ABSTRACT

WRITING FOR FILM: The Role of the Production Board of the BFI

A Thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil, University of Oxford
Faculty of English Language and Literature

This thesis provides detailed textual analysis of four films made (with BFI Production Board assistance) by two important, though contrasting, British writer/directors—*My Childhood, My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home* (Bill Douglas, 1972–77); and *The Draughtsman's Contract* (Peter Greenaway, 1982). Though the thesis is focused on those films, its form and substance have been governed by the fact it is text-based and presented within the Faculty of English.

The first chapter briefly considers early national and governmental concerns about the role of film in British life, includes a survey of films legislation and looks at the proposals for a National Film Institute. The second chapter looks at the specific outcome of those proposals, namely, the creation of the British Film Institute. It also looks at the history of BFI film production up to 1982, which is the terminal date of the period under study.

The discussion then turns to the main topic of the thesis, a detailed textual analysis of the Douglas and Greenaway films. As both discussions demanded, as a *sine qua non* of the descriptions offered, accurate texts of each work in its final, achieved form, editions of each have been specially prepared and are submitted with the thesis for ease of consultation. While the discussion of each work is primarily concerned to establish its distinct nature and quality, the two chapters devoted to them implicitly serve also a larger argument, dealt with more summarily in the thesis, about the perceived conflict between the demands of art and industry. Where the Douglas trilogy demonstrates a thoroughly uncommercial enterprise in the pursuit of a highly personal statement by its director for whom an integrity of personal experience was the prime concern, analysis of Greenaway's film demonstrates a contrasting achievement in terms of a commercial cinema and a quite different aesthetic. Where the one was in part made possible by the BFI's earlier commitment to experimental filmmaking, *The Draughtsman's Contract* is the expression of the Production Board's later concern to produce work for a broader audience poised on the borderline of art and entertainment.

The conclusion briefly takes up those issues and offers some suggestions as to the ideological and historical origins of the art/industry debate. This is complemented by a substantial bibliography of further reading on 'Culture, Art/Industry, and Avant-Gardism'.

Robert V. McNamee, Lincoln College, Hilary Term 1994

WRITING FOR FILM

The Role of the Production Board of the British Film Institute

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Michaelmas Term 1994



FOR MY PARENTS, SARAH & MY CHILDREN

WITHOUT WHOM . . . .

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ABBREVIATIONS

I have tried to avoid abbreviations in the body of the thesis, preferring clarity to convenience.

Abbreviations do occur, however, within the parenthetical references at the end of quotations.

Acts	=	*Public General Acts & General Synod Measures*
BBFC	=	British Board of Film Censors/Classification
BEd	=	Board of Education
BFI	=	British Film Institute
BFILib	=	BFI Library
BLib	=	British Library
BoT	=	Board of Trade
ExFF	=	Experimental Film Fund of BFI
FBI	=	Federation of British Industries
FO	=	Foreign Office
Gov. Min.	=	Minutes of Governors Meetings of BFI
HC Deb.	=	*House of Commons Debates*
HL Deb.	=	*House of Lords Debates*
HO	=	Home Office
MoI	=	Ministry of Information
NFFC	=	National Film Finance Corporation
PB	=	BFI Production Board
PRO	=	Public Record Office

PREFACE

> When Barthes says that literature 'exists only as discourse', we must forcefully remind ourselves that discourse always takes place in specific and concrete forms, and that those forms are by no means comprehended by the limits of language.
>
> J. J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections*.

This thesis is based on two assumptions that reflect what I take to be a constant challenge facing the humanities today: namely, the need for *rigorous* inquiries that yet do not lose sight of the *human* nature of their subject. Simply put, those assumptions are:

> 1. Theory and interpretation depend upon a detailed understanding of 'the composition, formal design and transmission of texts'[1] within their historical and sociological contexts;
>
> 2. Analysis cannot be separated from evaluation: literary facts offer nothing beyond their human significance.

The first premise depends in part on my reading of scholars like D. F. McKenzie and J. J. McGann.[2] McGann, for example, founds the critical study of literature upon historical bibliography, while McKenzie defines bibliography as a sociology of text production:

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[1] D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts*, (London, 1986) 4. Future references follow the *MLA Style Manual* for parenthetical documentation: with author and page number (and short title, when necessary) appearing parenthetically after quotations. Full citations are given in a list of references at the end of the thesis.

[2] See, e.g., McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts* and McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections*.

> . . . bibliography is the discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception. . . . What the word 'texts' also allows . . . is the extension of present practice to include all forms of texts, not merely books or Greg's signs on pieces of parchment or paper. It also frankly accepts that bibliographers should be concerned to show that forms effect meaning. Beyond that, it allows us to describe not only the technical but the social processes of their transmission. In those quite specific ways, it accounts for non-book texts, their physical forms, textual versions, technical transmission, institutional control, their perceived meanings, and social effects. (McKenzie 4)

Thus a full discourse-analysis properly addressed to all the physical and temporal dimensions of texts would be part morphological analysis, concerned 'with texts as recorded forms'—and the 'expressive function' of those forms—(McKenzie 8), and part social history, alerting us 'to the roles of institutions, and their own complex structures, in affecting the forms of social discourse, past and present' (McKenzie 7).

The second of the premises mentioned above rests in part on Alasdair MacIntyre's extensive work on moral philosophy.[3] MacIntyre reminds us that any social history, and by extension any analysis of cultural production(s), has profound and personal implications:

> . . . without allusion to the place that justice and injustice, courage and cowardice play in human life very little will be genuinely explicable. It follows that many of the explanatory projects of the modern social sciences, a methodological canon of which is the separation of 'the facts' . . . from all evaluation, are bound to fail. (*Virtue* 199)

The belief, clearly held by some, that we might conduct essentially value-free inquiry in the humanities is based on a mistaken, scientific model. Whatever protestations there may be to the contrary, science is neither free from personal nor social considerations. Einstein's formulation of the mass/energy relationship may refer to a physical reality that is value-free in itself, but that is something we cannot experience. *Pace* Descartes, everything we know, we

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[3] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

know subjectively (which only appears tautologous and unimportant from a stubbornly persistent, Enlightenment perspective). Even within the range of the hard sciences, we now know that subjectivity is fundamentally inescapable. Of course, like the humanities, science is also an organized, social and economic activity; and as such exists within a human context for the realisation (or obliteration) of human ends. If it were possible to take $E=mc^2$ purely as *a record of physical reality*, then it would be nothing more than a statement of equivalency, an abstract note of an obscure physical relationship. However, as *a scientific formula*, $E=mc^2$ is anything but free of human (which means ethical) considerations. In our world, it is not merely an equation but a narrative, telling a tale of treasure or Armageddon—depending on how we interpret and use the story. When science pretends otherwise, its disingenuousness is irresponsible and unconscionable.

Though similar dissembling by the humanities may appear only foolish and unpleasant in comparison, it can be more immediately disruptive and destructive socially. The humanities are imbricated in questions of evaluation and ethics, since the very objects of their study are incontrovertibly human productions. As I wrote this thesis, and in particular as I examined those scripts and films that are its main subject, foremost in my mind was the dual necessity for an attention to the evidence that was as determinedly objective as possible, along with a commitment to the human implications of those scripts and films, and of this work.

As I have suggested already, this thesis is primarily interested in the 'recorded forms' of certain instances of 'writing for film' and in the possible 'expressive function' of those forms. Under Professor McKenzie's suggestive rubric of 'the sociology of texts', my own particular interests and inclinations (resulting in part from my earlier training and experience in physics and, more recently, as a medievalist) found a natural place and justification. From science and the traditional study of manuscripts and incunabula, I brought a concern for the

delineation, or when necessary, as here, for the establishment, of the textual elements of *physical form*—the evidential ground of interpretation and theory that is, by definition, *evident*, though often not rigorously enough *observed* and *recorded*. To that end, I first established (and have provided in a separately bound volume) editions of the scripts of the films to be examined that are true to those films as distributed in the UK (and match, so far, all video editions in circulation)—an initial, traditional exercise in scholarship that had not previously been accomplished.[4]

The bulk of this thesis, however—its heart—lies in the detailed textual analysis of four films made with the assistance of the Production Board of the British Film Institute by two important, though contrasting, British writer/directors: the three films of the Bill Douglas Trilogy, *My Childhood*, *My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home* (1972–77), and Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982). In that discussion, I rigorously examine the structure of the films both towards understanding their textual forms and to show that those forms here selected for analysis 'effect meaning' (McKenzie 4).

Furthest from my point of observation has been some consideration of the historical and intellectual context for the BFI and its involvement in film production (this being a text-based work, viewed from the perspective of reception rather than genesis). In the interests of chronology, however, these two areas of discussion—cultural/institutional context and close textual analysis—are presented in the opposite order to which they have been mentioned here.

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[4] The historical manifestation of textual variation, even if brought together in an evolutionary or genetic version, can only be registered and understood if we properly establish given texts as they appeared at given times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Public Records Office and the Bodleian and British Libraries for information and advice; but I owe most to the staff of the British Film Institute and the Viewing Services of the National Film Archive. They have provided a wealth of material essential to this work, backed up always with a personal kindness and generosity that no acknowledgment could repay. Special recognition goes to Sarah Street and Mike Weaver for valuable support in the early stages of this thesis, and to Dick and Vicky Atkinson for more than words can express. Finally, to Professor Don McKenzie—in whose gentle nature shines a humbling display of compassion, scholarship and wisdom—I give my thanks.

I

THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

The every-day importance of the British Film Institute largely depends upon its role in archiving. The film-culture of the nation, not to mention that of the world, would be desperately impoverished were it not for the BFI collecting, preserving and making available scripts, films, artwork, photographs, books and other documents. The core function of the BFI in archiving should remind all would-be students of film that their work is conditional upon the simple existence of the material they study.

Surprisingly, the BFI seems not to have appreciated its own key role in film-culture—for, despite possessing a world-class archive, it has been without a formal archiving policy for its own papers and other material from inception. This makes the task of gathering information about the Institute and its activities more difficult, and often far less successful, than one would wish. If it is ever to be considered more than a service, the BFI will have to take seriously its own history and realize what it means to film in Britain. If this thesis could have any effect beyond its specific academic purpose, I hope it would be to encourage a revision in the BFI's self-image.[1]

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[1] I am pleased to add that due to recent suggestions (stimulated in part by this thesis) the BFI has finally appointed an official archiving officer.

1

FILM & THE NATION: THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE

The genesis and history of the British Film Institute have occurred within a circle drawn by the near century-long discussion of national film-culture, a discussion variously concerned with the nature, role and influence of cinema in national life. The varied interest and involvement of the British government in the whole question of film—including everything from legislation to the character of its executive traditions—forms a key arc in that circle. Much government discussion and legislation about film has been dominated by fundamental social and cultural concerns that are similar in kind to those surrounding the discussion of a national film institute. Indeed, on those few occasions when the British government sought to intervene openly and significantly in film (as with the establishment of the Eady Levy or the National Film Finance Corporation), it often seemed to work ground occupied (if often rather passively) by the BFI.

At first, both the government and the Film Institute were especially concerned with the general effects and uses of film. Only gradually did they become involved in issues concerning a specifically British cinema. Eventually, however, the BFI came to incarnate several important aspects of the national film-culture, in such departments as the National Film Archive, the National Film Theatre and the Production Board, and not least through its activities in education and publication.

For all that, connections between government and the British Film Institute have been largely indirect (which is in the tradition of government relations with film generally), although the connections need not be less important or less influential for that. Indeed, in its foundation at least, the British Film Institute was so conceived as to fill a role similar to that which has been attributed to the British Board of Film Censors: namely,

> [as] one of those typically British institutions whose legitimacy depends on an artfully constructed mask of political neutrality but which are, in fact, forms of quasi-state apparatus helping ruling interests maintain their hegemony. (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 44)

THE GOVERNMENT AND FILM

The British government and broad, national considerations in general have played an inextricable part in the history and practice of film in Britain. This has been the case since the beginning of the century and continues to be so today (if only in the form of its lamentable lack of interest). Whether Britain differs from other nations in the nature or degree of governmental concern is not as important as the fact that governments generally are so interested. Some nations, such as what was once the USSR, have maintained overt control (both in support and restraint) of the production, distribution, exhibition and reception of film. Others nations, such as the United States, have allowed considerable freedom and power to the film industry to get on with business as business—not least because its government has traditionally accepted that Hollywood's product is America's most powerful way of promoting itself and its way of life (which is, by and large, an entirely consumable culture). Allowing for differences in economic philosophy, and for variety in the arguments supporting or opposing interventionist films policy, however, it is generally true that all national governments have been interested in questions of film production, distribution, exhibition and reception.

In Britain, the relationship between government and film mainly has been conditioned by three factors. The first two are interrelated, and often inseparable, customary features of British society, while the third adds a strictly film-related colouring. Those factors are:

- The political and legislative traditions of government involvement with British society (that is, the traditions of government application).

- The continued history of government paternalism towards the *masses* (focused by a vivid concern for their political and cultural care—if for no other reason than out of fear for what their popular forms of information and entertainment might entail if left without guidance or regulation).

- The unfortunate, but unavoidable, coincidence that the most powerful film industry in the world speaks English, but is not British.

The history of governmental method in Britain shaped the relationship between government, the nation and film. This essentially followed the practice of government-at-arm's-length (a word in the right ear, the support of those in the know), reinforced as and when necessary by committees and commissions to study the possibility of new or to police existing legislation.[2] When film legislation was enacted, it was rarely more than patchwork job: quotas without production standards, on-again-off-again import duties, and multiple funding and advisory bodies with little money and less power.

Perhaps the procedure of indirect government operated at its most obvious (or perhaps, least obvious, but most effective) with the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), which ostensibly worked from the idea of a self-censoring trade. Suspicions abounded, however, about the true relationship between the government and the Censors. In *The Age of the Dream Palace*, Jeffrey Richards quotes two of the suspicious: Geoffrey Mander, Liberal

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[2] And, in equally traditional and predictable fashion, members of the national film-culture, like the British film industry, often felt such groups as a spur to self-regulation.

MP (with remarks he made during the 1938 parliamentary debate on censorship), and Ivor Montagu (with an extract from his 1929 book on *The Political Censorship of Films*:

> 'The British Board of Film Censors . . . is an unofficial body, and it is extremely convenient that it should be so, because, of course, the Government can say: "They have nothing to do with us; they can do anything they like". But that does not prevent useful contacts being established with the Government all the same'. ([Mander] 92)
>
> 'We see thus by the means of "unofficial censorship", the exercise of a far more stringent ban on politically controversial films, a far more effective expression of the Government's will than would be directly exercised by an official censorship responsible and answerable for its actions to the Houses of Parliament'. ([Montagu] 103–4)

For its part, the government could claim there was no state censorship in Britain and deny involvement with or influence over the existing Board of Censors: in Mander's words, 'They have nothing to do with us; they can do anything they like'. However, as Julian Petley puts it, 'The government did not have to tell the BBFC what to do—it knew perfectly well already' ('Cinema & State' 44). The Board's main task

> was to control the power of the cinema to affect the political outlook of uneducated people, especially those who went to the cinema regularly in the 1930s: the urban working class. (Pronay/Croft 145)

Consider too that the Home Office vetted, when it did not actually appoint, the President of the Board of Censors. For its part, the Board anxiously sought, and were willingly offered, consultation and advice from official departments, including the Home Office and MI5. The Board had no qualms about such associations; if anything, it was itself over sensitive about political reference and political implication in films, whether in defence of its own or even a foreign government's interests (see Richards 89–152). Of course,

> the Presidents appointed by the Home Office were not sociologists, educationalists or clergymen (as was the case with the genuinely 'morality' oriented Hays' Office of Hollywood) but men like Edward Shortt, PC (1929–35), Chief Secretary for Ireland in the Sinn Fein period and subsequently Home Secretary, and Lord Tyrrell (1935–47), who rose from head of the Political

> Intelligence Department to Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. . . . Colonel Hannah, the chief examiner and later vice-president, came to the BBFC in 1922 upon retiring from the Army as Deputy Chief of Intelligence in Ireland since 1918. The administrative head of the BBFC was J. Brooke-Wilkinson, who had been in charge of Film Propaganda to Neutral Nations during the First World War. (Pronay/Croft 145–46)

Interestingly, Brooke-Wilkinson 'was also a member of the secret CID Subcommittee on Censorship' (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 44).

What the government wanted was a censorship system that worked . . . discreetly. According to a Ministry of Information document from 1939,

> . . . film propaganda will be most effective when it is least recognizable as such. Only in a few rare prestige films, reassurance films and documentaries should the government's participation be announced. The influence brought to bear by the Ministry on the producers of feature films, and encouragement given to foreign distributors, must be kept secret. This is particularly true of any films which it is hoped to distribute in America and other neutral countries. (Pronay/Croft 144)

Of course, the government also wanted a discreet censorship system that was dependable—and the BBFC worked well within the tradition of indirect government. As Petley notes:

> Given the political backgrounds of those who ran the BBFC, the Board's *formal* position is largely irrelevant. . . . the BBFC was one of those typically British institutions whose legitimacy depends on an artfully constructed mask of political neutrality but which are, in fact, forms of quasi-state apparatus helping ruling interests maintain their hegemony. ('Cinema & State' 44)

Britain did not have state censorship, not because the state was not interested, but because the government did not need it:

> . . . the establishment of a State Censorship Board had been discussed in the Commons and rejected only because the existing extra-legal arrangements were felt to be working more effectively . . . . (Pronay/Croft 144)

To be effective, government of this sort requires the existence and judicious use of a broad and reliable coterie sharing a similar view of desired ends and the civilized means of achieving them. This worked well enough with the Board of Censors, and might even have

been a strength in the development of something like a national cinema. That this did not happen, nor is ever likely to, is perhaps mainly due to the fact that the practice of film is too expensive for success not to depend, at some stage, upon the calculation and payment of costs. However much film *cognoscenti* might argue for private-enterprise or state-sponsored production, it is in both cases the public that pays for the film.

British policy-makers had insulated themselves from the greater part of the national film audience through their belief in and support of a largely pre-modern *status quo*. This was a hierarchical social order, which they found conveniently mirrored in the film audience itself,[3] and in which they could identify 'a leading and responsible élite' (Mayer 244), with whom to cooperate in the instruction and control of the audience underclass. Thus, a key source of the information and experience needed to define and develop a successful national cinema was discounted, to say nothing of alienating the very people who made up that source, the people who frequented, and ultimately paid for, the industry.

With no mechanism or history to support greater public involvement in a culture industry, with a hotchpotch of legislation and statements of intent—which actually encouraged domestic misplanning, foreign predation and monopoly—and with a traditionally patronising and manipulative attitude to the medium and its audience, the government was and has continued to be singularly slow, unwilling, or unable to make the hard, public decisions in favour of a national film-culture that Britain's real position in world cinema requires.

And that brings us to the final, complex factor conditioning government/film relations in Britain and the source of a profound, endlessly debilitating misconception about the country's place in world cinema. That is, an anxiety over the power and influence of American

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[3] See Docherty, *The Last Picture Show?*, Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences* and Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, for a discussion of the audience class structure.

film, and a love/hate obsession with its commercial and ideological success. Both are constants in the history of British film-culture, as is the corollary belief that, but for the US, Britain might have been the world's Hollywood. As the British producer Leon Clore once said, 'if the United States spoke Spanish, we would have a film industry' (Auty/Roddick 5). This anxiety/jealousy was voiced in the late 1920s, when it seemed that the imposition of a quota on the number of British films distributed and exhibited would guarantee profitability and provide a domestic base from which an assault could be launched on the cross-Atlantic market. It was heard very loudly in the mid-1930s, after

> The success of Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, which took vast sums of money in New York, fostered the notion that with a proper show of stardom, spectacle and extravagance British films could lead the world. (Betts, *The Film Business* 6)

It was heard again after Britain's film successes in the 1980s—which included successive Best Picture Oscars for *Chariots of Fire* (1982) and *Gandhi* (1983). It was heard again after the 1990 Oscars, and despite present concerns will undoubtedly be heard again in the future.

All of which fails entirely to consider the historical relationship of the two cinemas. For example, 'By 1926' [*before* the introduction of sound to British cinemas—and thence removing the influence of language] 'thirty-seven British films competed with over five hundred American imports' (Murphy, 'Under Hollywood' 47). Whatever stopped the British film industry from being a world power, it was not the fact that American films spoke English.

This concern is important in another way, however: for, because of it, Britain has generally failed to see its true place in world film-culture, which is as a relatively small, ethnic, national film-producer (perhaps along the lines of Sweden, Poland, Taiwan, or Japan).[4] A

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[4] Of course, Americans may use British filmmakers, actors, facilities, locations and money, and all but locations may go make films in America—but it is usually *American* filmmaking in both cases. Statistical/semantic games can be played about crew numbers or funding to turn

nation's potential for film production and for producing films of quality is not simply decided by language. However, British aspirations are forever distorted by the spectre of an enormous, economically and ideologically powerful, American film industry that opens its silver-screened mouth and speaks English.

BRITISH FILMS LEGISLATION

Any historical understanding of the British Film Institute must be read within the tradition of social and cultural concerns about film and that includes what was often seen as its potential threat to Nation and Empire. So before turning to the BFI itself, I want to survey briefly the important films legislation of the century, where those concerns are often easiest to see.

Legislation concerning film in Britain began with the first Cinematograph Films Act of 1909, and to date includes nearly seventy pieces of primary legislation with more secondary legislation operating under the principal acts. Although most of the seventy-odd primary acts regulating or otherwise influencing film, strictly speaking, are other-than-films legislation—including Finance, Public Health, Children and Young Persons, Copyright, and Protection of Animals Acts—sixteen of the primary statutes are Films Acts proper. Entitled 'Cinematograph Films Act' or, in later years, simply 'Films Act', the primary statutes are dated 1909, 1922, 1927, 1938, 1948, 1952, 1957, 1960, 1964, 1966, 1970, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1985.

It is notable that, from the first Act of 1909, the significance of any given legislation cannot necessarily be determined by the title or ostensible subject matter of the act alone, but must be judged by the intent and the results of its application. For instance, the stated purpose of the Cinematograph Films Act of 1909 was to 'invest local authorities with the necessary

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the head of the pin British (and there may be practical reasons), but, equally, anyone watching knows if the film *is* British or American. See, e.g., the *BFI Film & Television Handbook 1993* (16–31), where *Return Of The Jedi* and *Superman 3*, are classed British productions.

power to take measures regarding safety at the exhibition of inflammable film' (Hogenkamp 29). In practice, however, it was used to control such things as the exhibition of 'subversive' films made by workers' film groups. As Julian Petley says, one can see in its application:

> The beginnings of the present system of censorship. . . . The Act . . . allowed councils to impose whatever conditions they wished, 'so long as those conditions are not unreasonable'. Quite against the spirit of the Act, the courts ruled that it was 'not unreasonable' to include specifications as to film content. ('Cinema & State' 41)

Even the report that recommended establishing a national film institute reads the 1909 Act this way (including it in its third chapter, under 'Censorship and Control'):

> The legal foundation of the Censorship of films in Great Britain is the Cinematograph Act, 1909. Now the primary object of that Act was to guard audiences against the material risks of the cinema, such as fire. . . . A public cinema exhibition may be given only on premises licensed for the purpose, and subject to the regulations of the Secretary of State. The Act recognises the fundamental principle of British internal government, local freedom and responsibility. . . . It places the final responsibility on local bodies which are sensitive to the public opinion of an area . . . . Subject to the regulations of the Secretary of State, the licensing authority may attach conditions to the grant of a licence. A series of High Court decisions has established that these conditions may relate to matters other than the safety of the audience if they are reasonable and administered in a judicial manner. Thus, through the medium of conditions attached to the licence the local authority acts as the final arbiter and censor of films displayed in its area. (*The Film in National Life* 28–29)

Note how this reading of the application of the 1909 Act implies what I have previously referred to as government by indirection. It is unthinkable here that any 'local freedom and responsibility' granted by the Act could do anything but confirm government confidence that a consensus existed among local authorities concerning the British way of life, a consensus which made their interpretation and application of the legislation calculable.

Workers' groups, however, tried to get around this control on exhibition by using 'sub-standard' film-stock; that is, film measuring less than the standard 35mm:

> The use of 'sub-standard' film meant exemption from the 1909 Cinematograph Act, because the Act only applied to inflammable film, the so-called nitrate

> stock. The 'sub-standard' format only made use of acetate stock, which technically was non-inflammable. (Hogenkamp 66)

Besides beating the censors, the use of 'sub-standard' film by workers' groups made it easier for them to exhibit their films: the smaller stock was safer to use and easier to handle, and since everything from canisters to projectors was lighter, it was also more portable.

To maintain (or regain) control of film exhibition, the local authorities simply reread the Act as required: the Cardiff Chief Constable took the Act as if amended to include non-inflammable film-stock (Hogenkamp 85–6), while 'The Surrey County Council . . . did not recognise the difference between 'flam' and 'non-flam' film (Hogenkamp 89). Eventually, the Home Office itself felt the need for more direct measures of control:

> In December 1933 it contemplated '. . . possible ways of dealing with "non-flam" subversive films'. . . . [It] decided on 30 December 1933 to start the 'preparation of a Bill to amend the Cinematograph Act, 1909, so as to remove doubts on the question whether a slow-burning film is to be regarded as an inflammable film for the purposes of the Act'. (PRO: Home Office 45/17067, Appendix B; also quoted in Hogenkamp 85)

By this time, however, 'sub-standard' film-stock had become the standard of non-commercial projection in schools, churches and industry. The government was unprepared for the subsequent outcry, particularly from educational quarters, when the planned legislation was made public, so it shelved the new Bill. It was not until the Cinematograph Act of 1952 that the local authorities' powers over 'non-flam' film were confirmed.

The next significant Act (after 1909) was the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927.[5] The Act established a trade-dominated Advisory Committee to consult with the Board of Trade on films issues and sought to protect exhibitors from the infamous blind- and block-booking

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[5] The domestic industry had crashed in 1924 and the Americans thought it was finished: 'Not even on the horizon can I see the nucleus of a British film-producing industry' (Marcus Loew, *Bioscope*, 24 June 1926, 23; quoted in Low, *1918–1929*, 298).

systems imposed by the American majors. However, it is, perhaps, best known for introducing the film quota system. This last required distributors and exhibitors to meet imposed percentages on the number of British films rented and shown:

> The Act provided that in the first year the renters' quota should be 7½ per cent, and the exhibitors' 5 per cent. . . . Both quotas were to increase by stages to 20 per cent in 1936, and remain at that level until 1938 when the Act expired. . . . The Act also regulated booking practices in an attempt to open up more of the home market to British films. (Dickinson/Street 5–6)

As defined under the Act,

> a film was British if it was made by a British subject or a British company, its studio scenes were photographed in a studio in the British Empire, the writer was British, and not less than 75% of the salaries, wages and payments for labour and services (with certain exemptions allowing the use of one foreign star) were paid to British subjects. (Roddick, 'If the United States' 13)

This legislation amounted to nothing less than a restraint-of-trade act passed at a time when Britain pursued a near century-old policy of free trade (though more widespread trade restrictions were introduced in 1931). Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, then President of the Board of Trade, gave the government's reasons for breaking such long-standing economic practices in the interests of film. His speech on the Bill's Second Reading began with the cultural reasons:

> The cinema is today the most universal means through which national ideas and national atmosphere can be spread, and even if these be intangible things, surely they are among the most important influences in civilisation. Everybody will admit that the strongest bonds of Empire . . . are just those intangible bonds—a common outlook, the same ideas and the same ideals which we all share and which are expressed in a common language and a common literature. . . . the greatest proportion of the Press is British, and we should be very anxious if the proportion was in the opposite sense as it is with British films.[6]

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[6] *Parliamentary Debates: Official Report*, Fifth Series, vol. 203, House of Commons, Second Volume of Session, 1927, columns 2039–2040, 16 March 1927. Future parliamentary references will appear parenthetically in the form: *HC Deb.*, 16 March 1927; 203, 2039–40.

