter, but other films showed a desire to break away from the formal conventions of documentary realism. An early example was Jack Clayton’s film *The Innocents* (1961). As Clayton’s *Room at the Top* had found fame as a social realist film, it was perhaps surprising that this next film was a supernatural story from a novella by Henry James and under the aegis of Twentieth Century Fox. However Clayton’s treatment of the ghostly elements of the film was remarkable. There are two ghosts in the film, Peter Quint (Peter Wyngarde) and Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop). They are seen by the governess, Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr), but we are never sure that they are seen by anyone else.

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10 Ibid., p.115.
Clayton photographs the ghosts in the same way as the other characters in the film. In other words they are not transparent, superimposed images. What we see is possibly real, or possibly the visions of Miss Giddens’ mind. As with the imagined images of *Marienbad*, the images of this film can never be verified. The film does not provide a single reading of its images, but leaves it to the viewer to decide on the meaning of the images presented.

Clayton’s next film is doubly significant. Not only does he continue to use formal innovation but the screenplay of *The Pumpkin Eater*, as I have previously noted, was by Harold Pinter, and time was not what it had been. As we saw in the chapter on Swinging London, this film was recognised as innovative, if not appreciated for the fact. In that chapter we briefly looked at the other films with screenplays by Pinter, but which were directed by Joseph Losey. The second of those films, *Accident*, is of interest for the way it too dissolves time. The framing story of the film is an accident in which an Oxford student, William (Michael York), is killed. His girlfriend, Anna (Jacqueline Sassard), is pulled from the wreckage by their Oxford tutor Stephen (Dirk Bogarde). Some ten minutes into the film Anna is lying on a bed, semi-conscious, in Stephen’s house. The police have been and gone, and Stephen is gazing at Anna as he fingers the handle of a drawer beside his head. There is a cut to a close-up of William and then Stephen’s memories, prompted by the accident, begin. Unlike the four second memory image in *Hiroshima*, this memory lasts some seventy minutes. However at the end of the memory we return to Stephen a moment after we last saw him, standing by the chest of drawers, gazing at Anna.

The reason this remains a memory shot, as in *Hiroshima*, and not simply a narrative flashback as in *Citizen Kane*, is that Losey never relapses into classical continuity editing. The sequences do not flow one from the other, they are glimpses of events from the past. We can never be sure of the chronological relationship of one to another until a character within the memory refers to other events. In fact at one stage, Losey goes so far as to dissociate sound and image. In a scene in which Stephen visits Francesca (Delphine Seyrig), an old lover of his in London, we hear their conversation, and we see them together in her London home, but their lips do not move; the conversation is not what was said exactly, but his memories of the content of their conversation. Furthermore, Francesca’s lines are repeated, fragmented, as if Stephen were struggling to recall exactly what was said.
Another scene intertwines two separate events which are logically connected, and intertwined in Stephen’s’ memory. In one sequence he visits his pregnant wife, Rosalind (Vivien Merchant) who is staying with her parents; in the other sequence he visits a woman we have not seen before, but whom he calls Laura. We know from previous scenes that ‘Laura’ (Ann Firbank) is the wife of Charley (Stanley Baker) another don at Oxford. The two scenes are intercut, and it is not until the end of whole sequence, when Stephen tells Rosalind that he is going to call in on Laura, that we know the chronology of these two memories. They are intertwined because both scenes have to do with marital infidelity and the student Anna. Stephen is recalling both moments, not separately, but simultaneously. In his own mind they would be what Deleuze calls ‘crystalline’ memories, reflections of each other; but film, being linear must show them sequentially.\textsuperscript{11} If they were shown literally crystalline they would be unintelligible to the viewer. As noted in Colin Gardner’s monograph on Losey, Harold Pinter became intrigued by this and stated that he came to be ‘conscious of a kind of ever-present quality in life...I certainly feel more and more that the past is not past, that it never was past. It’s present.’ Gardner concludes: ‘By destroying linear, causal time and replacing it with a kaleidoscopic, crystalline duration, Pinter ensures that past, present and future exists as a single, indivisible reality.’\textsuperscript{12}

In the final film in this section such a single indivisible reality is brought forth in one of the most complex non-linear narratives of the 1960s. The film in question, \textit{Petulia} (1968), is also one of the most significant films of the latter part of the decade in that it signals the extension of those innovations which had begun in France and Italy and then, as we have seen, were taken up by the British. The film, at first glance, would appear to be impeccably British; it stars Julie Christie in the title role, is directed by Richard Lester, was photographed by Nicolas Roeg, and the music was composed by John Barry. These credits taken alone would lead one to assume a Swinging London film. As well as these leading technicians, the editor of the film was Anthony Gibbs who had edited such film as \textit{A Taste of Honey}, \textit{Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner}, \textit{Tom Jones} and \textit{The Knack}. However the film in question is set in San Francisco, and was a Warner Bros. release.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.68.
The film’s narrative, if it were told in linear fashion, is nothing more that a triangular love story in which a rather ‘straight’ doctor becomes enchanted with an unconventional young woman who is married to a wealthy naval architect. However it is not a linear narrative and the events of the film are broken up in such a way that the viewer must actively participate in the narrative as the film proceeds.

That this was an innovation in American cinema is revealed by the very careful trailer that Warner Bros. issued for the film. *Petulia* was branded ‘The Uncommon Movie’; in the trailer the voiceover announces ‘its name is Petulia’ not *her* name. The film itself is the centre of interest, not the characters in it. ‘It starts in the middle’ we are told, ‘moves toward its end and its beginning at the same time.’ The trailer is not an introduction to the characters and their narrative, but a brief primer on how to watch the film. This is necessitated by the fact that it is not linear and indeed does not rely simply on flashbacks. Anthony Gibbs says in an interview that as he was contemplating the structure of the film he considered that just using flashbacks would not create sufficient interest. He claims to have coined the term ‘flash-forward’ to describe what he wanted to do. He does not claim to be the first to use such a device, but he had not previously seen it used when he was working on the film.

The centre of the narrative, and the climax of the film in classical terms, is the beating of Petulia by her husband David (Richard Chamberlain). We never see this event. The film begins with a shot of an ambulance, its lights blinking, coming towards us through a tunnel. We are then, suddenly, in the midst of a charity ball at the Fairmont Hotel. We recognise the main actors Christie, Chamberlain, George C. Scott and Joseph Cotten among the crowd. The initial shot of the ambulance does not seem to have any logical connection to the following shot. Nothing in the scene at the ball refers back to the ambulance. There is never any attempt to coherently narrate the film, no formal scenes of dialogue in which the characters and their relationships are identified. We must simply take in each scene and slowly sort the chronology as the film proceeds.

Unlike the films previously discussed in this chapter, there is no internal character whose view is being presented. We are not seeing the recollections of a single character within the diegesis. What we are seeing are the fragmentary recollections of

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13 The film was based on a novel, *Me and the Arch Kook Petulia* by John Haase.
14 Gibbs is interviewed in the short feature *The Uncommon Making of Petulia* on the 2006 Warner Bros. DVD release of the film.
the entire narrative by a single consciousness which is outside the diegesis. For example, Scott’s character, Archie, a doctor, is seen at different times with his friend and colleague Barney (Arthur Hill). Every time Barney refers to his wife Wilma (Kathleen Widdoes) we see her in a brief flash. This flash could be Archie’s memory-image, or equally Barney’s memory-image; however, in the context of the film it appears to be neither. The film is its own consciousness; it reaches back, forth and even sideways for simultaneous events. The camera (or more accurately the director) sees all the events of the narrative simultaneously and chooses to show different scenes as they are prompted by its (his) memory of those events.

In Bergson’s terms, an event will trigger a memory of something connected to it. However in this case the memory can be forward-looking as well as backward-looking because the consciousness concerned has the entire narrative in its (his) memory. For the viewer the meaning of a scene will only become apparent when he is in the same situation as the film-consciousness, once he has seen the entire film. This also means that on a subsequent viewing the film will have changed in quality; there will be added meaning to scenes which were unintelligible the first time. The experience of the film will be irrevocably changed. The viewer will be in the same position as the camera/director. So it is that, when we next see the film, the interpretation has changed. The image is exactly the same but our memory is now part of the film.

What had been happening in the progress of cinematic innovation in the 1960s was a break from film as naturalist drama – heirs to Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, and the change to film as internal narrative - heirs to Proust, Joyce and the other moderns. Modernist literature in the early part of the twentieth century broke away from literal storytelling to focus on the internal workings of the human mind. Joyce chose a stream-of-consciousness style in which everything a character perceived was given in unmediated detail; Proust, on the other hand, was influenced by Bergson and attempted to reveal how memory, time past, was ever present, and could be regained. It is interesting that one practitioner of such methods, John dos Passos, used the metaphor of the camera in the stream-of-consciousness sections of his U.S.A trilogy. He called these sections ‘The Camera Eye’. As well Christopher Isherwood begins his novel Goodbye to Berlin with the line ‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking’. For the modernist writer the camera is a passive
instrument, but for the director of the new cinema, recording and re-presenting is an entirely active pursuit.

New cinema narrative is necessarily linear, as we have seen, but inserted in the narrative are images of other times, not the present of the accumulating narrative. Film is all memory in that it is a record of events which are past, but these can be straight flashback, in which narrative is given in the past historic - a structure which would be familiar to anyone who has read Homer’s *Iliad*. This is a standard film noir technique: a film starts in a suspenseful situation and then retreats to the beginning of a sequence of events which then leads up to the introductory scene. The narrative is not *what* will happen but *how* will we arrive at the beginning; a mode most infamously seen in *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950). This is not the way memory functions in the new cinema.

In the new cinema there is another kind of image which is Deleuze’s time-image. This is “internal vision”; it may be memory, fantasy or a character’s interpretation of an event. In *Hiroshima* we see, not flashbacks, but memories. In *Marienbad*: unreliable memories: in *Billy Liar* wish fantasies but also interpretations drawn from memory of films, not his own life. Only a social realist film such as *A Kind of Loving* considers that realism requires linear time. As all film is memory, ‘realism’ is not the same as recorded actualities: we recall a memory to add to the present. However an event may inadvertently recall something as in Proust’s madeleine, or the woman’s memories in *Hiroshima*. Instead of a character remembering in words the cineaste shows the memory image. It may, in fact probably will, be incoherent to the viewer, who is after all not the psyche remembering; it is the image interior to the character. Hence the time-image is interior to a person other than the viewer, for whom it is still external.

What is most significant about all this is that the director, rather than effacing himself from the film allows the viewer to be aware of his presence. He is the overriding consciousness which chooses the images and their sequence. The director is no longer self-effacing but a presence within the film. As we shall see in Schlesinger’s next two films, the director is not an invisible hand, but an active presence in the world he has created.
**ii. Midnight Cowboy**

John Schlesinger’s fifth feature film marks a new stage in his career. It was his first film that was not produced by Joseph Janni, it was his first American-based film, and it was also the first film in which he could fairly be called the overriding conceptual artist of the piece: the author of the film. It is also his first film in which form is as adventurous as content. Although the film is usually written about in terms of its relevance in the history of gayness, or queerness in film, it is seldom discussed in relation to the experiments of form which carry the gay content. Foster Hirsch considers that it is one of the films that show how ‘Hollywood discovered the underground’ in 1969. As well as this film he names *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper), *Alice’s Restaurant* (Arthur Penn), and *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler), all of which were released in that year and distributed by major studios: Columbia, United Artists and Paramount respectively. As I noted in the previous chapter, *Midnight Cowboy* was originally intended to follow *Darling*. If the delay in financing had not occurred and the film had gone into production at that time it would have appeared in 1967, the same year as *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols) and *Bonnie Clyde* (Arthur Penn). In fact it is one of the films which epitomises the advent of the ‘new Hollywood.’ As Peter Biskind states these films signalled the beginning of ‘a directors decade.’ According to him this ‘first wave’ was not so much the peak of the 1960s as the vanguard of the 1970s. In this context the film would be of importance for its presence as part of the new Hollywood, and for Hirsch it is important for its then new content. Hirsch’s essay begins with this historical context, but it then continues as an analysis of the narrative content. In both instances the analysis, historical or ideological, is divorced from the formal features that convey it.

For my purposes the film is important for the way it incorporates the new forms of time image and such underground experimentation as seen in the works of Kenneth Anger and Andy Warhol. The film needs to be considered, not just for its then-controversial subject matter, but also as one of those films which changed the language of the mainstream by normalising what had hitherto been considered ‘art’ language in film: the language of memory, imagination and dreams.

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The novel *Midnight Cowboy* was the second published novel by author James Leo Herlihy. His first novel, *All Fall Down*, was published in 1960 and adapted to the screen in 1962. That film had been produced by John Houseman for MGM, directed by John Frankenheimer with a screenplay by William Inge. The central character, one Berry-Berry Willart, a drifter with a serious case of existential angst, was played by Warren Beatty. The film qualified as a ‘prestige’ production for the studio and managed to be nominated for the *Palme d’Or* at Cannes in 1962. However, the subject matter of *Midnight Cowboy*, published in 1965, was such that the studios were loath to touch it. Berry-Berry may have been a ne’er-do-well, but at least he was a heterosexual ne’er-do-well. Joe Buck, the eponymous protagonist of *Midnight Cowboy*, is a hustler, a male sexworker. He travels from a small town in Texas to New York because he believes that the women of New York are longing to be bedded by a ‘stud’ such as himself. He is, in fact, the latest in a long line of naïve young men to leave the country for the city to seek his fortune, but to find only ruin.

The novel was remarkable because it was one of a group that was published around the same time that acknowledged the existence of the male sexworker, and that his primary client group was not female, but male. The most significant novel on the theme at this time is *City of Night* by John Rechy, published in 1963. This latter work is a first person narrative and describes in some detail the life of a hustler as he travels from New York to the West Coast to New Orleans.

United Artists, the company which eventually funded *Midnight Cowboy*, had already considered the novel and rejected it. Janni was not enthusiastic because he did not consider the American location advisable. He was willing to produce the film if the location were changed. He thought that rather than follow the journey of Joe Buck from Texas to New York, they could adapt the story to a journey from Scotland to London. Schlesinger was adamant that the film be an American story, and so he looked for another producer.

Jerome Hellman had previously produced two films: *The World of Henry Orient* (George Roy Hill, 1964), which was Peter Sellers’ first film actually made in the United States and *A Fine Madness* (Irvin Kershner, 1966) with Sean Connery in an

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early non-Bond leading role. He had already approached Schlesinger after the success of *Darling* and was willing to produce anything Schlesinger wanted to make. However, neither his previous record as a producer, nor Schlesinger’s as a director, was sufficient to convince any studio to back the film. When eventually United Artists agreed to fund the film it was on condition that Hellman and Schlesinger, as well as the screenwriter Waldo Salt, take a reduced fee in exchange for a percentage of the profits. As both men were determined to see the film made they agreed to the risk. There is a double irony to these events: not only did the contract make all three men wealthy, but as effective majority investors in the film (the three men’s share was 60%) they had much more control over the final form of the film. Although the film was released by United Artists it was ‘A Jerome Hellman-John Schlesinger Production’. This was the first time that Schlesinger had so much control over a film.

The narrative of *Midnight Cowboy* concerns the travels of a young man named Joe Buck (Jon Voight). He is a Texan who travels to New York in the belief that he can make a living as a hustler because of all the rich, unsatisfied women there. In New York he continually fails in his aims and the only sustained relationship he develops is with a down-and–out type from the Bronx named Enrico Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman) whom everyone on the streets refers to as “Ratso”.

Robert L. Fiore claims that this is a picaresque tale. A picaresque narrative is ‘one which portrays the *picaro* as a person who is isolated socially and morally and who can neither join nor reject his fellow man completely. His only sustained communication is with other unfortunate travellers.’ This seems an accurate description of the film’s content, but as Fiore himself notes the film is not a first person narrative and Joe Buck is not in any way the narrator of the film. Nor do our two characters have a cynical view of the society in which they operate. Picaresque is an accurate description of *City of Night*, but not of *Midnight Cowboy*.

It would be more accurate to consider the tale of Joe Buck as being generically descended from the Bildungsroman of German tradition. According to one source a definition of such a narrative is: ‘The folklore tale of the dunce who goes out into the

21 Ibid., pp.297-98.
23 Ibid., p.270.
world seeking adventure and learns wisdom the hard way.'

Joe travels to a New York of his imagination, and intends to fulfil his dream there based on what he thinks he knows. The events of the film show how the real New York gives him the knowledge of experience, and how it continually recalls his past. The journey of Joe Buck is a journey to self-knowledge. Unlike the pícaro Joe is unaware; he is not like the first person narrator of City of Night whose awareness of his intent makes him a true pícaro.

Both Joe and Ratso believe that they will eventually succeed in their goals. These goals are visualised by wall posters. For Joe his goal can be seen in a poster for the film Hud (Martin Ritt, 1962) in which the eponymous character of ‘Hud’ is played by Paul Newman. We see the poster for the film as Joe unpacks his bag in his hotel room in New York. It hangs on the wall of this room along with a rodeo poster and a pinup of a semi naked woman. Ratso’s ambition is to go to Florida and eat coconuts and drink orange juice as depicted in the poster he has hanging in his decrepit apartment. In Joe’s case it would seem that he has an ideal of the person he wants to be, but no idea of how to become that person. In the novel he simply lives in the moment, but in the film, by the use of memory images we see that his present is constantly invaded by his past. ‘Hud’ is the life he imagines as his own, but his past continually intervenes. Ratso knows his own life, but imagines an elsewhere in which he can change his life.

The film begins with a blank screen. The camera slowly pulls out as the sound of horses’ hooves, cowboy whoops and gunfire, the sounds of a western, can be heard on the soundtrack. The blank screen is literally a blank screen at a drive-in: ‘The Big Tex Drive-In’. At the base of the screen a boy can be seen riding a rocking horse in the playground at the foot of the screen. The ‘western’ sounds fade to be replaced by the creak of the rocking horse as the boy rides it, then a voice is heard singing ‘whoopi-ti-yi-ooh, get along little doggie’. There is a cut to a close-up of a hand picking up a cake of soap from the floor of a shower, then another cut to the face of a handsome young man who is singing the cowboy song. A woman’s voice is heard calling ‘where’s that Joe Buck?’ There is a cut to an African American man washing dishes, he turns to the camera and repeats the question. Then the image cuts back to Joe Buck who is placing a Stetson hat on his head. Another cut reveals the woman we have

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heard. This time she adds to the question ‘look at this crap’. She is peering through a shelf loaded with dirty dishes. What we, the audience, are seeing is a classically cut shot/reverse shot sequence of a conversation between Joe, as he is getting dressed in his cowboy outfit and his co-workers at the diner, where he is apparently late for work. That this is an impossible conversation makes us immediately question if the co-workers are reality, or Joe’s imagination. It would appear that Joe, as he is dressing, is telling himself what is happening at that very moment at the diner, and we are seeing his imaginings. In the final shot of this pre-credits sequence Joe talks to his reflection in the mirror, then turns to the camera and addresses it directly: ‘You know what you can do with them dishes’, he says. He is not talking to the camera or the audience; he is talking to his boss at the diner. In this first minute and a half of film a style has been established. This is not a film in which a linear narrative will direct our attention. We must constantly take the information and interpret it for ourselves. We must be aware that we will see both the external world and also Joe’s internal world. We will also learn shortly that the film does not explain all its images. We must, on occasion re-evaluate previous images in the light of new information.

As Joe steps out of his room into the Texan sun a song swells up on the soundtrack and the opening credits begin. The song, Everybody’s Talkin’, became something of a hit, and brought its singer Harry Nilsson to a wider public than he had previously known. As in Schlesinger’s previous film Far From the Madding Crowd the song is a carrier of meaning within the context of the film. It is not simply a pop song on the soundtrack; it is, in true Brechtian style, a commentary on the film.²⁵ The lyric is worth quoting in full:

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Everybody's talking at me
I don't hear a word they're saying
Only the echoes of my mind

People stopping staring
I can't see their faces
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²⁵ Bertolt Brecht formed a theory of theatre based on his own practice. A succinct summary of his theory is contained in the essay ‘A Short Organum for the theatre’, which is contained in Brecht, Bertolt and Willett, John, Brecht on theatre; the development of an aesthetic, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. ‘alienation’ (192) is a device used to prompt the audience to evaluate the work in progress, rather than passively accept it. Music, including song, according to Brecht, ‘must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into unthinking slavery’(203).
Only the shadows of their eyes
I'm going where the sun keeps shining
Thru' the pouring rain
Going where the weather suits my clothes
Backing off of the North East wind
Sailing on a summer breeze
And skipping over the ocean like a stone.

As we progress through the film we will become aware that Joe constantly hears only the echoes of his mind as people’s talking and looking prompts unwanted memories to resurface in his mind, and on our screen. While the song is played the camera focuses on various parts of Joe’s body: his booted legs, his fringed jacket, his cowhide suitcase. This fragmentation of Joe into the various parts of the cowboy image is reminiscent of the way Kenneth Anger fetishises the leather, motorcycle rider in Scorpio Rising, his 1964 underground film in which music on the soundtrack comments on the imagery on the screen.

While Joe walks down the street and the song continues he passes a cinema which is closed; we see on the cinema marquee the disarrayed letters of the ‘last movie’: John Wayne in The Alamo (John Wayne, 1960). In a John Schlesinger film one needs to pay attention to the whole screen. We saw in A Kind of Loving that as Vic and Ingrid walked past a cinema, the film showing just happened to be Victim, a film which commented on the events taking place; here the film conjures up the mythical West of the John Wayne movie. Just as the little boy in opening scene imagined a whole Western movie by riding a rocking horse, so Joe imagines a Western persona by wearing western clothes. When he enters the diner the boss comments on the clothes: ‘What you doing in that getup?’ so we know this is not Joe’s usual outfit. He tells his co-workers that he is going up East to New York, and he leaves the diner.

Next he passes a shop, ‘Sally’s beauty salon’ which has boards over one window. As he looks in the window, we hear a woman’s voice saying ‘that’s real nice’ and see a woman (Sally?) seated in a chair as a boy (the one at the drive-in?) is rubbing her neck. This is an ‘echo of his mind.’ In the window we see a sign saying the shop is for rent. Sally is no longer there. It is safe to assume that the woman, whoever she was is dead. These images are echoes, recollection images. The Bergsonian past/present is shown in this moment in a truly crystalline way.
Joe continues on to the bus to New York. During the bus trip Joe has time to remember what it is he is leaving and imagine what he is going to. The first part of the trip triggers memories of his past. The first memory begins with a voice, the same voice as the woman in Sally’s Beauty Salon. This time she says ‘you look real nice’ and we see her and the boy. This time the boy is wearing a cowboy hat. We hear her tell him that she has left him movie money because ‘your Granma’s got herself a new beau’. The audio memories and the visual memories do not always cohere. As I noted in the previous section, a memory image doe not have to be synchronised; we see images and hear voices, but the effect is of a generalised memory, not a single narrative scene. In this way Schlesinger has managed to overcome the linear tyranny of film. he has overlapping images which are crystalline, but still intelligible.

Next, Joe sees a water tower out the window of the bus. There is writing on it. A sudden close-up reveals the writing: ‘Crazy Annie loves Joe Buck.’ We hear a young woman’s voice saying repeatedly: ‘you’re the only one Joe, the only one.’ Then we see her running through a field towards Joe. Next we see her walking down a street away from the camera. She glances back, a reverse shot reveals a gang of teen boys, including Joe, who are whistling and calling after her. We do not hear any dialogue attached to the scene, just Annie’s repeated protestations of love for Joe. Finally we see Joe and Annie making love. Once again audio memories and visual memories are separate.

The fourth memory begins with Granma Sally Buck singing a lullaby ‘Hush pretty baby’ as the bus passes a farmhouse; then we see two young women in tight slacks with the boy between them holding their hands. He has on a soldier’s hat and jacket. They lead him up to the verandah of Sally Buck’s house, which is similar to the farmhouse that has triggered this memory, and leave him with her. As Joe progresses forward, away from the past, the past comes with him. The sequences are not just ‘back-story’ fill-ins; they are representations of Joe’s fragmented memory. As involuntary memories strike his mind we see them too. We have learned, in this indirect manner that Joe was the unwanted child of a woman who left him with her mother. It appears from the military gear that this was during World War II. His grandmother raised him, indeed doted on him. We see that he often shared her bed, but she too appears to have had an active sex life, which she did nothing to hide from Joe. We see that sometimes Joe shared the bed with Granma’s beaux as well as Granma. Joe, as a teenager hung out with a gang of boys, but he also fell in love with
a local girl called Annie. However there are some disquieting shots in the Annie sequence of the boys chasing Annie over a sand dune. We have fragments, but no coherent narrative of Joe’s past. As Bergson taught us, we know that the past continues in the present, and that while Joe may distance himself from the places of these events he cannot distance himself from the events themselves; he carries them with him. Only new events can displace the old and it is now that he looks forward to these new events.

As the bus approaches New York, Joe picks up a local Talk Radio station on his ever-present, ever-on transistor radio. The topic is: ‘What is your ideal of a man?’ a woman’s voice says ‘Gary Cooper. And he’s dead.’ That Gary Cooper was an actor who played cowboys reinforces Joe’s own fantasy, but also reinforces the fact that Joe is acting a part as well. The voices out of the radio can be heard just as the disembodied voices of Joe’s memories can be heard. Now Joe imagines his future. As the women’s voices describe the attributes of an ideal man, we begin to see the women. We see them as Joe imagines them. Once again the imagery is not literal. The radio voices become Joe’s forward looking fantasy ending with a claim that the ideal man is “You”.

In this first sequence, up to Joe’s arrival in New York, the memories, although triggered by external events do not appear threatening. It is not until an event triggers unwanted memories that we begin to see the troubled interior of Joe Buck’s mind. This happens several times during the New York sequence and is usually attached to an event to do with Joe’s attempts at hustling.

In the course of the film Joe is seen in four different sexual encounters; two with women and two with men. His first encounter is with Cass (Sylvia Miles). The sex is straightforward and seems to be successful for both parties. The only drawback is that Cass is herself on the game and becomes offended when Joe brings up the subject of payment. The second encounter is with a young man (Bob Balaban) in the balcony of a 42nd street movie theatre. In this encounter we see the young man sink out of sight into the direction of Joe’s groin. There is a cut to the action on the screen and then to a men’s room where the young man is vomiting into a wash basin after having performed fellatio on Joe. The young man (he is never named) has no money and Joe takes his watch in payment, but then he gives it back. Again Joe has received no payment for his ‘service’. The third encounter is with Shirley (Brenda Vaccaro) at a loft party. Having drunk much and smoked marijuana Joe, at first is impotent, but
after some time he is able to perform. This comes about after Shirley taunts him about his sexuality, querying whether or not he is gay. Joe denies this and, after Shirley begins to arouse him by biting, he is able to perform satisfactorily. As he leaves the next morning, Shirley pays him. This is the only time that Joe is successful in being a hustler. In the fourth and final encounter, he is picked up by a man named Townsend P. Lott (Barnard Hughes) from Chicago. Towny (as he is called) is in town from Chicago for a convention, and ‘dammit’, he says ‘to have a little fun.’ Joe is by this time desperate for money in order to take Ratso south to Florida. The two end up in Towny’s hotel room, and Joe, for the first time is aggressive. He demands money. Towny offers ten dollars, but Joe insists that he pay him fifty because he has family to take care of. Towny opens the bedside drawer, and in a brief shot, we see not only his wallet, but a photo magazine of muscle men, obviously a masturbatory aid for Towny. Joe, in his anger and frustration assaults Towny, knocking out his false teeth, as the latter mutters that he deserves to be punished for his behaviour. In a final act of revulsion, Joe pushes the telephone receiver into Towny’s bloodied mouth in a grotesque, violent parody of fellatio. On its own this violent act would appear to be inexplicable. Michael Moon, in his article about this film and Andy Warhol’s *My Hustler* (1965), argues that the act reveals a tendency to sadomasochism on Joe’s part and that in fact the relationship between Joe and Ratso is a repressed sadomasochistic relationship. However if we examine the memories that Joe reveals in moments of stress there is another explanation for Joe’s act of violence.

The first event in which this occurs takes place in the hotel room of a man named O’Daniel. After the episode with Cass, where Joe ends up paying her, he finds himself in a bar trying to figure out what happened. Here Joe meets Ratso, a sordid looking type. The latter gives Joe the impression that he knows something about hustling and advises him that trying to pick up on the street is no good, he needs a manager. Ratso, it just so happens, knows just such a man, a Mr O’Daniel. If Joe will just give him ten dollars, he will give him an introduction. Joe gives him twenty and the introduction is arranged.

The scene with Mr. O’Daniel (John McGiver) begins in a comic vain. O’Daniel is enthusiastic about Joe’s future as a hustler. ‘I’m gonna work ya hard,’ he avers.

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When he refers to Joe as a cowboy, Joe replies, ‘I ain’t a for real cowboy, but I am one hell of a stud.’ This is the first time he makes this statement, but it is not the last time. It sounds like something he has either made up for himself, or has been told. In any case it shows that Joe is well aware that his cowboy persona is an act, a performance for others, just like Paul Newman and Gary Cooper. Midway through the scene O’Daniel begins to get personal, ‘I bet you’re lonesome, just like all the others,’ he says. Joe looks disconcerted at this assertion, but admits to being a bit lonesome. Now O’Daniel reveals his true nature, he wants Joe to get down on his knees and pray. He throws open the bathroom door and there is an illuminated Jesus attached to the other side. It is never clear whether O’Daniel is a missionary out to save boys like Joe, or is indeed a pimp, who just happens to trust in the Lord. We will never know. However his lines of dialogue about working Joe hard incline to the view that he is in fact a pimp. As we never see him again, we can only surmise.

When O’Daniel reveals the illuminated Jesus and urges Joe to get down and pray, a new memory is triggered in Joe’s mind. From a close up of a look of panic on Joe’s face there is a cut to Granma Sally Buck and her cowboy beau at a riverside prayer meeting. Then we cut rapidly between Joe and O’Daniel and the riverside meeting. We see young Joe, a frightened look on his face, being called into the river by the preacher who baptises him by full immersion in the river. Joe’s reaction to this memory is one of panic. He runs in terror from O’Daniel’s room and out of the hotel onto the street.

Now the sequence breaks up into three distinct strands, all of which are intertwined. In the first strand Joe runs through the streets, no doubt trying to find Ratso to get his money back. In the second strand, which is monochrome, we see Joe in the subway and we see again and again glimpses of Ratso on trains, always in the next carriage. Finally in this strand Joe catches Ratso and strangles him. This appears to be Joe’s imagining of what he will do if finds that little rat. In the third strand we once again see Annie and Joe. However this sequence is not the idyll of love that Joe remembered on the bus. The short flashes of this strand are broken up such that they are almost incoherent. There is a flash of Joe and the other boys in a car; there is a flash of Joe and Annie alone in a car; there is a flash of Annie, naked, running into a derelict house with a sign saying ‘stay out’; there is a flash of Annie’s agonised face looking out from under a boy on top of her; there is a flash of Joe, naked, being manhandled by the other boys; then there is a shot, longer than the others of Joe,
naked, straddled across the hood of a car, and one of the other boys, also naked on top of Joe. Both Joe and Annie are being raped. The sequence comes to an end as Joe arrives back at the bar where he met Ratso. He asks the barman if he has seen the ‘little runt’. When the barman feigns ignorance, Joe picks up a beer bottle and makes a move to throw it at the mirror behind the bar. Another memory flashes up, of young Joe smashing the mirror in Sally’s beauty salon, as Sally cries out in protest. Joe finally regains control and puts the beer bottle down.

The sequence is cut so rapidly that it requires several viewings to comprehend all that is happening. It is incoherent, in fact hysterical, because that is Joe’s state of mind. From it we learn that Joe’s past contains memories which he has hidden, but which, in moments of panic, when he is not in control, reveal themselves and let loose a very angry Joe. The violence on his face as he runs through the streets, intent on murdering Ratso, and again when he reaches the bar, reveal a very angry young man indeed.

The next set of memories is revealed in the sequence with the young man in the theatre balcony. As the young man sinks below the frame, the camera remains fixed on Joe’s face. Two hands reach up to hold his face, but they are not the young man’s hands, they are the hands of Annie. Once more we hear her voice, this time asking ‘do ya love me Joe?’ As Joe keeps his eyes fixed on the science fiction film on the screen, and the young man continues his act of fellatio out of sight, the memories flood back in. This time it is a scene in a movie theatre. Joe is kissing Annie as one of the boys comments ‘If you kissing Crazy Annie you better drink a whole damn drug store.’ We see Annie walking down the aisle of the theatre and then on a mattress behind the screen. Annie, it appears, was available to anyone, but Joe remembers her as protesting that ‘he was the only one.’

The last sequence of memory is in fact a dream. It occurs on the first night that Joe spends in Ratso’s apartment. Joe has found Ratso and berated him for the O’Daniel incident. When Joe calms down and tells Ratso that he is homeless, Ratso invites him back to his apartment. The apartment is in a derelict building which is scheduled for demolition. After a tense exchange in which Joe questions Ratso’s intentions in luring him back, Joe falls asleep on the mattress and the dream begins.