Even the economic reasons, given next, are in the broadest sense 'cultural'— referring, not to financial considerations of film as an industry in itself, but to film as a subtle, highly effective medium for promoting the image, style and products of the originating nation:

> It is the greatest advertising power in the world. Just let the House imagine the effect upon trade of millions of people in every country, day after day, seeing the fashions, the styles, and the products of a particular country. (*HC Deb.* 16 March 1927; 203: 2040)

To make his point, the President quoted reports from British representatives in two different countries on the influence of regular, American film exhibition on the local audiences. The first comments came from the Consul in Peru, the second from an unnamed source in Canada:

> 'Fashions in behaviour, dress, furniture, and houses, as seen on the films, not merely have an unconscious effect, but are sought for. Peruvians with a social problem, a dress to buy, a room to furnish, or a house to build, will deliberately go to the cinema as to an animated catalogue to get ideas.' (2041)
>
> 'The cinema film has also operated against British trade. The production, distribution and exhibition of films in Canada is almost entirely controlled by foreign interests. The effect of the constant exhibition of foreign films on the sentiment, habits, and thought of the people is obvious. The pictures show the foreign flag, styles, standards, habits, advertisements, etc.' (2041–42)

The results of the quota legislation, however, were not at all what the government had hoped. True, 'As soon as the . . . Bill was published, a film production boom began' (Hartog, 'State Protection' 64), and, while many new film companies were formed, hundreds of films were made throughout the Empire (often, however, by barely disguised American companies). Without the imposition of quality restrictions on production, however, the result was mostly low-budget, low-standard films that seriously damaged the reputation of British filmmaking.

The next noteworthy piece of legislation (though not a Films Act) was the Sunday Entertainments Act of 1932. The government had decided to allow Sunday openings of cinemas, 'provided that a certain proportion of the takings went into a fund for charity' (Dickinson/Street 49). The Act came before parliament while consideration was being given

elsewhere to the establishment of a national film institute, and it was suggested, and finally agreed, that a small part of the money collected by the Sunday fund should go towards financing the proposed film institute.

Four years later the 1927 Act came up for review (two years before its expiry in 1938). The law was clearly ineffective:

> 'quota quickies' . . . flourished, American distributors were encouraging exhibitors into illegal blind- and block-booking practices, and American interests were increasingly penetrating not only the distribution sector but also production. (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 33)[7]

As a result, Board of Trade President Runciman established a committee under Lord Moyne:

> to consider the position of British films, having in mind the approaching expiry of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927, and to advise whether any, and if so what, measures are still required in the public interest to promote the production, renting and exhibition of such films. (*Cinematograph Films Act 1927: Report of a BoT Committee, 1936*. Cmd. 5320, [2].)

Moyne's Committee was particularly concerned with two problems: the generally poor results of the quota system and the continuation of illegal booking practices. It decided the quota system had failed because registration of a film under the Act entailed no minimum cost or quality standard—so it suggested application of a cost-test for quality. To stop the illegal booking practices, it recommended registration of 'a statutory declaration on behalf of the renter and his associates that the film had not been booked in contravention of Part 1 of the Act' (Dickinson/Street 54), backed up by more inclusive and more severe penalties.

Beyond this, the Committee's final report was vague, with few practical ideas—though it did point to 'the formation of some kind of Film Bank' (Dickinson/Street 63), and further suggested the creation of a Films Commission, independent of the trade, which

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[7] It is worth noting that between 1928 and 1937 the total value of British film production rose from £500,000 to £7 million—suggesting the opportunities that must have existed for filmmakers from all branches of the craft (however we may now judge the results).

> should, in addition to exercising its normal administrative functions and acting as a tribunal to give impartial judgements on matters dividing the film industry, have powers of initiative and control. . . . (*Report of BoT Committee, 1936*. Cmd. 5320, 35–6)

The timing of the recommendation, however, is interesting. Four years before, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had recommended the creation of a national film institute. Seeing itself in the tradition of earlier investigations into the moral, social and cultural effects of the cinema, that Commission had seen the proposed institute as the very organisation to implement the general conclusions of those earlier studies:

> There is a singular unanimity, which we endorse, in the main general conclusions of earlier enquiries, but little or nothing has been done to implement them. . . . There has been no organisation whose concern it was to take action where need has been proved. This inaction is perhaps the most convincing argument we can adduce to support our plea for a permanent central co-ordinating organisation. (4)

In effect, what the Moyne Committee was suggesting with the Films Commission was something like a BBC for film, or, with some changes (admittedly not all insignificant), it was suggesting a national film institute, as that organization was originally conceived: *with teeth*.

However, dissenting opinions were recorded with almost all parts of the Moyne Committee Report anyway, and with no power to impose changes the Committee's recommendations depended upon a Board of Trade that had from the beginning concurred with the industry's desire to leave well enough alone. Following release of the Moyne Report, the Board petitioned organisations like the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, the Kinematograph Renters' Society and the Federation of British Industries for their opinions so as to aid government formulation of a new Films Act for 1938. The results of the poll were unevenly mixed, for and against, each of the Committee's recommendations but one: the industry was united in opposition to an independent Films Commission. It was not alone. The Board of Trade was also against the idea of such a Commission, because, in its own words:

> It would place executive powers in the hands of a body over whom the President would have little control but for whose actions he would be answerable in Parliament. (PRO: BoT 64 89/6551/37)

On reflection, this seems a curious reason for the government to be opposed to a Films Commission, especially when one considers the indirect but effective relationship it had with the BBFC. In practice, the Censors enjoyed independent, executive powers touching on a sensitive area of public concern, yet the government did not feel compelled to answer for its actions in Parliament—in fact, since the Board made potentially controversial decisions (though ones that were usually consonant with the desires of government), the government must have been pleased that it did not have to answer for the Censors in Parliament. If, in that case, the government felt no compulsion to answer for the exercise of executive power by a body supposedly beyond its control—though it not only approved of that body's decisions, but had a strong if indirect influence on them—then it seems likely that the government's objection to the Moyne Committee's proposed Films Commission must have been that it really would have been 'a body over whom the President would have little control'. It is a precise kind of distinction to make, but successful government depends upon the ability to make just this kind of discrimination between the real and the apparent exercise of power.

In the end, the idea of a Films Commission was dropped, and instead:

> there was created a Cinematograph Films Council along the lines of the Advisory Committee of the 1927 Act . . . a trade-dominated body whose function was simply to 'keep under review the progress of the British film industry and report to the Board of Trade'. (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 33)

Because of the response of the British industry to the Moyne Committee Report, and because of much increased political and economic pressure from the Americans in support of their film industry, the 1938 Act was little more than a revision of 1927 Act: with slight increases in quota percentages and a quality cost-test for film registration under the quota.

Two years later (1940), the same Cinematograph Films Council recommended the government establish the Film Finance Corporation (essentially a bank for British film production), in the hope that the corporation would, in particular, support the more expensive, export films. With the high cost of the War, the continued domination of British screens by American films was making worse an already deep trade imbalance; and the Council believed that the injection of money would launch (or relaunch) an internationally and commercially successful British film industry. The implicit corollary of this being that it would help right the country's broader economic problems. Such clear interest in the *economics* of the film industry does not disprove my contention that culture was co-fundamental with economics in national considerations of film. The Council was, after all, 'a trade-dominated body whose function was simply to "keep under review the progress of the British film industry and report to the Board of Trade"'. It is true, however, that by 1940 more government discussion and legislation was being directed towards film as an industry entailing important domestic and foreign economic considerations. For the first time, the American/British opposition in film was now talked about more in economic than other terms. No longer was film seen simply as an *extra-cultural*, industrial threat.

In November 1924 ('Black November'), British film production came to a complete stop. Although things looked black indeed, it gave the relatively small British, film industry common cause with those who were concerned about film's general influence on society, so that for once almost everyone in any way interested in film in Britain could together call for government intervention: obliteration of both British filmmaking *and* British culture by an American industry with global ambitions seemed certain without some sort of government assistance. The converging beliefs that government assistance was necessary to protect, not just British film, but Britain itself were brought to a head in June of 1925, when Universal

Studios tricked the British Army into giving a print of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* an honour guard escort from Southampton to London. This seemed to confirm the worst fears that American, industrial film-production was not just an economic threat, but was working to subvert British power and eliminate the British way of life. Following this incident, the government handed authority for film to the Board of Trade and began to consider protective legislation, realized in the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927.

The quota system introduced by the 1927 Act fired a British production boom that, perhaps not surprisingly, turned out to be a bubble. By 1931 the bubble had burst, broken not just by poor production values and wild speculation, but by the coming of sound. In the end, the Act left a mixed, and in some ways an odd, legacy. First, and foremost, it left a large catalogue of 'quota quickies'. Although these films are now largely forgotten (a fate many may deserve), the post-1927 production boom gave a start in the business to many important British filmmakers and actors, and gave them more-or-less constant, *quickie* work to carry them between larger, or better remembered, productions.[8] From my own experience, I know the Act also left a variety of ramshackle buildings across Western Canada. Now only of fading, local interest for having been 'quickie' studios, they once had the advantage of being on Empire soil close to American money and personnel. Unfortunately, because most of the speculative companies encouraged by the Act had failed, its long-term economic legacy was one of fear and distrust among money sources who might ordinarily have backed future, more stable and promising productions.

Yet, along with the speculative sector, and despite the prevalence of shaky businesses and disreputable business practices, a more stable and businesslike production, distribution and

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[8] A detailed examination of the cinema of the quickie boom might provide interesting and significant information about the development of British filmmakers and their film practices.

exhibition base had grown (Gaumont-British being an example of the latter). In many ways it was a promising period in British film history. The Americans had actually suffered more from the economic collapse of 1929, and their film companies were slow to recover. On this side of the Atlantic things were somewhat better. Having made the conversion to sound,

> . . . British film production, protected by the quota, rose each year until, in the early 1930s, Britain became the most important centre of European film production and began to believe that it could beat Hollywood at its own game. (Hartog, *State Protection* 65)

Gaumont-British, for one, 'set in motion an ambitious programme of production clearly intended to be prestigious at home and successful in the United States' (Hartog, *State Protection* 67). Then the sudden, worldwide success of Alexander Korda's *Henry VIII* threw all the careful planning out the window. I have already quoted Ernest Betts observation that

> The [1933] success of Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* . . . fostered the notion that with a proper show of stardom, spectacle and extravagance British films could lead the world. (*The Film Business* 6)

It seemed that 'The wildest claims of the advocates of the quota system looked like becoming realities' (Hartog, 'State Protection' 67). Caution went out the window as ambitions and production costs soared. Then, before the government could introduce a new act in 1938, the bubble broke again—burst by overspending and carelessness in the British industry and by the political and economic resurgence of the American industry. As Hartog notes, even

> Gaumont-British stopped production as a consequence of massive losses . . . . Korda's extravagant production programme was not a financial success. Companies failed, financial scandals filled the national press and the Board of Trade opened an enquiry into the affairs of Gaumont-British. New studios were empty and half the production labour force was unemployed. (Hartog, 'State Protection' 69, 72)

As I suggested earlier, somewhere around the time of the Moyne Committee in 1936, government discussion of film changed, for the first time taking on a genuine, economic tone formulated in terms of the particular interests of domestic filmmaking, which was itself

addressed (also for the first time) specifically as a *national industry*. It was also increasingly assumed that the maturing British film industry (however prone to cycles of productivity and prosperity) would naturally support the national image, the status quo, and art and culture generally—support for this last being in large part what would distinguish it from American film.[9] Undoubtedly, the creation of the Film Institute in 1933 also helped grant a new kind of legitimacy to the cinema. All of this contributed to a sense that film posed less threat to British society than was once thought—not least, because there were now various ways in which an entirely British sense of control could be brought to bear upon film, whether through an industry that would naturally share the consensus view of British life, or through organisations like the BFI that could influence and educate the audience to prefer that same view of life. As a result, the government, for the first time, could talk about film in economic terms alone.[10]

In 1940, the Cinematograph Films Council recommended the setting up of a Film Finance Corporation. During subsequent discussions, the Bank of England was of the opinion that 'the industry needed reform more than money', and saw this as a precondition for the creation of any film bank:

> For the present, the Bank reintroduced the idea of a Films Commission 'to effect co-ordination and direct the future development of the industry—in other words to govern it', and made the provision of finance conditional on the creation of such a body. (Dickinson/Street 133; quoting Securities Management Trust, Bank of England, 2/40, doc. 3, 5/4/40)

By the autumn of 1940, the Board of Trade was convinced of the Bank of England's argument and '[t]he priorities were therefore reversed in that the Commission came to be regarded as

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[9] A shallow, tiresome analysis that is still trotted out to explain cross-Atlantic differences.

[10] A concurrent change occurred in the way the traditional distinction between art and industry was understood *vis-à-vis* film: with it becoming internalized to film. This allowed a distinction to be made between commercial-industrial production and art. For more on the art/industry distinction see the Conclusion to the thesis and the bibliography in Appendix 4.

the primary objective and the bank as a means for achieving it' (Dickinson/Street 135). Industry opposition to the Commission, which was now the centre of discussion, was as strong as ever. By 1943, everyone was again backing away from the idea of a Commission, while the film bank had been forgotten along the way. In the end, 'no steps were taken to set up either a bank or an independent authority' (Dickinson/Street 139).

Five years later (1948) the first Cinematograph Films Act for ten years became law. This too introduced few changes. The quota for distributors was dropped, that for exhibitors was made more flexible, the Board of Trade, in consultation with the Cinematograph Films Council, was given leeway in fixing the latter, and the composition of the Films Council was changed. Even film was dominated, however, by the nation's postwar problems. With the country nearly insolvent, the government was eager to revive the economy and stop the haemorrhage of funds to America. In August 1947, Chancellor Sir Hugh Dalton announced a 75% duty on all imported films. The Board of Trade had advised that the Americans would not like the tax, but would acquiesce. Within a day of Dalton's announcement America began a complete boycott of British cinemas. What makes the episode a disgrace in the history of film in Britain was the country's failure to capitalise on the American response. After all, the boycott meant that Britain was in all but sole possession of film distribution and exhibition on its own shores. For much of the century, she had played Jeremiah to American domination. Yet here were the Americans, leaving the country, and neither the government nor the film industry, had a single contingency plan! For a while everyone hoped someone else would do something . . . and then they gave it all back to the Americans:

> When the duty was withdrawn in March 1948, it was agreed that blocked earnings could be invested in British production (thereby facilitating further American domination), and there was a glut of both British and American product. Small producers were now on the edge of bankruptcy, and even Rank was badly hit. (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 35–6)

Subsequently, in June 1948, the Board of Trade tried to impose a quota of 45 percent on first-features exhibition. Almost immediately, conflict with the exhibitors' association brought it down to 40 per cent. Two years later it was reduced to 30 per cent, and fell still lower before finally being abolished in 1983.

A series of Cinematograph Film Production (Special Loans) Acts followed in 1949, 1952 and 1954. Initiated by then President of the Board of Trade Harold Wilson, these made good in part the often discussed ideal of a national film bank (in the eventual form of the NFFC—the National Film Finance Corporation). Meanwhile, Treasury official Sir Wilfred Eady suggested another scheme to help the ailing British industry. Following similar arrangements in France and Italy, the plan called for exhibitors to make voluntary contributions to a fund that would be shared among British film producers according to their earnings at the box-office. Known as the Eady Levy, it

> involved reduction in Entertainments duty and certain increases in cinema seat prices which were expected to have the combined effect of increasing the industry's annual income by £3 million. Half this was to be retained by the exhibitors; the other half was to be paid by voluntary agreement into a fund for producers of British films. (Dickinson/Street 225)

The government, hoping to avoid conflict and looking for cooperation from the film industry, initially decided against imposing the Levy by direct legislation. Changes were made instead to the Entertainments duty in 1950.

The Cinematograph Films Act of 1957 made the Levy statutory. It also set up the NFFC, which began life with £5 million, with which to make

> loans to be employed in financing the production or distribution of cinematograph films to persons who, in the judgement of the Corporation, while having reasonable expectations of being able to arrange for the production and distribution of cinematograph films on a commercially successful basis, are not for the time being in a position to obtain adequate financial facilities for the purpose on reasonable terms from an appropriate source. (Quoted in Roddick, 'If the United States' 14)

Although the Corporation was mainly a supplement to private money, it played a significant role in the making of

> more than 750 films, including *The Third Man* (1949), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *The Servant* (1963), *The Europeans* (1979), *Black Jack* (1979), *Babylon* (1980), *Gregory's Girl* (1980), and *Another Country* (1984). (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 37)[11]

The 1957 Act also ordered that the NFFC, the National Film School, the BFI Production Board and the Children's Film Foundation be supported by monies paid into the British Film Fund from the Levy. This was the last Act to give serious support to the development of British film:

> The Cinematograph Films Act of 1960 made no major changes to its predecessor. The 1970 Act increased the lending power of the NFFC by a further £5m, but before the money could be made available the Conservatives returned to power and declined to advance the funds made available under the Act. Eventually a further £1m was provided from public funds, but the NFFC's scope of action was severely reduced. (Petley, 'Cinema & State' 39)

The Labour Party returned to power in the 70s with a Prime Minister interested, well-informed and sympathetic towards British film and the industry. He set up a Working Party (1975) to study British filmmaking and to decide what was required to ensure its prosperity. Its report, *The Future of the British Film Industry* (1976), suggested that the main problems and areas needing urgent attention were finance and regulation: the same areas that had been argued about since the beginning of films policy debates. The report recommended creation of a new film fund out of excess-profits tax from the commercial television companies. It also returned to the idea of a films commission, in its call for a British Film Authority:

> to coordinate in a single body the activities of the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Trade, the NFFC and the British Film Fund Agency. . . . It was to be responsible to one Minister so that 'responsibility for film-as-an-art should be unified'. (Dickinson/Street 245)

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[11] For 'the contradictions inherent in the NFFC's brief', see Dickinson/Street (199–226).

After publication of the Working Party Report an Interim Action Committee was established to elaborate upon its proposals. It published reports on both the details of the proposed Film Authority and on the planned changes to industry financing. The Committee's recommendations should have been part of the new Films Act of 1980—but by then the Conservatives were back in power with a view to changing, not just the philosophy of government relations to society, but its history as well: further government involvement in film was frozen and what had been done in the past began to be reversed. The new government passed an Act postponing many major decisions, by extending much of the existing legislation for five years. But they also began dismantling the admittedly often piecemeal legislation of the previous seventy years. Essentially, state-support of film in Britain, such as it was, was over.

Two significant films acts were passed in 1981: the National Film Finance Corporation Act and the Film Levy Finance Act. In both cases the legislation was meant to give the government time to review its position on films policy. The first of these acts was meant

> to consolidate the Cinematograph Film Production (Special Loans) Acts 1949 to 1980 and to repeal, as spent, certain enactments relating to the National Film Finance Corporation. (*Acts 1981* I, 15, 135.)

The Act continued the NFFC with the provision that the Corporation could not operate beyond the end of 1985—though before then, the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, could agree to the 'transfer . . . for valuable consideration, of the assets and liabilities of the Corporation' to a British company suitable to the Secretary of State.

The Film Levy Finance Act continued the operations of the British Film Fund Agency and allowed the Secretary of State to 'continue to provide by regulations for the imposition upon exhibitors of a levy' until 1985. The Film Fund Agency was to continue to provide monies from the fund to sponsor the production of British films, especially by supporting the NFFC, as well as making available from the Levy, with the approval of the Secretary of State,

> payments to, or for the benefit of, [authorised] makers of British films . . . payments to the Children's Film Foundation . . . payments to the British Film Institute towards the cost of making films . . . payments to not more than one relevant body for the time being approved for the purposes of this paragraph by the Secretary of State. (*Acts 1981* I, 16, 149–50)

This last 'relevant' recipient was to be

> a body incorporated on or after 29th May 1970 and having among its objects the carrying on of a school in Great Britain for the training of persons employed or to be employed in the making of films. (*Acts 1981* I, 16, 150)

As I say, the 1981 Acts were meant to give the government time for a review of films policy. The resulting White Paper, *Film Policy* (Cmnd. 9319), was presented to parliament in July 1984 by Kenneth Baker (Minister for Information and Technology). In the interim, British films had twice captured Academy Awards for Best Film—*Chariots of Fire* (1982) and *Gandhi* (1983)—and the talk everywhere was of a British filmmaking renaissance. Mr Baker wrapped the White Paper proposals in the rhetoric of rebirth:

> The British film industry is undergoing a renaissance. We are fortunate to have so many talented producers, writers, directors, actors and outstanding technical skills in film-making. Several companies in Britain have achieved commercial success in quality films. Channel 4 has effectively encouraged the thriving independent production sector. (*HC Deb.* 19 July 1984; 64: 523)

True, cinema attendance and number of screens 'continued to decline dramatically'—but the Minister would have us believe the White paper could resolve all contradictory experiences of film in Britain: British film was a commercial, world-beater . . . though it was supported by the Eady Levy . . . which had been based on cinema attendance that was fast becoming trivial. According to government logic, the conclusion was obvious: 'the outdated Eady Levy on cinema receipts must be ended' (523). The White Paper's rhetoric suggested that the government wanted to support British production, but that the Levy was no longer up to the task—Baker said its 'revenue in real terms [had] fallen by six sevenths' (523). Yet when

the new measures were announced, it was not just the Levy that ended, but the history of government involvement in film in Britain:

> The Government propose to bring in legislation to end this [the Eady Levy] in 1985, and at the same time to wind up the British Film Fund Agency, the Cinematograph Films Council, and the National Film Finance Corporation. The legislation will also repeal eight Acts of Parliament and 25 statutory instruments relating to films. (523)

The 1985 Act was 'to repeal the Films Acts 1960 to 1980'; only then would it 'make further provision with respect to the financing of films' (*Films Act 1985*, 821)—which meant

> privatisation of the NFFC, with Rank, Thorn-EMI and others—what the report called 'certain organisations in the film, television and video sectors'—putting up £1.1 million a year to finance it and the government establishing a fund of £1.5 million a year for five years. (Walker, *Once & Future* 17)

The managing director of the NFFC, Mamoun Hassan, cut through the ministerial rhetoric when he pointed out that a privatised NFFC was illogical:

> 'Really, what point is there in having a corporation whose brief is such that it would be no different from the brief of a private company? When people talk airily about the privatisation of the NFFC, it's meaningless'. . . . 'If we were in a monopoly position I could understand that things might be different if we were privatised. We are badly underfunded; the funds we have are nothing to the funds that Goldcrest has or EMI or Virgin or Handmade. What is the point in the Corporation becoming yet another underfunded film company? If you feel it's not doing a job, you do away with it.' (Quoted without reference in Walker, *Once & Future* 17–18)

What point indeed? According to Mr Baker, the policy would

> free the film industry from Government intervention and from an intrusive regulatory regime dating from the days of the silent films. Our policy will clear the way for the industry to operate in a more confident framework and to consolidate upon its success. (*HC Deb.* 64: 524)

Opposition MP Bryan Gould did not agree. He felt the privatisation arose

> from misplaced ideological zeal for turning the future of the industry over to market forces despite the fact that, as the Monopolies and Mergers Commission found, nothing remotely resembling a free market exists in this area. (*HC Deb.* 64: 525)

Whatever the Government might claim for its policy, and whatever opposition parties might accuse that policy of being, the role of government in film in Britain was drastically curtailed.

Of course, that particular renaissance in British production passed with the films that supposedly announced it. Not that other British films were not made, but the idea of a British film renaissance has always meant only one thing: a permanent and major role for British film in international, commercial cinema, and as usual this did not happen. In fact, as Simon Garfield was to note, after the supposed 1980s rebirth British film instead went into decline:

> Despite our Bafta awards and Oscar nominations, many in the British film business believe it to be in a worse state than ever. Fewer films are being made, and there is less money to make them. Goldcrest, once the industry's flagship, maker of *Chariots of Fire*, *Gandhi* and *The Mission*, has collapsed. Virgin Films abandoned production . . . after the failure of *1984* and *Absolute Beginners*. George Harrison's and Denis O'Brien's Handmade Films . . . has hit a disastrous fallow period. The film arm of Thorn EMI has withered since its purchase by Cannon.
>
> What's left? A few ambitious independents, scrambling around for cash from television companies, and largely reliant on support from the United States. (*The Independent on Sunday*, 25 March 1990, 8)

Space for indigenous production was limited, but one organisation had worked to remarkable effect in the constrained niche of 'ambitious' independence since the 1950s, and the BFI Production Board remained a model of creativity on a shoestring.

CULTURE OR COMMERCE?

At the beginning of the chapter, I said that all governments seem to be interested and variously involved in the questions of film. I also looked at some of the factors that influenced the character of government relations with film in Britain. What I have yet to examine are the essential reasons for British government interest in film. According to their study of *Cinema and State*, Dickinson and Street believe that the reasons were initially economic and only became cultural after World War II:

> The films legislation was clearly conceived of within the framework of commercial policy. Film production was protected and later subsidised as an industry. . . .
>
> In practice, little account was taken of the claim that film was an 'educational and cultural medium'. (2)

> At the time when the first quota Act was being discussed, film production stood little chance of gaining assistance except as an industry. Interest in the artistic potential of film developed very late in Britain. . . . The position was very different twenty years later. (3)

Focusing as they do on the economic dimension of films policy, Dickinson and Street have covered a part of British film history otherwise left largely unexplored, and the quality and significance of their work is unquestionable. In their research, they find no evidence that government, in its early consideration of the cinema, was interested in film as art (or, I might add, interested in the art of film), adding that the government had no established way to handle film non-industrially until 'the creation of the Arts Council in 1946 provided a formal framework for the provision of state support for the arts' (3). As a result, they assume that 'remarks about the cultural importance of film became an almost obligatory element in any preamble to a statement on policy', in particular so as 'to justify the [films] quota' (2). In other words, 'remarks about the cultural importance of film' were mere rhetoric.

This is the only point at which I differ with Dickinson and Street. Their focus on the economics of government films policy means that they were not inclined to consider the possible legitimacy and hence the significance of early, cultural arguments for government involvement in the cinema.[12] The cultural arguments advanced by government and others in the discussion of film in Britain were widespread, however, going back long before the introduction of the film quota, and were generally so vehement and various as to suggest they

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[12] Claire Johnston finds a similar pattern of thinking characteristic of British Marxism in the 1930s, which tended to focus on 'an essentially economic understanding of historical materialism' without appreciating 'the relative autonomy of the ideological' (14).

might be significant in themselves. Of course, there is no absolute standard by which we can decide whether the ideas or economics underlying activities, events or organisations drive historical change or public decision making. Those who think economic concerns underpin all others are undoubtedly encouraged in the belief by the power and widespread influence of writers like Marx—but they mistake literary coherence for empirical evidence. Whether mind is more than chemistry, society more than economics, is finally a matter of conviction.[13]

It is my belief that the cultural arguments for films legislation made earlier in this century were not simply 'invoked to justify the quota' (were not merely rhetorical), but expressed fundamental reasons for such legislation. Furthermore, I have found that such concerns helped shape the creation and development of the British Film Institute (as I will show in the next chapter) and so are of particular interest to this thesis. I would even reverse the Dickinson and Street order and say that the reasons for legislation were *initially cultural* and only became economic around the beginning of World War II. After all, the early film industry in Britain, on Dickinson and Street's own evidence, was relatively insignificant:

> Economic arguments were not persuasive since the sector to benefit, film production, played a minor role in the national economy and employed only a few thousand people based in the relatively prosperous South-East. (Dickinson/Street 2)

Granted, the imbalance in film trade between the United States and Great Britain—with the American domination of British screens leading to a subsequent flow of cash across the Atlantic—was, and has generally remained, an important economic consideration for the British government. Granted too, that, besides the direct loss in revenue from exhibition, there was the indirect or secondary loss through the promotion of American products by American films (Dickinson and Street report an early American claim 'that each foot of film exported

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[13] In truth, it is probably a fluid intermixture of both these and many other factors besides.

and exhibited abroad yielded one dollar in foreign purchases of American goods', 12). Still, it was understood early on in the discussion of British, government policy that film was both propaganda and promotion, stealing minds, loyalties and languages as well as pounds and pence. As so many statements in and out of Parliament suggest, it was not just financial loss, but the wearing away of national identity (by American films in particular), and the implied loss in sovereignty (which remains a touchstone of British anxiety), that provided the essential motivation for government interest in film—a fear of cultural erosion or cultural imperialism sharpened by the emotional alloy of love and hate that still lies just beneath the surface of British encounters with America.