This time there are two different memories which are intertwined. In one memory (in colour) Granma Sally comes home, she is looking stern; we next see a naked Joe held over her lap as she beats him on his bare backside. In a subsequent shot, which is
taken from a low-angle, we see Sally standing beside a contraption which consists of an upside down hot water bottle hanging from a stand. Sally is holding a rubber tube which she is lowering down to the mouth of the bottle. The device appears to be a kind of home-made enema kit. In the context of Joe’s memory the enema is a form of punishment. The other memory (in monochrome) is of the night of the rape. We see more detail this time. Joe and Annie are in a car outside a deserted house. The gang have tracked them down and dragged the naked pair out of the car. In the first distinct shot of the gang we see Ratso in their midst. There is a closeup of Ratso leering into the camera. Annie is seen running towards the house; Joe is dragged back to the car and straddled across the hood. This action is closely intercut with Granma Sally’s punishment. Suddenly a police car and then two policemen are seen. Annie is being led away by the police; she is wrapped in a blanket. She says, as she turns away ‘It was Joe. He’s the only one.’ We see Annie in the back of an ambulance as it drives away. The sequence ends in a jumble of shots of Texas, New York, Joe, Annie and Ratso. At one moment Joe is running naked through a New York street. Joe wakes up with a start.

This final memory sequence reveals much about Joe. We discover that he equates being penetrated with being punished; sex, in his youth was a mode of power. It appears from Ratso’s identification with the gang of rapists that Joe fears Ratso’s intentions towards him. Joe cannot believe that it is possible for the two of them to feel affection, because ‘that’s faggot stuff’ and that means being punished by penetration.27

It is notable also that no memories are initiated by his sexual encounters with the two women. The differences between the encounters with men and the encounters with women are primary to the code of the male hustler. A hustler trades on the fact that he is, or claims to be heterosexual, and, if he goes with men, it only ‘for the money’. Hence he will approach women, but men must approach him. Also his sexual encounters with men must be unreciprocated. John Rechy, in his novel Numbers calls this ‘the myth of the streets (primarily the myth of male hustlers): a curious myth which says that a man may go with other men, over and over – especially to make

27 The film is credited as having been edited by Hugh A. Robertson; however Schlesinger had problems with Robertson’s style and called in an English editor named Jim Clark. Clark had edited Darling and worked primarily on these memories and fantasies of Midnight Cowboy. He is credited as ‘creative consultant’. Robertson retained credit as sole editor and was subsequently nominated at the Academy Awards for the editing of the film. (Mann, op. cit., pp. 328-330.)
money – and with as many as he wants – and still be “straight” (that is, heterosexual) as long as he doesn’t reciprocate sexually.’ Thus he is able to engage in full vaginal intercourse with the women, but the only form of sex in which he will engage with men is fellatio, with himself in the insertive role. The conundrum of this act is that, although he is the insertive partner in the act, he is in fact the passive partner. He takes no active part in the sexual act. In order to be ‘queer’ one must be the receptive person in the sexual encounter, no matter which orifice is being penetrated. Sexual identification for such men was based purely on the act.

This confused idea of sexuality is what limits the relationship between Joe and Ratso. In all their scenes together the dialogue constantly contains bickering, and denials of any sort of emotional link between the two. However, the domestic relationship gradually establishes itself so that by the time Joe is in the room with Towny he protest that he needs the money because he has family. That family is Ratso. If one does not consider Joe’s memories then the scenes between the two men do not ring true. Thus Vito Russo writes of the film in the context of the return of the ‘buddy movie’ in the late sixties. ‘The relationship between Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo is lily pure’, he asserts, ‘Their contempt for faggots and faggot behaviour is well established in the course of their growing buddyhood and justified by the behaviour of the “real” homosexuals in the film.’

Russo’s analysis of the film is necessarily brief, but what he overlooks in the film is that it is a portrait, possibly the first, of what would very soon be described as internalised homophobia. The word had not yet come into being, but the phenomenon certainly had. The term homophobia was coined by psychologist George Weinberg and first used in his book *Society and the healthy homosexual* published in 1973, although he claimed to have started using the word as early as 1967. His initial definition was a “dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals”. However the definition widened to become something akin to racism, an irrational fear of same-sex

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28 Rechy, John, *Numbers*, Grove Weidenfield, New York, 1984, p.45. (The novel was originally published in 1967.)
29 This concept is examined in some detail in Chauncey Jr., George ‘Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era’ in Duberman, Martin B., Vicinus, Martha, and Chauncey, George, *Hidden from history : reclaiming the gay and lesbian past*, Penguin, New York,1990 pp.294-317
sexuality.\textsuperscript{31} As Vern Bullough states in his article: ‘The problem, the term implies, is not with homosexuals or homosexuality, but with those who hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality.’ Joe and Ratso’s problem is that they have internalised this homophobia because of their conditioning by society to see sex as a violent power game and that to lose, to be penetrated, is to be despised by society.

For a man like John Schlesinger, this is a pitiful state of affairs. Schlesinger never had a problem with his own sexuality. Repeatedly in his biography Mann stresses how much homosexuality was not a problem for Schlesinger. He was “really quite comfortable with the gay part of himself very early on” according to one of his cousins.\textsuperscript{32} His previous portrait of a gay man, Malcolm in \textit{Darling}, reveals no discomfort with his sexuality. This film, in John Schlesinger’s hands, reveals a sympathy for those who have been brow beaten by society into such an attitude. He has been able, by the use of recollection imagery, to reveal this very complex psychology in filmic terms.

The final sequence of the film, the bus trip to Florida and Ratso’s death, reveals Joe’s growth towards some kind of wisdom. In a \textit{Bildungsroman}, the protagonist, at the end learns a sort of wisdom. He may not be materially successful, but he has the wisdom to continue on in a useful life.

Joe’s first action when the bus arrives in Florida is to divest himself of the cowboy outfit. The clothes were a symbol of his performance as the cowboy stud, but he has rejected that performance. He muses to Ratso that he will get ‘some kind of job.’ The idea being that he has left behind his hustling days. When he realises that Ratso is dead he finally makes a gesture of love; he takes Ratso in his arms and holds him tenderly. This act of love is pathetic in that Ratso has to die before he can make it, but at least Joe has learned that he can be tender to another man. Nevertheless the ending is open; there are many questions. What can a barely literate boy of low intelligence do with the rest of his life? Will he spend it washing dishes? Will he eventually go back on the game? We do not know and can only speculate.

\textsuperscript{31} Weinberg, George, \textit{Society and the Healthy Homosexual} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1972) Chapter1 ‘Homophobia’, passim. See also the article “homophobia” by Vern L. Bullough, Professor emeritus at California State University, Northridge, at \url{http://www.glbq.com/social-sciences/homophobia.html}, an online Encyclopedia of ‘gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender,& queer culture. (Accessed 16 April, 2010.)

\textsuperscript{32} Mann, op. cit., p 84.
In *Midnight Cowboy*, Schlesinger has used the time image in a way that the critics of the time just did not comprehend. Some admitted to being ‘confused’,33 others simply misread the images. John Simon of *The New Leader* completely misinterpreted the rape scene. He writes that Joe’s ‘loving girlfriend ... is the victim of a gang rape (which) Joe (is) forced to watch.’34 As the shot of Joe being raped is one of the longest shots in that memory sequence, perhaps the idea of a man being raped was so alien that he simply did not comprehend what he was seeing. As I have shown it is not possible to fully understand this film without correctly interpreting the memories which give a full psychological portrait of Joe Buck. The film itself is not homophobic, but a portrait of homophobic characters, men who have been socialised into a view of sex as power and submission, as loss of masculinity. Schlesinger immediately followed this film with a portrait of a society in which such homophobia and sexual politics was non-existent.

iii. *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*

The final film in this study is in many ways a return to basics for its director. He was back in the United Kingdom, back with producer Joseph Janni and the film was a small scale work focussed on a group of individuals rather than a society at large. After the frenetic, almost phantasmagoric style of *Midnight Cowboy* the film appears classic in its style and narrative. In a way it is the typical example of a conservative step back after the adventurous experimentalism of the previous work. However, on examination, the film reveals itself to be just as formally adventurous as the previous work, only the calmer style belies its complexity. In this way it demonstrates how filmmaking, at the end of the 1960s had incorporated all the experimentation into a new form of classical narrative cinema: a neo-classical cinema.

In *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* there is nothing new for this director. Much has been made of the kiss between two men as a first, not to mention the sight of Peter Finch in bed with Murray Head, however such things are not new to the film’s presumed

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33 This was admitted by the critic of *The New Statesman*, John Coleman in a review included in Schlesinger’s press-cutting book in the BFI collection (BFI reference: JRS/6/27.)
audience. Everythi
ning in the film recalls elements of Schlesinger’s previous work, but in a new light: the complexity of love, the inability of a woman to make a place in the new society, the uneasy acceptance of a gay man in general society, these have all been seen before. However in this film mastery is evident in the way the whole is put together. This is the film of a master.

The film with which the present work has most in common is Darling. It is a contemporary, London-based narrative and it is not an adaptation. Like Darling it is based on events which happened in reality. Unlike Darling the events were not an anecdote told to the director, they were events from Schlesinger’s life. Some years earlier, before Darling, Schlesinger had been in a relationship with an actor whom he directed in a play. The actor was 22 years old at the time and Schlesinger was 36 years old. Although the relationship lasted some time, Schlesinger was aware that the man was also seeing a woman at the same time. He put up with the situation as long as it lasted because, as his biographer put it, ‘he had learned long ago to consider something better than nothing.’

By the time he was ready to put Sunday, Bloody Sunday into production he was in a more stable, and confident position to tackle the story of his failed relationship. He had met Michael Childers, a 22 year old photographer, while in the United States for the promotion of Far From the Madding Crowd in 1967. They were together still and would remain together for the rest of Schlesinger’s life. The film, then, was a personal story which he would tell in a quiet, intimate way. There is none of the cynicism of Darling, or the hysterical homophobia of American society necessarily present in Midnight Cowboy. The events are told from the position of a calm observation of flawed, but inherently good people. If Diana Scott and her cohort were examples of lives lived in bad faith, then the group of people in Sunday, Bloody Sunday live, or at least try to live, honestly and in good faith. For this reason the film avoids polemic and satire. Any negative response to the film comes because the critic demands a moral judgement on the behaviour of these people. John Schlesinger makes no such judgement.

The script for the film was commissioned from writer Penelope Gilliatt. Gilliatt, at the time had published two novels and reviewed films for The New Yorker, a duty she

35 “I knew from the start that it was really a piece of chamber music, that not everyone would appreciate it...But it was a film I believed I had to do. Not wanted to. Had to do. (Schlesinger in Mann, op.cit. p.39).
36 Ibid., p. 223-227.
shared with Pauline Kael. One of the novels *A State of Change*, published in 1967 was the story of a ‘thirtyish Polish girl who immigrates to England and develops a friendship with a doctor and his younger male companion.’

Using this situation as a template Gilliatt produced a tale of three lovers. However the script was not without its problems. Gilliatt was a novelist and journalist but not a screenwriter. Schlesinger needed a rewrite and Gilliatt refused to change a word. He called in script editor Ken Levison to rewrite the opening scene of the film and Gilliatt took offence. Gilliatt at that time was resident in New York and refused to travel to London to consult on the script. In the end Schlesinger called in another writer to be present during shooting for any rewrites. The writer concerned was David Sherwin, and according to several accounts he extensively rewrote the script. As was the case with the editing of *Midnight Cowboy*, nothing was formally changed in the credits. Gilliatt retained sole writing credit, while a note at the end ‘gratefully acknowledge(d) the assistance of David Sherwin and Ken Levison during the production of the film.’ Gilliatt subsequently accepted all nominations and wins for the numerous awards and gave several interviews claiming sole responsibility for the finished film. Joseph Janni eventually issued a formal letter to Gilliatt advising her to cease and desist in her claims: ‘The first concept’, he wrote, ‘of *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* as a triangular love story as it is now in the film, was originated by John some time before we started *Far From the Madding Crowd* and it was while we were in Weymouth that John first started to discuss the subject with me.’

These events reveal that the film should be seen primarily as the creation of John Schlesinger, it is his personal vision which is present in the finished film.

Out of all these elements came a narrative which was, in William J. Mann’s words, ‘exquisitely literate, more like a novel than a film’. In this respect the film is an experiment in that it does not deny its literary heritage, but makes a virtue of it. The film is novel-like because the characters are reminiscent of the characters in a novel by such as Iris Murdoch; his is no coincidence. At the time of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Janni, Raphael and Schlesinger had planned a film based on Murdoch’s *A

\[\text{37} \text{ Phillips, op. cit., p. 131.} \]


\[\text{39} \text{ An undated copy of the letter is included in Schlesinger’s scrapbook maintained for the production, which is included in the British Film Institute Special Collections: Reference: JRS/7/14.} \]

\[\text{40} \text{ Mann, op. cit., p.9} \]
Severed Head. This comedy of sexual ill-manners did not come to pass, but the influence of Murdoch’s equally literate and articulate characters can be seen in the present work. Murdoch’s novels throughout the 1960s were essentially explorations of attempts to identify a new morality which allowed the character to be ‘good’ in a philosophic way, while not being bound by the sexual strictures of the old moralities of the Judeo-Christian mode. Her novels were unusual too in that they were inclusive. There was sometimes a gay character whose tribulations were treated on an equal footing to the rest of the characters in the novel. As with Sunday, Bloody Sunday their sexuality was not the issue, but personal morality was.

The film narrates the events that take place in the overlapping lives of three residents of (then) contemporary London over a period of ten days. The characters are all educated, articulate, but not quite conventionally middle-class. Unlike the characters in any of his previous films they are at ease in their position in society and their problems are not related to society at large, but to their personal choices.

The three central characters of the film are Daniel Hirsh (Peter Finch), a general practitioner, Alex Greville (Glenda Jackson), an employee of a large London firm in their human resources division, and Bob Elkin (Murray Head), a sculptor. Hirsh, who is in his fifties and Jewish, and Greville, in her thirties, divorced and probably protestant secular are both having an affair with Elkin. This trio are surrounded by family, friends and colleagues, all of whom know of the situation to varying degrees.

As the characters are all highly articulate extensive dialogue scenes are a necessary element of the film. These people, unlike Joe Buck, are able to give intellectual form to their emotions and can, and do constantly, express them in coherent language. If the kind of film which Hollywood perfected in the 1930s is a film based on sound stages, linear time and continuity editing, then the form which Schlesinger uses in this film could be called neoclassic. The film is primarily chronological, as the titles reiterate and the editing is, for the most part, unobtrusive and based on capturing performances rather than random reality. However the time image, so prominent in Midnight Cowboy, has remained and the film reveals that in cinema after the sixties characters think and their thoughts can be revealed visually rather than enunciated verbally.

41 Ibid. p282. The film was eventually made with Frederic Raphael’s script but directed by Dick Clement. It was distributed by Columbia Pictures in 1970 to little notice.
The film, like a novel, is divided into chapters, each of which is given the title of the day on which the events take place. This has caused pain to some such as Gene D. Phillips who considers the chapter titles to be a ‘miscalculation’. However the film does not suffer from these titles and they serve to enhance the form of the film as a literate work. In fact the opening credits of the film are displayed in the same typeface as the ‘chapters’ against a plain black background and reinforce the notion of the film as a literate work, that is the titles function in the same way as the title page of a novel. The single title reads ‘Joseph Janni’s production of A John Schlesinger Film Sunday Bloody Sunday’. There is no action behind it, no theme song to give a commentary. Having proven his ability to work with the most extreme experimental forms Schlesinger, in this film, returns to a classical form in which the word has equal status with the image. To reinforce this, the first line of dialogue is heard over the title and there is a cut to the first image which is a closeup of hand which is palpating a naked abdomen.

Although it would be assumed the consultation is the subject of this scene, the dominating motif is the intrusion of the telephone. Dr. Hirsh is consulting a patient, a businessman (Richard Pearson), who is worried about abdominal pain. Daniel is calmly reassuring him when the telephone rings. He answers the telephone and with a small, but fond smile, asks the caller to wait until he rings back as he is with a patient. He hangs up and continues his conversation with the patient. The phone rings again and he presses a button on the apparatus and the ringing stops. The image cuts to an external shot of the building in which the consultation is taking place and the first chapter title, ‘Friday’ appears as the conversation continues on the soundtrack. The building is a late Georgian terrace on a square in West London. The image cuts back to Daniel, now alone as he rings the answering service. In a small montage the camera follows the electrical signal from his receiver, through the tangle of cables, past switching mechanisms to the woman at the answering service (Bessie Love). We learn that the caller was a Mr. Elkin. In this small moment a major theme of the film is established: modern telecommunications may be an aid to connections but they can also be a hindrance to real communication. As Daniel dials Bob’s number a series of images of a studio, Bob, his toucan and kinetic sculptures are superimposed over Daniel’s musing face. Daniel is thinking of his lover as he dials and we are seeing his

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thoughts. This is a time image, but it is not a specific moment, as we saw in the examples in the first section of this chapter; sometimes a thought is generalised, not specific; this is such a moment. Daniel’s face fades out and we are left in Bob’s studio. He is not there. The telephone rings again and the image cuts to the person ringing. This time it is a woman, Alex Greville. The call transfers to the same answering service. She is also enquiring after Mr. Elkin.