The concern for the economic viability of the indigenous film industry, or for the overall position of film (domestic or imported) within general fiscal planning, while not unimportant, was both grounded in and encompassed by this cultural preoccupation. In practice, the government wanted to support British film for economic *and* socio-cultural reasons, but the most attractive legislative options available were economic (mainly, because they were both practical and fit into British traditions of democracy and liberality). Despite often strident expressions of moral and patriotic concern about the cinema (and later, about television and video), it has been rare for a British government to make *overtly* censorious laws governing such a public and popular industry, especially when more indirect means have typically and traditionally worked so well (compare, the desire for censorship and the operation of the British Board of Film Censors). Of course, the government would not have minded also giving economic encouragement, at least, to such a potent means of shaping and directing public morality and sensibilities.

As I say, Dickinson and Street have given us an essential work on the economic history of cinema/state relations in Britain: cultural reasons for films policy were not the focus of their

attention. Although they are right when they say that little initial consideration was taken of film as culture: right, that is, if 'culture' is taken as a synonym for 'art'. Only gradually did film come to be considered an art form. Unfortunately, however, Dickinson and Street miss the significant change that occurred over time in the terms of reference of cultural arguments regarding films and films policy. They seem unaware of the history of the art/industry distinction—though, as is typical of most discussion of film in Britain, they take the distinction as a given, and use it in their own work.[14] As a result, they elide 'culture' with 'art' (in keeping with much current usage), and take the art/industry distinction as naturally internal to film itself: whether distinguishing the economics of production from the aesthetics of the film product, or separating an industrial/commercial cinema from an art cinema. What they miss, however, is the fact that in the discussion of films and films policy earlier in the century 'culture' referred not to 'art' but to 'national image'—a British, even an Imperial, ethos—while the art/industry dipole was still understood to be *external* to film. There was no consideration of film as art, or of the art of film, and no way so to consider it, and though this precluded identification of an industrial cinema, it meant that film could only be seen as an industry.

Film's place was at the industrial end of the art/industry dipole—opposite art and culture—where it remained until sometime in the 1930s. Still, the position was highly charged culturally, since it was mainly an American industry that was taken to impinge directly, and in threatening fashion, on Britain's social, educational and artistic heritage. Film was seen as an industrially mass-produced, mass- (and largely underclass-) consumed, deeply emotive and highly influential entertainment—and one that was largely controlled by foreigners (which

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[14] See the Conclusion to the thesis and Appendix 4 for more on the art/industry distinction.

often meant Americans and Jews).[15] The cultural arguments about film expressed real concerns about the effects that film would have on Nation and Empire. It threatened British social order, self-image and cultural history; and it undermined Britain's international standing and decreased the marketability of its products and way of life, thus undermining Empire as well.

> Examples of this sort of argument could be heard from the Prime Minister—
>
> > I think the time has come when the position of that industry in this country should be examined with a view to seeing whether it be not possible, as it is desirable, on national grounds, to see that the larger proportion of the films exhibited in this country are British, having regard . . . to the enormous power which the film is developing for propaganda purposes, and the danger to which we in this country and our Empire subject ourselves if we allow that method of propaganda to be entirely in the hands of foreign countries. (*HC Deb.* 1925; 185: 2084)—

read in the pages of the *Kinematograph Weekly*—

> > The [FBI Overseas] Committee view with great alarm the practical monopoly which has been obtained by foreign film production concerns of the kinema programmes of the British Empire. They consider that this must have a most detrimental effect on British prestige and must be seriously prejudicial to the best interests of the Empire, especially in those parts of the overseas Dominions which contain large coloured populations. (22 April 1926, 42; also quoted in Dickinson/Street 27)—

read in the pages of *The Times*—

> > Twenty million people go the cinema every week; and in those millions the young, the unsophisticated, the slightly educated are so many that they need protection against the evils of which they are hardly aware. Supposing that the distinction between innocent and injurious films were, indeed, only a matter of taste, the taste of a vast number of cinema-goers cannot be held to be so trained and formed as to be capable of deciding right. We make no bones about training and correcting the taste of our children; and in a sense a very great many of the cinema-goers are but children. The public taste may be the ultimate standard; but that taste first needs training, and then . . . supporting by a parallel advance in censorship. (16 January 1935)—

or in the 1936 Report of the Board of Trade Committee on Cinematograph Films—

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[15] Burnett and Martell identify those 'corrupting' the cinema as 'mainly Jewish' (Richards 55); while the attitude toward the Americans ranged from interest to hysteria.

> The cinematograph film is today one of the most widely used means for the amusement of the public at large. It is also undoubtedly a most important factor in the education of all classes of the community, in the spread of national culture and in presenting ideas and customs to the world. (4)

Even early calls for outright government intervention in the film industry came, not as a plea for support of an art form, or for the domestic industry, but as a demand for an authority independent of the foreign-dominated film trade that would guard the moral and national interests of Britain. Take, for example, the remarks made at the national conference of the Birmingham (later National) Cinema Enquiry (27 February 1932), by Sir Charles Robertson, Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University and Chairman of the Enquiry, in which he calls for the establishment of official, state censorship to control the cinema:

> 'We can make it a tremendous instrument to maintain what I like to think is the supremacy of the English-speaking and British people over all others in the world'. (Richards 59)

Similar attitudes can also be found in, perhaps, unexpected parts of the film world, similar at least in springing from a sense of personal insight—intellectual, moral, or political, coloured by nostalgia for a golden-age lost or departing. Consider, for example, how

> Even culturally sympathetic aims, as in the documentary film movement of the 1930s, now seem patronising, the product of 'art' applied to nostalgic notions of community and the romanticisation of industry and labour.[16]

A critical look at the Grierson era (which quickly moved out of film history into cultural mythology), at Grierson's or Rotha's idea of documentary film and the government use of the documentary movement, reveals a remarkable degree of naïvety or self-delusion by the former, encouraged by calculated hypocrisy on the part of the latter. In his Introduction to *Traditions of Independence*, Don Macpherson puts the case regarding Grierson directly:

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[16] D. F. McKenzie, in a note to the author, 2 June, 1990.

> . . . Grierson forged a state-subsidised propaganda machine under a National Government urging a paternalistic social democratic view of non-conflictive politics under a 'strong' but 'benevolent' state. Combining reformist fervour with an interest in experimental aesthetics, and with a funding structure designed to inaugurate a new political era, the GPO Film Unit produced films 'portraying British life' which created a new realist mythology for a Britain struggling to represent itself to the world as a stable and contented nation. (5)

However, by the time this 'propaganda machine' came steaming from the forge, the idea of film in Britain had begun to alter dramatically. Previously, for example, the art/industry distinction had been taken to be external to film (with film as an industrial activity opposite to art). Changes in the domestic industry through the late 1920s and early 1930s (not all of which were successful), plus the activities of groups like the documentary film movement and the creation of organisations like the British Film Institute, all show that the old distinction between art and industry was being internalized to film itself. This had profound implications.

Initially, when the art/industry distinction was taken to be external to film, thinking about film had been dominated by an oppositional structure like the following:

Art & Culture	vs	Film—Industrially Produced Entertainment
British Culture . . .	vs	American 'culture'
Sovereignty	vs	Dependency
The status quo . . .	vs	Social disruption from below (where film drew most of its audience)

Through the 1930s and 1940s it became possible to distinguish art and industry within film itself, so that thinking about film was dominated by an altered oppositional structure:

Art/Cultural Film ('Truly' British production)	. vs	Industrial/Commercial Film (Still American—to the extent that what many defined as commercial, British film success was just American filmmaking, only British.)

Now it was possible to think that film might have the potential, at least, for high-art status. At the same time, the industrial activity of making films could be addressed directly. 'Culture' was increasingly elided with 'art'; although, as would be expected of a country with a tradition

of seeing itself separate even from the continent of which it is a part, the 'culture/art' elision in Britain retained strong associations with national identity[17]—an attitude encouraged by America's continued domination of the cinema world. However, once the art/industry distinction was internalized to film, it meant that a distinction could be made in British film between commercial-industrial production and art (a development that continues to influence the operation of the BFI and its Production Board). Production could now be distinguished from product, and an industrial/commercial cinema (still seen as largely American and variously bad) from a serious, or cultural, but at least British, *art-cinema* (artistic/cultural because it was British). Furthermore, as it was now possible to identify an industrial cinema, it was also possible to see film as more than an industry.

THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE

I said earlier that I was more interested in the social and cultural than in the economic and rhetorical reasons for government involvement in film in Britain. And it has been my position that cultural arguments for films legislation (particularly, though not exclusively, in the first half of the century) did not simply mask or legitimise economic concerns, but expressed fundamental anxieties about film as a new, highly attractive, powerfully influential, cultural—though essentially alliterate—medium that was largely controlled by foreigners and consumed by workers and children. Such anxieties were part of the social psychology of the empowered strata of society—the rich, educated and official, jealous of their vision of British identity. As such, these anxieties informed and inspired economic interest and were reified, in part, by

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[17] In America, the opposite process of definition occurs. Despite using a European rhetoric in which national identity defines culture, America actually defines itself in terms of its culture. American culture, however, is entirely defined in terms of production and consumption—a cultural disorder that extends to the personal level.

economic legislation. Of course, Leftist (or otherwise dissenting) intellectuals and academics have often been as suspicious and disapproving of film and popular culture as anyone to their political right, criticising film for threatening *their* vision of correct personal and national identity. For example,

> . . . Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and their colleagues in the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research . . . . shared the view that mass culture and the mass media, as developed under capitalism, had degraded civilization in the twentieth century. . . . Happily gobbling down the products of the commercialized 'culture industry', the masses had developed a 'false consciousness', so that they no longer saw things as the Frankfurt theorists wished. Consequently, Horkheimer reports, 'truth has sought refuge among small groups of admirable men', and 'the general intellectual level of the masses is rapidly declining'. Following this line, Marcuse preaches the confessedly 'élitist' doctrine that genuine art must be inaccessible to the masses. Only the individual can appreciate 'high' culture—and mass civilization threatens to obliterate the individual. (Carey 43)

Of course, in terms of film, that criticism has been mainly directed at the commercial cinema—Hollywood film in particular—which seems especially to anger the left for its popularity as much as anything else; although that 'mass' popularity feeds the left's predisposition to see the largest part of the film audience as a kind of stupid monolith, constantly fooled into cheap gratification and escapism.[18] Whatever political preferences may be associated with it, however, the fear that film is an agent for the cultural annihilation of Britain has not passed away. In 1990, for example, the Policy Studies Institute reported that 'with the crushing demise of the British film industry we are being swamped by Hollywood product'. Even the serious press turned this into 'British culture "swamped by Hollywood"' (*The Independent*, 11 September 1990).

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[18] A perception of the *mass* cinema audience that they seem to share with those on the right. Although, where the left is loudly moralistic about what entertains the *masses*, the right is more apt to silently use such means of entertainment to exploit the *masses*.

Although I would never suggest the creation of the BFI was without an economic dimension, it is true that the Film Institute embodies a precedence of social and cultural over economic concerns about film. If nothing else, the creation of a national film institute reflected an international trend during the 1930s towards more collective concerns and more centralised planning for the use of limited resources (true even of the U.S. under Hoover). Still, in origin and shape, the BFI was a specific response to the early cultural and social anxieties raised by film. Later, and to the surprise of many who supported it, the Film Institute was *discovered* to be ideological. For some that meant it was apolitical, conservative, nationalist and obsessed with school films and projectors. More recently, others have taken it to mean that the BFI is political, Leftist, internationalist and obsessed with critical theory at the expense of practical education. In either case, the Film Institute was accused of betraying its origins and failing in its purpose: both false accusations. The BFI had always been ideological, since, in Northrop Frye's words, it acted as a 'structure . . . for social authority' (his definition of an 'ideology', *Words with Power* 16). Although, for those who felt the Institute had betrayed them, it did not seem to matter whether the betrayal had occurred through programme or medium.

In fact, the British Film Institute was an educational response to a perceived cultural threat, created at a time when cinema-going in Britain was, in A. J. P. Taylor's words, 'the essential social habit of the age' (392). During the first three decades of the century, it was often held that film, by undermining the moral and social order at its weakest point, would destroy, or seriously distort, the received national image:

> the question which exercised concerned groups most was the extent of the cinema's influence on its youthful patrons and how this influence could be controlled and directed into approved channels. From the outset there had been a predisposition to regard the cinema as potentially and often actually dangerous. (Richards, *Dream Palace* 70)

The assumed immaturity of the audience—whether made up of children or the working class—gave point to the danger: they needed protection (or, the status quo needed defending). But how could this best be accomplished? I have already quoted a suggestion from *The Times*:

> We make no bones about training and correcting the taste of our children; and in a sense a very great many of the cinema-goers are but children. The public taste may be the ultimate standard; but that taste first needs training, and then . . . supporting by a parallel advance in censorship. (16 January 1935)

Though the tone of this piece now sounds unpleasant, it shrewdly associates regulation and instruction—an association as true today as in the 1930s. For a social vision may be realized, or counterfeited, by control (or corruption), but real success depends upon education—formal or informal, liberal or doctrinal. One may bully (or bribe) compliance, but true commitment requires schooling, or first-class fooling.

In fact it is a very old story acted out with new players. As an inordinately affective and dangerously subversive art, which has to be contained within the social order or expelled from it, film—and now television and video—fill the demonic role that poetry once assumed for Plato. There is an economy of mind in the consideration of such things, however, that abhors waste and would rather limit and domesticate such power through censorship and instruction than prohibit it. Indeed, it is even better if the potentially disruptive art form can be co-opted to support the established order, as an educational aid in society's formal and informal instructional procedures. In the *Laws*, Plato's Athenian says

> that education is . . . the drawing and leading of children to the rule which has been pronounced right by the voice of the law, and approved as truly right by the concordant experience of the best and oldest men. That the child's soul . . . may not learn the habit of feeling pleasure and pain in ways contrary to the law and those who have listened to its bidding, but keep them company, taking pleasure and pain in the very same things as the aged—that, I hold, proves to be the real purpose of what we call our 'songs.' They are really spells for souls, directed in all earnest to the production of the concord of which we have spoken, but as the souls of young folk cannot bear earnestness, they are spoken of as 'play' and 'song,' and practiced as such. (2.659 d-e; 1256–1257)

Add 'film' (and 'television') to 'song' here and the Athenian's words could refer to the modern use of the arts for broadly-defined instructional purposes: whether in education, entertainment, propaganda or advertising. Although, being far less idealistic than Plato, we now let youth-oriented 'spells' express rebellion, so that we can contain it, dissipate it and, not least, make vast sums of money from it.

Education serves as a pillar of national identity—an especially strong support, with the law, in nations of clearly defined, long standing and broadly accepted cultural traditions. When that sort of nation feels itself under threat of cultural domination and social disintegration, governing élites typically look to the law to restrain the threat and to education to oppose what can be opposed and to assimilate the rest. In Britain, the perception among the socially and politically powerful élites that film posed a national threat meant that law and education were quickly brought to bear on the cinema. The fist part of this chapter has considered something of the application of law to film. The rest of the chapter looks at the link between education and film, a link that led directly to the creation of the BFI.

THE FILM IN NATIONAL LIFE

The British Film Institute was created as the result of a document called *The Film in National Life* (1932). This was the report of a Commission on Educational and Cultural Films set up at the 1929 conference of the British Institute of Adult Education. Social and cultural concerns about film, which were both prevalent in the 1920s, found it natural to link education and film, and on this linkage depended the very idea of a national film institute.

The 1920s were unsteadied by the memory of the war, which marked a turning point in Western civilization. The shock of that conflict unleashed an extravagance and giddiness that may have been the start of new thinking, but the times were also intemperate, careless and

often dangerously self-absorbed (as would be made clear by economic and political troubles at the end of the decade, and their often disastrous consequences in the next). It is often said that for filmmaking this was a golden age—though much of that particular film world did not survive the conversion to sound.[19] Still, against the indulgence and volatility of the decade ran strong counter-currents: one of which was felt in the deep cultural anxiety about the role of film in British society.

Parliamentary discussion of film had begun a year or so before the first Cinematograph Films Act of 1909. These early discussions were brief and mainly concerned with the physical hazards of exhibition that the 1909 Act was meant to regulate (though safety regulations were also used for censorship: see above 11–13). The coming of war turned interest in the cinema towards more direct questions of propaganda and public morale. An exchange between Sir John Rees MP and Under-Secretary for War Tennant, provides a good example (though it quickly became a commonplace in the discussion of film at Westminster, this may be the first time that the question of film's influence was raised in Parliament):

> *Sir J. D. Rees* asked whether, among the war films sanctioned by the War Office for exhibition in this country, are some taken at the instigation of the Kaiser for the education of neutral countries which represent . . . the humanity and kindness of the Germans in Belgium; whether such films were exhibited at the Scala Theatre on the 17th instant; if so, why . . . and whether their exhibition will immediately be stopped?
>
> *Mr. Tennant*: I understand that the films . . . are not War Office official films, but that they have been passed by the Military Censorship. They are not described as War Office films and their exhibition is a matter of private enterprise. I understand further that they are harmless pictures and that a lecturer explains exactly what they are. I am informed he forgets nothing, the pictures are consequently exhibited in the right light. . . . it is not proposed to take any action. (*HC Deb.* 24 January 1915; 178: 894–95)

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[19] The first feature to use sound 'in a realistic and seemingly undeliberate way' (Cook 240) was *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland 1927). It also notably combined the modern arts of jazz and cinema, as German expressionist films of the period had yoked modern visual art forms.

The response of the Under-Secretary for War is especially interesting and merits comment—not least because it proves that censors and propagandists need not wear heavy boots. Clearly someone had been concerned about the programme at the Scala before Rees brought it up in Parliament, and they had taken measures to regulate the event. Moreover, those measures were enough for the authorities to allow the screening of the films, although the government was literally at war with the producer of the films. Given the circumstances, proscription would hardly have been surprising. Yet authority came dressed as a 'lecturer', not a policeman. The films' *reception* was managed, rather than their *exhibition*: suggesting that education can serve the national interest as well as can repression. It is also a reminder that the supposed open handedness of a society may depend on underhand support and control.

Within five years of the Rees and Tennant exchange, parliamentary time spent on film had increased tenfold (judging from the indexes of Hansard). Not all discussion concerned film's effects, but interest in its influence increased through the 1920s and peaked in the 1930s (remaining high into the 1940s, it continues to appear today). As interest in film's influence grew, the linking of education and film became more frequent and natural.

The general educational potential of film was first discussed in the Commons in 1920 (*HC Deb.* 1920; 133: 441). Five years later, a more significant statement of the education-cinema connection was made by a Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy MP, during a debate on Board of Trade supply requirements. He used an educational analogy to warn of the seriousness of the foreign domination of commercial, film production:

> Suppose that 95 per cent. of the school books used in our schools were written, edited and published abroad. The position would be no more serious. I believe that a child learns more to-day from the cinema screen than from school books, and that 95 per cent. of the films shown in British theatres are of American, German or, in a very few cases, French origin. (*HC Deb.* 6 July 1925; 186: 153)

In the same debate, Sir Frank Mayer MP extended the education-film link in his suggestion of the type of film production the British ought to pursue and the government ought to promote:

> . . . we in this country can never by any possible means expect to rival the Americans in the production of what are known as features. . . . On the other hand, the smaller and shorter films of an educational and commercial character could be developed very largely in this country. That is where I think that the Government, the Board of Trade and, incidentally the Board of Education, could be of the greatest value. By an examination of resources, by encouragement and by inquiry, they could do a great deal to encourage the making of good educational and commercial films which could be shown in this country and be sent to our Dominions and Colonies. (186: 157–58)

I will return to Mayer's remarks in the conclusion to the thesis. For the moment, I want to bring out a bit more of the Imperial interest in film. Mayer was not the first to refer to film and Empire. Government was interested in the international issues of cinema and education and considered them vital to the well-being of the Empire in particular. The general influence of film, and the association of film and education, were both discussed at the 1923 and 1926 Imperial Conferences. There the consideration of cinematic influence and the film/education connection was drawn in the context of Imperial image, propaganda and economic promotion. The Conferences were in agreement about the importance of encouraging Empire films, 'having regard to the influence exerted by the cinema' (*Imperial Conference 1926* xi: 597)—with film's influence on cultural perceptions and trade singled out in particular. At the 1926 Conference, President of the Board of Trade, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, spoke of film's power to promote inter-Imperial trade (*Imp. Conf. Appendix II*, Cmd. 2769, xi: 647). The following year, he repeated his essential arguments in favour of Imperial action, this time in support of the imposition of film quotas, during the second reading of the *Cinematograph Films Act 1927* (see above 13–15).

Despite the importance of film's effects on trade, the Empire was also genuinely interested in its pedagogical applications. The role of film in education was discussed at the

Imperial Education Conferences of 1923 and 1927 (an interest that was formalised at the 1923 Conference in the Gorell Committee on film and education). The question also occupied the attention of the Colonial Film Committee (see its report on film and education, 1930, Cmd. 3630), and it influenced the activities of the Dominion Office and Empire Marketing Board.[20]

It is interesting to note in passing that Sir Philip, in his 1926 Conference statement, refers to both film and the Empire Marketing Board in what may be the earliest instance of their public association:

> The essence of Empire trade is on the one side a determination to produce efficiently and to sell efficiently and on the other side the will to buy. The determination and the will are there. 'Buy British Goods' in its wide Imperial sense is already passing from a slogan into a habit. The Empire Marketing Board will work in a fertile field. But there is one great vehicle of propaganda which we have almost completely ignored—the Cinema. (*Imp. Conf. Appendix II*, Cmd. 2769, xi: 647)

Of course, the Empire Marketing Board found lasting fame, not for its economic activities, but for its eventual involvement in 'the Cinema', helping to develop the kind of non-feature cinema that Sir Frank Mayer had called for in 1925.

Interest in film and education, and a deep concern about film's influence, was never limited to Westminster and the Empire. Local government, educational, religious and other social authorities were also keenly interested and worried about its influence. This uneasiness among social-authority groups, reflecting non-governmental concerns that often preceded those of government, had had its effect on the industry, which had itself set up the Board of Film Censors in 1913, preferring self-regulation to external interference. However, this did not stem the flow of criticisms, particularly from non-governmental authorities. So the industry went further. As *The Film in National Life* notes:

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[20] See also Holmes, 'British Films and the Empire', and Richards, *Dream Palace* 135.

> The Cinematograph Trade Council, on 24th November 1916, resolved: "That the National Council of Public Morals [NCPM] be requested to institute an independent enquiry into the physical, social, moral and educational influence of the cinema, with special reference to young people". (5)

Perhaps the most controversial part of the enquiry by the NCPM involved the question of film's general effect on behaviour and outlook and the possible specific connection between the cinema and juvenile crime. The NCPM report, *The Cinema: its present position and future possibilities* (London, 1917), opens with a strong statement of film's power:

> . . . in the course of our enquiry we have been much impressed by the evidence brought before us that moving pictures are having a profound influence upon the mental and moral outlook of millions of our young people—an influence more subtle in that it is subconsciously exercised—and we leave our labours with the deep conviction that no social problem of the day demands more earnest attention. The cinema, under wise guidance, may be made a powerful influence for good; if neglected, if its abuse is unchecked, its potentialities for evil are manifold. (xxi)

Reading the NCPM report now, I am struck by the fact that the enquiry found it difficult, on evidence alone, simply to condemn the cinema, despite a high level of initial confidence and moral fervour. To their credit, they had the honesty to say so. On the subject of juvenile crime, for example, the enquiry decided that

> . . . the problem is far too complex to be solved by laying stress on only one factor and that probably a subordinate one, among all the contributing conditions. . . . Our conclusion then must be, that while a connection between the cinema and crime has to a limited extent in special cases been shown, yet it certainly has not been proved that the increase in juvenile crime generally has been consequent on the cinema, or has been independent of other factors more conducive to wrongdoing. (xxxvii–xxxviii)

On the question of film's general influence, the enquiry was even less able to find for or against film. After recording a quantity of contradictory expert opinion, it decided that,

> When men engaged in the same kind of work reach so diverse conclusions, it is evident how difficult it would be to lay down rigid rules as to what films should be shown except in those cases where stimulus to sensuality or inducement to crime is patent. (xliii)

As a final recommendation, the Council suggested stricter censorship and the special exhibition of films approved for children.

It was, for its time, a remarkably balanced enquiry. Short of a more scientific investigation, it made good use of available data and came to what were, perhaps, the best conclusions possible. This is important. For however more frequent and widespread became the discussion of film's influence (and it did both), it was always hard to reach fair *and* definitive conclusions either for or against film. Early in the following decade, for example, Parliament considered the effect of the cinema on children (*HC Deb.* 1922, 155: 2305; 156: 1898); yet, at the end of the decade, discussing the same questions, it was not appreciably closer to a clear set of answers (*HC Deb.* 1929, 227: 1694).

Yet, although the National Council of Public Morals had shown how difficult it was to draw conclusions about cinematic influence, some 23 further studies of film's educational, moral, social and cultural dangers were undertaken in Britain over the next 30 years. Some of the most influential appeared in the years just before the establishment of the BFI, including:

- *The Cinema in Education*, ed., Sir James Marchant, 1925;
  [A subcommittee report of the NCPM enquiry];
- The report of the LCC Education Committee, 1926;
- The Colonial Films Committee Report, 1930;
- Report by the National Council of Women, 1930;
- The Birmingham Cinema Enquiry *Report 1930–31*;
- *A Survey of Children's Cinema Matinees in Sheffield*, Sheffield Juvenile Organisations Committee, 1931;
- *The Cinema and the Child*, Birkenhead Vigilance Committee, 1931;
- Report of the Mothers' Union, 1931;
- *School children and the Cinema*, LCC Education Committee, 1932;
- *The Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry*, ed., John Mackie, 1933;
- *Our Movie-Made Children*, James Forman, New York, 1933;
  [A survey of the 12 vol. US, Payne Fund Studies of film influence in Britain.]

Few of these reports saw film playing any positive role in the life of the nation, and without the active encouragement of instructional method, and a more acceptable cultural and

social bias, film generally stood condemned. Even when they found something favourable to say, the reasons for the commendation are often revealing. Consider the following extract from the 1931 Report of the Mothers' Union (as recorded in *The Film in National Life*):

> A number of experienced workers consider it is far better for young people and children and tired working people to be in cinemas than wandering streets and lanes or reading some of the literature they are likely to get hold of and discuss. (38)

Despite an ostensible interest in morality, I wonder whether 'mother' is not more concerned here with literature that might inflame social and political discontent, inciting disorderly activities, than she is with indecency?

Later, the BFI too was involved in the investigation of these issues (see the *Report of a Conference on Films for Children* 1936). This is not surprising, since the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films that first recommended a national film institute had seen itself in the tradition of these earlier cultural, social and moral investigations (see *The Film in National Life* 3–9). More than that, it believed that a film institute would be the very organisation to carry out the general conclusions of these studies:

> There is a singular unanimity, which we endorse, in the main general conclusions of earlier enquiries, but little or nothing has been done to implement them. . . . There has been no organisation whose concern it was to take action where need has been proved. This inaction is perhaps the most convincing argument we can adduce to support our plea for a permanent central co-ordinating organisation. (4)

Before going on to the specific recommendations made by *The Film in National Life*, I want to mention four groups (variously involved with film and education in the 1920s) whose histories parallel the conception and early development of the Film Institute. In fact, one had a direct bearing on its creation. The groups I refer to are: the Film Society, the documentary film

movement, the workers' film groups and the adult-education movement.[21] Together, they complete the picture of the essential circumstances for the foundation of the Film Institute, though only the last needs emphasis since the BFI was born out of its specific activities.

The first of these organisations was the Film Society (created in 1925). It did much to encourage an interest in and awareness of film as art (see Dickinson/Street 47). The Film Society contributed immeasurably to the stature of film and increased its chances of being treated seriously. In doing so, it also probably influenced the internalization of the art/industry distinction to film. Yet, while it made a significant contribution to the artistic aura and hence to the legitimacy of film, the Society's left-of-centre, intellectual élitism meant that it reached few members of the working class, which made up most of the cinema-going audience.