The telephone service, through its cables is used as a metaphor for the web of connections between characters in the film. In this first sequence connections are made, relationships established and no traditional exposition is made. The film works on assumptions. We recognise the actors, Finch and Jackson, and we know they are the leading players in the film. We have seen that there is a connection, however tenuous, between the two, but we do not know anything further. They are mutual friends of Bob Elkin. From Alex’s conversation with Bessie Love (the character is never named), we gather that she is running late for an appointment with him. She has been caught up, she says, ‘boozing with a client’.

The narrative, and the camera, now follows Alex. A wide view of her bedsit reveals a disordered environment with ashtrays and a kitchen sink full to overflowing with dirty dishes. We get the impression that Alex tends to pass through, rather than live here. In the next scene she is driving to her meeting with Bob. As she drives through the heavy London traffic we hear her car radio. There is a news broadcast regarding a ‘current economic crisis’ and a cabinet meeting which is expected to last all weekend. This crisis is in the background of the film, but plays no part of any narrative significance; it is an example of Schlesinger’s realist technique which he calls ‘laminating’. The fictional narrative is overlaid or laminated onto a background in which events are taking place which, although irrelevant, provide a solid foundation on which the fictional world sits. Alex is not listening to the radio, it is simply on. Instead she is thinking about the weekend ahead and how she has committed herself to babysitting for a family, while the parents go off to a conference. She is having second thoughts about the whole idea. We know this because as she drives we see flashes of her thoughts and in these thoughts we are introduced to the

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43 This is significantly different to the Alex conceived by Gilliatt in her screenplay. The shooting script reads ‘sc18: Int. Alex’s Kitchen day. Neat. Not at all scruffy.’ In Schlesinger’s copy this description has a line through it. Gilliatt’s Alex was not Schlesinger’s Alex. (BFI ref: JRS/74: shooting script dated February 1970).

44 Mann, op.cit., p. 33.
Hodson family. Unlike Daniel’s indeterminate musing, these thoughts are memories of specific events. However what it means is that both Daniel and Alex are thoughtful people and their thoughts are integral to their characters. Throughout the film it is their thoughts we see and hear, we never see or hear Bob’s internal world. We are led to ask ourselves, does he have one?

Alex arrives at the house of the family. Alva (Vivian Pickles) and Bill (Frank Windsor) Hodson have a visitor named Professor Johns (Thomas Baptiste) who is to give a lecture at the conference. Professor Johns is an African of unspecified nationality, although it would appear that he is from a former British colony. In a rather jarring note of unthinking racism the Hodson’s dog, a large and lumbering Rottweiler, is named Kenyatta after the first Prime Minister of Kenya. In a later scene Alex comments on the fact that Alva has stuck an Oxfam poster calling for the elimination of world hunger above a refrigerator full of leftover food. Such unthinking earnestness is the defining characteristic of Alva Hodson. She is concerned, but she does not think her concerns through.

This family is the first example of the normative heterosexual, married world which surrounds the three characters whose story we are experiencing. They are in it, but not of it. It appears to be a functional environment, but we will discover that even here there are cracks, particularly in the character of Lucy, the eldest daughter (Kimi Tallmadge). For the present, we now learn that the triangular situation is known to the surrounding world and the connections are more complex than at first it seemed. As Alva, Bill and the Professor drive away in the car, Alva suddenly says, ‘I say Daniel Hirsh wouldn’t just turn up this weekend, would he?’ Bill replies, ‘No, he knows we’re away this weekend.’ As with the glimpses of background in earlier films, in this, a film in which words count as much as images, such a throwaway line reveals much. The Hodsons know about Daniel and Bob and Alex, but do not know how much Daniel and Alex know.

The rest of Friday evening reveals much about Lucy. After the children have been put to bed, Bob and Alex retreat to the marital bed. Bob declares his love for Alex, and they fall asleep. They are woken by the crying of the baby, John Stuart, but Lucy calls out that she will take care of him. Alex comments that Lucy is like a lurking mother-in-law. During the weekend it will become apparent that, despite the apparent freedom from discipline in the Hodson household, Lucy keeps control. She cares for the baby, she monitors the children’s play and their whereabouts in the park on their
Sunday walk, and it is she who decides when it is time to go home. She is also very aware of the tension between Alex and Bob and asks questions of Alex which are brutally frank.

At last all is quiet and the scene cuts to a close-up of a revolving record on a turntable as the needle descends and the opening strains of the film’s principal musical theme is heard. The camera pulls back and we see Daniel in his living room, alone. As the music plays he wanders around the room, eats a candied fruit from a box on the coffee table, and takes out the kitchen garbage to the outside bin. The scene cuts back to a closeup of Alex as the music continues. Where the music was diegetic in Daniel’s house, it is now non-diegetic, a soundtrack comment on the visible scene. Alex is gazing, with love, at the sleeping form of Bob.

The music, a trio, is both aural link and intellectual comment on the scene. It is a Terzettino from Act one of Mozart and da Ponte’s opera *Cosi fan tutte*. The opera is a comedy about sexual infidelity and Schlesinger chose this passage for three voices because of its aural quality of longing and also for the meaning of its text. The short verse is as follows:

Soave sia il vento,  
Tranquilla sia l’onda  
Ed ogni elemento  
Benigno risponda  
Ai nostri desir.

Gentle be the breeze,  
Calm be the waves,  
And every element  
Smile in favour  
On our wish.

As a comment on the action it does not function in the way that *Everybody’s talkin’* functioned in *Midnight Cowboy*, nor the way the folk songs commented on the action in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. In both those films the songs comment directly on the action as in the style of Berthold Brecht. Here, I think, the lyric expresses the wish of all three; a wish that their lives, as they are, may bring

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45 This is another example of the disparity between Gilliatt’s conception of the character and Schlesinger’s execution. In the shooting script Gilliatt writes: ‘From a SHOT near the window we see DANIEL’S back bending down to put ’COSI FAN TUTTE’ on to his complicated Hi-Fi. CLOSE-UPS of switches on the mechanism as he puts on the records and starts the music. He adjusts the Hi-cut balance, treble, bass.’ Schlesinger’s Daniel simply pops the needle on a very straightforward record player and wanders away.
contentment. Schlesinger used it as such a comment, even if a general audience might not understand the reference. He once said: ‘the trio from the first act, which also lyrically has something - though you would never expect an audience to realize that.”46

This final element of this introductory sequence binds the disparate threads together. The film, we now know, is about the three central characters, and their intertwining relationships. However there are other elements that contribute to the film’s texture. The most important of these, and the one which does provide a gloss on the central theme of the film, is the presence of examples of heterosexual marriage. The Hodsons are only the first of these examples. As the film progresses we are exposed to several others.

On the Saturday morning Daniel sees a patient, a woman who weeps through the entire scene. She is not named and is listed in the credits as simply ‘weeping patient’ (June Brown). She appears to be frustrated by the emptiness of her marriage. Daniel gently coaxes her to tell him about the sexual relationship. From what she says he, and we, learn that their never really was a relationship. ‘He’s always been good like that,’ she says, meaning she never wanted sex and he never pushed her. His proposal of marriage was “do you think we could make a go of it?” Their marriage exists for no other reason than to not be alone. Daniel’s suggestion that she separate does not suit her. ‘Sometimes people survive better apart,’ he says. ‘You’re not married are you?’ she responds as if to say: ‘what would you know?’ However Daniel’s comment is as much about himself as it is about her. He has settled for the compromise of the situation, but would he better without it at all? In the film dialogue needs to be constantly interpreted, it is not simply giving information.

The next marriage we are admitted to is Alex’s parents. She dines with them on Tuesday evening. Mr. and Mrs. Greville (Maurice Denham and Peggy Ashcroft) live in a mansion apartment in a building in central London, there is no outside view, but it would appear to be somewhere in Mayfair. ‘Daddy’ is a businessman who deals in transatlantic finance. ‘Mummy’ is simply a wife. After Daddy withdraws to the study to conduct this transatlantic business, Alex and her mother discuss relationships. When Alex begins to chide her mother for putting up with her father’s indifference, mother cuts her short. ‘Perhaps you’re complaining about whoever it is you’re

seeing,’ she says. Just as Daniel was commenting on himself when he was making suggestions to his patient, so Alex is transferring her self-criticism to her mother. She then makes a statement which succinctly suggests the central point of the film. Alex, we learn in this scene is divorced. Her parents still see David, her ex-husband, because they like him ‘Darling you keep throwing your hand because you haven’t got the whole thing. There is no whole thing.’

She then confesses to Alex that she left her husband once. This reminiscence is another kind of external reference, similar to the Terzettino. In 1952 Peggy Ashcroft played the role of Hester Collyer in Terence Rattigan’s play *The Deep Blue Sea*. The play concerned a middle-class woman who leaves her husband, but does not find happiness outside her marriage. For those who recognise the reference, her anecdote of how she left Alex’s father causes a memory of that play. The unhappy ending of that play, Hester ends up with neither husband nor lover, is recalled now, because the older woman knows, through her own experience not to act precipitately. The relationship may not be ‘the whole thing’, but on the other hand as Mrs Greville finally says: ‘You think it’s nothing, but it’s not nothing.’ In the final scene of the film this central idea will be reiterated by Daniel.

During this scene we are given glimpses of an inner tension in Alex. As her father leaves the room there is a memory image of Alex as a schoolgirl running after her father with his gas mask. It is during World War II and she is in a panic because her father has left home without his mask. We see her running down a foggy, or perhaps gassy, street trying vainly to get to him in order to make him safe. The film pauses for this scene, but as I have previously noted in such instances it is not a flashback, it is a time-image. It elongates the reel of film, but it does not elongate the real time elapsed in the diegesis. One could excise the memory without damaging the narrative, but it would change our understanding of Alex.

On Wednesday evening Daniel and Bob host a dinner party at which we are exposed to the worst example of a modern marriage. The party is in the middle of a game of charades when a couple arrive late. They are in the middle of a blazing row. The row is over ‘Ingrid, the au pair’ girl. The wife demands vodka and begins to berate the husband for ogling the au pair rather than her. She bares her breasts in front of the whole party. One of the guests makes the comment, ‘here come those tired old

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47 Again the characters are not named. They are referred to in the published credits as ‘Rowing Wife’ (Caroline Blakiston) and ‘Rowing Husband’ Peter Halliday.
tits again’ leading one to infer that this is not the first time that scene has been played out. These three examples of marriages surround the less-than-perfect relationship that the three central characters share. What they show is that, as the week progresses and the relationships unravel, the alternatives do not look any more attractive. Peggy Ashcroft’s assertion is as applicable to the weeping woman as it is also to Daniel and Alex.

Bob, on the other hand does not seem to understand what a relationship is. These three, as the central characters of this drama, reveal themselves slowly to us, but Bob reveals the least of all. The social and familial backgrounds of Daniel and Alex are delineated in great detail, but little is directly revealed about Bob. We know he is an artist, a sculptor. His works are primarily kinetic sculpture, and border on the industrial. What we do not know is his background. We never see, and he never refers to his family. We can only infer from the man himself what his background is. However there is nothing about Bob that makes his upbringing identifiable. Unlike the predatory males of Swinging London films, his accent reveals nothing. There is no East End Cockney as in a Michael Caine or David Hemmings character, nor the South London wide boy of the likes of Dennis Waterman in Up the Junction (Peter Collinson, 1968). His accent is neutral, but educated, He is not aggressively one class or another; in fact he is déclassé in a way that Billy Fisher never was.

It is obvious that he has been to Art School as he approaches his work in a professional manner. He is not a Chelsea Art student such as populated the films of the middle sixties. He is a career-oriented young man and his focus, as Alex constantly reminds him is on America. ‘Why is it’, she says in one scene, ‘that every time you’re stuck, everything is better in America?’ Ian Britain considers this American aspect to be a reflection of Schlesinger’s personal circumstance. He had just made his first film in America and it was a huge success. To a certain extent this is true, but as this film was well into production before the success of Midnight Cowboy the American emphasis is something which refers to a wider phenomenon than just John Schlesinger. As Britain notes Bob, like Schlesinger, and indeed Alex’s father, was not limited to the United Kingdom. His assumption is that his career will be transatlantic. The generational change is not that he is looking outside the United
Kingdom, but that his eyes are turned west to the United States rather than east to ‘the Continent’.48

Unlike his two lovers, he is not introverted. We do not see his thoughts, and he does not seem prone to inner reflection. There is only one scene in the whole film where he is seen in a position which could be reflective. Alex is dozing in a chair and he is seated opposite her with a sketch pad in hand. When the camera reveals what he is sketching it is not Alex at rest, but a Pound Note symbol, which he then begins to elaborate into an abstract design. For all his protest of love, he does not gaze at the object of his love in the way that both Alex and Bob do. He does not prompt the return of the Mozart Terzettino. He is an object of love, he knows how to ‘make love’, but on the evidence of the film he does not love.

What Bob does have as a major characteristic is honesty. He does not deceive and he has no desire to deceive. This characteristic makes him an example of someone who lives in good faith, but it is the cause of the problems in the relationships. This is demonstrated vividly in the scene which follows on from the Wednesday evening. After Bob has left Daniel’s party, he calls on Alex. Alex is not alone. That afternoon she has interviewed a middle aged client whom she is having difficulty in placing in a new job. In the course of their conversation she discovers that he has not told his wife that he is unemployed. In passing we get a glimpse of another marriage. ‘We’re all right’, he says of their relationship. That slight emphasis conveys much meaning: all right, not wrong, they get along, are the thoughts that spring to mind. They live in the same house, but don’t appear to live with each other. This is a relationship which, in Mrs Greville’s terms, would appear to be ‘nothing.’

Alex ends up accepting an invitation to dinner and reciprocates with an invitation to her bed. So, when Bob arrives there is a socially awkward moment when she introduces Bob to George Harding (Tony Britton). The pivotal moment of this scene occurs after George has left, and Bob finally asks ‘Was I interrupting something?’ Alex replies, ‘No’. We can see from the look on her face that she is treating this as a challenge to Bob. Later she asks him if he minds about the other man and when he answers no she responds ‘You really don’t mind do you?’ There is hint of surprise in her voice. He replies ‘No, not a bit. We’re free to do what we want.’ To which she responds ‘Darling, other people often do what they don’t want to do at all.’ The gap

between them has been revealed. Alex is admitting that she is allowing Bob to behave the way he does because it is the only way she can keep him. However by revealing the compromise, she has forced herself to evaluate the decision. Her evaluation will lead her to reject this compromise. It will all be resolved on the second Saturday.

On the second Friday the narrative takes over. We see Bob making arrangements to fly to America while Daniel is making arrangements for a trip to Italy which he has been planning with Bob. This trip is another of Schlesinger’s external references, this time to his film *Darling*. In that film Diana’s first husband is also planning a trip to Italy, but Diana leaves him before they can go.

It seems at first that deception is happening here. Bob attends another doctor for his vaccinations for the trip. Although he has openly discussed the possibility of going to America, he has not told anyone that he is going away. There is a short scene in which Daniel is waiting for Bob at a restaurant, but the waiter tells him a message has been received that Mr Elkin is not coming. Once more a third party delivers the message; there is no direct communication. When, Bob finally confesses to Daniel that he is leaving for America, Daniel’s response reveals his knowledge about this self-deception. ‘I always knew Italy was fiction. It’s pointless, pointless’ he says. As Alex revealed that she was deceiving by pretending to do what she wanted to do, so Daniel reveals that he played the game, although he also knew it was false. Only Bob, the truthful one, takes it all as real. When he says to Daniel ‘I could never just piss off,’ he is stating a truth. He thinks that his brutal honesty is an ethical thing to do. He acts in good faith. However, as with Alex previously, Daniel exhibits signs of exasperation with Bob’s brutal honesty. Daniel asks if he has told Alex of his imminent departure and when Bob says he hasn’t we see that the situation is beginning to fall apart. Bob’s honesty is beginning to fail. At this moment Daniel makes the point that the choices in the situation are entirely Bob’s. This implies that he is content to continue on as long as Bob wants to, but if it ends then he is not about to do anything to prevent that ending.