The next group was the documentary film movement. In 1929, Grierson (who seems to have coined the word 'documentary' in 1927: see Essex 3), reestablished the sporadically active Film Unit of the Empire Marketing Board for continuous production. Grierson was given the opportunity to do this largely because of the success of his film *Drifters*, which was

> accorded the then considerable honour of a screening at the Film Society, which in those days attracted London's intellectual élite. In the programme on Sunday, 10 November 1929, at the Tivoli Palace, Strand, it was preceded by Jean Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher* and followed by Walt Disney's *The Barn Dance* and the first-ever British showing of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, which had previously been banned . . . . Eisenstein was in the audience and Aldous Huxley and a strong representation from the British documentary movement of the future, including Basil Wright, Paul Rotha, Stuart Legg, Arthur Elton. (Essex 5)

When the Film Unit was transferred from the Empire Marketing Board to the General Post Office in 1933—the year the BFI was incorporated—the stage was set for the flowering of a distinctive, and now almost mythical, period in British cinema.

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[21] See Barnouw and Montagu on the Film Society; Rotha, Grierson and Sussex on the documentary movement; Hogenkamp on workers' film; Maurice on adult education.

The third activity I want to mention is the socialist and workers' film movement of the 1920s and 30s. The history of this movement parallels orthodox British film history, but the memory of its activity has been suppressed so the extent that it rarely appears in standard histories of film in Britain (something Bert Hogenkamp begins to redress in his excellent book, *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain 1929–39*). I am only interested in that history to 1935, which saw creation of the Progressive Film Institute: a working-class response to the BFI (see Hogenkamp, esp. 192–209). Important events in this all but silent history include:

- Federation of Workers' Film Societies: created 1929.
- London Workers' Film Society: first general meeting, 28 Jan.1930.
- Workers' Topical News: first shown, 6 March 1930.
- Federation of Workers' Film Societies: first conference, 14 Sept. 1930.
- *Workers' Cinema*: first issue, November 1931.
- Workers' documentary of May Day demonstrations, 1932.
- Workers' Film and Photo League: established, November 1934.
- Progressive Film Institute: established, 1935.

In the years of social and cultural concern over film that I have been tracing—and especially after the General Strike of 1925—such activities must have added immeasurably to the discomfort of the power élites. For the activities of the workers' film movement associated representative members of the main, cinema-going audience—numerous, underprivileged and suspected of being potentially troublesome—with the complete structure of film production, distribution and exhibition. In this case, however, the entire structure, from production to reception, was outside the immediate control, usually outside even the influence, of the social, political and commercial status quo. Though in the end, it may have been of limited, lasting significance, direct, working-class access to and involvement in such a powerful medium must have been a keen stimulus to the creation of authorised film organisations with ideological and educational briefs that would ensure films were 'exhibited in the right light'.

Finally, I want to mention the Adult Education movement, whose interest and involvement in film and education, and active promotion of a link between the two, was the workbench on which the British Film Institute was built. The theory and practice of Adult Education had undergone dramatic growth during the 1920s, and the movement possessed a real sense of mission towards those not served by the established educational system:

> The . . . movement has . . . from small beginnings taken a definite place in the national life. More and more working people are realising the importance to themselves of a liberal education; the public and the State are increasingly conscious of the importance to the nation of 'educating our rulers'. . . . the general tendency of the movement is to approximate as far as its special needs and conditions admit to those characteristics of fellowship and corporate life which have always been a distinguishing feature of British Secondary Schools and of Universities. (Maurice 20)

Some of society's most influential and powerful interests (including the government and educational and cultural élites) were necessary for the creation and continuation of the BFI—though at the time they tended to see film as a social and cultural threat. The *idea* of a national film institute, however, was due to an educational movement that had two good reasons for considering film a valuable tool in 'the training of the mind'. First, film was powerfully affective. Second, film was popular with the movement's natural constituency and had not been co-opted into the established order of the educational hierarchy (that this is still true, however, should cause concern about Britain's definition of a *modern* education).

THE CONCEPTION OF A NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE

The idea of a national film institute took shape over a period of two and a half years. It was raised in November 1929 at the annual conference of the British Institute of Adult Education, and then given form when the conference created a Commission on Education and Cultural Films. Full expression of the idea came two-and-a-half years later, with the publication of the Commission's final report, *The Film in National Life* (May 1932). Between the two events,

much of the world's economic structure had collapsed, bringing with it broad social and economic changes entirely unlike those anticipated during the 1920s. While a widespread move towards more centralised social-planning might have encouraged the idea of a national, royally-chartered film institute (which is what the Commission's report called for), it was also true that less government money was available to make such a scheme work. Even without the global economic problems, however, the proposed Institute was hobbled by ambiguities inherent in the Commission and its work, ambiguities that are written into its report on *The Film in National Life*.

Unfortunately, no record of the originating, 1929 Adult Education Conference seems to have survived (though there are published reports for the 6th conference—*Science and Adult Education* 1927—and the 11th conference—*Adult Education and the Changing World* 1932). The only material we have on the 1929 Conference and its decision to create a Commission on Educational and Cultural Films appears in *The Film in National Life*, as the Commission looks back to its own origins—noting that it

> was established in November 1929 by the unanimous vote of . . . some hundred Educational and Scientific organisations who felt that the film had become, for good or for evil, a powerful force in national life, which should be used constructively in the interests of education in its widest sense. (1)

The difficulties and ambiguities that the Commission eventually passed on to the Film Institute are already in evidence here. To begin with, the parental organisations represented a limited constituency of opinion: of 54 officers and members, at least 36 (67%), and perhaps as many as 42 (78%), represented groups with strictly formal, pedagogical interests and priorities regarding film. Thus, the operative word in the passage just quoted is 'use'. Indeed, I suspect it is also the word that best describes the general attitude to film of those who established the Commission. For the groups represented were so constituted as to be concerned with the *use*

of film as an *aid to traditional subjects in established education*. They were not formed so as to be concerned with film in itself—as entertainment, propaganda, or even as a *subject* worthy of study. They were interested in the potential uses of film in their respective activities, an interest external to any consideration of the nature of film itself (given that any particular film could adequately fulfill the utilitarian role for which it might be chosen).

At the same time, it is clear that the weight of the passage quoted rests upon the final, complex clause of the sentence, which directly addresses film in language that is culturally and morally charged: 'film had become, for good or for evil, a powerful force in national life, which should be used constructively in the interests of education in its widest sense'. Is this mere rhetoric, perhaps intended to make the Commission sound grand? Or is it evidence that, counter to expectation and their official spheres of expertise and interest, these groups *were* influenced by the broader concerns about film that were widespread in British society at the time. The question is not simply academic. The Commission's activities and recommendations depended upon how its attention was directed: whether focused narrowly at the pedagogical *use* of film, or broadly, at film as a 'powerful force ["for good or for evil"] in national life'.

This ambiguity in the Commission's original charge introduced a fissure into its work that runs out in all directions from the word 'use'. For the Commission's original charge and purpose to fit with the conclusions that were eventually presented in its final report, and with the limitations initially placed on the operation of the Film Institute, the original statement of purpose should have been more along the lines of the following:

> The Commission . . . was established in November 1929 by the unanimous vote of . . . some hundred Educational and Scientific organisations who felt that the film . . . should be used constructively in the interests of education . . . .

Here, with the word 'use' kept separate from questions of social and cultural effect, its meaning is clear. A commissioning statement such as this would have required nothing more

than a study of film's possible, pedagogical applications—an area well within the formal interests and competence of the 'Educational and Scientific organisations' involved—but that is not how the Commission's purpose was worded.

At the time, no one seems to have recognised that the Commission's mandate forced it into a divided task, or that it would pass on a division of purpose to any organisation or activity undertaken on its recommendation. Of course, the Commission could easily and quite successfully consider and make recommendations on film's *use* in the classroom and lecture hall. But with 'good', 'evil', 'power', 'force' and the 'national-life' placed before 'use' . . . while 'constructive' and 'education in its widest sense' were placed after it, the Commission was not limited to pedagogical considerations alone. Given the high profile of social and cultural concerns about cinema at the time, it is not surprising the tenor of the enquiry and its final report are so different from what the originating body seems to have had in mind.

Consider the Commission's own description of its terms of reference. Note, for example, how different these would be if taken narrowly to refer to pedagogical applications alone (that is, if the cultural references in the following were struck out, as I have done):

> The Conference adopted as the terms of reference of the Commission the Project placed before it of which the three main heads are the following:—
>
> 'The Conveners of this Conference representing Institutions engaged in Science, History and Education, are of the opinion that an authoritative Commission of Enquiry and Recommendation of a representative character should be established with the following objects and methods:—
>
> '(1) To consider suggestions for improving and extending the use of films (motion pictures and similar visual and auditory devices) for educational ~~and cultural~~ purposes, including use as documentary records.
>
> '~~(2) To consider methods for raising the standard of public appreciation of films, by criticism and advice addressed to the general public, by discussion among persons engaged in educational or cultural pursuits, and by experimental production of films in collaboration with professional producers.~~
>
> '(3) To consider whether it is desirable and practicable to establish a permanent central organisation with general objects as above, and among its particular functions . . . . may be . . . advice on the production, selection, distribution and use of films. (1)

Put simply, the full purpose of the Commission was to consider the creation of 'a permanent central organisation' responsible for the improvement of films and audiences by broadly educational means—a pedagogical brief it is true, but of an entirely different type than simply an analysis of film's educational applications.

The style and structure of the Commission's final report shows just how far it had journeyed from pure applications analysis. Reflecting, perhaps, the Commission's uneasiness about that journey, the report follows a distinctly skittish line of argument: at one moment bashfully, but intensely, interested in the nature, quality and influence of film-culture in general, then just as shyly refraining from making plain what its interests and intentions are. Knowing of the ambiguity in the Commission's initial mandate makes the reasons for that skittishness clear. Clear too are the reasons for the alarm raised in the film industry by the Commission, its report and the recommendation for a national film institute, alarm that led the industry to try to neutralise the power and potential of the Film Institute at birth.

The situation seems to have stemmed from the involvement of the Adult Education group, which was host to the parental Conference. Granted that, given the historical timing of the Conference, members of the Commission as individuals would likely have been variously cognizant and interested in the virtues and dangers of film. They may even have held strong opinions on the subject. However, it was in the nature of the Adult Educational movement to see itself in the broadest possible social terms:

> from its earliest days the Adult Education movement acquired a sense of fellowship, of service, and of working for a cause . . . . it aimed at the training of the mind, not of the hands. . . . It has never offered, as an inducement to the student, to increase his earning capacity, though in fact it has very often done so. It has offered him the prospect of a fuller and richer life, and the opportunity to make better and more intelligent use of his citizenship. (Maurice 19)

This missionary zeal to transform society, coupled to the belief that this could be accomplished in the face of the established order, combined to bias the Commission from the start. This alone would have encouraged individual members in their interests and concerns over film's propriety and influence. By the time of its final report, the Commission itself took for granted the breadth of adult education's social role, going so far as to redefine state propaganda in its image: 'State propaganda on a national issue is a direct form of Adult Education' (106). Unfortunately, the Adult Education involvement did not go so far as to initiate a bold and forthright redefinition of the Commission or its purpose. Instead, ambiguity about the Commission's specific brief was written into the very terms of its enquiry.

I am not suggesting that it was wrong to undertake a study of the role of film within society. Indeed, I do not think it is possible to do more than limit the influence of biases on any enquiry into social and cultural activities: so far, all enquiries into the secondary worlds created by humans involve belief statements or acts of faith. The fault in such enquiries, lies in the deception, hypocrisy or confusion that the mistaken claims to complete objectivity entail.

It is not that the Commission had to address itself solely to narrow pedagogical concerns. To consider the role of film in society, and to suggest the establishment of an institute to encourage film and its understanding in the broadest possible way was highly commendable. But the Commission was caught in a complex and ambiguous statement of interest and intent that never quite dared speak its name. If it had had the courage of its convictions, it would have outraged the film industry—though in the end even its ambiguous challenge did that, and it might just as well have been hanged for a horse as a chicken. Besides, if it had openly pursued the kind of social vision that informed the Adult Education movement, it might well have found itself speaking for and to many more people. It might even have given government a lead in an area of deep but delicate concern. We can imagine that a film institute

recommended by such a Commission would have had national responsibilities for film, from production to reception. Such an institute might then have been the clear focal-point and the essential agent for the creation and support of a vital and rich national film-culture.

Yet as it was constituted, the Commission had two masters to serve. It was bound to the problems of film's pedagogical application, but was impelled to consider, and envisage a film institute that would exert positive control on the cinema experience of the nation. Though the interventionist note sounds well and good throughout the report—

> We are concerned, and the Film Institute would be concerned, with a constructive and not a restrictive influence on cinematography. (14)—

control is control nonetheless; and *The Film in National Life* cannot name its central thesis.

This fissure in the enquiry's interests and intentions appears in a series of oppositions, apostrophes and displacements in the report. When it enters upon areas where it might make clear what this 'constructive' influence would entail, it suggests, rather than asserts, then quickly backs away, hiding its tracks with euphemism or obliquity. It speaks of film getting into 'the wrong hands' and being 'turned to our disservice' (3). It says that 'in the public interest the breach between national culture and film activity must be healed' (4) and laments the fact that 'No single [government] department is concerned with the constructive development of cinematography' (9). The BBC is its model for a new film organisation, and it emphasises 'the strength of the forces which the Corporation controls and the dispensation which it exercises over national taste and morals' (10). Britain 'should lead rather than follow in developing the constructive and ordered use of the new medium' (15). The international film organisations it then identifies as possible models are in hindsight surprising, but telling:

> Germany was the first European nation after the war to produce cultural films which impressed the world. She was also the first nation to set up an effective and constructive organisation founded in 1919. We venture to suggest a causal relationship. (21)

> Italy has carried State control one stage further, with a Government Institute . . . which also produces films, and indeed controls Italian production. Fascism has realised the propaganda and cultural value of cinematography judiciously used. (21)
>
> Russia has realised, as clearly as fascist Italy, the power of the film; and the Government and Communist party control cinematography even more drastically. In their hands the cinema has reached what is in some ways its highest achievement. Born out of the artistic excellence of the pre-war Russian stage, by the storm and terror of the revolution, a new art has grown up which has the religious texture of the primitives and clothes its simple doctrine in a majestic robe. . . . The Central government has realised that an efficient cinema industry is its most powerful agent for influencing an illiterate peasantry. Every film made is a film with a purpose. . . . In the USSR no clear distinction exists between political, educational and amusement films. . . . The use of the film as a civilising and educating agent—briefly, as propaganda—does not destroy its predominance as the art of the people. (22–23)
>
> 'In Great Britain by contrast there is no Film Institute; and no government department is officially concerned with the constructive development of cinematography . . .' (23)

The line of argument is as clear as the kind of 'constructive' intervention envisaged—or is it?

Earlier in the document, we read:

> Other countries have taken steps to control the development of the film by the creation of Film Institutes in close relation to the government. Some of these . . . wield powers which we should hesitate to confer on a British Institute or Corporation. We do not want to see the cinema under tutelage. We feel that Government control, such as exists in Russia, or close supervision either of an entertainment or an art, is unnatural, unhealthy, and not in the national tradition. The industry, in our view, can and should develop in the hands of those who understand its management. The educational bodies of this country can co-operate effectively with the industry; if they attempt to nurse it they well defeat their own ends. We hope to see the machinery of co-operation set up in the form of a National Film Institute, but . . . an organisation without the right kind of public support will not do what we want. We submit that the constructive use of the cinema is a form of national planning from which the finest intelligences of the country should no longer hold aloof. Their influence may be indirect; but their critical interest, if the criticism be informed and constructive, can only help the industry whose readiness to welcome co-operation has been emphasised to us by their representatives on the Commission. (11)

On the following page the report says that while the feature film wants improving, it is not 'to be made deliberately "improving."' (12)

I quote all this, not to indulge in the easy ridicule of hindsight, but to point out how the Commission was drawn to a particular vision of what British film-culture and a British film institute might offer and accomplish, while at the same time it recoiled reflexively from what it saw. The vision itself was profoundly interventionist: with film intervening in the national life, and a national film institute in film. But how could the Commission maintain such distinct conceptions and still function? More important, how could it maintain a clear sense of purpose and go on to make serious recommendations to the nation?

The Commission was not intellectually paralysed, however, because there was a traditional method for dealing with dissonant situations of this sort—what I called earlier, one of the 'customary features of British society ' (5), which in the political sphere I described as 'government-at-arm's-length' (5)—and this technique actually displaced anxiety as it facilitated the implementation of seemingly incompatible recommendations and activities. The relevance and importance of this tradition of indirect social management is evident in the Commission's remarks about the feature film needing to be improved, so as to have a positive, educational effect on its audience, without *appearing* to be 'deliberately improving'.

What the Commission was essentially talking about was something not usually talked about in Britain, then or now (at least, not openly talked about)—namely, operational social control. Furthermore, it had to pretend to itself, as much as to anyone else, that it was not really going on about what it really was going on about. Of course, it is unlikely the Commission was conscious of the cognitive dissonance afflicting it, though it had to try and repress the anxiety this produced and seek a strategy to resolve the essential problems involved. The Commission could argue for levels of social control that were 'not in the

national tradition' without feeling it had betrayed the nation, because it was very much in the British tradition for there to be social control. What tradition also dictated, however, was that such control should be indirect and covered by a patina of apparent carelessness and makeshift rationality. Despite the claim that 'The refinements of State control are not adapted to the public life of Great Britain' (17), the truth was exactly the opposite: state control in Britain was both refined and subtle, an unobtrusive and apparently natural part of the British way of life. Indeed, the Commission's mention of 'refinements of State control' is ironic (though, not likely intentionally so), for what exists in other countries is often crude in comparison.[22]

The text of the report shows signs of this resolution/repression of dissonance throughout: it denigrates the controlling of public taste and entertainment, even as it argues the need for a constructive control 'complementary' (40) to the negative control of censorship. It even offers some oblique, indirect and frankly illogical ways of establishing and maintaining the negative control of censorship in Britain:

> A country with the social customs of Great Britain must always have some sort of public control over public exhibitions, and a typically British system has grown up which is not very logical but works quite well. (28)
>
> This Committee [Film Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State, 1931] has the opportunity, by quiet administrative action, and by tactful handling of local licensing authorities, of satisfying much informed criticism without controversy? (29)
>
> Such is the machinery of the British national system of control [referring to the BBFC], which combines the minimum of direct official interference with the maximum of voluntary effort. (33)

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[22] I have been surprised to discover that after living 6 years in Britain I now find more to admire in its traditions and techniques for maintaining and encouraging national identity and social order, a sense of history and aspirations for the future, than I do in the North American mode, which now seems a deadly mix of social irresponsibility and self-obsession, with a personal identity defined through a desperate conformity of consumption.

> The present system is a typically British growth, a mixture of irrelevance, compromise and common sense. It has worked surprisingly well. (40)
>
> . . . firms of advertising film producers are established to produce for industrial firms films which may be shown in the public cinema. The discreet tradition of British under-emphasis is preserved, as by the firm of soap-makers which has produced a film on whaling. (106)

The report's sympathies are glimpsed when it comments on the governing brief of the Grand Council of the French Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts. *The Film in National Life* begins its discussion saying, 'France is already familiar with the conception that the guidance of taste is a function of government (19).' It then goes on to explain how such familiarity is applied:

> The strong French national consciousness is shown in the instructions to the fifth section [of the Grand Council responsible for film]: "The Commission shall take into consideration the whole of the National interests involved, and more particularly the interest in the conservation of National Customs and traditions, and also, in the case of foreign films, the facilities for the release of French films in the various countries of origin." (19–20)

The Commission's admiration is clear in its concluding remarks: 'The system is centralised, logical and economical' (20).

I believe the blunt French statement of national interest and intention concerning film is just what the British commissioners also felt. The Commission's report does not disagree with the French about the need to consider 'the whole of the National interests involved'—the trouble was the British do not like to say such things so clearly. Social control and national promotion in Britain are not secrets, but neither are they so openly discussed; it exists but does not wish to speak its name in a nation that does not like to acknowledge its presence (which may be part of the reason for whatever success it does have.

The Commission could not acknowledge its inclinations, state its intentions or give a free rein to its thoughts; yet, neither could it let them go, because of the nature of its charge—so it failed to make the best possible use of the seemingly opposed British traditions of indirect

social control and personal liberty to support the film in national life. Of course, in the end, the avoidance and suppression did no good, for the Commission still scared almost everyone who could do it harm, especially the film trade, which worked to neutralise it and its creation.

Yet, curiously, the Commission several times reports that it enjoyed the warm support of the film industry. Near the beginning of the first chapter it says:

> We have received the most cordial co-operation from all sections of the trade. We believe that producers welcome the interest which educational and scientific bodies are taking in the development of this new medium, and are anxious to profit by their advice. Without the help of the trade any recommendations which we could make would have little more than academic interest. (3)

This claim of 'cordial co-operation' was challenged two years later in the Walter Ashley attack on the BFI (see ch. 2: 75–80); and it is hard to see how the Commission could make such an assertion. Only two of its members had trade connections, and it does not seem to have gone out of its way to get information from the industry. Moreover, the report scared various interests into trying to neutralise it and its recommendations, and 'Once the trade realised that the Film Institute was a *fait accompli*, it launched a campaign to make the organisation innocuous' (Dickinson/Street 50). The claim of trade support may have been suppressed anxiety expressed about its opposite; though it may be the Commission simply did not see the difference between genuine support and the polite mask of an industry gathering intelligence.

And yet, as the Commission's final recommendations and the resulting BFI show, for such broadly educational, cultural concerns to have been addressed properly, a far more interventionist national film institute would have been required than was eventually realised. Indeed, what I have been treating as a problem caused by the involvement of the Adult Education movement, was also a missed opportunity to create just such a broadly proactive film institute in support of the film in national life.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Nearly thirty separate suggestions are made in the body of *The Film in National Life*, suggestions that are then generalised into some ten formal proposals in the Report's final chapter. The general suggestions can be collated in two groups. The first group, under six headings, describes what the proposed institute would be:

1. An organisation for action;
2. Publicly funded under Royal Charter;
3. A constructive influence complementary to censorship's restrictive influence;
4. National and international in its interests (especially in terms of Empire);
5. A contact between the main film audience and the educated audience;
6. A contact between the trade and culture, and the trade and the audience.

The second group details the functions of the proposed institute. It would:

1. Encourage the production of good films;
2. Train the main film audience to select what is good;
3. Advise on censorship;
4. Advise educators on the suitability of films;
5. Circulate information on the morality of films;
6. Certify films as educational or cultural;
7. Help place projectors in schools;
8. Operate a film library;
9. Distribute educational and cultural films.

A film institute should 'focus public opinion on the problem of the film', but would also need 'to take positive steps to raise cinematography to its rightful position as an educational and cultural instrument, all the more valuable because it is powerful either for good or for evil' (27). Concerning the problems posed by film, the Commission notes 'a singular unanimity, which we endorse, in the main general conclusions of earlier enquiries' (4). However, as that 'ground has been surveyed . . . the urgent need now is not for further enquiry but for action, and for a responsible body whose duty it is to take action' (9). It is only in England that 'the film industry continues to develop without effective contact with the culture of the country' (11). Consequently, the Commission

> make[s] one central recommendation that a National Film Institute be set up in Great Britain, financed in part by public funds and incorporated under Royal Charter. (13)

The Film in National Life says repeatedly that a National Film Institute 'would be concerned, with a constructive and not with a restrictive influence on cinematography' (14). The Institute might advise on censorship (35). It might even distribute nationally, 'to licensing authorities and to bodies desiring to use films for special purposes' (40), information similar to that provided by the London Public Morality Council (which circulated a moral values report on films to its members). The Commission adds, however, that 'For such a service films would be described, not criticised, or a form of sub-censorship would grow up' (40). Not that the Commission was against censorship. It wished to define a role for the film institute, in the control of film in the national life, that was distinct but co-ordinate with established mechanisms of censorship. Simultaneously, it was concerned lest the Institute undermined those established mechanisms. Balance was needed:

> Preoccupation with censorship, even in a worthy cause, distracts attention from constructive effort. We desire to see a positive influence exerted over the whole field of cinematography which will develop all that is most valuable therein from the point of view of science, education, commerce, recreation and artistic enjoyment. Censorship, however enlightened, cannot do this. In the battle for the improvement of public taste censorship can only render garrison service—a valuable but not a determining factor. A Film Institute would be constructive, not restrictive. It would neither supersede nor run counter to the censorship, the two organisations would be complementary. The Cinematograph Act, 1909, provides for the effective local control by public opinion of films hired for exhibition in the locality. A Film Institute should succeed in making that opinion sufficiently articulate and insistent to secure for itself an effective voice in their selection. (40)

To accomplish this, it would train the young 'to regard the film as something more than the equivalent of a penny dreadful, and to help the adult to see the best that he desires' (17); that is, it would concentrate its educational efforts on the largest part of the cinema-going audience. The Commission divides that audience into a great pyramid:

> Its base and nine-tenths of its volume are the general public. Next there is a stratum of educated opinion (largely in the provinces) which will see good films if good films are brought to it, but will not seek them out. The apex is the smallest section: men and women who belong to film societies, and who are prepared to seek out the films they want. What we need to-day is to enlist the interest of this third group . . . provision both by repertory cinemas and by differentiated programmes in the ordinary houses for the second group; and an education in taste for the first group, which can best begin with the children. (83)

It says little, however, about training the better-educated members of society in cinema-going, those who were expected to help train the weaker members of the audience. Indeed, while the report avidly promotes the idea of film education, there is little indication of how this would be put into practice. What the country needed, and still needs, was for film to be studied formally, and not simply used, in schools, colleges and universities. Without such an established film-education programme, it was left to the Film Institute to help largely film-illiterate educators select films for the education of new generations. To end the film-illiteracy, though, film education should have been introduced across the educational spectrum. This was not going to happen at the time of the Commission, nor would it for some time to come. Even today, film education has fallen to only a handful of universities and the British Film Institute.

The report did believe 'An informed and critical public [would] applaud and encourage constructive British film production' (17):

> The public demand for better films should be the foundation and not the ruin of the British industry. . . . What both parties need is a trusted and impartial friend to serve as a go-between. (55)

The Commission asserted that an educated film audience would create a demand that would support the British industry. As well as anything else, this was no doubt used to sell the Commission's work and the National Film Institute to the trade. The Commission hoped that the Film Institute would be the 'trusted and impartial friend' to link the industry and all the other film interests, 'organising the demand' for 'British films which are good of their kind,

and can command a market in any company; films which are British in their essence, in the picture, in the subject and in the setting' (42).

Beyond the support of a properly educated audience, the Commission suggests that the Film Institute itself would give 'constructive support' to the right kind of films. And what kind would that be? Well, of course it would include the educational and documentary film, but it is with reference to the commercial cinema that the Commission is most revealing. It has often been asserted that postwar Britain saw a change from class conflict to regional conflict, especially along the lines of a North-South division. Well, according to *The Film in National Life*, the kind of commercial film that deserves support is the film that would do well in the West End and with the critics but would do poorly in the North:

> . . . the North of England is still the greatest field of exploitation, and its supposed taste rules to a considerable extent the production schedule. A film may be a success in the West End of London and 'flop' (*i.e.* not be booked) in the provinces. But a producer who is sure of at least one large circuit knows that failure is unlikely. On the other hand, an independent producer makes a cultural film; it is hailed by the critics as a very fine film, and has a success both of esteem and of profit in the West End theatres; but it is no longer judged by individual viewers. One man books films for each big circuit, and if he thinks the film against the policy of his company he will not book it. (45)

In the best tradition of cultural élitism, the report takes a patronising stand towards the public and its sources of interest and amusement. Following its own well-established pattern of indirection and irony, the report makes a serious implication of social inferiority and blame—and then redirects it. It says this kind of commercial film would fail financially, and suggests the reason would be an aesthetic failure by the Northern, largest part of the cinema-going pyramid—'the base and nine-tenths of its volume' that needs 'an education in taste'. It then shifts the blame to the recent development of large circuit-houses. Such a film, it says, would not be booked to run across the country and so would fail *before* the box office. Completing the turn, it then accuses 'the big exhibitors' of 'not giv[ing] the public the chance to deliver a

verdict' (45). The Commission adds elsewhere that 'If the growing power of the large circuits give cause for thought, this is in our view but one more indication that a National Film Institute should be set up to link the public interest with the trade' (79). The implications of that comment must have caused some excitement in the trade!