Daniel throughout the film is a self-possessed man. He wants the relationship, but he does not appear to worry about its non-existence. His life is full of friends and, it appears, that he has had other lovers, or at least sexual partners. On the previous Saturday night there was an incident in the King’s Road where he was accosted by a drunken young Scotsman (Jon Finch). The young man injures his hand by banging on the closed window of Daniel’s car. Daniel takes the injured man to the all night
pharmacy off Piccadilly Circus. His attitude to the young man is brusque, despite his acknowledgment that they have been together previously, possibly in a one-night stand. When the Scotsman asks him if he is in love, he answers ‘I might be.’ He has not invested all his emotional being into this relationship, because there is a problem with it. It would appear then that when he says that the choice is Bob’s he is waiting for Bob to commit fully to him. Only then will he allow himself to fully invest his emotions in the relationship. This may seem cold, but at least it saves him from pain. As we will see in the final scene, unlike Alex he does not necessarily need ‘the whole thing’.

On the Second Saturday, we get further evidence of Daniel’s wider life. He attends the bar mitzvah of his nephew, the son of his brother. As the boy approaches the Torah to read the camera closes in on Daniel’s face and, in a reverse shot becomes a subjective view of the approach to the torah. However the men at the table are Daniel’s father and the clothing is vintage probably 1930s. As Daniel is watching his nephew his identification is so great that he experiences again his emotions at his own bar mitzvah. Once more the past is present in the present. In scenes such as this, and Alex’s memories the new cinema reveals depths of character which would not previously have been conveyed.

The question of something/nothing returns in Alex’s final scene with Bob. Alex, by now, has formally resigned from her job. Bob protests that, even though he is going abroad, ‘nothing’s changed’. Alex responds that she has changed. Then she states in deliberate, premeditated tones, ‘All this fitting in and making do and shutting up; I won’t be here when you get back; I can’t come over; don’t ring. We’ve got to pack it in and I don’t know what else to say.’ He offers to move in with her. She laughs at this; he could never do it, because, as we have seen with both Alex and Daniel, whenever one situation becomes difficult, he has the other as refuge. The means of escape is essential, and Alex can see that, even if Bob cannot. She at last concludes: ‘I’ve had this business “anything is better than nothing”, there are times when nothing has to be better than anything.’ Unlike Daniel, Alex, after all, cannot live with less than everything.

The second Sunday, the last day of the film centres on a scene in which Alex and Daniel meet for the first time. Daniel is having lunch, a Sunday roast, with the Hodsons and the ever silent Professor Johns. Alva, who needs to be seen to be caring, clutches at Daniel and tells him she is terribly sorry. ‘No need’, he replies. From this
exchange we infer that the Hodsons know that Bob has left and that Daniel is alone again. As Daniel leaves, he sees Alex waiting across the road in a park. He pauses, she comes over. Their exchange of dialogue reveals an established routine:

Daniel: This isn’t very easy is it?
Alex: I thought he’d be with you today.
Daniel: He’s gone away – yes?
Alex: I’m sorry. I only heard it from the answering service.

They have both learnt to keep out of each other’s way. She thought he would be with Bob on their last day, so it was safe for her to come to the Hodsons. As throughout the film, much has to be inferred from the unspoken assumptions. He leaves Alex to the Hodsons and returns home.

There is another of Schlesinger’s short narrative montages. A TWA jet takes off from Heathrow, Alex returns home to find Bob’s keys and the toucan with a note attached. Then we cut to Daniel at home practicing his Italian with the gramophone. There appears to be a simultaneity to these three short scenes. Although they are shown sequentially, they appear to be about the same moment. Again, they would have to be overlapped to reveal this, and that would render them unintelligible. In real time they are simultaneous, in reel time they need to be shown separately.

The camera begins to travel slowly around Daniel, who is sitting in the chair normally occupied by his patients. He expresses frustration with the Italian lesson: ‘Bugger the conditional’ he says. This could equally be his opinion of the last months with Bob. The whole relationship was conditional on Bob’s mood. Then he begins to speak directly into the camera. Since the whole film to this point has been classically naturalist, such a switch brings the spectator to attention. As the camera has come to rest behind the desk, in the position that Daniel usually occupies, we are put in the position of the sympathetic listener. This could easily have become a case of special pleading, and indeed Gilliatt had originally included a line which Schlesinger deleted: ‘You have no right to call me to account.’ Such defensiveness was out of sympathy with the rest of the film and the rest of this final monologue. Nowhere is it implied or can we infer that Daniel, or anyone else in his milieu, is uneasy with his sexuality.

The closest the film comes to such a scene is at his nephew’s bar mitzvah dinner when various female relatives question him on his single status. Even here Daniel

49 Mann, op. cit., p.374.
manages to not lie while not quite telling the truth. The exchange begins with a question from his father (Daniel Goldblatt): And how are you son? Daniel replies: ‘Fine, I’m fine.’ The slight emphasis in the question, the concerned look, carries all the implications inherent. He knows (that his son is gay), he knows that Daniel knows he knows, but does he also know more, not just the general but the specific? Does he know about Bob and Alex? We do not know, but as everyone else knows it is entirely possible.

Perhaps his concern is the same as that expressed by Aunt Astrid (Marie Burke). ‘You’re going to be very lonely’, she says. Daniel replies: ‘I haven’t met the right person yet.’ We note the use of person rather than woman, he doesn’t want to lie to his family, but he doesn’t tell the whole truth. In fact he knows that Bob is not the right person. He is being truthful to Astrid, but not in the way she thinks. This delicate dance of meaning is readily recognisable to any gay person of a certain age. How to not lie, but not reveal the whole truth is a game to be played constantly. This is social comedy at its best.

So in the final monologue Daniel expresses openly what he has previously hinted at:

‘When you’re at school and you want to quit people say: ‘You’re going to hate it out in the world.’

I didn’t believe them and I was right.

When I was a kid, I couldn’t wait to be grown-up. They said childhood was the best time of your life, but it wasn’t.

And now I want his company and they say ‘What’s half a loaf? You’re well shot of him.’

And I say ‘I know that, but I miss him, that’s all.’

And they say ‘he never made you happy.’

And I say ‘But I am happy – apart from missing him.’

You might throw me a pill or two for my cough (Smile)

All my life I’ve been looking for someone courageous, resourceful; he’s not it; but something. We were something.

I only came about my cough.’
Fade out.\footnote{Despite their difficulties, Schlesinger always acknowledged that this formally adventurous ending was Gilliatt’s idea. See Mann, op. cit., p.355-6.}

Just before the film fades completely to black Daniel smiles. He is happy. He is a content man. So after all the film is an attempt to find a compromise. There is everything, there is something, and there is nothing. For we humans, whoever we are to find a measure of happiness, we must accept compromise, accept that we can have something or nothing. It is self-deception, and therefore a life lived in bad faith, to believe in the possibility of everything.

Throughout the film Alex and Daniel have both been aware of their self-deception. They have known that by allowing Bob’s constant inconstancy they are not being faithful to their own ideals. However by living with such acknowledgement, they have been aware of their own bad faith. Bob, on the other hand, lives without self-reflection. As the film’s form has shown us, he has no inner life, no being in himself. As Jean-Paul Sartre writes: ‘Good faith seeks to flee the inner disintegration of my being in the direction of the in-itself which it should be and is not. Bad faith seeks to flee the in-itself by means of the inner disintegration of my being. But it denies this very disintegration as it denies that it is bad faith.’\footnote{Sartre, Jean-Paul, \textit{Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology}, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p.93.} So it is that after all it is Alex and Daniel who live in truth, in good faith, while Bob, the brutally honest Bob, has in fact been the insincere one, the epitome of the life lived in bad faith.

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At the end of the 1960s the classical narrative film in which time unfolds in discrete scenes which follow on from one another has been replaced by a new form of time which is ‘crystalline’ in that it can be interrupted at any moment by events from the past. This constant presence of the past is such that the idea of linear time is no longer sufficient in films which enter into the psychological world of its characters, rather than passively recording the external world in which they live.

This final films reveal that after all the experimentation of the middle years of the 1960s leading finally to the use of any and all examples of underground and avant-garde cinema in what used to be traditional narrative and mainstream cinema, the purpose of these experiments returns to the basic concept of telling a story. New techniques have been tried and those that have succeeded have become part of the vernacular of film narrative. In \textit{Midnight Cowboy} the constant intrusion of a traumatic
past shreds the continuity of the present. In Sunday Bloody Sunday, a classical, chamber piece is interrupted in its linearity by momentary intrusions of Proustian time; the characters live in an ever present past. These intrusions of the past reveal that for films such as these it is necessary to be aware that the past is always present in the human mind and that finally film has found a narrative method which can reveal how we exist within time as a succession of pasts constantly being revised.
CONCLUSION

During the period in which John Schlesinger directed his first six feature films, 1962-1971, a significant change in the basic approach to narrative in film can be observed. At the beginning of the period, when he directed _A Kind of Loving_, the dominant mode of film narrative in Britain was a form of realism based on the ideas of documentarist John Grierson. The basis of this realism was the idea that the camera captured reality in an objective way. The ‘purest’ form of realist cinema did not in any way manipulate the reality which the camera revealed. The theorist who was most prominent in promoting this idea was André Bazin. Hence a film such as _A Kind of Loving_ was made with an objective camera, keeping the audience at a distance from the events and describing them in a dispassionate way. As a result such films portrayed reality in an external way, observing the characters but not allowing the audience any insight into their minds. The only insight to the psychology of character was through dialogue. The camera was to all intents and purposes a passive observer of the context of the characters. This kind of cinema was really not much different from the classical cinema of Hollywood except for the fact that there was minimal use of studio sets and maximal use of location shooting. It was the use of real locations into which the fictional characters were inserted, a strategy which Schlesinger dubbed ‘laminating’, which gave such films the gloss of heightened realism. That the critical establishment agreed with this aesthetic legitimised such a strategy of film making. However the so-called New Wave was really the last stage of a narrative mode, the observational film, which had been extant since the earliest days of film.

By the time Schlesinger directed his second feature, _Billy Liar_, there was a desire extant to use film to explore the inner workings of the human mind as much as the external world in which it existed. Where the play on which the film was based had been completely realist, Schlesinger chose to enter Billy’s mind and show the fantasies only described in the dramatic work. In this way the audience becomes a part of Billy’s fantasy world and understands that his fantasies are a reflection of the
world in which he lives, but with which he refuses to engage. By ceasing to limit the camera’s view to an absolute reality the director is engaging the viewer in the psychology of the character on the screen. The stance is no longer distanced, objective, but a subjective view. The film reflected a desire by directors to experiment with film in ways which were outside the limitations of strict realism.

In the middle years of the decade, the ‘swinging’ years of pop culture, a more playful mood of experimentation was evident in films in Britain as elsewhere in the world. It was possible for a film to use realism as an aesthetic strategy but to subvert it with new modes of subjective film making. In *Darling*, the film uses the form of the television documentary with a voiceover narrative by the eponymous heroine. However it soon becomes evident the narrator is unreliable and that the images often contradict the narrative. In this way the idea becomes apparent that a photographic image, despite previous theorising, is not always an accurate reflection of reality but may be a subjective image originating in the psyche of a character.

At the same time a new use of realist strategies came into view. There was a spate of historical dramas, which used realist techniques to tell non-contemporary stories. As one of the criteria of realism as a theory has been that it must be used in a contemporary setting, such an idea was theoretically invalid. In practice, film makers began to use realism, not as an ideological stance, but as an aesthetic strategy. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Schlesinger filmed on location in Dorset, Hardy’s Wessex, in order to give the film a realist patina. The locations onto which the fictional characters were ‘laminated’ were an aesthetic strategy to alter the audience’s perception from the traditional costume drama on elaborate sound stages. The film used what was now an established historical context of documentary realism filmed as and when it happened. Such a strategy assumes an audience is aware of the aesthetic of the documentary and will read a film in that way if the techniques of documentary are used in its making. Although this was new, and even experimental in the 1960s, any Sunday Night BBC costume drama now uses such techniques.

As realism became an aesthetic strategy another phenomenon began to appear in film narrative which changed the norm of narrative significantly and permanently. Time in film until the late 1960s was, in the main, a linear phenomenon. The majority of films simply told a straightforward story which moved from one event to the next in a cause and effect relationship. If there was to be divergence backward in time this was clearly signalled to the audience, usually by a lap-dissolve, preferably
accompanied by voice over narration explaining the change. When the narrative returned to the diegetic present it was made clear that an elapse of time had taken place in the diegetic present equivalent to the time taken to narrate the past events.

In the new cinematic language such is not the case. Beginning in the late 1950s, time functions in narrative in the way described by French philosopher Henri Bergson. This was particularly the case in the films of Alain Resnais. Although we move forward from the past to the present into the future, in the human psyche the present is a fleeting, never captured, moment. We constantly live in an actuality which becomes past before we know it. Psychologically we constantly revise the past in the light of this never-grasped present. As well events of the past may be thrown up on the inner screen of the mind by current stimuli.

In *Midnight Cowboy*, the traumas of Joe Buck’s past are stimulated into life by the traumatic events of the present. As they are revived, they are thrown onto the screen for the viewer to see. Thus the linear narrative which is concerned with the external world in which Joe and Ratso move is constantly interrupted by visions from Joe’s past. Sometimes the visions are distorted and we can never be sure if the events are historical reality or Joe’s distortions of the past. It is only when the film is over that our own psyche can reorder, assess and construct its own narrative from the events portrayed. In this respect the film is similar to other films of the late 1960s, such as *Petulia*, in its extreme use of these new narrative strategies.

By the end of the 1960s this enthusiastic experimentation had established a new form of cinematic language. It was now possible for a film which dealt with a realist, contemporary story to incorporate time images into the narrative to illuminate the psyches of the characters. In *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* Schlesinger returned to the kind of realist story he had begun with. However, by the use of time images, revealing the inner thoughts of the characters on the screen he provides a new form of cinema. Unlike his first film, there is no longer the need for expository dialogue in the style of a stage play. The screen throws up images from moment to moment which are external, internal, real or possibly imaginary. Unlike the extreme experimentation of previous films, particularly in the films of Alain Resnais, the style is ‘quiet’ possibly neo-classical, but what is clear is that the language of cinema has been enriched by its ability to reveal the inner lives of characters in a substantially realist aesthetic. Cinema is no longer bound to real time; the reel time, the time which unfolds on the screen before the spectator is the same as the psychic time in which the spectator
lives. It moves forward, but at any moment it may throw up an image from the past, or an imagined alternative present. What is evident is that cinema can no longer be considered a passive recorder of external events.
FILMOGRAPHY

This list is in a similar format to a bibliography. As the credits of any film are now readily available on the internet, particularly at IMDB, the purpose of this list is to identify the edition of the film used in my research. Film is now a published medium in the same way that books are published. As films are readily available, most commonly in the DVD format, I have found it advisable to nominate the particular edition used.

I have included the names of the trio of creative artists most influential in the film, that is the producer (P), the director (D) and the screenwriter(s) (SC). The year cited is the year of copyright on the finished film, as listed in the credits.

Films directed by John Schlesinger in Chronological Order

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Other films referred to in the work in alphabetical order by title

A Bout de Souffle, 1960, P: Georges de Beauregard, D: Jean-Luc Godard, SC: François Truffaut, Studio Canal Collection, Blu-ray disc, 2010.


Charge of the Light Brigade, 1968, P: Neil Hartley, D: Tony Richardson, SC: Charles Wood, Shock/MGM, DVD,


Chronique d’un été, 1961, P: Anatole Dauman, D & SC: Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin, not currently available in any format.


*It’s Trad Dad!*, 1962, P: Milton Subotsky, D: Richard Lester, SC: Milton Subotsky, not currently available in any format.


My Hustler, 1965, P, D, SC: Andy Warhol, not currently available in any format.


The Secret Place, 1957, P: John Bryan, D: Clive Donner, SC: Lynette Perry, not currently available in any format.


The Violent Playground, 1958, P: Michael Relph, D: Basil Dearden, SC: James Kennaway, not currently available in any format.


White Corridors, 1951, P: John Croydon, Joseph Janni, D: Pat Jackson, SC: David E. Jackson, Pat Jackson, Jan Read, not currently available in any format.

The Wild and the Willing, 1962, P: Betty Box, D: Ralph Thomas, SC: Nicholas Phipps, Mordecai Richler, not currently available in any format.


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174


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APPENDIX

John Schlesinger – A Career Overview

Until the 1950s the standard career path in the British film industry began with getting a job, any job, with one of the studios. As the industry was a new one there was no established apprenticeship or educational path towards becoming a director. The path usually started with a job as ‘gofer’ or tea boy on the set. If one reads the biographies of the directors of the first two generations, covering the years 1920 to 1940, those who became successful directors did so by sheer persistence within the studio system. The career path could follow the trajectory of camera assistant, camera operator, director of photography, director (Ronald Neame, Michael Powell) or editor, director (David Lean). Very rarely, and never once sound came in, did a director rise fully fledged on the studio floor. Alfred Hitchcock and Anthony Asquith appear to have been born directors, but they are very rare cases.

Even after the Second World War this was still considered to be the best way to secure a career in the industry. The problem was that for the eager young men who would be film makers at that time the industry was a closed shop. Karel Reisz has stated that had it been possible, he would have gone straight into the studio system rather than taking the circuitous route to film making which he and all the others tagged as ‘New Wave’ had to take.\(^1\) Although the primary criterion for being considered ‘New Wave’ was being independent of the established studio system, it appears this was from necessity rather than design. In the case of John Schlesinger it meant taking a journey through an even newer medium than film.

After taking his degree at Oxford, Schlesinger attempted to break into the film industry by making two amateur films and using them as a calling card. As described in his biography the results were attention getting, but unsuccessful in their aim.\(^2\) He began a half-hearted career as an actor, but eventually took a job with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). At the BBC in the 1950s the Griersonian

documentary tradition was in full flourish. Actuality programs were a part of the BBC’s charter of ‘information and education’ and Schlesinger found work as a director of short films which made up these programs. Eventually he worked on the flagship program *Panorama* and became their ‘star’ director. These films could be anything from five minutes to the full half hour. Usually the job of the director was to find a subject, shoot enough film to fill the allotted time and then hand it in to the unit where a coherent piece of film would be assembled for broadcast. This was as much a technical apprenticeship as any studio gofer in the 1930s received. One could say that working at the BBC in the 1950s was the equivalent of attending film school for later generations; one learned the various aspects of the various trades which went to make up the profession. That there was no formal training or system of qualification was still evident. Effectively the theory of making these films was intuitive. A director such as Schlesinger did not apply a theory, he simply looked at what had worked in the past and applied those techniques he found amenable to his subject matter.

By the end of the 1950s and well into his thirties, Schlesinger looked to be an established, and permanent, fixture within the BBC. However, his intention was always to direct feature fiction films. In this respect he was no different from the determined young men of earlier generations who had worked their way up from within. The only work he took outside the documentary field was as second unit director on two drama series: *The Four Just Men* (1959) and *Danger Man* (1961). In the former he worked under Basil Dearden and had the opportunity of directing Vittorio de Sica. In interviews he refers to his work with de Sica as illuminating and educational for a budding young director.³

**Terminus**

This first phase of Schlesinger’s career ends with his first documentary produced outside the BBC. *Terminus* was produced by British Transport Films, a well-established film-making concern which had emerged from the Griersonian GPO Film Unit. It was a half-hour film on Waterloo Railway Station which was based on the familiar format of a ‘day in the life’ of a particular place. Photographed over a period of two weeks, the film is structured in a linear fashion. It begins with the morning

³ Ibid., p.155. See also Schlesinger’s audio commentary on the Criterion Region 1 DVD of *Billy Liar* during which he refers several times to working with De Sica.
rush, and then picks out highlights such as the departure of the boat train for Southampton, the arrival of two boat trains from South Africa and the West Indies and finishing with the departure of a night mail train. Interspersed between these general scenes are small dramas: a woman in the lost and found looking for an umbrella, the arrival of a manacled gang of prisoners, a lost little boy, and a homeless woman. Although the film is described as a documentary, many of the scenes in it were staged. According to Schlesinger half the film was what would now be described as ‘dramatic reconstructions’. So, although the film is realist, it is not strictly a documentary as some scenes are acted. In fact many years later, in his conversations with Ian Buruma he commented that the ‘purists’ objected to the fact that some scenes weren’t ‘real.’ What we see in this first major work is Schlesinger’s predilection for observation. Although the film is not strictly narrative, the individual scenes present small dramas. The overall impression is that somewhere in this railway station a major story may be taking place. *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) could be occurring in any part of this film; it is just that we are not shown it.

*Terminus* was shown at the London and Venice film festivals and was given a general distribution. The film was awarded a ‘Golden Lion’ at Venice and a British Film Academy Award (BAFTA) in the category of best short documentary film. This was the first time that Schlesinger had a film on general release. It would be easy to say that it was as a result of this that he began his career as a feature director if it were not for the fact that it was not true. The delay in time between production, release and recognition for individual films is such that often a film maker is already in pre-production on his next project before the last one is in release. This was the case with Schlesinger.

In fact, according to Schlesinger the producer of his first feature film approached him after seeing two of his films for the arts program *Monitor*. The first, *The Italian Opera* had been broadcast in 1958, the second, *The Class*, was broadcast in April 1961, the same month that *Terminus* was released. The producer’s name was Joseph Janni.

Janni was an Italian who had been active in British films from the late 1940s. He had acquired the rights to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) and had approached Rank for backing. The Rank Organisation had rejected the

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material as ‘not suitable’ and not likely to make money. He had sold on the rights to *Saturday* to the Woodfall Production Company and had then watched as their film became a hit. He was determined to succeed in this new environment and had acquired the rights to two properties which were similar in tone and, he thought, potentially successful⁵.

A Kind of Loving and Billy Liar

The British New Wave in cinema was directly linked to new waves in writing, both prose and dramatic. The films usually listed as New Wave were all based on works associated with the ‘new realism’ of the mid to late 1950s.⁶ The two works Janni had acquired were integral to this literary phenomenon. *A Kind of Loving* was written by Stan Barstow, a Yorkshire native and published in 1960. It was a kind of *Bildungsroman*, although at its conclusion the hero has reached a kind of stasis, rather than enlightenment. *Billy Liar* was first a novel by Keith Waterhouse, another Yorkshire native, and was published in 1959. It was subsequently dramatised by Waterhouse and fellow Yorkshireman Willis Hall. It was produced in the West End at the Cambridge Theatre, opening in September 1960. In the wake of the success of the films produced by the Woodfall Production Company, Janni was in a position to argue for the potential success of these works. He approached Schlesinger to direct one of them. In the event *A Kind of Loving* was the first to go into production as *Billy Liar* was still running successfully in the West End and any film had to be delayed.

The two films have much in common but their differences reveal the changes taking place in British cinema at that time. *Loving* is a plainly filmed social realist tale of a young couple struggling to establish an independent life after a forced marriage. The focus is on the societal pressures which limit their ability to act freely. In some ways the films is backward-looking as the couple do not display any of the qualities of the newly affluent society of the early 1960s; rather, they relate to the struggle of the austerity years of post-world War II. The film was shot in black and white and standard ratio. Extensive location work was done in Stockport, near Manchester. The screenplay was written by Waterhouse and Hall.

⁵ Ibid. p.55
Billy Liar, which was also written by Waterhouse and Hall, takes a very different approach. Although it was photographed in black and white to retain a realist effect, Schlesinger chose to shoot it in Cinemascope, with an aspect ratio of 2.35:1. He chose this form in order to incorporate the fantasy element of the novel and play. In certain scenes both reality and fantasy were shown on the screen at the same time in the style of a cartoon. Although the film was tagged as social realist, the intrusion of fantasy gave it a new element which looked forward to the middle 1960s, rather than back to the 1950s. In this respect it was among the first British films to break with the past, something the majority of British New Wave films did not do.

Both films were nominated for various BAFTA awards and Schlesinger was awarded the ‘Golden Bear’ at the Berlin film Festival for A Kind of Loving, and nominated for the ‘Golden Lion’ at the Venice Film Festival for Billy Liar. The partnership of Joseph Janni and John Schlesinger was now established as successful and carried some artistic cachet on the festival circuit.

Darling

Following the success of the first two films, Schlesinger was intent on creating an original work. He did not wish to stay in the North, as he found the experience limiting in scope. In this he was no different from the other directors of the New Wave. In any case the advent of such realist television dramas as Z Cars and Coronation Street had moved the aesthetic of northern realism firmly to the living rooms of the nation, where it has remained to this day.

The success of the Beatles film A Hard Day’s Night (Richard Lester, 1964) and the advent of the James Bond phenomenon with Dr. No (Terence Young, 1962), and From Russia With Love (Terence Young, 1963) indicated a new focus in British film which had nothing to do with the economically depressed North, or for that matter with realism.7

The origin of the film was in an anecdote related to Schlesinger by the broadcaster Godfrey Winn on the set of Billy Liar. He told of a ‘high-class call-girl’ who had been set up in a flat in fashionable part of London by a syndicate of businessmen who had

‘exclusive use’ of her body. The woman concerned had ultimately committed suicide. Schlesinger thought the idea had possibilities for a film which would observe the new morality of 1960s London.\(^8\) One compromise adopted early on by the film’s makers was that the lead character should not suicide. She would end up unhappily trapped in a life she had chosen, but which was not as she had imagined it. The film contained much which was considered to be controversial at the time. One of the leading males and the eponymous character Diana’s best friend is portrayed as gay and in no way is his sexuality problematised or pathologised.\(^9\) A central scene of a party in a Paris apartment is frequently referred to in reports at the time as a ‘Dolce Vitaish’ event.\(^10\) This refers to Federico Fellini’s 1960 blockbuster *La dolce vita*. The party includes a scene in which there appears to be a sex act performed for the entertainment of the guests. This scene created much heartache for the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC). Schlesinger and his scriptwriter, Frederic Raphael, mollified the BBFC by making cuts which almost render the scene incomprehensible.\(^11\) Nevertheless the film was reasonably well received by the critics, especially in the United State of America. Schlesinger was nominated for both the BAFTA and American Academy Awards (Oscars) as Best Director. Although he did not win, Julie Christie won the ‘Oscar’ for Best Actress and Raphael won Best Screenplay. The awards are of no significance as far as critical analysis is concerned, but they were very significant in the development of the careers of those involved. Christie was now a fully-fledged star and Raphael was a mainstream writer. Schlesinger and Janni were able to continue making their own projects, rather than having to enter into the studio system. They were still ‘independent’, although how long this could last was moot.

By now Schlesinger was an established director of feature fiction films and had developed an overlapping mode of work. In 1966 he was in discussion with an American producer, Jerome Hellman, about a new novel he wanted to film. The title was *Midnight Cowboy* and he envisioned it as his next project. It was intended for the

\(^{8}\) McFarlane, Brian, *An autobiography of British cinema, as told by the filmmakers and actors who made it*, London: Methuen, 1997, p.512.


\(^{10}\) Schlesinger’s scrap book for the production, which is held in the BFI special collections, contains several reviews which mention *La dolce vita*. (BFI ref: JRS/4/15).

1967 season, where it would have been in concurrent release with *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn). However developments were slow and Joseph Janni was keen for Schlesinger to be involved in another project, preferably with Julie Christie again.

**Far From the Madding Crowd**

Schlesinger was loath to repeat himself. He had been reluctant to make *Billy Liar* straight after *A Kind of Loving*, because he considered them too similar. He decided that if he were to make another film with ‘the team’ it would have to be considerably different. He decided to look at the novels of Thomas Hardy. His first choice was *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, but after he read *Far From the Madding Crowd* while on tour in the United States for *Darling*, he chose the latter. It seems an odd choice. Until now he was known as a director of small realist films on contemporary themes. The main influence was that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) had offered Janni a four million dollar budget to make a ‘big’ film after the success of *Darling*, which MGM had turned down; so much for independence. The film was envisioned by MGM as their ‘roadshow’ picture for 1967 in the model of *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965), which had been a huge success for them. That it would star Julie Christie was a bonus. Schlesinger stated at the time that he wanted to get away for the contemporary and make a film in the past. Unfortunately it had to be shot in Panavision, a widescreen process which could be blown up to 70 millimetre for prestige seasons; fortunately his director of photography was Nicholas Roeg, who worked wonders with Hardy’s ‘Wessex’ locations. Ironically Roeg had just been fired from David Lean’s *Ryan’s Daughter* for reasons cited publicly as ‘creative differences’.

The film was not a success, but as Schlesinger was already working on *Midnight Cowboy* when its failure became apparent, it did not affect his career. The problem, as with many roadshow films of the 1960s, was that the story was just too small for such a grandiose and long film. It certainly looks magnificent, and has an air of authenticity about its recreation of nineteenth century rural England. It was the first time that Schlesinger had directed a ‘period piece’ and he demonstrated that his attention to detail could make the past live. In this respect one could still call the film ‘realist’ even though it was not contemporary. The characters and their environment read ‘as if’ the camera had gone back in a time machine.
Schlesinger was not the only director to recreate the past at this time. Tony Richardson had already had great success with *Tom Jones* in 1963, and was in production for another historical epic *The Charge of the Light Brigade* which would be released in 1968. Karel Reisz was making a biographical feature on the dancer Isadora Duncan at this time, which would also be released in 1968. It appears that all the young directors, at this moment, were succumbing to a desire to escape the present. That none of their films were successful perhaps hints at the error of their ways.

**Midnight Cowboy**

Schlesinger had assumed that Janni would produce *Cowboy*, but Janni was not enthusiastic. He did not consider it a good idea to leave the British social milieu and even suggested that if he were to produce the film the locale should be shifted to England. Schlesinger did not agree. Jerome Hellman had previously approached Schlesinger about working together, but Schlesinger had not accepted the offer. His primary motive for this decision was fidelity to Janni.\(^{12}\)

Schlesinger had read the novel *Midnight Cowboy* by James Leo Herlihy when it was first published in 1965. He was immediately interested in the possibility of a film. Once again, he was focused on the characters and their milieu. He did not consider the fact that the film’s subject matter might create problems. Although it was not easy for Hellman to set up the production, the film was finally funded by United Artists and the production went ahead. It is a matter of record that it was the first, and to date, the only film to be rated ‘X’ in the United States to win the Oscar for the best film of its year. Schlesinger was also awarded the Oscar for best director. In terms of his career, this was a peak.

Until *Midnight Cowboy*, Schlesinger’s film style was heavily committed to a Griersonian style of documentary realism. In hindsight, this film can also be read as a social document of New York in the late 1960s. However, with this film, he finally began to explore some of the new aesthetic which had emerged from the *Nouvelle Vague* in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The film still maintains his observational style: a scene will often contain incidental details which, though not directly related to

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\(^{12}\) Mann, op. cit., p.268.
the narrative, enhance the context of the scene but for the first time he uses a non-linear time scheme to flesh out the protagonist’s back story. These flashbacks are perhaps the most adventurous narrative devices in the film. His use of music has also changed. In the Hardy film Richard Rodney Bennett had provided a score heavily indebted to Ralph Vaughn Williams in its use of ‘pastoral themes’ and English folk song. In this film the music was mostly New York Underground rock, with a couple of instrumental themes written by John Barry, most notably the ‘Midnight Cowboy’ theme. However the film’s title sequence had as its background a straightforward pop song called ‘Everybody’s Talking’ sung by Harry Nilsson, which went on to be a hit. With this film Schlesinger ceased to be a British director and became an international film maker.

With the success of Midnight Cowboy, John Schlesinger could now be considered at the peak of his profession. With five completed features one can begin to discern that there are similarities in the stories which he has chosen to tell though the medium of the cinema. In 1970, while in production for his next film, he was interviewed by David Spiers for the journal Screen. In it he stated that he was ‘interested in…escape from the real self into a fantasy world, or the means by which one compromises and accepts what one has got, which is invariably second best.’ Later in the article, when talking about his new film he poses a question which will recur in interviews for the rest of his life: ‘is half a loaf better than no bread to two people who are involved emotionally, not with each other, but somebody else?’