Beyond its 'constructive influence', the report suggests specific responsibilities for a National Film Institute. It would officially certify films 'as of artistic, interest or educational value' (45), with reference to an international agreement on special customs status for films so certified. It would help educational authorities with most aspects of the film, being

> an authoritative body to which a teacher can go for advice as to what films are available and how to use them; a body which will arrange either directly or through the trade for the distribution of films to schools and institutions. In particular, [it would provide] a catalogue which will tell teachers what they want to know about films. . . . a National Film Institute will supply interested head teachers with a short précis and opinion on entertainment films recently released, so that they may be able to advise children on their film-going as much as on their reading. (75)

It would also help in the placing of projectors within schools:

> Other countries have made grants towards the installation of projectors in schools. . . . In default of other government funds, public opinion, within as well as outside the trade, might countenance a voluntary levy on the profits of the industry, whether as a part of or separate from the funds of a Film Institute. (71)

A National Film Institute would be responsible for establishing and maintaining a film library (both a circulating library and an archive for the preservation of significant films):

> The library of a Film Institute would have a multiple function. It would preserve for future record copies of a selection from all classes of film printed in England, entertainment, news, scientific or educational, professional or amateur. It would make available for study, films of interest to students and (while respecting the secrecy of records of incomplete investigation) information about films produced as private notebooks. It would distribute to teachers and bodies of students films not available through ordinary agencies of distribution. It would promote the production of documentary films of non-recurring occasions and historic events for the instruction and delight of posterity. (124–25)

Finally, the Institute would distribute films of an educational or cultural nature:

> A Film Institute would perform an important function in arranging to distribute at a reasonable cost suitable films to such bodies [schools, churches, film societies and repertory theatres], either direct through its central film library or indirectly through a trade organisation. (96)

The Institute would have international responsibilities as well:

> An important branch of the National Film Institute should deal with Imperial and Colonial affairs. Its concern would be to promote the interchange of films between Great Britain and the Dominions, as an aid to mutual understanding, as a means of reciprocal trade publicity, and for Empire teaching at home and overseas. It would advise the Secretaries of State for the Dominions and Colonies; it would help both in the training in cinematography of Colonial Education officers and in the selection of films of educational value for backward races; and it would co-operate with the trade for the making of special films. (139)

In the end, however, it is the promotion of a broad cultural role for the Film Institute that stands out. The close of Chapter VI, 'The Entertainment of the Public', for example, not only presents a philosophy for the proposed Institute, it reminds us of the Commission's split personality, and of the irony that pervades its report:

> . . . we want to make it clear beyond all question that we do not advocate a bureaucratic control of entertainment. . . . The functions of an Institute would be suggestive. Its interest in the entertainment film would be to ensure that informed opinion was able to express itself and to exercise an influence on production. It could focus intelligent adult thought throughout the country. It could link up isolated workers and thinkers by, *e.g.*, the issue of a review and of press articles, or by lectures and meetings at important centres such as universities. . . . The need is for organisation and for an influential and representative body which could approach the trade: a body which would represent the now disconnected members of the thinking public, and through specialised weekly and monthly papers could advise them on films, as they are now advised on their reading and hobbies; which would be able to call for worthy films and to supply an audience which would make them profitable. We need, in fact, both public opinion which will appreciate and demand films which as entertainment are really good of their kind or have more than entertainment value, and a national tradition of film production which will supply that demand. (90–91)

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THE BFI:
AN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE

On 25 September 1933, the Board of Trade granted a licence to the British Film Institute as 'an Association limited by guarantee' without Share Capital (under Section 18, the Companies Act, 1929). The licence directed '"The British Film Institute" to be registered with limited liability without the addition of the word "Limited" to its name' (BoT Licence). Five days later the Institute was granted a Certificate of Incorporation as a Limited Company. Both licensing and certification were granted 'in consideration of the provisions and subject to the conditions contained in the Memorandum of Association of the said Association' (BoT Licence).

It would seem the dream of the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had come true. But was this the national film institute that the Commission had envisaged? For one thing, the BFI was without a Royal Charter (that took another 50 years), though the original Commission had felt such a charter was essential if the Institute were to play a central role in the film-life of the nation. Without it, the BFI lacked the weight and substance necessary to turn the report's open recommendation of 'positive influence' into the 'constructive control' that the Commission clearly desired and that its report so often implies but dare not name.

Another subtle but significant difference between the Commission's image of a national film institute and the actual film institute created in 1933 can be found in a comparison of the

Commission's recommendations and the Memorandum of Association on which basis the British Film Institute was licensed and incorporated.[1] Sometime between the publication of *The Film in National Life* in 1932 and the certification of the British Film Institute in September 1933, the definition and purpose of the Institute changed substantially.

> The 1932 report imagines the proposed national film institute as
>
> a permanent central organisation which will have the kind of directive influence that springs from ability to take a broad view of the problem, from command of specialised knowledge in various fields, and from the support that it will receive from all those who realise the possibilities for good and for ill of the moving picture. . . . an organisation to exercise a constructive influence over cinematography . . . . (2–3)

The institute would be publicly funded under Royal Charter to take action as a constructive influence on film, complementary to the restrictive influence of censorship. It would establish and maintain contact between the trade and culture, between the trade and the audience and between the mass of the film audience and the educated minority through which much of its influence would be channelled. The institute would encourage the production of good films, train the audience to recognize and choose what is good, circulate information on the moral status of films released, and provide advice on censorship. It would advise educators on all aspects of film and assist in the use of film in the classroom, and it would, if required, certify films as educational, cultural or scientific. Finally, the film institute would operate a film library and distribute educational and cultural films nationally.

Compare this to the Memorandum of Association of the BFI, which records the official definition of the Film Institute as it was created, beginning with a statement of purpose and

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[1] See Appendix 2 for the formal recommendations of *The Film in National Life*, and Appendix 3 for a key parts of the Memorandum of Association.

then giving an outline of its responsibilities and limitations. Leaving aside for a moment the statement of purpose, the Memorandum catalogues the Institute's responsibilities as follows:

> (*c*) To advise education institutions and other organisations and persons as to sources and conditions of supply, types of films and apparatus, and the conditions of production, distribution and exhibition.
> (*d*) To act as a means of liaison between the trade (producers, distributors and exhibitors) and cultural and educational interests.
> (*e*) To promote and undertake research into the various uses of the film and of allied visual and auditory apparatus.
> (*f*) To develop the National Film Library to form a comprehensive collection of significant films; to arrange for the loan and exhibition of films from such a Library, and generally to evolve facilities for individual and group study of films and the showing of special programmes.
> (*g*) To act as a clearing house for information on all matters affecting the production, exhibition and distribution of films at home and abroad.
> (*h*) To undertake if required the certification of films as educational, cultural or scientific.
> (*i*) To establish district or sectional branches, and local and other associations for the promotion of all or any of the objects of the Institute.

Six of the seven responsibilities listed in the Memorandum are taken from the ten listed in *The Film in National Life*, although in the earlier document some items, like (*f*)—regarding the National Film Library and support for film study—are divided into separate points. The Memorandum and the Report do agree on the Institute's responsibility for advising educators and others about films (*c*), for acting 'as a means of liaison between the trade . . . and cultural and educational interests' (*d*), for promoting and undertaking 'research into the various uses of the film and of allied visual and auditory apparatus' (*e*), for developing a National Film Library and arranging 'for the loan and exhibition of films from such a Library' (*f*), for general education in the film—including the evolution of 'facilities for individual and group study of films and the showing of special programmes' (*f*)—and for the provision of 'information on all matters affecting the production, exhibition and distribution of films at home and abroad' (*g*). They also agree that the Institute might 'undertake . . . the certification of films as educational, cultural or scientific' (*h*). The Memorandum adds a final responsibility not listed in the original

recommendations made by *The Film in National Life* (though the responsibility is suggested in the body of the report): namely, that the Institute 'establish district or section branches . . . and other associations for the promotion' of its other responsibilities (*i*).

Despite the similarities, however, there is an important and carefully worded difference between the Commission's vision of what the film institute should be and the Memorandum's official definition of what it would be. *The Film in National Life*'s final recommendations include four items describing functions of the Institute that either do not appear in the Memorandum or do not appear in the same form. According to the original report, it would be a function of the Institute:

> (2) to influence public opinion to appreciate and demand films which, as entertainment, are really good of their kind or have more than entertainment value, by, *e.g.* the publication of a review or of press articles or by lectures and meetings at important centres such as Universities;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> (7) to act as an advisory body to all Government Departments concerned with the use and control of films;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> (9) to undertake such duties in relation to the Dominions, Colonies and Protectorates as may be allotted to it, *e.g.* the approval of films as suitable for backward races; and
>
> (10) generally to undertake such duties as may be assigned to it under conditions not inconsistent with the terms of its Royal Charter. (156–57)

The first of these functions essentially serves as a statement of purpose for the proposed institute. The other items suggest the breadth and freedom of agency that the institute would enjoy. As strong as these statements are (particularly in light of the organisation as created), they form a poor and limited summation of the proposals, suggestions, hints and implications found in the body of the report.

In turn, the Memorandum of Association contains two items that do not appear in the Commission's report. According to the Memorandum, the Institute was established

> (*a*) To encourage the development of the art of the film, to promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners and to foster public appreciation and study of it from these points of view.
> (*b*) To explore and promote new or extended uses for the film and to encourage, support and serve other bodies working in the same field.

At best, this softens considerably the institute's purpose as stated in the conclusion of the original report, which was itself an adulteration of the ideas found in the body of the report. In each case, we move further and further from a direct involvement in industrial production and commercial and feature cinema, which dimension of film was and continues to be the largest and most influential part of any phenomenon that could be referred to as 'the film in national life'. We move from an implication of broad control and profound influence on the entire film experience of the nation (an institute with responsibilities in all areas of film), to the recommendation of a definite if narrowed educational responsibility (an institute teaching the public to appreciate and demand good films), to the realisation of an Institute that will:

- 'encourage the development of the art of the film',
- 'promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners'
- 'foster public appreciation and study of it from these points of view'.

Now, it may be reasonable to say that the Film Institute should provide some indefinite support for the study of film, and be highly politic to say no more—but if the Memorandum's three unique points are considered closely, it is difficult to tease out just what is implied here. Does 'art' refer to the craft of filmmaking, or to a privileged kind of cultural product; or is it a weak metaphor for film as a cultural/entertainment activity? Is the Institute supposed to 'promote' documentary film, or fictional film that is judged to be realistic and relevant? And finally, is the Institute to 'foster' only certain approaches to film appreciation and understanding? The structure of ambiguity and restriction and the use of implication in the discussion of film and the Film Institute is by now familiar.

Of course, to get things done in the real world, to get organizations like the BFI founded in the first place, manifestos have to be softened and ideals compromised—and by its very existence, and its general openness to new ideas and people, the BFI did do good and important things. There is always the danger, however, that the reification of historical contexts and rhetorical traditions in the structures and procedures of real organizations will limit the focus of a vision (however open in intent), will incline risk-taking toward safe-bets and sure-things and will distort the influence of success when it comes. Nothing short of a full operational analysis of the British Film Institute could make clear the effects that the history of ambiguity, implication and restraint has had on its development and operations. I am restrained by topic and space from undertaking anything like such an analysis.

The ambiguity of the Institute's responsibility to 'the art of the film' has its Production Board counterpart in the debate over the Board's primary role. Should it focus support on art film (particularly experimental or avant-garde work)? Should if offer training in filmmaking skills, preparing apprentices for the film industry? Or should it simply get as many people as possible involved in as much filmmaking as possible (whatever their goals or commitment and whatever kind of films they may want to make)?[2]

The Institute's responsibility to film 'as a record of contemporary life and manners' would find its counterpart in educational and documentary films or, under a different interpretation of the obligation, in films that are politically and aesthetically polemical, though the particular bias of the polemic would depend upon dominant figures and power groups at

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[2] The last, perhaps most democratic interpretation, would have the Production Board doing what local, public television does in Canada. There, local television, which is almost always a cable operation, legally must provide facilities for anyone who wishes to make a programme, and time during which these programmes are broadcast. Much rubbish results, but there are also attempts to address local political, economic and environmental issues, while marginal groups have an opportunity to be different without being commercial tropes and clichés.

the Production Board, at the BFI and amongst the hopeful and competing constituency of potential filmmakers interested in Production Board support.

Finally, the Institute's obligation to 'foster public appreciation and study of [film] from' the perspective of 'the development of the art of the film' and its promotion 'as a record of contemporary life and manners', has no direct Production Board parallel—unless it was the attempt by some, in the 1970s and 1980s, to get the Production Board to provide a greater role for manifestos, polemics and critiques regarding films and filmmaking. Although in the enthusiasm of the political pedantry-chatter that necessarily accompanies such arguments, those outside the BFI sometimes seemed to believe that rhetoric was more important than actual films and filmmaking.

Of course, as I note earlier, ambiguity was not the only curiosity written into the BFI's Memorandum of Association. Limitations were included, which did not always wear their true colours. For example, the Film Institute's responsibility 'to foster public appreciation and study of [film] from [the] points of view' established in the first two points was not, as it might seem initially, a further area of opportunity for the Institute, but the first of two serious restrictions placed upon its activities. It was meant to limit the kinds of films that the Institute could become involved with, which by extension would limit the 'public appreciation and study of [film]'. The second restriction was explicit: the Institute could neither 'seek to control nor attempt to interfere with purely trade matters in the Film Industry or with the censorship of films for public entertainment' (Memorandum 3).

Not everyone was pleased with the film institute as created, for the BFI had its critics from the beginning. Ivan Butler remarks on one, a Walter Ashley, whom I wish to consider briefly myself:

> The birth of the young organisation was not given an unqualified welcome: despite the strong educational bias of its early years there were fears among the industry that it might encroach on commercial pastures, and among the film societies that it might interfere with their own activities in the raising of public appreciation of film as an art form. Assurances were hastily given in both cases. It is, in fact interesting that what may be the first of many attacks on the BFI during its existence came in 1934 in a booklet entitled "The British Film Institute Exposed", declaring that it was unworthy to receive grants from the Cinema Fund because, among other failings, it had fallen under the control of the film trade. The booklet, written by a Mr. Walter Ashley, was later withdrawn. (18)

Before I look at Ashley's book, there are a couple of things to be said about Butler's comments. First, *pace* Butler, a careful reading of *The Film in National Life* would justify 'fears among the industry that [the Institute] might encroach on commercial pastures'. There is also material in the report that could easily cause concern for 'film societies'. Butler's implication that these fears were unfounded, because of the 'strong educational bias' of the Institute in 'its early years', seems to be a case of putting the cart before the horse. He apparently forgets that the original Commission was 'Cultural' as well as 'Educational'.

It would have required considerable naïvety, carelessness or worse for a member of the film trade to read the Commission's final report and not find it threatening on several counts. Yet by the time the British Film Institute was created, under the terms of the Memorandum of Association, it was explicitly barred from 'Trade matters' and posed little practical threat to the industry. In his pamphlet, Walter Ashley suggests that this was a result of a deal, struck between the trade and the Commission, that neutralised the threat from the Institute in return for trade support for its creation (22–32). I am always suspicious of conspiracy theories, but the noted educational bias of the established Film Institute flies in the face of much of what the report has to say. This cannot merely be put down as an inclination towards educational concerns. It has to be seen as a comprehensive turning away from the commercial cinema. If

Ashley is correct about how this change came about, then the educational bias did not stand forth *despite the trade's fears*, but was the result of a hidden compromise to allay them.

Whether or not Ashley is correct, Butler seems guilty of a remarkably naïve reading of *The Film in National Life* and the constitutional documents of the British Film Institute. Because of this, I question Butler's implied dismissal (in the passage quoted above) of Ashley's criticism of the Film Institute as 'unworthy to receive grants from the Cinema Fund because, among other failings, it had fallen under the control of the film trade'. Butler implies that the educational bias of the Institute negates the possibility of it having fallen under trade control. Ashley's point, however, is not that the Institute had fallen under the control of the film industry, in the sense of being used to promote its interests, but that the trade exercised enough control over the formation of the Institute to severely limit its ability to examine and question the commercial cinema, thus neutralising its potential threat to the trade. Thus, the particular educational bias of the Institute was a sign of the film trade's influence.

Butler was probably correct in believing the Institute was not under the 'constructive control' of the trade. However, Ashley does not say that it was, what he says is that it was under the 'restrictive control' of the trade, or had fallen under such control long enough for its nature and purpose to be compromised. Because of this, Ashley wanted to see the BFI barred from receiving Cinematograph Fund moneys, although he did not want the Institute, as then formed, barred from receiving any government support at all. His book, *The Cinema and the Public: A Critical Analysis of the Origin, Constitution and Control of the "BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE"*, which was published two years after *The Film in National Life* and only a year after the British Film Institute was established, was written in anticipation of a government

decision on an application from the BFI to the Privy Council for a Cinematograph Fund grant.[3] Of course, the Institute did eventually receive money from the Fund, and later received more government support by way of the British Film Institute Act, 1949.

I am not interested here, however, in Ashley's worries over BFI funding but in his reading and criticism of the purpose and design of the Institute. In the Preface to his book, he notes that in the summer of 1932, when the Cinematograph Bill was under consideration,

> a 'Commission on Educational and Cultural Films' issued a report advocating the establishment of a National Film Institute. It was to have a Royal Charter and State-appointed governors, complete independence of control by the cinema trade, and wide powers over the whole realm of cinematography comparable to those exercised by the B.B.C. in the realm of wireless. (5–6)

He admits the proposal may have been 'too ambitious' (it certainly had other defects), but it had merits too and 'was on the whole favourably received'. Dickinson and Street report that it

> received an enthusiastic reception from the *Daily Telegraph*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, the *Spectator* and *The Times*. (50)

Ashley emphasises, however, that '*It was strongly opposed . . . by nearly all the leaders of the film trade*' (6). Despite the opposition, the Institute was quickly a '*fait accompli*' (Dickinson/Street). Once the trade recognised this

> it launched a campaign to make the organisation innocuous. . . .
>
> In August 1932, Simon Rowson wrote a letter to *The Times* outlining the trade's new strategy. He accepted the need to make provision for 'cultural film', but argued that an Institute must 'enlist a large measure of co-operation from the trade itself.' (Ashley 51)

Remarkably, trade opposition to the very idea of an Institute became a recommendation for co-operation between the two groups, and in the end the request was granted. In Ashley's words, the result was that

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[3] The Fund had been created by the Sunday Entertainments Bill, 1932, and was to be created out of moneys drawn from the receipts of Sunday openings by cinemas.

> In October, 1933, representatives of the film trade and the same 'Commission' set up and registered a body called 'The British Film Institute,' which, although it has been frequently confused with the National Film Institute proposed a year previously, bears little resemblance to it. On the contrary, its registered Constitution, on analysis, shows that it has governors appointed not by the State or some independent authority but by the cinema trade and the 'Commission,' a large measure of control by the cinema trade, and very restricted powers. *In this form, it received the warm support of nearly all the leaders of the film trade.* (6)

This betrayed the intentions of the Commission (however limited their viewpoint, and however ambiguous their report). According to Ashley, it did not answer the needs of the nation either:

> Parliament and the interested public required, not a new body to deal with class-room films—to which, as a result of restrictive clauses secured by the cinema trade in its Constitution, the 'British Film Institute' is mainly confined—but one to deal with the vast output of *entertainment films* which are exhibited each week to twenty million people in every corner of the country. The urgent need for raising the character—artistic, moral, intellectual and purely entertainment—of this vast output was, in fact, the predominant consideration which moved Parliament, by a small majority and almost in despair, to establish the Cinematograph Fund. (6–7)

I am not trying to rehabilitate Ashley, for Butler is not the only one guilty of naïve or dishonest reading. Ashley attacks the Commission for not representing those with an extra-trade interest in film and chastises its original work for being too limited to classroom considerations (he deviously drops the word 'Cultural' from the Commission's name throughout). Even so, he feels the final recommendations were for a far more interventionist organisation, with a much broader charge regarding film, than were represented in the British Film Institute. He says the *volte face* in the Institute's concerns, the first and essential appearance of the educational bias in its interests, occurred somewhere between the final report and the Institute's creation a year later. In this, his reading of *The Film in National Life* seems as problematic as Butler's. I have shown that the change occurred much earlier, and can be read in *The Film in National Life*, between the actual body of the report and its final

recommendations, and that this was made law in the clear restrictions placed on the Institute in its Memorandum of Association.

Ashley further accuses the Commission of expressing the need (albeit in grand but vague terms) for a Film Institute involved in broad questions of film culture—one that included in its mandate a position of influence and control over production and reception—while the nuts and bolts of the final report are centred too much on purely educational concerns. Understandable, says Ashley, considering most Commission members were educators. As Ashley rightly notes, the Commission had very little trade representation, though it pretends otherwise in its report (see Ashley 13–17). On page eleven of *The Film in National Life*, the Commission says that it knows the trade is willing to co-operate with a National Film Institute because it helped with the report that recommends it. Yet a quick look at the Commission's membership shows there were perhaps only two out of fifty-four who had even the faintest connection with the trade—a ratio which had changed dramatically by the time of the Memorandum of Association. Of seven signatories there, two or three were members of the film industry—a change in favour of trade representation from around 4% to almost 50%!

Yet despite the skewed membership list, the truth is that, in the report at least, the Commission wanted to make general and wide-sweeping reference to film. Moreover, it seems to have been inclined to believe or hope that the Film Institute would take a hint from the report and claim a broad mandate to weigh and influence the entire film experience of the nation. Unfortunately, it seems that in negotiations with the trade over the issue of industry support for the Institute, the Commissioners gave the game away. According to Ashley, a series of meetings took place between representatives of the Commission and the trade following publication of *The Film in National Life*, and before the official establishment of the

British Film Institute. The trade successfully insisted upon four conditions at the meetings, 'which took place in one of its own offices, and at which the Institute's Constitution and Articles of Association were drawn up, as the price of its conversion' (24). Those conditions we have already considered. There were bans upon the Institute's involvement in matters of the film trade and in questions of censorship, and the trade was to play a major role in the selection of the BFI's Governors and Chairman. Although over time the Film Institute grew independent of the trade and became more wide-ranging in its activities, it took much of the rest of its history, almost from its foundation to the present, for it to accomplish this. And for much of that time it operated without the muscle of strong government association or the constitutional charge to consider and influence all aspects of the cinema that the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had hoped for it.

Later Considerations

Through the 1940s, interest and concern with the cinema still tended to centre on its influence, rather than on its aesthetic. In this regard the Film Institute came in for serious criticism. It had been conceived in large part as a broad, educational response to the concern with cinematic influence, though at its creation its charge had been limited to such classroom concerns as the promotion of

> a more enlightened approach to film by the teaching profession, but after fifteen years very little headway had been made in this area.
>
> There was widespread dissatisfaction with the Institute and its work. . . . And by the end of the war it was apparent that the Institute's activities in the field of educational film, as opposed to film education, were duplicating the work of other bodies. (Dickinson/Street 162)

Various groups had become involved in educational film production, and the National Committee for Visual Aids in Education (1946) had taken over responsibility for the use of film in education. Also, the government needed to replace the Ministry of Information with a

new peace-time information service. For these reasons and more, decisions had to be made about the nature and the future of the British Film Institute.

The national arts-policy also came under general scrutiny in the years following the Second World War, with attempts made to rationalise government involvement and expenditure. The examination was conducted under the general heading of the 'Arts Enquiry':

> film was not at first included in the work of the Arts enquiry; but a working party was later to study the factual film, and some years after this the PEP brought out a very comprehensive study of the feature industry. (Dickinson/Street 160)

In 1947 the Arts Enquiry published a paper on *The Factual Film*. The paper included a critique of the British Film Institute and its work:

> The Institute has tended to spread its services too wide for its resources, and has accomplished little. Much of its work has been superficial and halfhearted. Its activities have been constantly frustrated by the nature of its constitution and governing body, members of which sit as representatives of political organisations. It has failed to serve the needs of education or the film industry, or to promote co-operation between the two. . . . Inability to fulfill its functions adequately and the general trend of its policy have now created among those who should be its warmest supporters disillusion and even mistrust. (*The Factual Film*, Interim Draft 1945, Digest and Recommendations, iv; quoted in Dickinson/Street 162–63)

The Enquiry called for the Institute to 'safeguard the public interest' (*The Factual Film* 32) and looked to the creation of a British Film Academy, whose purpose would be:

> the reconstitution of the British Film Institute whose main function should be to encourage the use of the film for educational, cultural, scientific and recreative purposes and to protect the public interest and assist the British Film Industry. (36)

Of course, what is suggested here is very much like what the original Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had suggested as the role of a national film institute (though it is stated here with less ambiguity and back-tracking than in *The Film in National Life*). At the

same time, the new organisation would differ from the established Film Institute. As Dickinson and Street suggest,

> Its governing body was to be a board composed of persons with authority to speak for education, the arts and learned and scientific associations. It should be better funded than the BFI and have better premises, including its own three-hundred seat cinema. It was conceived of more as a service to the industry, and its functions were to include research into cinematic technique, a statistical service, and the critical appraisal of films, as well as the provision of an educational advisory service. It was to organise the making of experimental films, to exhibit films itself, and to encourage the exhibition of films of cultural and sociological interest. (164)

As I said, the Enquiry's report was published in 1947 and it stimulated a 'campaign for the reform or transformation of the BFI' (Dickinson/Street 164). A British Film Academy was also established in 1947, and although it was not what the Arts Enquiry had called for, being more a meeting place for film artists and technicians, it too 'called attention to the failings of the BFI, and in particular to its impotence to make any cultural intervention relevant to the feature film industry' (Dickinson/Street 164). At the end of the year the Lord President of the Council appointed a committee (later known by the name of its chairman, Sir Cyril Radcliffe)

> To consider and report on any changes which may be desirable in the constitution and scope of the British Film Institute and the relationship which should exist between the Institute and other bodies concerned with the film as a cultural and education medium. (*Radcliffe Enquiry* 3)

Butler rates the issuing of the Radcliffe report as 'the second of the three most significant events in the history of the BFI to date'—the other two being the founding of the Film Library and the opening of the National Film Theatre—(26). In his opinion,

> The importance of this Report and its recommendations cannot be over-emphasised. It radically altered the aims and objectives of the Institute, started it off on a fresh footing, and injected new life into a somewhat tired and lethargic body. (27)

Dickinson and Street replace hyperbole over the Committee's importance with a critical eye on the report's achievements:

> The Radcliffe proposals, which were nearly all adopted, went some way to satisfying the criticisms of the Institute but provided neither for the degree of independence nor the extension of powers and facilities that many people considered desirable. The Committee opted for adapting the BFI rather than replacing it with a new body. (165)

But as happens so often in the history of the British Film Institute and in the discussion of film in Britain generally, the Radcliffe Report misreads antecedent material and is misread in turn.

Dickinson and Street imply that the report should have insisted on greater independence and extended powers and facilities; they also mention the need for more substantial financial resources for the Film Institute, and these are exactly the kinds of recommendations that the report should have made. They also assert that the report 'in the short run did little to make the Institute more influential within the feature industry' (165). However, as they also record, 'The Radcliffe proposals . . . went some way to satisfying the criticisms of the Institute'.

As one would expect, Butler goes further, claiming the report 'reshaped the course of the Institute and fundamentally shifted its emphasis' (28). But where does the report provide this satisfaction and reshape the very nature of the Film Institute? According to Butler, it is the result of the 'most significant paragraph in the Report'. He adds that 'From this time forwards the BFI could see its way more clearly before it . . .' (28). It is the same paragraph in which Dickinson and Street find the aims of the Institute 'redefined'. They quote the report's tripartite statement of purpose for the Institute, and say that

> Its new objectives would be:
> 'a) To encourage the development of the art of the film, to promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners and to foster public appreciation and study of it from these points of view.
> b) To explore and promote new or extended uses for the film.
> c) To encourage, support and serve other bodies working in the same field.' (165—their reference being '[*Report of the Committee on the British Film Institute*, April 1948, Cmd. 7361], p. 5, para. 11' (261).)

But these are not 'new objectives'. Paragraph 11 on page 5 of the Radcliffe report is a quotation of the first two items—(*a*) and (*b*)—of the Memorandum of Association of The British Film Institute as registered in 1933. The Radcliffe Committee has simply divided item (*b*) of the Memorandum into two separate items (*b*) and (*c*). This is not all. Working in the opposite direction, appendix III of the Radcliffe report is said to be a direct quotation of section III of the Memorandum of Association, but it is not. Instead, it is a conflation of that Memorandum and the formal recommendations of *The Film in National Life*, but with its emphasis on the latter. Basically, the report recognises the *status quo*: it simply states the nature and purpose of the Film Institute as it found it. The report says 'the Institute should envisage itself primarily as a body designed to promote and inspire' (12:5), and it presents executive responsibilities that were already the primary responsibilities of the Institute:

> (*a*) the administration of the National Film Library;
> (*b*) the conduct of a first-class information service;
> (*c*) the development of a central and regional organisation to promote the appreciation of the film art and new or extended uses for the cinema. (13:5)

The only new material of importance provided by the Radcliffe report is its suggestion for changes in the funding of the BFI and for the composition and method of appointment of its governing board—neither of which are insignificant, but neither of which 'reshaped the course of the Institute and fundamentally shifted its emphasis' (Butler 28). As for the Arts Enquiry suggestions for a revamped Film Institute, the Radcliffe report bars the BFI from providing a statistical service, limits its role in the critical appraisal of films, and makes no mention of research into cinematic techniques, or the making of experimental films. Rather than redefining the BFI, and laying 'the foundations for subsequent development' (Dickinson/Street 165), the Radcliffe report seems another exercise in partial-admission and partial-denial, in implication and misdirection and missed opportunity.

I have chosen to close this section on the British Film Institute with the year 1983, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Institute's creation. It also takes us just past the release date of *The Draughtsman's Contract*—1982—which is the actual, terminal date of the period under study in this thesis. To mark the anniversary, the BFI was finally granted a Royal Charter, signed by the Queen on the 18 July 1983, effective from the 30 September.

As we know already, the originating Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had wanted its proposed national film institute to have a Royal Charter from the beginning, believing perhaps that this would lend the organization weight and legitimacy, at least suggesting a semi-official, national function, which would allow the institute to operate effectively in the face of expected opposition. It seems a Royal Charter was expected to protect the organisation and its work from the manipulations of the trade and to increase its impact upon the cinema audience it was meant to influence. Of course, the royal warrant was not forthcoming. Instead, the foundation of the British Film Institute was such that the organisation had to struggle along as best it could, as a private company, operating under trade pressure, and with a less than national influence on the general, cinema audience.

So, when a Royal Charter was granted fifty years later, did it finally give the Film Institute a semi-official status, restating its mandate so as to lend force to its 'constructive influence' on the nation's film experience? In other words, did the Charter truly acknowledge the influence and accomplishments of the BFI? Or was it little more than a birthday present honouring the endurance of the BFI—a reward for the BFI having become an *institution*, a part of the established order, and for not having too seriously rocked the cultural boat? Whatever the explicit and implicit reasons for the BFI's reincorporation, the new Charter was granted without requirement or implication of change in the Institute's essential objects or operation—allowing for the need to add television as an activity to be nurtured:

> The objects of the Institute shall be to encourage the development of the art of film in Great Britain, to promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners, to foster study and appreciation of it from these points of view, to foster study and appreciation of films for television and television programmes generally and to encourage the best use of television in Great Britain. (*Royal Charter* sect. 2.)

At the same time as the Charter came into force, the Film Institute published a self-evaluation called *The BFI in the Eighties: The work of the British Film Institute and its plans for the future: a report produced on the occasion of its 50th Anniversary in 1983*. The report, which took the British Film Institute two years to compile, reviews the organization's current operations and announces plans for the future. Although, perhaps, the report accomplishes less than it aspires to, the language of the report is familiar and revealing.[4]

The booklet begins with a Preface by the BFI Chairman (then Richard Attenborough) and an Introduction by the Director, Anthony Smith, and consists of five sections: the first, assesses the current work of the BFI ('The Work We Do'); the second, maps out the context for future operations ('Context and Environment'); the third, presents divisional plans for the future ('Plans and Problems'); and the fourth considers the nature of 'Membership'. The fifth section, which closes the report, is a statement of 'The Five Year Plan', including long-term goals and specific strategies for their realisation. The bulk of the report is commendably factual, practical, even restrained in its presentation of what is and what might be (given the availability of funds). Indeed, both the Chairman and the Director present *The BFI in the Eighties* as a humble document: it is 'not over-expansionist' (Attenborough 5), indeed, 'It is modest rather than expansionist in intention' (Smith 11).

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[4] Of course, it is probably true that all organizations walking a similar tightrope between creative, public, government and corporate interests are forced by political and operational realities to remain *on the rope* when making reflective and prospective announcements.

The practical considerations and aspirations presented in 68 of the booklet's 80 pages are important. For present purposes, however, it is the introductory material, where the Institute is discussed in broader terms, that is of most interest. The Chairman announces the report's nature and purpose at once:

> This is not a document of theory or wishful thinking. It is *the BFI's plan for action*, a series of firm intentions for actual future development, innovation, consolidation, continuity and change; its success will be judged therefore only in the fullness of time. (5)

The Chairman here confirms the Film Institute's remarkable ability to maintain temporal continuity with its origins. For fifty years before, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films had also declared the time for mere talk about the cinema to be at an end; and its proposal for a national film institute was too a plan for action. Yet, if this is not a 'wishful' document, how is it that the success of its 'plan for action' can only be judged within the mythological order—'in the fullness of time'? What redeeming function did this review propose for the British Film Institute?

The answer seems to lie in the Director's Introduction, 'The Mission of the British Film Institute'. Even the title uses strong, optimistic diction of a sort we have seen as far back as the original conception of a national film institute. The word 'mission', entailing a sense of vocation—literally, a calling—of having been sent by a greater power or authority, suggests that mix of conviction and progressive enterprise often associated with philanthropic and cultural organizations at their best, and most fervent—a combination often found in the BFI from the beginning. Some might say that this would have made more denotative sense in the early years, when the issues surrounding film and the reasons for the creation of a film institute had a strong moral dimension not unconnected with traditional religious concerns. To some ears, the usage might seem to make less sense in 1983, in an undoubtedly secular age,

concerning an undoubtedly secular institution, and with hardly a moral concern in sight. But the committed and confident tone of the title points to the visionary nature of what follows. Unfortunately, coupled to that visionary quality, are connotative associations that point deeper, to a rhetorical and conceptual tradition that influenced the creation of the BFI, its subsequent operation and its stance towards those it was meant to serve, a tradition that continues to perpetuate widespread confusion about the nature of film and art in general.

The Introduction is divided into four parts:

- 'The position of film as an art';
- 'Film culture and the service functions';
- 'Commerce in support of Art, Art in support of Commerce';
- 'Our purposes in the 1980s'.

The first three divisions deal with organizational, operational, historical and cultural contexts for the existence and activity of the BFI, considered from three different perspectives. The first provides what we might call *The General Purpose of the BFI*:

> [The BFI] exists . . . to stimulate and satisfy a public curiosity concerning [moving images]. Its archive and theatres, its work in production and publishing, its libraries and special collections are the physical basis upon which it fulfils its mission. (7)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> None the less, all the physical activities . . . are carried out within the basic remit, which is to add an understanding and a higher pleasure to the experience of moving images. (8)

Smith begins by noting that the moving image 'has become a major cultural preoccupation in virtually all societies' (7), and he remarks on the ubiquitous presence and power of the moving image in the representation and interpretation of self and world. Yet if film is a fundamental cultural activity, why, he asks, is a Film Institute necessary? To answer this he first looks at a historical reason for the creation of the British Film Institute (a reason I have emphasised in this thesis):

> When the BFI was founded in the 1930s it was partly as a response to a widespread fear of the effects of the cinema. The BFI was, in some sense, seen as part of society's protection *against* movies. Film and television . . . only belatedly were recognised as forms of art and, even today, the process of recognition is not complete. (7)

He points out, however, that unlike the other arts,

> it is still exceptional, certainly in Britain, for the history and analysis of cinema—still less, television—to be taught in schools as part of the core curriculum. In fostering the enjoyment of these media as art, therefore, there is a vast task of basic explanation still to be undertaken. (7)

This leads to a suggestion of publicly supported film archives and non-commercial theatres. 'That is why,' he says, 'the BFI is a cause as well as a series of practical services' (7). He leaves open exactly the kind of 'cause' he takes it to be, and does not make explicit what his line of argument implies: namely, that the BFI has a primary responsibility to promote and help with the introduction and expansion of film education in the school system. This would have been a clear statement of constructive purpose for the BFI and would also have been in clear continuity with the original idea of what a national film institute would do, and what its responsibilities to the public and mass cinema audience would be. Perhaps it would also have been too clear a challenge to the established order, and it seemed best to leave this implicit.

The second section then suggests what might be called *The Higher Purpose of the BFI*, which depends upon an understanding of the phrase 'film culture':

> [Film culture] describe[s] the whole community of activities and practices in the field of film . . . [and] arises from film preservation, exhibition, production, education, documentation, when these are allied to an intellectual and cultural purpose. Film culture exists in and between the minds of the people who work to create it. It arises from the attempt to understand films through examining the world which gives rise to them and to aid the understanding of the world through examining the films. . . .
>
> The BFI, therefore, is not just a collection of services, though many of the public and even of the membership regard it as such. . . . In some countries, libraries and collections of film and stills do exist unattached to an organisation which uses them to make interventions in the culture and growth of the medium. There exists, and has always existed, a necessary and creative tension

> between two similtaneous views of the BFI, one which sees it as a collection of inter-dependent services and one which sees the services as a collection of interventions, of deliberate efforts to stimulate a special kind of film audience, one which readily links the experience of different films, which extends its emotional and intellectual reaction to films into an active preoccupation. (8)

This section depends upon a refinement of Whannel's broad and inclusive description of *film culture* as 'the whole community of activities and practices in the field of film' (which would seem more in keeping with the general purpose outlined in section one), to something rather more mysterious and potentially accessible only to initiates, existing 'in and between the minds of the people who work to create it' (8). From here, the purpose of the BFI seems to be the making of 'cultural interventions' of a rather specialised kind: namely, the creation of 'a special kind of film audience', rather than the creation of something special of the existing film audience, which the first section suggests.

Granted, the different views of what the BFI should be and do have generated productive tensions that have stimulated the BFI to exciting and significant accomplishments. But the BFI's deep purpose in support of the film culture often seems too narrowly addressed to those who, in the words of William Blake, are capable of

> 'seeing through not with the eye'; the film culture consists of the aspirations of those who try to see films through the eye after seeing them with the eye. (8)

Although there is a sense in which this is literally true, nevertheless, as the allusion to Blake makes clear, the argument draws on the romantic tradition that art is transcendent and the artist/intellectual is a priest of culture. The hierarchical structuring of culture and society is mystified, sanctified and linked to the nature and purpose of the British Film Institute, which becomes a site of 'film-culture' and the locus of hieratic activity. This deep structure of the argument is never foregrounded or asserted (a tact that maintains a continuity of its own with discursive traditions concerning the BFI), and I suspect that it is not asserted simply because it

would then be seen to conflict openly with the public responsibilities referred to in the first part of the Introduction. This twinned and opposed type of argument has come to seem intrinsic to any discussion of the BFI.

The third section, in proposing what we might call *The Immediate Purpose of the BFI*, also shows the origins of the practical and rhetorical constraints operating on the Film Institute and those working on its behalf. This section, like the last, depends upon an initial, conceptual understanding, this time concerning the practical nature of the cinema:

> Cinema was born after the age of individual patronage was over; it carries different traditions from other arts. It belongs to the mass age. It exists through the patronage of the people and through the work of commercial investors. (8)

This leads to a statement of the BFI's immediate purpose:

> [Cinema's] tradition is a firmly established one today, but there nevertheless still exists a tremendous gap—which the BFI seeks to close—between the 'industry' and those who are concerned with enhancing or emphasising the 'art' from which that industry constantly and necessarily draws its strength. (8)

Here we return to the ubiquitous (and supposedly essential) division of modern culture, and of film in particular, along art/industry lines, but with the BFI trying to provide the long-needed suture for the wound.[5] This would be an accomplishment indeed; for it is an impossible task. The distinction does not have objective existence as a given of the external world, but is the essence of a rhetorical and conceptual tradition regarding the nature of the world, which, if accepted, constrains understanding and action to the conditions of that perspective. The gap cannot be closed, because it only exists as part of a conceptual and rhetorical framework. It can only be eliminated when its existence is radically denied and we are able to remove all traces of our commitment to its perspective from our thought and speech—which does not

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[5] See the Conclusion of the thesis and Appendix 4 for more on the art/industry distinction.

mean that we can expunge, or should wish to expunge, all trace of it from our discourse. At the least, for purposes of antiquarian interest, it has a place as a topic of conversation.[6]

Unfortunately, in practice, as Edward Buscombe says, 'the mutual exclusion of art and industry operates at a level too deep to be affected by mere common sense' ('Notes on Columbia Pictures' 45)—as evidence of which he cites the origination and organisation of the British Film Institute (see my Conclusion 311). What is noteworthy at this stage in Smith's discussion is that, despite working in the interests of a cultural organisation well within the all but inescapable grasp of that rhetorical and conceptual tradition, he still seems aware that something else is needed. For after the suggestion that the BFI will close the gap between art and industry, he says that

> In films all the arts converge (direction, writing, design, performance) in a business undertaking. The BFI thus has the task of conducting its multitude of roles, of building the 'film culture', alongside an industry . . . which often ignores the artistic needs and implications of its own work. (8)

As things stand, the BFI's task and activities can only build 'alongside' the industry and not bridge the gap, in large part because the industry itself is not particularly interested in anything but business. Of course, the business side of cinema is no less influenced by the rhetorical/conceptual tradition regarding art and industry. Indeed, simple material reward, or the promise of it, provides an irresistible incentive to maintain the tradition.

From within the rhetorical and conceptual tradition of an art/industry split, the BFI is forced by industry apathy and antipathy to a 'borderline' existence (9), making the best of its

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[6] St. Augustine's *City of God* provides an early example of such rethinking to take the life out of what once passed as essential. There he treats the pagan beliefs of Rome as not needing refutation, but as *obviously* wrong. Once made safe by objectification, they can be studied as historical evidence, and as an exegetical (philosophical and theological) exercise. Reread in 'the light of truth'—which for Augustine meant in light of Christianity—the pagan beliefs are seen to have unknowingly approximated the truth. The reader gains interpretive confidence and seems to find confirmation for the *absolute* veracity of their world-view.

constrained and difficult state (as it has so admirably for over fifty years). Unfortunately, this also forces it into supporting and strengthening the very distinction that constrains it in the first place. Under these conditions,

> the ultimate judgment [for the BFI and its colleague organisations] is whether they succeed in maintaining in Britain an artistically successful and lively film culture with an informed and active audience. (9)

However, from within the discourse that posits an essential art/industry division this task cannot be focused at more than a small and self-selecting part of the general cinema audience. If it were possible to break free of these constraints, perhaps film could be reviewed as something more like architecture or earlier forms of 'public' poetry. This last, poetic connection, would associate it with the work of Homer and the Greek dramatists, Dante, Chaucer and Shakespeare—where high-art is so, because it is also popular and accessible, and often cooperatively produced and enacted.

In its original formulation, the BFI was supposed to serve the established order of British society by attending to the mass cinema-audience. Smith alludes to this in the first part of the Introduction, which is immediately noteworthy for breaking with the tradition of intellectual condescension to the public as a mass-audience (a tradition that has dogged the BFI from its founding). For the 'understanding and . . . higher pleasure' that the BFI can add in 'the process' of the trade's commercial titillation and gratification of the public seem clearly intended for that audience's corporate appreciation and improvement. However, to this he opposes a more élitist vision in the second section. The third section then returns us to the fundamental notion of an art/industry split, which like the distance between a god and its creations requires an intermediary to bridge the gulf. Here the BFI hopes to take on the hieratic function—although it is immediately clear this could be little more than ceremonial.

The fourth section draws conclusions from the preceding sections as they apply to the BFI's future, and prepares the way for the plans that occupy the rest of the document. Meanwhile, Smith sums up the organisation's future self-image as follows: 'In the future, the BFI sees itself as the mainspring of a more truly national film culture . . .' (12).

Originally, the remit of the British Film Institute was educational: to serve and protect the nation by protecting and controlling the film audience (largely children and the childlike—the working-class, ignorant, and potentially troublesome). They needed to be educated about film, about proper films, films made about proper society. The BFI was to be responsible for the first, identify the second, and advise on the making of the third. As with all educational institutions, it was implicitly expected to fulfill a role in social control. But without a voluntary submission to it by the film industry, or a clear legal mandate for it to exercise control over the industry, the BFI was always pushed, in terms of the argument of this thesis, into supporting only one side of the distinction: occupied initially with the *uses* of film, particularly its uses in education. 'Education and film' thus turning into 'film in education', an inversion that it was strongly encouraged to make (even archiving and preservation ran into difficulties). Gradually, this enforced concentration on use was again transformed into a purpose and description, as the Film Institute became a support centre for academics and others interested in film: it was still occupied with the educational use of film, only now more as a *subject* for study.

If *The Film in National Life* is read carefully, however, it is implicit throughout that a Film Institute was to be responsible for making, what Smith calls, 'cultural interventions'. Originally meant to be in support of the established order and culture, these interventions were later taken naturally to involve aesthetic, social, cinematic and political subversions. However, whether directed to conservative or radical ends, such intercessional activity would always be against the grain, which is incompatible with the view, typical even of the BFI itself, that the

course and activities of the BFI are part of a (romantically natural) developmental process. Even apparently rationalist, (falsely) contractual descriptions of the BFI's post-war changes ultimately depend upon an organic conceptualization:

> The BFI was reorganized as a result of the Radcliffe Report in 1948, and its post-was history has been characterized by cautious advances, under a range of contradictory pressures, onto the nominally forbidden territory of the film trade. These interventions became more overt, although no less subject to conflicting logic, as the failure of the industry to keep its side of the 'bargain' (that is, to maintain a moderately thriving cinema) became steadily more apparent. (Blanchard/Harvey 229)[7]

It is important to acknowledge that Smith makes explicit something significant about the BFI, which had not been clearly said before (certainly not by a Director of the Institute), but it is also true that, reading it as I have done, *The BFI in the Eighties* contains its own implicit contribution to the discourse of romanticism. This ontological split in the Institute was projected onto the cinema itself, where it was taken as further evidence of a fundamental and necessary split between film art and film industry.

FILM PRODUCTION AT THE BFI

As the BFI was born out of a concern for national identity and national culture in the face of a perceived threat from cinema, so perhaps it is fitting that film production at the BFI should be born out of a celebration of British culture and industry in the face of dire economic circumstances and a drastic decline in British power, productivity and influence in the world.

It will be recalled that from the very beginning the idea of a national film institute had included a role for such an organization in film production. *The Film in National Life* had

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[7] There was never a 'bargain' between the BFI and the film industry about respective areas of responsibility. I imagine an industrial, commercial activity would only make such a deal with a government, if then. Thus the analysis uses a contractual fallacy to imply a rationality it does not believe in, for the clear, structuring image is of biological reclamation.

specifically said that the recommended institute should be involved in experimental production. According to that report, the originating Commission had been formed

> To consider methods for raising the standard of public appreciation of films, by criticism and advice addressed to the general public, by discussion among persons engaged in educational or cultural pursuits, and by experimental production of films in collaboration with professional producers. (1)

The Commission was to consider further whether it was 'desirable and practicable to establish a permanent central organisation with general objects as above . . . '. That 'permanent central organisation' was realized in the British Film Institute, which, if it had been created according to the Commission's original conception, should have participated from the start in the 'experimental production of films in collaboration with professional producers.'

Of course, that never happened—though, even if it had, the context for production would have been decidedly unclear. No one had bothered defining 'experimental', and it seems the Commission had given no thought to what participation in 'experimental production' might involve (a problem that would continue to affect the self-conception and results of BFI production). Even at this early stage, 'experimental' could mean several things. Did it mean:

- Creative experimentation (an aesthetic avant-gardism, challenging traditions of form and content); or,
- Technical experimentation in the material of the art (an empirical development and testing of new techniques and technologies); or,
- Experimentation in the activity of filmmaking itself—a synonym for 'experience' (either a personal or pedagogical exploration, training apprentices in known technology, techniques and subject matter, whether for professional or personal development)?[8]

The issue never seems to have been thought through, and when it came time for the Commission to publish its report it had backed away completely from any notion of a film institute involved in production. Indeed, it took almost twenty years before that early,

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[8] Few at the time would likely have taken it to mean 'political avant-gardism', which by the 1970s many were arguing was exactly the kind of filmmaking proper to the Board.

recommended role was finally realized, with the establishment of the Experimental Film Fund, a body that came about as a result of the BFI's involvement in the Festival of Britain.

THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM FUND

From early 1943, plans had been about for a centennial celebration of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Royal Society of Arts had made private submissions to the government in favour of a grand international exhibition, expecting the war would be over and Britain would be well into recovery by 1951. When the war ended, the Board of Trade established a committee to consider what fairs and exhibitions could do towards the nations's economic recovery.

The committee appointed by the Secretary for Overseas Trade on 25 September 1945 was chaired by Lord Ramsden, and its terms of reference included a consideration of 'the desirability of organising an exhibition in London in 1951' (*The Story of the Festival* 2). In March 1946, the Ramsden Committee reported that it was

> strongly of opinion [sic] that a first category international exhibition should be held in London at the earliest practicable date to demonstrate to the world the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of the war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields. (*Story of the Festival* 2)

The rhetorical emphasis of the report upon the *immaterial* qualities of a rejuvenated nation was sometimes hidden during planning and implementation by a practical and operational emphasis upon material interests. But the immaterial qualities continued to dominate the purpose and expectations of those closest to the fair as they had the Great Exhibition a century before—but with one important difference. According to the historian H. C. G. Matthew:

> The Great Exhibition of 1851 celebrated the ascendancy of the United Kingdom in the market-place of the world . . . . The Exhibition, sponsored by the court and organized by the aristocracy, reflected Britain's commitment to economic progress . . . . (463)

The tone of the Great Exhibition was that of the nation itself, and could be found incarnate in Lord Palmerston (soon to be Prime Minister), who

> personified the bombastic self-confidence of Britain as the only world power, [and who] succeeded in being simultaneously an aristocrat, a reformer, a free-trader, an internationalist, and a chauvinist. (Matthew 465)

The Exhibition celebrated a nation second to none in material wealth; a nation in a position of Imperial grandeur and world supremacy. Given this national stature and status, the exhibition was free to fan the nation's already bright fires of 'moral, cultural [and] spiritual' wealth and supremacy.[9] One hundred years later, the nation and her ministers and appointed servants seemed not to want to know how much had changed with time and two great wars. Yet admit it or not, the 1951 exhibition had to accomplish the opposite ideological operation to the one of 1851: it had to *ignite* 'moral, cultural [and] spiritual' fires to encourage and make the most of a nation desperately short of material wealth, in possession of fragments of a disappearing empire and in some respects heavily dependent upon other nations. Though never openly acknowledged, this underlying truth of the enterprise exacted its price, just as the changed material considerations transformed the purpose and nature of the celebration.

Following the Ramsden report, a committee began work 'On the assumption . . . that such an exhibition must surpass in scale the largest of pre-war international exhibitions' (2). It rejected all recommended locations (including the heavily blitzed South Bank area) in favour of 300 acres in Osterley Park—but analysis of its plans forced the first of several retreats. To complete the scheme would have taken over three years, using more than a third of London's building labour, and cost around £70 million in 1946 prices (six times the final bill). This was

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[9] The self-image fired by the Exhibition was fragile, however, its structure crazed with inconsistencies and contradictions—a condition beautifully recreated in J. G. Farrell's fictional account of *The Seige of Krishnapur*, in which the Great Exhibition plays an important role.

out of proportion to the cost of reconstruction in the country as a whole, and the government 'reluctantly decided against staking a claim to hold the first great post-war international exhibition' in favour of 'a first-rate demonstration of British recovery' (2). Britain simply could not afford to host the best each nation had to offer: it could not pay for such a show, and perhaps was not yet ready to bear comparison with those who might come.[10]

To economise, the government assembled existing bodies, rather than create new organisations, with responsibilities in relevant areas. It also suggested '1951 could best be marked by a more elaborate and extended British Industries Fair, together with a demonstration of British achievements in the arts and sciences' (2). Gradually the exhibition was becoming more introspective and retrospective, more an expression of pride in what had been accomplished (given the circumstances), and an exercise in self-encouragement for the great amount that remained to be done.

With these changes, jurisdiction for the Festival passed from the Board of Trade to the Lord President of the Council, who made a final proposal that was accepted by the government and announced in the House of Commons on 5 December 1947,

> for a 'national display' comprising exhibitions to be sponsored by the Council of Industrial Design, an exhibition of science and technology, arts festivals to be promoted by the Arts Council and a display of films to be sponsored by the British Film Institute. (*Story of the Festival* 3)

Shortly after, he and the Prime Minister announced that the title of the new 'display' would be: 'Festival of Britain, 1951'. Though the details of the event were yet to be worked out, we can now see that the *mythos* of the celebration had been rewritten, so that an *Exhibition*—

- 'a display, demonstration, disclosure, performance'—literally an unmasking to an external audience—

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[10] Even in 1851, amid all the self-congratulation, there had been surprise and shock at the quality of German engineering and production (see Matthew 463).

had become a *Festival*—

- 'a feast, celebration, ritual observance—with the participant often in costume or masked' for an essentially celebrant-audience).

Planning responsibility for the Festival went to a special executive committee of a newly appointed Great Exhibition Centenary Committee. The Executive Committee was made up of representatives from the following groups:

- Scottish Committee
- Welsh Committee
- Northern Ireland Committee
- Council for Science and Technology
- Council for Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research
- Arts Council of Great Britain
- Council for Industrial Design
- British Film Institute
- National Book League

The Committee began work in April 1948 with a broad plan based on the Lord President's statement to the House of Commons of the purpose of the Festival. It was to be:

> a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future, in the arts, in science and technology, and in industrial design. (*Story of the Festival* 3)

Despite that, most of the twelve exhibitions that would comprise the Festival involved science, technology and industrial design and production. The main arts effort went into sponsoring twelve new arts festivals and a formal association with eleven established festivals. Film was confined to exhibitions at the Telekinema, which was designed to show television as well.

Two contrasting questions seem to clamour for attention at this point. Why on the one hand was a film organization included so prominently in the planning of the festival, with the BFI in an executive role? And yet, why was popular, commercial, British film ignored so completely? Arguably, as the national centre of disinterested film appreciation, the BFI was an obvious candidate for a role in the development and operation of the Festival. Still, given

film's social significance and power, given that the BFI did have an executive role in the Festival, and given that this was a festival of art, industry and technology, it is very odd that commercial film was not allocated a central part in the celebration. Film was both art and industry—perhaps unlike any other activity in society at the time—and it existed in a distinct, British version.[11] Surely few could have argued that a technical, arts/entertainment industry with widespread popularity and immense influence did not deserve a key role in this kind of festival. Yet film as such was so marginalised that one wonders if it was not the victim of suppression.

Only a year before the Executive Committee for the Festival began work the Arts Enquiry had published its paper on *The Factual Film* (1947), a document which criticising the British Film Institute for having 'accomplished little':

> Much of its work has been superficial and halfhearted. Its activities have been constantly frustrated by the nature of its constitution and governing body . . . . It has failed to serve the needs of education or the film industry, or to promote co-operation between the two. . . . Inability to fulfill its functions adequately and the general trend of its policy have now created among those who should be its warmest supporters disillusion and even mistrust. (*The Factual Film*, Interim Draft 1945, Digest and Recommendations, iv; also quoted above 83)

Now here was the BFI being given executive status on one of the nation's greatest corporate acts of self-promotion since the 19th-century. The 'disillusion and . . . mistrust' must have had a short life or a small circle of acquaintances.