**Sunday Bloody Sunday**

Having succeeded so spectacularly in the United States, Schlesinger returned to the United Kingdom for his next project. Joseph Janni was once again his producer, but Frederic Raphael was otherwise engaged. As was the case with Darling the subject matter of the film was drawn from actual events. However, where Darling was based on an anecdote told to Schlesinger, the new film was based on events from his own life. The film was to be very personal, almost autobiographical. Schlesinger had had a relationship with a young man a few years earlier. He was aware throughout the relationship that his lover was also seeing a woman. Everyone was aware and no-one

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objected. It was not perfect, but it was better than nothing. Once more Schlesinger did not consider that he needed to worry about convention in the relationships in his films.\(^{14}\)

A script was commissioned from writer Penelope Gilliatt. She took the basic situation, but adapted it to the plot of a novel she had written titled *State of Change*. The novel told the story of a Polish woman who migrates to London and there develops a relationship with a Jewish doctor and his young male companion. The combination of Schlesinger’s life experience and Gilliatt’s novel produced *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*.\(^{15}\)

Once more Schlesinger moulded the form of the film to fit the material presented. The time frame of the film is limited to a ten-day period in which the three-way relationship reaches a climax. In this way the film concentrates on established situations and established relationships. The social and cultural context of the film is assumed. In order to give depth to the characters, Schlesinger inserts pieces of the past. These pieces do not function as flashbacks, in other words they are not narrative inserts to explain present action by past events. They function in the same way as Proustian memory. For example, in one scene, the Bar Mitzvah of the doctor’s nephew, we are shown his own Bar Mitzvah; this is memory produced by a current event. Time in the film is not linear. It reveals that the past does not just influence the present, it is present in the present. In this respect one can see that the non-linear time narratives of Alain Resnais have influenced how John Schlesinger constructs his narratives. He has seen effective use of such methods and adapts them to his own use.\(^{16}\)

I consider *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* to be Schlesinger’s masterpiece in the traditional sense of the word. The origin of the term goes back to the medieval craft guilds. An apprentice would present a work to the guild to prove that he had ‘mastered’ all the elements of the craft and could be entered into the ranks of ‘master’. In this way we can see that in these first six films Schlesinger has slowly developed his style. He has progressed from the Griersonian style of his first feature through the use of different screen shapes, colour, music, the breaking up of time in the cinematic experience, and the creation of the past on the screen. In this film all these elements

\(^{14}\)Mann, op. cit., pp224-228.


\(^{16}\)See chapter 4 of the present thesis for a more detailed examination on non-linear narrative.
come together in harmony to produce the work of a master. From now on John Schlesinger’s films do not enter new areas of aesthetic experience; they build on what has gone before. This does not mean that the films are of less interest, but we have moved from the work of a developing mind to the works of a fully mature artist.

The Day of the Locust

As with his previous projects The Day of the Locust has a pre-history which overlaps his previous films. He had first read the novel in 1967 and decided it would be suitable for him. The novel deals with a group of disparate residents of 1930s Los Angeles, almost all of whom fantasise about ‘making it’ in the movies. Nathanael West’s narrative of hope disappointed can be seen by now as typical Schlesinger subject.

The film was originally under the aegis of a producer named Ronald Shedlo, and funding was sought from Warner Bros. However, after some delay Jerome Hellman took over as producer, and the film was released as a Paramount production. Waldo Salt, who had written the screenplay for Midnight Cowboy, wrote this screenplay as well. It would appear then that the reason the film was made at all was as a re-run of the successful team from Midnight Cowboy. Ronald Shedlo remained on the credits as ‘presenter’ of the film.¹⁷

This pre-history of the film reveals a transition in the way Schlesinger had worked until now. He still worked with an established team, but he was becoming more involved with Hollywood Studio production. His previous film had been a chamber piece; this was painted on a grander scale. What remained constant was his interest in the subject matter of characters whose desires outstripped their abilities.

As the film is set in the Los Angeles of the 1930s it is another ‘period piece’. As with Far From the Madding Crowd, there is meticulous attention to period detail, such that once more time has shifted. Although the narrative is linear, the fact that the entire film is set in the past gives it a certain dream-like quality. The climactic ‘apocalypse’, at a Hollywood premier at Grauman’s Chinese Theater, is both bravura in its staging and editing, and at the same time, gives a sense of stepping outside of reality into a dream-time.

¹⁷ Phillips, op. cit., p. 95.
The film was not a financial success, but as a work of art I find it impressive in its sheer confidence. Once more Schlesinger has chosen to film a subject that was of personal interest, even though its subject matter was considered by mainstream critics to be ‘controversial’.

One can see the film as part of that sub-genre in which Hollywood pretends to be self-critical, from *What Price Hollywood?* (George Cukor, 1932), through the various versions of *A Star is Born* (William A. Wellman, 1937; George Cukor, 1954; Frank Pierson, 1976), to the outright gothic of *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (Robert Aldrich, 1962). However, *Day of the Locust* also coincides with *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974). Where the other films cited were all contemporary tales, these two films are evidence of a desire to re-create the past. Hollywood, after some sixty years of existence, was beginning to build a visual and narrative structure of self-reference. The films create a simulacrum of the Hollywood of the past, and can be seen as a move away from the modernism of the contemporary narratives to a post-modern creation of a possibly non-existent past.

**Marathon Man**

Because of the financial failure of *Locust*, Schlesinger was unable to find backing for any personal projects. Hence, for the first time since *A Kind of Loving*, he signed on as director of a project which he had not initiated. This may be seen as a backward step in his career, but for Schlesinger it was a sign that he was accepted as a professional in Hollywood. The producer of the film was Robert Evans, who at that time was head of production at Paramount. This was during a period in which Paramount had produced such notable films as *Rosemary’s Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), the aforementioned *Chinatown* and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). Evans was seen as a sign of the ‘new Hollywood’ and he personally selected Schlesinger to direct what was intended to be Paramount’s next ‘blockbuster’.

Although this would appear to be a departure from his usual way of working, the team that Schlesinger assembled for the film reveals continuity in his working methods. Although he had not initiated the project, he ensured that his creative team included people he had worked with previously, including Conrad Hall as

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cinematographer and Jim Clark as editor. Dustin Hoffman played the leading role, his second time in a Schlesinger film. Also of note is the presence of William Devane in the character of Janeway, the first of three films he would make with Schlesinger. He was now working wholly within the studio system, but Schlesinger still managed to create an English style ‘unit’ atmosphere.

Although the film can be interpreted as an exercise in genre, there are significant stylistic touches which enable the film to be seen as ‘A John Schlesinger film’, as the title credits declare. In fact this was only the second time that such a credit had appeared. The first was on Locust. This, I think, was not a reflection on Schlesinger’s professional reputation; it was more likely a reflection of the ‘New Hollywood’. The ascendance of the director as star was a phenomenon which came to prominence in the 1970s. It can be seen as a the influence of the Nouvelle Vague on Hollywood as the new generation aspired to the quality of European ‘art cinema’ rather than the Classical Hollywood it was replacing.

In Marathon Man, the thriller genre is used to examine the impact of the past on the present, in the same way that the past impinged on the lives of the characters in Sunday, Bloody Sunday. So we once more get brief glimpses of a central character’s memories. In this case, the glimpses are rendered in sepia, to separate them from the present, an emphasis which was probably requested by the studio. Schlesinger had not previously needed to separate out memory in such an obvious way. Apart from this the film is entirely classical in its narrative. In the first half of the film there are three major threads to the narrative, and the director uses parallel editing to combine the stories of Babe Levy (Dustin Hoffman) in New York, his brother ‘Doc’ (Roy Scheider) in Paris, and the Nazi fugitive Christian Szell (Laurence Olivier) in Argentina.

However, the most remarkable aspect of the film is that Doc is in a sexual relationship with his Secret Service partner, Janeway. In Doc’s first scene he is engaged in a telephone conversation with ‘Janey’. It is clear from the conversation that Doc wants Janey to come to the hotel room and make love. An hour later, after Doc’s death Janeway introduces himself to Babe with the line ‘The name’s Janeway, but you can call me Janey.’ This small piece of information forces a complete revision of all the scenes played between Doc and Janeway in the film. On a second viewing it becomes obvious that Schlesinger has directed the two actors to play the domestic couple. The film is in fact playing with what would become Queer Theory. An entire
narrative thread of the film is only available to those in the audience who are sufficiently alert. Unfortunately the relationship is so subtle that it generally goes unnoticed. It is not even mentioned in Vito Russo’s seminal work *The Celluloid Closet.*\(^{19}\) The presence of a gay couple whose relationship simply exists is typical, by now, of Schlesinger’s work. From *Darling* onwards, any gay character is simply presented, never emphasised or problematised. As in his own life, homosexuality is not a problem, simply a fact. One wonders if the producers of the film were even aware of this alternative presence in such a mainstream film.

**Yanks**

As *Marathon Man* was a success financially, Schlesinger was able to move back to his own project, and back to the United Kingdom. Jerome Hellman offered him the film *Coming Home,* which was eventually directed to great acclaim by Hal Ashby. However, Joseph Janni had a new project, and the desire to work in the United Kingdom was ever present.

If there are only glimpses of personal memory in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* and *Marathon Man,* then *Yanks,* like *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *Day of the Locust,* is entirely memory. The film, on the surface, is a war-time romance as experienced by three different couples from three different social strata. Helen (Vanessa Redgrave) and her American soldier lover John (William Devane) are upper-middle class; she lives in the ‘big house’ outside of town, he is a Harvard educated lawyer. Jean (Lisa Eichhorn) and her American Sergeant Matt (Richard Gere) are both lower-middle class; her family own a grocery shop which incorporates the town’s Post Office, his family owns a diner in Arizona. Molly (Wendy Morgan) is a bus conductor, and her G.I. is Danny (Chick Vennera) an Italian American prize-fighter from the Bronx.

There is nothing particularly new in these relationships, and if that were all the film had to offer it would be of very little interest. However the social milieu of the film expands out to enclose the three couples in what is best described as lived memory. The film recreates in detail the time, but it is the time as remembered by the director. The film has a number of boys in it, for whom the war is more an opportunity than a

\(^{19}\) Russo considers that the relationship was ‘deleted’ from the film: Russo, op. cit. p.226
hindrance. One boy in particular, Helen’s son Tim (Simon Harrison) appears to be a sketch of Schlesinger himself. He is away at school but unhappy because he is not good at sports. As his father is away at the war, he is allowed to come home. The other town boys do a brisk trade with the US Army camp. Although the film is British in its viewpoint, it does not deride the Americans in general. The only criticism of American culture occurs in an extended dance sequence in which race prejudice is portrayed and criticised.

On an aesthetic level, the film works best in terms of memory. As a whole it recalls the Humphrey Jennings films Listen to Britain (1942) and A Diary for Timothy (1945). It does this by evoking impressions of an environment which work on an emotional level. On another level the film invokes the spirit of the British New Wave. Much of the film was shot on location in Stockport, the location for A Kind of Loving. Also Rachel Roberts, in the role of Jean’s mother, recalls the roles she played in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960), and especially the embittered Mrs. Hammond in This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson, 1963). Even more striking to me is the presence of Vanessa Redgrave. Forty years old at the time of filming she recalls in both looks and demeanour her mother, Rachel Kempson, at the same age. I am thinking particularly of the Ealing war film The Captive Heart (Basil Dearden, 1946). In that film Kempson also plays the role of a middle class wife waiting at home while her airman husband is away on duty. In Schlesinger’s films, memory is ever present, either within the film narrative or in the film form. For those who share Schlesinger’s film memory, his films are rich indeed.

**Honky Tonk Freeway**

During the post-production phase of Yanks, Schlesinger was offered a script for a new-style ‘big’ comedy. This was at the time of such blockbuster comedies as Animal House (John Landis, 1978) and Caddyshack (Harold Ramis, 1980). However the idea of ‘A John Schlesinger Film’ being cited in this genre is unexpected to say the least. We are once again at a transitional period in Schlesinger’s career. Yanks was financially unsuccessful and was not greeted with warmth by the critics. Perhaps the only way to see this choice is as one last attempt to be accepted as an insider in the Hollywood establishment. The attempt failed.
It is not that *Honky Tonk Freeway* is a bad film. The interweaving of the multiple narrative strands is deftly handled, the characters are drawn with sympathy and the film is never misanthropic in its view of human foibles. However, some of the characters are perhaps too unconventional for mainstream American audiences. Among the characters are a young nun who decides not to take her final vows, but become a call girl; an elderly alcoholic woman; a dissatisfied family man who abandons his family at the end of the film to find fulfillment with his mistress; and the entire population of a Florida town who are prepared to bribe politicians and destroy the eponymous freeway in order to save their town.

The film has often been compared to *Nashville* (Robert Altman, 1975) in its use of multiple narrative strands. Like this latter film its implicit aim is to present a ‘state of the nation’ film in the guise of a narrative fiction.\(^{20}\) The major problem with this is that Americans can be very touchy about criticism of their culture from outside. John Schlesinger was definitely an outsider. The characters seem to question basic tenets of American faith: the indestructible nuclear family; the sanctity of religious vows; the essential incorruptibility of American Politicians, and so on. The last time an outsider attempted such a general criticism of the United States of America was when MGM made the mistake of inviting Michelangelo Antonioni to the USA. The resulting film – *Zabriskie Point* (1970) – was not accepted by the American Public. Although one might think that *Midnight Cowboy* had been critical of American Society, that film was essentially an excursion into the lower depths and the characters were ‘other’ to the mainstream. *Honky Tonk Freeway* was about the mainstream. When the film was released the newly-elected President of the United States was Ronald Reagan. The mood of the country was conservative and triumphal. There was no room for criticism from outside. The $24 million dollar film earned just $600, 000 on its initial release. It was a disaster. As his biographer declares it was not so much *Nashville* as *Heaven’s Gate*, the Michael Cimino folly that bankrupted United Artists in 1980.\(^ {21}\)

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\(^{20}\) Mann, op. cit., p. 480-481
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
The retreat from Hollywood

It is only in retrospect that one can say that *Honky Tonk Freeway* marked the end of John Schlesinger’s attempts to sustain a Hollywood career. Had the film been a financial success, he would have continued on his quest to make mainstream, essentially commercial films. As this did not happen, he was forced to find other outlets for his creative pursuits. Although this work focuses on his fiction feature films, Schlesinger also maintained an intermittent career as a director of theatrical productions. In the 1960s he directed several productions for The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), both classical and modern; in the 1970s he worked at the National Theatre, again in both classic texts and modern plays; he even directed one West End musical (*I and Albert*). What he did not do in those two decades was return to television. There had been a videotaped performance of one of his RSC productions in 1966: *A Day in the Trees* by Marguerite Duras, but this was no more than a record of a performance in the theatre.

It was not until 1981 that he once more worked on a television production. In this case it was to direct a play for the American Cable network HBO and a local British Independent Television Network (ITV) named HTV. The production was to be of *Separate Tables* by Terence Rattigan. This duo of plays had been successful in the West end in 1954, and had also run very successfully on Broadway in 1956. The film version, directed by Delbert Mann was also a success in 1958, but there had been no productions since then. Rattigan had been eclipsed by the advent of the new realist theatre, led by John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* in 1956. Although he had several plays produced after it, *Separate Tables* was his last major success; he had died in 1977.  

This television production can be seen as the beginning of the Rattigan revival. There is a certain synchronicity, then, that the production helped channel Schlesinger into a new, fruitful period of work. It is important to note that this is not in any way a film. In fact, unlike the 1958 film version the work was presented as a duet of one-act plays, as it was presented originally on stage, and on its original single set. The text is not rewritten at all. In fact the work is, like *Days in the Trees*, a recording of a theatrical performance. The only difference is that it was never seen in a theatre. The

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great attraction for Schlesinger appears to have been the fact that the two leads were to be played by Alan Bates and Julie Christie, with Claire Bloom and Irene Worth in the other two main roles. The work was greeted with acclaim, and Bates and Christie won awards in the USA for their performances. Once again Schlesinger was seen at this best. The work is a chamber piece, it was produced in the environment of a ‘cottage unit’, and he was allowed to make the work to his own plans.\(^{23}\)

Another significant fact was that the work was no longer ephemeral. The domestic videotape recorder meant that works such as this would have a much longer shelf life, and in fact could be collected as part of a personal library. It was released as a commercial videotape by MGM/UA in 1984, but unfortunately has not been re-released in any format since then.

Television was now a place where works of enduring value could be produced and retained. Unlike his apprenticeship films in the 1950s, these new works were critically evaluated. Although this production was not a film, there were other works at this time which were changing the nature of the medium. The 1970s had seen the advent of the ‘mini-series’. This was a new long-form, but contained, narrative. It may be said to have reached it creative climax with the now legendary series *Brideshead Revisited* (Charles Sturridge, 1981). A new generation of producers was using the medium in a way which was similar to the film culture in which Schlesinger had first worked.

**Patriots and Traitors: The Spy Films**

At the BBC there was a producer who was interested in working in this new way. His name was Innes Lloyd. He was known as a mentor of writers and is generally credited with the development of this new style of television. Schlesinger’s biographer mentions both Andrew Davies and Alan Bennett as writers who benefitted from his backing in their early writing careers. Bennett had first worked with Lloyd in 1972 on the production *A Day Out*.\(^{24}\)

The new work was based on an anecdote which the Australian born actress Coral Browne was fond of telling at parties. In 1958 she had played Gertrude in *Hamlet* in a cultural exchange tour to the Soviet Union. There she had been contacted by the

\(^{23}\) Mann, op. cit., p.491

\(^{24}\) Bennett, Alan, *Writing Home*, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 71
notorious spy-defector Guy Burgess. Both Bennett and Schlesinger were familiar with the story and both were attracted to its qualities, especially the idea of, as Schlesinger’s biographer expresses it ‘loyalty, loneliness and isolation’. The two gay men were well aware of the psychology of Burgess and how easily an outsider can be alienated from a society which may pretend to tolerate, but ultimately always disapproves. With Coral Browne playing herself and Alan Bates in florid mode as Burgess, An Englishman Abroad was a great success. Once again the awards flowed. Both Schlesinger and Bates won at that year’s BAFTA awards in the television categories.