The limitations placed on BFI involvement in the affairs of the film industry would have disinclined its advocacy on the industry's behalf, if they did not disallow it outright—though there is no evidence that the Institute tried either to promote or hinder a broader conception of film for the Festival. However, opposition must have come from somewhere for

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[11] See the Conclusion to the thesis and Appendix 4 for more on the art/industry distinction.

the British industry to have been so thoroughly absented. One possible source can be reconstructed from a late statement on what the Festival would do for the nation:

> When the idea for the celebration . . . had been first mooted, it had been assumed that by 1951 Britain would be well on the road to recovery. The economic crisis of the summer of 1949, which led to devaluation on September 19 of that year, showed that this assumption was over-optimistic, and it was necessary to decide whether, in the changed circumstances, the Festival of Britain would accord with the mood and condition of the nation in 1951, and whether, indeed, we could afford the expenditure involved.
>
> The decision was that it was right to go on with the Festival to show that Britain was not down-hearted by its setbacks; to gain the advantage to our balance of payments directly from the presence of additional overseas visitors in the country, and indirectly from the fact that so many influential foreigners would have a first-rate opportunity of appreciating British skill and achievement. It might also display, in an international situation that was becoming increasingly tense, that the British people had developed a way of life from which other nations might learn much. (*Story of the Festival* 8)

Now what 'overseas visitors' and 'influential foreigners' could have been expected in enough numbers in 1951, with cash and influence to matter, but Americans—to whom Britain was deeply in debt? Yet these 'visitors' made, and guarded their right to make, huge profits in Britain from the distribution and exhibition of their *own* films, in intense competition with the home industry. Indeed, through their influence and involvement in the British industry alone they could have discouraged its promotion at the Festival. It is unlikely the British government would have been keen to suffer any further embarrassment over film, still bearing the bruises of their last film-fight with the Americans (over quotas and the Dalton Duty—ch. 1: 22ff).

Whatever the reason for the insult offered to British film, it was not because the industry was then weak or inactive. Figures for numbers of cinemas, admissions, distribution and production were all at, or near, their highest in history.[12] Nor was anything wrong with the quality of British films or their role in maintaining and celebrating the spirit and resiliency of

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[12] See, e.g., Patricia Perilli's 'Statistical Survey', appended to Curran & Porter 372–82.

the British people and way of life. However, nowhere in the discussion of film and the Festival is mention made of films from the war, documentary or fiction, or that the period 1945–52 saw the creation of such distinctly British genres as the Ealing comedies and Hammer horror. Other remarkable films and film-events of the period included:

1945

- *Blithe Spirit*; *Brief Encounter*; *Dead of Night*; *Henry V*; *Journey Together*; *They Were Sisters*; *Waterloo Road*; *The Way to The Stars*; *The Wicked Lady*.

1946

- *Caesar and Cleopatra*; *George in Civvy Street*; *Great Expectations*; *A Matter of Life and Death*; *Wanted for Murder*

1947

- *Black Narcissus*; *Brighton Rock*; *Courtneys of Curzon Street*; *Frieda*; *Hue and Cry*; *It Always Rains on Sunday*; *Mine Own Executioner*; *Nicholas Nickleby*; *Odd Man Out*; *They Made Me a Fugitive*; *The Upturned Glass*.

1948

- *Bonnie Prince Charlie*; *The Guinea Pig*; *Hamlet*; *Miranda*; *My Brother's Keeper*; *Noose*; *Oliver Twist*; *The Red Shoes*; *Saraband for Dead Lovers*.
- National Film Production Council created (chaired by BoT President H. Wilson);
- Creation of Selection Committee, ordering circuits to show films initially rejected;
- Gater Committee Report, which considered 'whether an additional studio should be built and reserved for the use of independent producers' (Dickinson/Street 204);
- Working Party on Film Production Costs;

1949

- *Boys in Brown*; *Kind Hearts and Coronets*; *Passport to Pimlico*; *Queen of Spades*; *The Third Man*; *Whisky Galore*;
- Plant Committee Report on *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films*;
- 45% exhibition quota (reduced to 30% in 1950);
- Plans for a Film Bank, which became the National Film Finance Corporation;

1950

- *The Browning Version*; *The Blue Lamp*; *Cage of Gold*; *Chance of a Lifetime*; *Dance Hall*; *The Elusive Pimpernel*; *The Miniver Story*; *Stage Fright*; *The Wooden Horse*; *The Woman in Question*.
- Creation of the Eady Levy, originally proposed to fund a company dedicated to new talent, making low-budget films;
- Plans for three production groups, the third, led by Grierson, supporting new talent.

1951

- *The Lavender Hill Mob*; *The Man in the White Suit*; *Pool of London*; *Scrooge*; *The Tales of Hoffmann*; *White Corridors*.
- Festival films included: *Around is Around* (NFB and BFI, N. McLaren); *Now is the Time . . .* (NFB and BFI, N. McLaren); *Painter and Poet* series (BFI, J. Halas);

1952

- *Hunted*; *The Importance of Being Earnest*; *Ivanhoe*; *Mandy*; *Pickwick Papers*; *Secret People*; *You're Only Young Twice!*

Yet for this industry, which the government ostensibly had been supporting in the years before 1951, there was no room at the Festival. The ruling principle seemed to be representation only for the narrower field of film-as-art, and that was what the BFI had responsibility for—'to encourage the art of the film'. It would know best how to get hold of art-film/film-art in the naturally uncommercial form of documentary, educational, and technically experimental films. Film was separated out from other arts in part because existing organisations were being used, but also because no one was sure whether it was part of art or industry, although they seem to have been sure it was not art and industry.

This confusion about film, and its consequent isolation, carried through to the design and layout of the Festival itself. The exhibition was held on the South Bank (the supposed centre-piece of the show), but the site of the Telekinema was physically marginal to the rest of the exhibition. Even the name of the theatre suggested the Festival's relative disregard: it was a 'Tele'-cinema, concerned in part with the presentation of large format TV—at a time when few people had even a 'small-scale' experience of the technology. Perhaps too, it was felt that any cultural activity that could not bear modification by a capitalized form of the word 'art' was simply inappropriate to the nature of the show—and commercial film, of course, was a 'popular' art, and 'popular taste must be "bad" taste' (Dickinson/Street 154).

Now whatever the reasons for the emphatic marginalisation of the nation's film-culture at the Festival of Britain, the result was that an event meant to celebrate and promote the 'moral, cultural [and] spiritual' effects of art and industry, no less than their material activities and accomplishments, went ahead without the one form of it in which, perhaps as nowhere else, art and industry were united. Moreover, this art/industry was perhaps better suited than anything else to give a symbolic representation of the nation's culture as a whole, and reciprocally to present the creative power of British filmmaking as a symbol of the strength

and diversity of that culture. The effects of this marginalisation were long-term.

It gave implicit support to the long-standing belief in a natural opposition between art and industry, and went some way towards extending its pernicious influence, particularly over the practice and discussion of film. Of course, BFI involvement in the Festival was highly valuable in leading to the creation of the Experimental Film Fund and the start of official film production at the Institute, yet it also led to the over-determination of how such production would be conceptualized. Inherent limitations on BFI activities would have kept its film production distinct from industrial/commercial cinema anyway—except as a kind of training and testing ground—but the influence of the art/industry dialectic made the process and products of BFI filmmaking marginal to the cultural centre of British life (where even avant-garde activities in literature, theatre, art and music are often found). For these reasons, the otherwise admirable mixture of ideals and practicality to be read in the comments of many who worked diligently and honourably for the Experimental Fund (and later, of many at the Production Board) never really addressed the core issues of British filmmaking as a whole.

In a preface to the *1951–1976 British Film Institute Productions* catalogue, for example, Sir Michael Balcon wrote:

> The film industry is unique. It is the only industry that spends almost no money on pure research, research in ideas. In any other industry with a comparable investment of capital it would not be credible. . . . The Experimental Film Fund was necessitated by the needs of the young film-makers who could not get into the industry, and of those whose ideas were unacceptable to the commercial industry. It was called 'experimental' because the BFI was willing to discover the unknown—the unknown both in talents and ideas. (8)

The Fund's proper work would be inquisitive and innovative, supporting young and unconventional filmmakers by giving them experience they could not find in the industry. The results, as the Fund's production record shows, engaged non-commercial areas of production from animation and technical experimentation to documentaries and art films. It may have

been a journey into 'the unknown', but the implicit conception of that region was flawed. Filmmaking at the BFI was historically and conceptually constrained to be marginal. The art/industry dialectic kept film culturally isolated, while the work of the Experimental Film Fund was peripheral to the commercial cinema. Taking the less complex of two evils, the Fund's work was understood to be in a functional, if informal, relationship with the trade: aiding 'unknown . . . talents and ideas' provided research and training for the industry. The challenge for the future would be to rethink that marginal role and give cultural authority to *The Film in National Life*. That would require an entirely different conception of filmmaking at the edge, one that would show the full potential of the BFI's filmmaking enterprise.

WORK FROM THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM FUND

The films undertaken by the Experimental Film Fund soon showed the promise inherent in such an organization, however constrained. The Fund's essential work was done between 1951 and 1958, when its initial financial resources ran out. A Gulbenkian grant restarted the Fund in 1960, but it was broke again by the end of 1963, after only two more noteworthy films: *The Vanishing Street* (1962) and *The Blackhill Campaign* (1963).[13] BFI filmmaking was not over, however, for the fund was restarted again in 1965—though actual production did not restart until mid-1966—with another Gulbenkian grant. Highlighting the restart was a name change from the Experimental Film Fund to the BFI Production Board. A note in *Sight and Sound* said at the time: it was 'felt that "experimental" can be a word leading to an infinity of argument and misunderstanding . . .' (Autumn 1966: 170). However, as we shall see, the

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[13] The last, tells of miners who try to run their local pit when it is scheduled for closure. The film, still available through BFI Distribution, until recently, was often shown to groups in similar real-life dramas—exemplifying the significant, practical role film can play in the life of a nation. Surprisingly, it does not appear to merit space in the National Film Archive.

change neither diminished the likelihood of 'misunderstanding' nor the grounds for argument. What is noteworthy, is the Experimental Film Fund's ability to make films on a shoestring, due in part to a general lack of theoretical interest, although the personal influence and practical experience of its Chairman, Sir Michael Balcon, cannot be discounted.

In any case, the first twelve years of BFI production—the Film Fund years—saw some fine examples of British filmmaking, with several names in the list of those who received BFI support destined for future prominence in British film-culture. Give or take a couple of years, the first decade of production is particularly well represented in the Film Archive, with some fourteen films available for viewing—although one further, important film survives outside the Archive (see below), although only one script has been preserved in the BFI Library (for the film *David*). These are the films (with directors, dates and times) that have survived:

- *David* . . . . . (Paul Dickson, 1951, 38 min).
- *O Dreamland* . . . . . (Lindsay Anderson, 1953, 11 min).
- *Figures in a Landscape* . . (Dudley Shaw Ashton, 1954, 18 min).
- *Together* . . . . . (Lorenza Mazzetti, 1955, 50 min).
- *Momma Don't Allow* . . . . (Karel Reisz/Tony Richardson, 1956, 22 min).
- *The Door in the Wall* . . . . (Glenn H. Alvey Jr., 1956, 29 min).
- *A Short Vision* . . . . . (Joan & Peter Foldes, 1956, 6 min).
- *One Potato, Two Potato* . . (Leslie Daiken 1957, 36 min).
- *Nice Time* . . . . . (Claude Goretta/Alain Tanner, 1957, 17 min).
- *Amelia and the Angel* . . . . (Ken Russell, 1958, 30 min).
- *Coventry Cathedral* . . . . . (Dudley Shaw Ashton, 1958, 23 min).
- *The Vision of William Blake*(Guy Brenton, 1958, 29 min).
- *Refuge England* . . . . . (Robert Vas, 1959, 27 min).
- *The Vanishing Street* . . . . (Robert Vas, 1962, 20 min).
- *The Blackhill Campaign* . . (Jack Parsons, 1963, 52 min).

Six of the films—*O Dreamland*, *Together*, *Momma Don't Allow*, *Nice Time*, *Refuge England* and *The Vanishing Street*—were part of what was known as Free Cinema. At least two other Free Cinema films were made by the Fund—*Enginemen* (1958, 21 min) and *Tomorrow's Saturday* (1962, 18 min)—both by Michael Grigsby, though neither seems to have survived. Another film that is still available, *One Potato, Two Potato*, (a technically

flawed study of childhood games that is available, perhaps, more for sociological than cinematic reasons), could also be considered, in style, purpose and result at least, as potentially a member of Free Cinema. In any case, these films probably form the most famous group of films produced by either the Film Fund or the Production Board (perhaps as well known as any single film made by the BFI). Because of this they have received almost as much comment and attention as any other BFI film.

Generally speaking, the Free Cinema classification was descriptive rather than prescriptive, since such beliefs as defined the group would not have allowed rules and methodologies to constrain procedures or results. Indeed, filmmakers included under this rubric of unfettered filmmaking did not like to be considered a 'movement' at all. Here is what Simon Blanchard and Sylvia Harvey have to say about what they call 'the phenomenon':

> Benefiting from the establishment of the Experimental Film Fund . . . and from individual connections with the National Film Theatre and *Sight and Sound*, the various film-makers associated with 'Free Cinema' managed to make a succession of pioneering films . . . and to raise, if only temporarily, the level of discussion about film-making in England and elsewhere. This was a continuation of the work that several of them (particularly Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz and Gavin Lambert) had been doing with their magazine *Sequence*. Some of this energy and concern was to find its way into film-related activity inside the early 'New' Left and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament . . . but by the end of the 1950s all the key activists of 'Free Cinema' had been absorbed into the mainstream of the film and theatre industries. Those involved with it had expressed a dislike at being considered a 'movement' . . . . In the absence of sustained, programmatic and collaborative work addressed to the social and economic structures impeding the film-making for which they had argued, the ensuing dispersal was largely to be expected. (229–230)

Compare this to what the filmmakers said of themselves, and it is clear Blanchard and Harvey misrepresent the group by ignoring a key word. These were not failed Leftists; they associated themselves with the Left because at the time that seemed the locus of political and social conscience (although the Left could, and now usually does describe them as victims of

'False Consciousness'[14]). However, the Free Cinema group seems to have realized fairly soon that the lack of ideological sympathy was really evidence of a fundamental incompatibility. The essay on Free Cinema in the first BFI Productions Catalogue (1978) generally gets it right. The defining characteristic of the group, and the word missing from the Blanchard/Harvey description, was 'humanism'. Although working in the general tradition of documentary,

> It was a tradition which the Free Cinema group rejected except in the work of Humphrey Jennings, who was in any case an odd-man-out in the documentary movement. Jennings was admired most for the personal and poetic vision he expressed in his films, transforming 'conventional' war documentaries into moving allegories of the times. (Ellis *BFI Productions* 29)[15]

This suggests the first of Free Cinema's two central commitments:

> the commitment of the film-maker to his or her own personal response. Free Cinema was free, then, not only of commercial constraints but also of artistic constraints. Art was understood as personal expression and the films were deliberate attempts to present reality not just as it is, but through the individual vision of the film-maker, hence able to show not just its 'surface' but also its depth, its meaning . . . . It was, in fact, a belief that films *should* offer personal interpretations of their subjects; that there is no such thing as objectivity, and that therefore film-makers have the same responsibility as every other artist of the time: to make a statement. (29–30)[16]

However, the work Free Cinema had in mind was not poetic or topically allegorical alone, for those involved believed that film was not only an art,

> but also an art which if it did not have a direct relationship to society, would be trivial and insipid. Hence the concern for 'commitment' . . . . . Commitment was both for cinema and for people. It was shown in the group's hostility to the typical film criticism of the time, which failed to take film and film culture

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[14] That is, '*ideology*, the manner in which men are systematically deceived, or deceive themselves, in the interest of the established order and its spurious absolutization' (Gellner 4).

[15] Interestingly, many critics would later see Bill Douglas as a film-poet successor to Jennings, suggesting at least one line of production continuity at the BFI.

[16] This definition of artistic commitment is significant, for it not only fits the BFI work of Bill Douglas (see ch. 3), but it also stands in contrast to the avant-gardism that by the 1970s was fighting for production supremacy at the BFI—an avant-garde epitomized by *The Draughtsman's Contract* (see ch. 4).

> seriously and which invariably reinforced the implicit snobbery and elitism of most British films where 'the functions of working-class characters are chiefly comic, where they are not villainous. . . .' It was a concern to present real people in the cinema, to show contemporary life, to expose its beauty, and ugliness; to show people as individuals and as members of the community, in real situations, neither romantically nor snobbishly. The politics behind this commitment were not particularly radical, perhaps best expressed . . . by Lindsay Anderson: 'But one thing is certain: in the values of humanism, and in their determined application to our society lies the future. All we have to do is to believe in them.' (Ellis *BFI Productions* 29)

The legacy of Free Cinema probably lies in two areas: in a non-ideological (although not necessarily non-political) art-cinema; and in television documentary in particular—though not in the popular form of documentary-drama (a form sometimes known as 'docudrama', 'dramadoc' or 'faction').[17] Documentaries of this type have tended to be more openly polemical (whether politically Left, Centre or Right) than Free Cinema ever was, while their express loyalty to, and dependence on, the *fact*, on something external to the filmmaker and the film, puts them more in the tradition of Griersonian documentary than Free Cinema.

Next in the list of films produced by the Experimental Film Fund are the two Dudley Shaw Ashton films.[18] These are all that is left of six or seven *art-films* produced during the 1950s (I question including the Blake film in this group, since it is more concerned with the relevance of poet/artist's work to his own struggle for spiritual freedom than it is with the work itself). It should be said that these are *art-films* of a specific sort: for art is their subject matter, usually in the from of painting, sculpture or architecture. One result of the 1947 Arts Enquiry (see above 81) was that responsibility for these films passed to the Arts Council—that is, until television made them an important part of their arts-programme scheduling.

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[17] For more on documentary-drama, see Derek Paget's openly polemical *True Stories?*

[18] My viewing of Ashton's *Coventry Cathedral* turned out to be memorable. The sense of recognition, and the range and nature of associations generated, are convincing—if this is not the first film I saw as a child, it is the first of which I have any recollection.

Sadly, *A Short Vision* and *The Door in the Wall* (both 1956) are all that remains of two distinct types of films that might have been expected to play a prominent part in the activities of the Experimental Film Fund, since both types offered apparently boundless opportunity to test the new and untried. *A Short Vision* seems to be the only surviving member of at least six animated films sponsored by the Experimental Film Fund between 1955 and 1964, while *The Door in the Wall* may be not only the one surviving example, but perhaps the only instance where the Experimental Film Fund made a film that was specifically concerned with technical, cinematic *experimentation*—in this case, with the possibilities of dynamic-aspect-ratio. The film demonstrates a device that alters aspect ratio during projection to suit scene and potentially story and mood.

So far, I have not included Ken Russell's *Amelia and the Angel* (1958) in any of my categories. This is because for me the film stands on its own among the surviving works of the Film Fund—with its embarrassing sentimentality offering what I would describe as a half-hour of anti-purgatorial viewing (no redemption follows). That this could be a Russell film is almost beyond belief, although I suppose its technical accomplishment (which is undeniable) and Russell's subsequent career could serve as a lesson in perseverance for aspiring filmmakers. Anyway, the film deserves no further comment.

Finally, I want to turn to one of the outstanding films of the Experimental Film Fund period, and what I believe must be the first film officially recorded film produced under its auspices: Paul Dickson's *David* (1951).[19] The film is based on a true story set in a small

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[19] The film-credits report that the film was 'Made for the Welsh Committee of the Festival of Britain . . . through the British Film Institute'. Interestingly, social and political relevancy in BFI productions seems often to have been borne by various, and almost invariably, excellent films involving coal-mining and the Celtic or North regions of the country: films like *David*, *The Blackhill Campaign* and the Bill Douglas Trilogy.

mining community in Wales, and it could stand as introduction to the tenets of the Free Cinema group and much else that would follow. The opening sequences of the film seem at first to have succumbed to the same failing that kills *Amelia and the Angel*, but the story quickly catches you up, and you realize that what at first seemed sentiment is really a frightening (because consciously fragile and Sisyphean) yet almost belligerent commitment by the narrator and characters to be gentle, quiet and dignified in comfortless, impoverished and even tragic circumstances. This is a film that deserves to be better known and to have a much wider audience.

The film presents the story of its main player, the elderly D. R. Griffith: 'David'. A Marxist would argue that the film perpetuates a myth used to maintain ruling-class hegemony: namely, that the uncomplaining acceptance of hardship and misfortune by the working-class is spiritually rewarding. The film engages this issue immediately, beginning with the epitaph: 'He who suffers, conquers' (which is the motto of stability for the oppressor given as the promise of salvation to the oppressed). However, the film works to confound the expectations of romantic discourse (whether Marxist or individualist), for there is neither class-political, nor individual-creative salvation here. The film is instead a truly subversive tribute to the greater number of human beings who are forever outside the arenas of power, wealth and privilege (whether constructed by the Left or Right). The film is about the persistence and constancy (which some argue is the true face of courage) of the quotidian being, the one who lives without expectation of triumph or reward, without even the recognition that this is indeed how they have lived. In the end, this is all that remains: continuance and constancy.

In a June 1951 review of the film in *Sight and Sound* (quoted as the catalogue entry in the first productions' catalogue), Gavin Lambert says that David's

> manner and appearance . . . are in themselves an invitation to recollect the strenuous passage of time; friendly, but withdrawn and solitary, he only has to walk down a street, to stand on top of a hill, to communicate something of the struggle of the years stretching back to the first decade of his life in a Welsh mining town. (23)

What saves the film from the sentimental and romantic is both the character of the central figure, and the ending of the film—for in what Lambert calls David's 'moment of recognition', (which consists of a brief, verbal tribute at the local school's prize-giving ceremony, from 'a visiting man of letters'), we see that what is conquered by 'He who suffers', is his own pain and humiliation. It may be a small triumph, but it stands outside political and creative procedures, definitions or polemics. It also stands as an epitome of the Experimental Film Fund's constancy of effort and achievement. This too will remain.

THE PRODUCTION BOARD

The pages that follow provide neither a history of the Production Board, nor a study of the mechanics of production, but are concerned to make some brief points about the intellectual and cultural circumstances of the Board during its first decade-and-a-half (roughly between the 1965–66 name change and the release of *The Draughtsman's Contract* in 1982—which is the terminal date of the period under study).

Of chief interest is an issue that appears ubiquitously (if in a variety of guises) in discussions concerning the Production Board during this period—and the presence of which can be traced through the few articles, essays and catalogues (appearing primarily 1976–81) that contain any substantial reference to the Board. Such items were usually written to initiate, continue or forestall discussion of the Board's responsibilities, operations and results, but generally show a lack of interest in the history behind film production at the BFI, and of the BFI itself. Rolling through this exchange are some key names from the Experimental Film

Fund and the Production Board of the time: including Sir Michael Balcon, Mamoun Hassan, Barrie Gavin and Peter Sainsbury. Other relevant names include Alan Lovell (who arranged a controversial NFT programme of 'Films from the BFI' in 1976, coordinated with the publication of an equally provocative booklet about the Production Board), John Ellis, Elizabeth Cowie, Rod Stoneman and Hilary Thompson, who are associated with the three BFI production catalogues that appeared during this period:

- *1951–1976: British Film Institute Productions: A Catalogue of Films Made under the Auspices of the Experimental Film Fund 1951–1966 and the Production Board 1966–1976*. Edited by John Ellis (1978).

- *Catalogue: British Film Institute Productions 1977–1978*. Edited by Elizabeth Cowie (1978).

- *The New Social Function of Cinema: BFI Production Board Catalogue, 1979–80*. Edited by Rod Stoneman and Hilary Thompson (1981).

One need hardly look further than the titles of these three publications to begin to see the nature of the endless discussions and disagreements that surrounded film production at the BFI, and which were in danger of overwhelming the Production Board as those discussions and disagreements turned more political between 1974 and 1976. The discourse implicit in these catalogue titles shifts over the course of only four years from a traditional, objective relationship to history with an insistence upon coverage ('1951–1976', begins the first catalogue), through an indefinite, intermediary stage, to a *particular* view of history (in the abstract and the specific) that is political, polemical and predictable.[20] Behind this shift and driving it is the, as yet unidentified, issue I referred to earlier.

All arguments, polemics and discussions concerning production at the BFI have depended upon one essential thing: the lack of an adequate definition (often of any definition)

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[20] It is in the general nature of testimonials to be formally predictable, depending not upon analysis—whatever the appearances—but upon rhetoric and shared conviction.

of the word 'experimental'—a word associated with BFI film production from the first (and which later appeared in the adjectival forms of 'art', 'avant-garde' or 'independent'). Not that this semantic inadequacy was localized to the Production Board—or to film—for it existed (and largely still exists) as an epistemological and rhetorical inadequacy in cultural historiography: that is, the lack of an adequate definition for the term 'avant-garde'.[21]

Now some readers might want to suggest, surely, that money has always been the issue of greatest concern and disagreement in BFI production. From a practical perspective this may seem correct, but the fact is both the shortage of financing capital (which moved from absolute to relative between the 1950s and the 1980s), and the way in which available money was distributed (that is, to whom it was given and for what kind of project), have both been always tied up with the issue of what kind of films the BFI should support—which would not be an issue but for the conceptual and constitutional separation of the BFI from 'matters of trade' (and of the trade from matters of art).

Early on, this structural and operational restriction was taken to be a natural and then a desirable state of affairs, in support of which much theoretical and polemical effort was expended. The force pushing for the normalization of this state of affairs, and which provided the conceptual structure for its transformation into an aesthetically, morally and politically privileged position, was the very belief in an art/industry opposition that so dominated British cultural discussion concerning film (and which was embodied in the BFI itself—see the Conclusion for a brief discussion of this). The inherent role of this belief in cultural thinking

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[21] Josephine Guy, in a fine study of *The British Avant-Garde*, provides a broad survey of the problems and polemics surrounding the whole idea of 'avant-gardism' (a spelling and use I follow). She demonstrates convincingly that the difficulties and disagreements depend upon the inadequacy of traditional definitions, ideas and theories of '*the* avant-garde'—not the least of which is the belief in a transhistorical, transcultural phenomenon deserving of the definite article. For an extended list of readings on culture and avant-gardism, see Appendix 4.

meant that it required only a slight change of focus to read the left-hand side of the oppositional formula 'art/industry' as referring specifically to 'the avant-garde'. This involved a change from passive to active occupation of the marginalised space marked out by 'art's *natural opposition* to industry'. Of course, it was implicitly (and often explicitly) taken to be the case that there was such a thing as '*the* avant-garde', which was naturally political and in implacable opposition to bourgeois capitalism and its political and ideological hegemony—though whether this meant that any particular work of 'the avant-garde' was *politically effective*, or merely *politicised* to look effective, has always been an issue much-avoided by critics and theoreticians. Anyway, since the mid-century at least it has become clear that this understanding is deeply flawed.

One of the first things that Josephine Guy establishes in her excellent study of the subject is that the term 'avant-garde' is highly problematical. As she rightly notes, the category is traditionally defined and vehemently argued about under one of two opposed theories: either as 'aesthetic' or 'political' radicalism (neither of which has ever successfully accounted for the other).[22] This corresponds to what we see in the history of film production at the BFI: which does not show a linear development from a superficial towards a deeper understanding of oppositional filmmaking, but an oscillation between aesthetic and political redefinitions of the same oppositional space. Variety in the practice and results of those redefinitions is an expression of the varying material conditions of production rather than of any fundamental change in theory.