The form of the film is of great interest. That it is a film and not a television play is beyond question. There are numerous locations, both interior and exterior, and the photography, mise-en-scène, editing and music are in cinema style. By this I mean that the film is not produced in the limited style normal to a television play at that time. A play, like Separate Tables, is limited in its scope. There will be few sets, and the interiors are videotaped while the exteriors, if there are any, will be in the form of a filmed insert, and usually jar because of the changing quality of the image. A television film, on the other hand, has an affinity with the old style ‘B’ feature. The number of locations will be limited, the number of characters will also be limited, and most importantly there is no requirement to extend the running time of the film. A ‘B’ feature usually ran less than eighty minutes and was shown as the first half to a main feature which ran a minimum of ninety, and usually in excess of one hundred minutes. With the demise of the ‘B’ feature and the move to multiple screenings of a single film, the requirement developed that any film which was made for theatrical release must be a minimum of ninety minutes long. There was, and is, no such requirement for broadcast television. As a result, the film An Englishman Abroad runs just seventy minutes; the tale it tells is an anecdote and needs no more time to portray the event.

Once again Schlesinger demonstrated the environment in which he worked best: with a small unit in which the triumvirate of Producer-Director-Writer worked in close collaboration on a chamber piece where the words and their delivery were at the forefront. Schlesinger was always a director of actors rather than scenes, and in his best work this shows. By now we can see that for him to function at his best he needs to work in an environment of collaboration. In what I have been calling ‘cottage unit’

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25 Mann, op. cit., 492.
productions, he always worked at his best. Even in a film, such as *Midnight Cowboy*, where he is clearly the author, he worked with, not against the producer and the writer. Although in the films in the last part of his career he always manages to produce work of interest, if he is not working with, but against others in the creative team, his work suffers.

*An Englishman Abroad* marks the beginning of a new stage in Schlesinger’s career. In the 1960s he established himself as a director of British realist films; in the 1970s he attempted to establish himself as a major director in the new Hollywood. As we have seen, only once did he succeed in this ambition with *Marathon Man*. The problem was never the quality of his work, but the subject matter of his films. His films always centred on characters who were in some sense outside society. In the 1960s this fit with the dominant notion of the alternative society and it was possible to find a major audience that identified with the anti-heroes of his films. However in the 1970s, a time when Clint Eastwood’s *Dirty Harry* and the new summer blockbusters of Spielberg and Lucas were the dominant forces in cinema, such characters were no longer popular. In order to maintain a mainstream career, a director needed to maintain a mainstream audience. Schlesinger was never really such a mainstream director. So in the era of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher it was probably inevitable that his films would begin to focus on the problems of patriotism and also the perceived threats to the family.

In the decade after *An Englishman Abroad* Schlesinger directed three more films on the subject of spies. The spy in popular culture is usually seen as the heroic defender of the status quo as in the *Ashenden* stories of W. Somerset Maugham, Ian Fleming’s James Bond, Len Deighton’s Harry Palmer, and John Le Carré’s George Smiley. However there has also been the tradition of the disaffected, resentful outsider, a character who probably has his origin in Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* published in 1907. In all four of Schlesinger’s spy films the protagonist is of this type.

Following on from Guy Burgess is Christopher Boyce (Timothy Hutton), in *The Falcon and the Snowman*, (1985). Where Burgess was a very British traitor, Boyce is the epitome of the righteous American. The film is firmly set in a specific time from the opening montage - a series of clips from television in the early 1970s. Also in an early scene the focus of the characters, and the audience, is on the direct telecast of the US Congress vote to impeach President Richard Nixon over the Watergate Scandal. This specific event fixes the narrative at this point as taking place in August.
1974; another event, the sacking of the Australian Labour government by the Governor-General again fixes the time to November 1975.

These background events are used by Boyce to justify his selling secrets to the Soviet Union. However, the film also reveals that he is a failed seminarian whose main interest is falconry. He is an outsider who appears to believe that his position allows him to be objective in his criticism of society, and to act on that criticism. I say appears, because the film never allows us to enter into the mind of Boyce. There are no memory flashes in this film to intimate the past as agent in the present. His only close relationship is with ‘the snowman’ his childhood friend Daulton Lee who is now a drug dealer. Their relationship inevitably recalls Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo from *Midnight Cowboy*; especially as Sean Penn’s acting style in the role of Lee is very much in the style of Hoffman’ method-acted Rizzo.

In 1992 Schlesinger was reunited with Innes Lloyd and Alan Bennett for a companion piece to *An Englishman Abroad*. The new film, *A Question of Attribution*, details the last day of Sir Anthony Blunt at the Courtauld Institute. He is about to resign as his activities as a Soviet spy have finally been made public. The film, like the earlier piece is a short piece, running just seventy minutes. Its centrepiece is a long scene in which Blunt is confronted by the Queen, referred to in the script as HMQ. This scene is a brilliantly written dialogue in which nothing is openly referred to, but everything is said. Both films are primarily about the words spoken and Schlesinger’s direction is of the actors, not the scenery. In this respect they play as a double bill, and in fact have done so on the stage. As film-work they are masterful examples of the literate cinema. They are linear in narrative, staged and edited in plain, classical style, and focused on the actors. They are ideal examples of fitting form to content. They are also examples of the new flexibility that ‘cinematic television’ was bringing to the fictional film.

The final film in Schlesinger’s quartet of spy stories was *The Innocent* (1993), based on a novel by Ian McEwen. This time the film uses the framework of a specific event to evoke a past period. The event is the opening of the border between East and West Germany and the demolition of the Berlin Wall. These events are prominently shown both in the diegetic world of the film and, as usual, in television images present in the mise-en-scène of the film. The ‘innocent’ of the title is Leonard Markham (Campbell Scott), a telephone engineer who is in Berlin to meet a woman from his past. The city and the memory of the woman evoke the events in which he
was involved in the mid-fifties, before the wall was built. Once more Schlesinger uses the power of memory to evoke a period which he can portray on screen. As we saw in *Yanks*, Schlesinger’s evocation of period is not just documentary in form. In that film the presence of Vanessa Redgrave evoked the memory of her mother; in this film the presence of Isabella Rossellini evokes the memory of her mother, Ingrid Bergman. As in the previous film, the use of makeup, costume and acting style is powerful in its evocation of memory. Rossellini’s character, Maria, is a German woman, whose past is uncertain, but whose present involves Leonard in deceit and murder. At the same time, Leonard is working on a clandestine operation supervised by an American Intelligence agent, Bob Glass, played by Anthony Hopkins. This latter character is the most problematic of the film. He is a man of some bluster, and, as played by Hopkins, is prone to bullying in his pursuit of ‘commies’. The film invokes above all, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1943). The end of the memory narrative in *The Innocent* takes place on a runway at the Templehof Airport, Berlin. A DC3 is waiting to take Leonard and Maria to London; at the last moment Maria tells Leonard that she is not going. This is a direct evocation of the final scene of *Casablanca* except that the gender roles are reversed. The pleasure of the film is as much in its evocation of film history as it is the evocation of political history. As with *Yanks*, the film is most successful for those who share its cultural memory.

**The Family under threat**

Interspersed with the spy films were three commercially oriented Hollywood films. Schlesinger referred to this type of film as ‘for them’26 The three - *The Believers* (1987), *Pacific Heights* (1990), and *Eye For An Eye* (1996) – can all be loosely described as horror movies. In the first a child is abducted by a group of people involved in a voodoo-like cult called Santeria. The father, a New York psychiatrist played by Martin Sheen must find the child before he is sacrificed. In the second a young couple, played by Melanie Griffith and Matthew Modine, are harassed by the tenant from hell played by Michael Keaton. In the third Sally Field wreaks vengeance on the man, played by Kiefer Sutherland, who has raped and murdered her seventeen-year old daughter. In all three films the underlying theme is the attack on the

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26 Mann, op. cit., p. 509.
American family home, and the perceived lack of support provided by the legal system.

All three films were unpopular with the critics and none did better than average business at the box-office. At the time they were seen as evidence of a once-great director prostituting himself to Hollywood. In fact the first of the three was a personal project for Schlesinger and Michael Childers who are jointly credited as producers. Schlesinger had always been interested in the horror genre, but as it was not deemed respectable he could never get a project that interested him.

Unfortunately an initial critical reading tends to stick so that The Believers, in particular is dismissed readily as trash. However as an efficient thriller on voodoo themes and the threat to the family by the ‘other’ the film works. It is no better than it pretends to be, and perhaps needs to be re-interpreted as a B-movie exercise. Such a film, if it had been made forty years earlier would have been the bottom half of a double feature; if it had been made a decade later, it would be classified as a straight to DVD film. This trio of horror films reminds us that film is a business as well as an art and that sometimes a director must compromise in order to have an income.

A Triptych of English Eccentrics

If The Believers was ‘one for them’ the other film Schlesinger directed in the late 1980s was certainly ‘one for us’. The film was titled Madame Sousatzka (1988) and starred Shirley MacLaine in the eponymous role. Madam Sousatzka is a London-based piano teacher and the film focuses on her efforts to train a young Bengali boy Manek (Navin Chowdry) up to concert standard. The film was based on a 1962 novel by Bernice Rubens and the screenplay was by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. The latter was well-known at the time as the regular screenwriter on Ismail Merchant -James Ivory films. Surrounding the two central characters were a gallery of English eccentrics played by such stalwarts as Peggy Ashcroft, Twiggy and Jeremy Sinden and South Asian actors such as Shabana Azmi and Mohammad Ashiq. The film gained some attention on its release, mainly through MacLaine’s flamboyant performance, which attracted nominations at several awards ceremonies.

It is significant that the novel on which this film is based was published in the year that Schlesinger directed his first feature film. If it had been made in 1962 then Sousatzka and the young boy would have been outsiders, ill-adjusted to the new
society. Twenty-five years later, such characters have become merely eccentric. Schlesinger effected one significant change to the novel to reflect the changed nature of British Society: in the novel the boy was Jewish, reflecting the author’s heritage. By changing his ethnicity to South Asian, Schlesinger is acknowledging the otherness of the new British Asian community. In fact the boy occupies a similar place in society to the heroes of British New Wave films. The major change is that there is no element of anger or resentment in his character.

After the lack of success of the Hollywood Horror films, Schlesinger, by now approaching 70 years, was happy to retreat to England and make a pair of small-scale British films for television companies. Like Madame Sousatzka both films, Cold Comfort Farm (1995) and The Tale of Sweeney Todd (1998) can be described as portraits of English eccentricity. The former, based on the 1933 novel by Stella Gibbons, took great delight in the eccentricity of the Starkadder family. The cast included Eileen Atkins as Judith Starkadder, Ian McKellen as Amos Starkadder, Rufus Sewell as a particularly sexy Seth Starkadder and 75 year old Sheila Burrell as Aunt Ada Doom who ‘saw something nasty in the woodshed’. The novel had cheerfully parodied the earthy style of the ‘regional’ novels. These novels, culminating in the work of D.H. Lawrence, were noted for the sense of doom (perhaps inherited from Thomas Hardy) and the vivid descriptions of rural England and the erotic habits of its denizens. The film can equally be read as a cheerful parody of such recent phenomena as the BBC literary serial and the Merchant-Ivory heritage films of the 1980s. Everyone in the film enthusiastically plays their part and the whole is done in classically English eccentric style. Had it been Schlesinger’s final film it would have been an appropriate farewell. Unfortunately he directed two more films, neither of which has added to his reputation.

The Tale of Sweeney Todd was made for the American Showtime cable network. It was filmed on location in Dublin, and the mise-en-scène is appropriately grotesque. Unfortunately the screenplay for the film is a somewhat lacklustre affair. At the time the film was made, the character of Sweeney Todd was most familiar as the hero of Stephen Sondheim’s ballad opera, Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street. In that darkly comic work Todd is the victim of British colonial interests and his motivation is anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist vengeance. In this film Todd has fallen to cannibalism while in the African Jungle and, it is implied, has become addicted to the taste of human flesh. As a minor character states: ‘Once one has tasted
human flesh, so they say, no other meat will satisfy.’ The character, as played by Ben Kingsley, has none of the dark vengeance of the Sondheim creation; instead he is portrayed as a slightly eccentric, if rather garrulous barber with an odd dietary habit. Joanna Lumley, who had played Mrs. Smiling in *Cold Comfort Farm*, was a particularly grotesque Mrs. Lovett. As the film was made for television, of necessity, was reticent with the expected gore of this familiar tale. By virtue of this familiarity, the dramatic tension in the film is built by an absence of effect. Schlesinger films several shaving scenes in which the camera zooms in slowly on Todd’s razor gliding over a jugular vein, and then *not* cutting it. When we do finally see Todd cut a throat, it is not in the chair but in the cellar and the effect is somewhat anti-climactic.

For the rest, the film is built around the search by an American, Ben Carlyle, (Campbell Scott) for a missing merchant. This rather routine mystery has no drama as the conventional narrative makes it inevitable that Todd will die and all will be put right in the end. There is only one sequence in the film which allows Schlesinger to reveal his mastery of the medium. The American is walking through a street market and is attempting to fit together the pieces of evidence he has acquired. As he gazes at a butcher’s stall, Schlesinger cuts from a shot of Carlyle to a butcher’s basket in which there is a human hand, then back to Carlyle and again to a point-of-view shot of the basket, this time there is a human head in the basket. This brief montage of objective reality and subjective perception, reveal to the viewer Carlyle’s thought process and his conclusion. It is done without a word of dialogue. Carlyle now knows, and the viewer knows he knows, the monstrous deeds of Sweeney Todd. If the rest of the film had been made with such deft touches the film would be more memorable than it is.

**The Next Best Thing – or not**

Schlesinger’s last film is also one of his most problematic. *The Next Best Thing* (2000) was a project initiated by Rupert Everett. Everett had just appeared to great acclaim in *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (P. J. Hogan, 1997) and wanted to repeat the success of that film. His aim was to be the first out gay man in Hollywood who could successfully carry a film. The initial idea for the film was a straight woman (Madonna) and a gay man (Everett) who decide to have a child together. It would be a
light comedy about a new family. By the time the film was complete major changes had been made to this concept. Instead of the couple deliberately attempting parenthood, the pregnancy is the accidental result of a drunken one night stand between the two best friends. This plot point was greeted with derision by the gay press and doubt by the mainstream media. The only people who believed in the situation were Everett and Madonna.\textsuperscript{27}

The oddest thing about the narrative as it stands is its similarity to the novels of the British New Wave. A young man who lives a relatively carefree life is trapped into a loveless marriage by an unexpected pregnancy. He decides to commit himself to the new situation, even though it means he can no longer be free. This is a plot point that would not be out of place in a novel or play by Alan Sillitoe or John Osborne.

In the second act of the film, Abby (Madonna) reveals to Robert (Everett) that in fact the child, who is now six years old, is not his; she just deceived him into marrying her for security. This takes the film out of light comedy and into melodrama. As the woman is the villain and the male lead is the wronged character, one can see elements of male melodrama. Unfortunately as a melodrama the film does not convince. That an independent woman who acknowledges that she is approaching middle age should feel insecure, even though she runs her own business seems far-fetched. In fact the character as written, and as played by Madonna, is so selfish that one cannot find anything to like in her. In a film made thirty-five years earlier, it would have seemed daring; in fact in \textit{A Taste of Honey} (Tony Richardson, 1961), a very similar narrative was depicted with realism and a touching sense of the naivety of the young people involved. For two thirty-something Los Angelenos it simply seems careless. The film ends with a compromise. It is as if ‘half a loaf’ has come back to haunt Schlesinger. But as one critic noted at the time, in this film, unlike \textit{Sunday, Bloody Sunday}, ‘half a loaf is not better than none at all’.\textsuperscript{28} Once more the film is not bad as such; it is simply let down by a poorly written script. At the time of filming Schlesinger was old (72 years), ill with diabetes and a heart condition, and did not have the energy to fight for revisions as he had done in his younger days. It is a pity that this is remembered as his last film. Had he stopped with \textit{Cold Comfort Farm}, his ‘swan song’ would be more fondly remembered.

\textsuperscript{27} Mann, op. cit., p.22
\textsuperscript{28} The quote is from \textit{The New York Daily News} review, 3 March, 200, quoted in Mann, op.cit., p.553.
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