Although Guy's ultimate concern is to establish the existence and understand the nature of avant-garde writing in 19th-century Britain, her grasp of cultural issues and fidelity

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[22] As Guy notes, respective, paradigmatic statements of each theory are made in Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968) and Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984).

to historical and material evidence, which are well-served by sound thinking and clear writing, give her work a cultural significance that reaches far beyond the 19th century. Thus, in place of the confusion and division of vying aesthetic and political theories, Guy provides an original and impressively clear bit of historical, rhetorical and social analysis that results in a new, largely heuristic definition of 'avant-gardism':

> all avant-garde movements . . . define themselves in relation to the past—*to tradition*. To be innovative, to be ahead of one's time, implies some kind of disavowal both of 'what is'—the status quo—and what has been—tradition. Moreover . . . what is at issue is not the degree of this disavowal (whether or not, for example, avant-gardism depends upon a total repudiation of the past and a totally hostile attitude towards society) but the form which it takes. The form of that opposition to the past is itself determined to a large extent by the singularity of the intellectual and cultural climate in which the avant-garde artist or writer is situated. Specifically, it is the general attitude within a culture towards the past which influences how avant-garde artists and writers define themselves in relation to tradition, and also, therefore, the manner and extent to which they repudiate those traditions. (41)

The real strength of her redefinition is that for the first time we can see how the categories of aesthetic and political radicalism (which are typically taken to be distinct) are actually related, something that no other theoretical discussion of the avant-garde has so far been able to accomplish. Opposition or disavowal of the past—of tradition—may spring from, or be preoccupied with, or be predominantly expressed through, aesthetic or political concerns and techniques. As Guy notes, how and why a given avant-garde experiences and expresses this disavowal is culturally determined. The fact of *opposition*, however, remains: strictly formal, innovative work will still have social and political implications because of its very opposition to the ways in which 'what has been' has been expressed. Similarly, strictly political, innovative work must *express* itself in ways that are noteworthy and effective and so will use more or less innovative formal techniques.

If we turn back to the Experimental Film Fund, for a moment, we could say that the Fund read 'experimental' as aesthetic, formal, technical or even personal innovation—testing and leading the way for a mainstream cinema that in general would have been expected to follow. This took the idea of 'avant-gardism' at its most literal: stripping away the concretions of metaphorical use and returning it to the original military idea of a vanguard, moving first into new and dangerous territory, but which is followed by the army of which it is an integral operational part. A good example of this thinking can be found in Sir Michael Balcon's view (quoted earlier) of the Fund's 'pure research' role *vis-à-vis* the film industry.

When the Film Fund restarted in 1966 (renamed, as Sir Michael says, 'partly to counteract the stereotyped attitudes towards people who dare to try something new') it might seem that production continued as before.[23] However, a gradual conceptual shift had occurred redirecting the perceived purpose of BFI production away from that of an apprenticeship-cum-research agency for the film industry (which had largely been the self-image of the Experimental Film Fund) to that of an organization responsible for 'art-cinema' in Britain—though there was an initial attempt to return the Board to the earlier model:

> The Governors had originally suggested in 1963 that the Fund, once reconstituted, should concentrate on experiments in the development of cinema more than experiments in film form. But the Board saw its role as 'in the absence of a national training school, fulfilling a useful function in assisting aspiring young film-makers'. It was therefore decided that the brief of the Board should be to 'encourage new talent and new ideas in the cinema'. It was recognised that the purpose of the Fund was the production of films of artistic merit, and that commercial considerations were not to become paramount. (Ellis *BFI Productions* 40)

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[23] Structurally, this is not surprising, since half the members of the first Production Board (1966–68), including Balcon as Chairman, had been members of the last Experimental Film Fund Committee (1961–65), while 13 out of 18 were still on the 1968–70 Board. This particular continuity did not change until Michael Relph took over as Chairman in 1973.

The filmmaking that would now receive the focus of Production Board sponsorship was thought of as 'specialised or "art" cinema', which would generally be concerned with *formal* or *aesthetic* experiment or non-commercial subject matters (though few of the films strayed far from conventional narrative structures). The roots of this art-cinema aesthetic lay in the years of the Experimental Film Fund:

> . . . the aesthetics of the Fund's films were being developed . . . . around questions of form (style, technique) and content (attitude, commitment). The documentary movement had developed notions of the poetic treatment of reality during the Thirties, but although their attitude arguably influenced the preponderance of Neo-Realist films in the specialised cinemas, their thinking had lost its impetus by the Fifties. It was largely the writers in *Sequence* magazine (Gavin Lambert, Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson etc.) who provided the dominant critical attitudes of the decade. Lambert's aesthetic, perhaps the most complex produced during the decade, stressed the creative response of individual artists: he looked for the personal tensions and personal views of directors coming through their work. Films worthy of note were evaluated according to whether they were: 'clearly the work of individual artists that ask to be judged on the level that one considers an outstanding contemporary novel or play, quite apart from their implications for the commercial cinema'; or whether they were: 'the kind of near-art which most above-average contemporary production usually exemplifies'. He expands his description of 'near-art' as follows: 'Such films, though they lack the intensity and revelation that comes from a really vital, untrammelled creative response to material, are distinguished for their craftsmanship, their awareness of wide issues, their quality of observation'. (19–20)

Not that Lambert's aesthetic of 'personal vision and style' (20) had the ground to itself, for there were political currents as well, perhaps best represented by Lindsay Anderson's famous article 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' (I take the following from the Ellis catalogue essay as it would be hard to improve on its presentation of Anderson's essential point):

> 'I hope I will be pardoned if I say that I find the distinction between form and content somewhat naïve. It is the essence of poetry (in any medium) that the thing said cannot be critically distinguished from the way of saying it'. He ended with a forthright defence of commitment . . . 'Essentially, in fact, there is no such thing as insignificant art. It is merely a question of the openness with which our commitments are stated. I do not believe that we should keep quiet about them'. (20)

Although the roots of this important development in British film lay largely in the Free Cinema work of the 1950s Film Fund, the practice of art-cinema continued throughout the Board's work of the following decade—indeed, until mid-decade it had a leading influence in commercial British cinema too, as is noted in another part of the Ellis catalogue:

> 1959 was a year of new beginnings: *Room at the Top* (a film by a traditional director) marked the initiation of a new trend in British films, one of whose origins was the Free Cinema movement. . . . Woodfall was the company most identified with the new aesthetic: it was founded by Tony Richardson and John Osborne, and their first film was *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne's stage play that had initiated a new atmosphere in British drama. The film . . . was not a success. But Woodfall's next films . . . were more popular: Richardson's *The Entertainer*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, and Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. These films combined a new technical flexibility . . . with a new social realism . . . . (36)

Despite commendable ideals, formal and social, there was a problem with Lambert's and Anderson's philosophy of filmmaking, a problem shared at the time by many associated with the Fund or influenced by its work. The trouble lay in the way the marginal status of this art-cinema was understood, not as ground to be explored, defended and maintained (if not expanded), but essentially as a place of exile. This could be taken literally, when the filmmaker felt like an outcast or loner. However, since working with an organization like the Film Fund provided some sense of community, at least, the marginal status of art-cinema was more often read metaphorically. In that gentler light, it looked more like the isolation of a professional training ground—a view of filmmaking that we have already seen in Sir Michael Balcon's comments quoted earlier in this chapter (105). Yet whether it was seen in a hard or soft light, if the marginal location of art-cinema was understood as a place of exile, then it was not going to be a place where anyone would want to stay for too long. I think this, in part, is why Mamoun Hassan (Head of Production 1971–74) could call the commercial successors of this aesthetic 'the lights that failed' (quoted in Wilson 'Images of Britain' 85). He had an entirely

different perspective on filmmaking at the BFI and on its relationship to filmmaking in Britain; from that perspective the art-cinema aesthetic had had commercial influence because the filmmakers involved were willing to give up that marginal space. High-profile commercial influence and success would be relatively brief, however, but it would make worse the broad misunderstanding of British film's true nature, with continued misdirection of effort and funds.

What then did this BFI influence on British commercial cinema produce? Well there were the films, which were often very good. In the long term, however, the attempt to take marginal cinema (where BFI production—and perhaps British production—properly belonged) into the big-time (where it did not belong) was in many ways self-defeating. Its very success (though temporary) encouraged unrealistic ambitions and fed all too human greed among British filmmakers. When buoyed by one or two internationally successful films such conditions have always proven fertile ground for the reported signs and wonders of another renaissance in British filmmaking. In this instance, it encouraged American exploitation (itself a familiar scenario) of a relative British success. In either case the result is inevitably the same: hyperbolic intentions, exaggerated plans and budgets and an eventual crash. In the present instance, the first significant incursion of American money went to Woodfall for Richardson's *Tom Jones*. Its success greased the wheels and the result, coinciding with the discovery of London's hip Sixties scene, took 'British production . . . away from the working-class dramas towards the classless world of 'Swinging London', and the mid-Sixties glamour explosion' (Ellis *BFI Productions* 37). A year later we had Dick Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). In his comments on the film, Ellis quotes what can now be read as Lester's naïve view of its social significance:

> The style was frantic, derived from television, employing pastiche, fast cutting, stereotypes, crazy humour, ad-libbed lines, and *ciné-vérité* techniques. And as Lester put it: 'I think we were the first to give a confidence to the youth of the

> country which led to the disappearance of the Angry Young Men with a defensive mien. The Beatles [later to accept orders from the Queen] sent the class thing sky high: they laughed it out of existence . . . '. (37)

The film was significant, but what made it so was the nature of the 'confidence' it gave to youth and the relationship of that confidence to filmmaking (as well as television and music recording). Following the multiple definitions of the word in the dictionary, we can say that the film gave youth 'a sense of self-reliance [and] boldness', but that this was inseparable from 'something told confidentially'. And it was the coupling of that 'boldness' with this 'telling of private matters with mutual trust' that had the greatest consequences (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*). What was whispered into the ear of youth by a film that was anything but quiet? It was the secret of their manumission through consumption. For we can now see in this film (as in others like it) the birth of commercialised youth culture (of which more in a moment).

During the next decade, however, something extraordinary happened at the Production Board. From somewhere near the beginning of Mamoun Hassan's tenure as Head of Production in 1971, a new conception of the Board's role began to take shape. From this perspective, the marginal area of oppositional filmmaking naturally occupied by BFI production was for the first time (and as far as I know for the only time) actually seen in its correct and potentially most productive light: as mirroring the conditions of British filmmaking in general, which must operate at the margins of an international film world forever dominated by the American industry.

Mamoun Hassan is the Production Board officer most clearly associated with this realistic, culturally-specific and realizable vision for British film, at least up to the *terminus ad quem* of my interest in 1982 (although undoubtedly there were others who shared this insight). Hassan's strength was to visualize this marginal space as the eternal centre (however small in

absolute terms) of the past, present and future of British filmmaking—whatever specific forms that oppositional cinema might take and however radical its practice might be.

An early expression of this vision can be found in the Wilson article on 'Images of Britain' (1974) that I cited earlier. The date of the article is significant, since it appeared just as Mamoun Hassan's term as Head of Production at the Board ended (which also seems to have marked the end of this unique view of the relationship between BFI and British filmmaking because of their jointly marginal nature). Wilson's article appeared as British filmmaking, in its endless metempsychotic cycle, was undergoing one of the *re-deaths* that inevitably succeed (and precede) its *rebirths*. His conclusion was historically specific, but its significance is continuous:

> if British cinema is not to lose its production status and dwindle into a service industry, subsidy is what it will need. (85)

Wilson goes on to note that 'small areas of subsidy exist already', including the National Film Finance Corporation (which, some five years later, would be headed by none other than Mamoun Hassan). His focus of attention, however, is directed at the BFI's Production Board, which he calls 'one of the last outposts of an indigenous British cinema'—depending, 'of course, on what you mean by British cinema'. As for Wilson, he sees the locus, or perhaps better the kernel, of British filmmaking in the work done at the Production Board under the direction of Hassan. And he reports that Hassan

> is confident that the work now being done at the Board represents the kind of films which can be made in Britain from subjects which are recognisably British in the sense that they owe something to a British tradition, whether it is historical, social, literary or cinematic. (85)

Wilson adds that the Production Board 'is already developing into a kind of production centre, and Mamoun Hassan is anxious that its cooperative working methods should not be hampered

by lack of funds' (86). The best representative of this remarkable period is probably the Bill Douglas Trilogy (which is the subject of an extended examination in the next chapter).

Unfortunately, the original perspective on which the work of this period was based—what I would take to be the closest yet to a *focused* view of British filmmaking, and still the view with the greatest potential significance for British film-culture—never had the chance to reveal the full breadth and depth of its possibilities. It was overtaken by the next in the series of shuffling redefinitions of oppositional filmmaking, which this time recast the practice as *politically* radical (six or eight years after the events of 1968).

These changes roughly began in the sixteen months between Mamoun Hassan's leaving the BFI (March 1974) and Peter Sainsbury's appointment as Head of Production in January 1976.[24] Of course, despite the move towards a political redefinition of the oppositional space occupied by BFI production, films were still made that took aesthetic avant-gardism to be the practice proper to oppositional filmmaking. Such films essentially continued in the conceptual tradition of the Experimental Film Fund, however much further they may have gone in their expressive radicalism. And it is in this tradition that we could place Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (which is discussed in the last chapter of this thesis).

Now, I am not interested here in this politicisation *per se*, whether of practices or of films. I am interested in its conceptual implications for filmmaking at the BFI (though, again, only so far as it relates to the films that are the main concern of this thesis). Having said that, I would like to speculate for a moment on just what conceptual changes occurred in the changeover from the Hassan to the Sainsbury Board, and how the Board's altered view of

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[24] The post was held by Barrie Gavin during this time, though even he seems to have felt that his tenure was abortive. He tried to initiate changes at the Board, such as the establishment of a production policy, but left before anything could come to fruition.

oppositional practice may, for example, be reflected in the way it read the relationship between those two of its own production successes that are the concern of this thesis: the Douglas Trilogy and *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

The general politicisation of the oppositional space of BFI production, and the attempts to institutionalize the view that proper oppositional/avant-garde filmmaking is political filmmaking—which took over from the less theoretical, more inclusive view of the Hassan period—really marked a retrograde step at the Board. For, in true dialectical fashion, by positing the necessary and privileged existence of a political avant-garde, its opposite—which is always taken to be a formal or aesthetic avant-garde—was granted equally necessary existence. In other words, repolarising oppositional filmmaking really returned it to a traditional, conceptual framework, a framework that actually made it easy for the Board, first, to conceptualize, and then later to justify the pursuit of, aesthetically avant-garde filmmaking—despite the undoubted sincerity of any commitments to politicised filmmaking or to the political avant-garde. For the sake of consistency, the main strut of that justification would be that such filmmaking had a greater potential to attract a wider audience (relatively speaking) than strictly political/polemical work, which would open the ground for further, genuinely politicised, oppositional films. Such justification would have been reinforced by the fact that the calculation of success in creative activities tends to maintain a historical consistency or continuity—and in film, success has most commonly been determined by some form of quantitative analysis of reception.

Unfortunately for Bill Douglas, his Trilogy (which was in production during the time of the changeover) was both the most noteworthy representative of the Hassan production period and the most successful, internationally well-known and praised BFI production for some ten or fifteen years. I think it is fair to suggest that part of the incentive to continue

Production Board *success* came from that achieved by Douglas's films. Despite their oppositional nature, which was both personal, passionate and non-commercial, those films had garnered international stature and awards. It is quite natural that the Douglas success would have opened eyes and stimulated ambitions at the Production Board, much as their relative commercial and critical success had earlier influenced the Free Cinema filmmakers. The post-Douglas result was a noteworthy attempt to occupy the art/entertainment boundary in search of the almost mythical combination of commercial, critical and art-cinema success. The film that came closest to realizing that success was *The Draughtsman's Contract*. However, our Freudian century has taught us that such associations of influence often entail dark and unexpected implications—and reading between (or behind) the lines of an in-house organ like the *BFI News* (for the period in question) reveals symptoms of a troubled relationship concerning the Douglas Trilogy and *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

Between September 1972 and January 1975 the production, release and reception of the first two films of the Douglas Trilogy, and the beginning of shooting on the third film, merit front page articles, headlines and generally, high-profile, respectful treatment in the *News*, with the films often standing as representatives of the value of the Board's work:

'Production Board Film for Venice'	Front page article, Sept. 1972;
'Venice Prize for "My Childhood"'	Front page headline, Oct. 1972;
'More Awards for "My Childhood"'	Front page article, Jan. 1973;
'More Aid for BFI Production Board'	Front page photo, Jan. 1974;
'New From Production Board'	Page 3 photo and note, Jan. 1975.

The last item includes the following note:

> On the day that *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk* opened as a double-bill at the Academy Cinema, Bill Douglas began shooting the third part of his trilogy, *My Way Home*. He has already completed shooting on two-thirds of the film, which it is hoped will be ready for showing in the spring.

However, anyone reading further in the *BFI News* would be left wondering if Douglas ever finished the last film, for there is no further mention of the Trilogy.

One year later, before *My Way Home* had been released (which it was in 1977), Peter Sainsbury became the 'New Production Department Head' (Jan. 1976: 1). That summer, Sainsbury published a long article on Production Board policy in the *News*, during the course of which he discusses the Board's relationship to the nation's film-culture.

> The BFI Production Board has just published a new information leaflet giving a description of its functions and a guide to the kind of limitations it is likely to impose in deciding which of the two hundred or so projects submitted each year to support. Among these appears the following:
>
> > 'The Board's work is intended to have a relevance to the future of the film and television industries, but it is generally reluctant to finance projects that conform to existing commercial and quasi-commercial models (such as conventional documentaries and plays in the familiar television format) which could legitimately be expected to find backing elsewhere.'
>
> In this is nicely inscribed the contradiction between the cultural and the commercial which so frequently militates against the former in British society and which makes the work of the Production Board so valuable and vulnerable at every level of production, distribution and criticism. In statistical terms, the inter-relationship between the Board's priorities and those of the distributors and television companies has produced a commercial interest in no more than fifteen percent of the films made over the past three years. In notable cases, such as those of Brownlow and Mollo's *Winstanley*, Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* and Brown's *Brown Ale with Gertie*, this interest has emerged over a year after distributors have been invited to view the films and has usually been entirely contingent upon the generation of favourable publicity without their participation. (3)

The three films Sainsbury refers to are respectively dated 1972, 1975 and 1974. No mention is made in the entire article of the Douglas achievement—*My Childhood* 1972, *My Ain Folk* 1973, *My Way Home* [then in production and released in 1977]—even though, as the note quoted above from the January 1975 issue of the *BFI News* reports, the first two films of the Trilogy had, during this period, opened as a commercial double-bill.

I said earlier that Douglas was unfortunate for his films being so successful and so closely associated with Hassan. The reason was that, as the *type* of preceding Production Board success (an Oedipal model to be overcome), and equally as the *iconic* sign of the preceding historical period (which was to be overturned), the Douglas trilogy became the classic cause of anxiety of influence.

OPPOSITIONAL BEING/OPPOSITIONAL KNOWING

Before turning to the main concern of this thesis, which is a close textual analysis of the Douglas Trilogy and *The Draughtsman's Contract*, I would like to return for a moment to Josephine Guy's discussion of avant-gardism. Guy uses her valuable reinterpretation of avant-gardism to study late nineteenth-century artists and writers, so she has little to say about how and where mid to late twentieth-century avant-gardes would locate and direct their disavowal and opposition. This is an area of often unrecognized intricacy because of a surprising but relatively unexamined characteristic of modern culture.

As Richard Stivers shows in his outstanding book on *The Culture of Cynicism*, avant-gardism has a fundamental, philosophical identity with the market-consumerism that, at least since the 1950s, has grown to dominate the social and political, no less than the economic, order of the world. This springs from the fact that a disavowal of the past is also, in other words, an avowal (and privileging) of change and innovation, which is the basis on which market-consumerism operates. Indeed, it is so in the nature of this socio-economic order to use any and all innovative techniques of presentation and representation that when it is not borrowing from the formal inventiveness of avant-gardism (in any media) it can actually *lead* avant-garde art. This is most evident in the system's vast range of promotional expressions; and by its very nature the system sees all created and natural phenomena—physical,

environmental, mental, emotional, etc.—both as promotable products for consumption, and as material to help promote the consumption of other commodities.[25] More than that, however, market-consumerism is also avant-gardist in its desire to shock (stimulate/titillate) its audience. The generation of scandal and controversy is big business—as subject and technique—so that even the shocks of avant-garde art become part of the mass market. All this is done in the interests of the parallel processes that drive the market-exchange system: the recreation of the universe as an infinite range of consumables, and the engendering an infinite desire for consumption.[26]

What of the politically radical in avant-gardism? Well, from an aesthetic perspective we can say that the procedures of market-consumerism dissipate the energies of avant-gardism's political opposition by subsuming and reusing its formal, oppositional structures and practices (just the subversive activity that many theorists suggest is the essence of political avant-gardism). From a political perspective we can say that the ideology of market-consumerism (and its insistence upon radical individualism) offers spaces (confined as that may be) for political opposition, in part to create (or allow to be created) avant-gardes that will feed innovative methods, structures and beliefs into its vast promotional mill.

So both avant-gardism and the socio-economic system it seems most naturally to oppose are anti-traditional and radically innovative—albeit, one for economic and the other for

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[25] It was not always recognized that this economic order had a natural affinity with the iconoclastic—even the alienating—procedures typically associated with avant-gardism. However, from the 1960s at least, there was a growing awareness of that affinity and finally of the identity of these two interventionist and disruptive practices. Initially, this awareness was most clearly manifested in the production and products of 'youth culture'. Now everything from wilderness to fine art, from rock videos to zygotes, or from philosophy to the news is promoted, sold, consumed and recycled for yet more promotion and consumption.

[26] In theory, Marxism would only try to ameliorate the two processes. In practice, it merely showed itself unable, not unwilling, to take them as far as possible.

political ends.[27] How does an aesthetically and politically oppositional practice maintain itself as *different* when the culture in which it finds itself grows daily in the awareness that it is (axiomatically) for innovation and against the past. Perhaps the only way is to oppose the mere exploration of *knowing* (in, for example, Peter Greenaway's epistemological cleverness) by a greater concern for the quality of *being* (as in Bill Douglas's ultimately subtler and far more humane ontological commitment). For some sense of how the subversive activities and expressive modes of that new oppositional practice might differ from the present we need look no further than the work of those two filmmakers: the Douglas Trilogy is ontological in its concerns and in its subversions, while *The Draughtsman's Contract*, for all the titillating pleasures of formal inventiveness, is an epistemological work of the old school.

I am not sympathetic to Frankfurt school thinking on culture, but even those we disagree with can have insight. One of their's was to believe that 'our key concepts . . . are formed not by a spectacle, but by our predicament' (Gellner 4). This is exactly what distinguishes Douglas and Greenaway, as is visible in their art. Perhaps more surprising is the fact it was even evident in their filmmaking practice. Greenaway has been praised for his calm, controlled handling of crews and material, and that fits with his art, which is cool and theoretical. On the other hand, Douglas was consumed, and tended to consume others, with the passion and significance of his art; for him it was life itself.

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[27] Although it may seem hard to imagine how politics and economics could be separated, a distinction may be possible, outside modern discourse, from a teleological perspective.

II

WRITING FOR FILM

The documentary difficulties that attend a study of BFI history also hamper the study of films produced by the BFI. The fault lies with the lack of a formal archiving policy, as referred to in the first part of this thesis. Relatively little, useful material from either the Experimental Film Fund or the Production Board has been saved.[1] Whether that was because film production was considered a quasi-independent endeavour at the BFI, or simply peripheral to the Institute's essential activities, is unclear. The few production papers I did find in the BFI Library had literally been dumped in a cardboard box, and despite my best efforts to put them in some sort of order, and give them some physical security by putting them in ring binders, the results were discontinuous and insignificant.

Two further factors complicate the study of film production at the BFI. First, even among those official papers that have survived and are accessible (as minutes of BFI Board of Governors' meetings) there are few references to production—and those are usually scanty

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[1] Long after having researched the material for this chapter, I was told that additional Production Board papers had been deposited in the BFI Library. Having conducted a brief, general survey of this additional material, I saw nothing that would significantly alter my argument. Still, the step towards formal archiving by the Board is to be applauded. Minimal though the information is in the papers recently deposited, it does provide basic dates for meetings etc., and some indication of agendas (though no account of Board discussions and few records of its decisions).

and insignificant. Second, neither the Experimental Film Fund nor the Production Board have received the kind of serious consideration they deserve. Few publications have shown anything but a passing interest in them, and except for the BFI's first three production catalogues (and a couple of other BFI publications) any mention is usually brief.

Nevertheless, by the nature of this thesis and the institutional constraints under which it is submitted, I had intended from the beginning to focus my discussion not upon the minutiae of Production Board meetings but upon a study of some of its work. When it came time for me to turn to the scripts and films that were my chief concern, however, I discovered that again the BFI had preserved precious little of its own material—in this instance, few of the scripts and films of its own productions.

Now, a combination of institutional modesty and busy application to its external responsibilities may have prevented the BFI from collecting and cataloguing its own operational papers, but it has been a central responsibility of the BFI, almost from the beginning, to collect and catalogue all the British scripts and films possible. Yet the work of the Production Board for as much as an entire decade is sometimes represented by less than a handful of records. For example, during the 1960s, the Production Board produced some forty-four films, but only *two scripts* and *two films* have been preserved—one, it must be admitted, for each of the surviving scripts (the Film Archive has a viewing copy of one film, while BFI Distribution has a rental copy of the other). It seems that none of the other films or their scripts are extant (or if any of them have survived, the BFI does not seem to know of their whereabouts, so they are as good as lost). Of course, the level of accomplishment and worth of the body of films produced by the Fund and the Board would have varied, but who was to say what would one day be significant? Two of the missing films for the 1960s, for instance, were early works by Ridley Scott and Tony Richardson.

Of the limited amount of work preserved, many films are unavailable for consultation since no viewing copy has been made, while the few Experimental Film Fund and Production Board scripts kept by the Library are rarely better than photocopies of copies of poorly typed originals (often covered in lacunae and literals). If for no other reason than the textual state of these documents—which are important in the cultural history of this country, if not of Europe—I believe that the study of film is especially suited to the academic traditions and scholarly concerns of a university like Oxford.

Before turning to essential matter of this work, I should add that the scripts and films discussed in this section will be considered within a broader cultural context than is often the case in film criticism (too much of which seems to assume that cinema sprang into being like a cultural Minerva). I assume that film does not exist outside the context and tradition of the arts generally, a connection I will draw especially in terms of the literary arts, though that does not mean simply discussing the films *as* literature. I take this approach partly because my thesis is submitted through the Oxford Faculty of English Language and Literature; partly because that fits my own particular interests and training; but also because too much film criticism seems polarized between a popular banality and an obsessively narrow theoreticism—poles united by the same failure to apply a rigour of textual observation. The results have become predictable: impotent aesthetics and often simply mistaken analysis.[2]

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[2] Consider, e.g., the inexplicably sacralized *Cahiers du Cinema* essay on 'Young Mr. Lincoln' (reprinted in Mast/Cohen), which is built on multiple errors of observation and audition—the same sort of evidential errors that bedevil the critical discussion of film generally (as in the published criticism concerning the films discussed here in chapters 5 and 6).

3

THE BILL DOUGLAS TRILOGY: CRUEL LIFE/EXEMPLARY JOURNEY

Though few, the films of Bill Douglas are usually judged to be the work of a distinctive and distinctly British film master.[3] Yet Douglas has attracted little serious or careful critical attention. This chapter is concerned with the three autobiographical films made with Production assistance—*My Childhood, My Ain Folk, My Way Home*—and will aspire to a more rigorous and attentive analysis.

The BFI Library holds one script for each film, each of which is of a different type. The second almost certainly preceded its film, while the first clearly, and the third probably, came after their films. The scripts are only alike in being unsuited to a critical analysis of Douglas's finished work. They do not adequately represent the films and, except for the second, they contribute nothing to our understanding of the development of the Trilogy.

The first script, described in the BFI Library catalogue as a 'Dialogue Script', and meant to be used in the preparation of subtitled or dubbed versions of *My Childhood* for foreign release, consists of a photocopy of a poorly-typed original in English, French and

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[3] These include: four film school projects, *Charlie Chaplin's London* (1969 [lost]), *Striptease* (1969), *Globe* (n.d.) and *Come Dancing* (1970); four films as writer/director, *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973), *My Way Home* (1978), *Comrades* (1987); and one project as co-writer, *Home and Away* (1974).

German, which is abridged to the extent of missing key scenes, including the final two scenes of the film. The script for *My Ain Folk*, which is described as a 'Screenplay', is more like a final draft before filming, though again dialogue and events often differ broadly from that of the film. What is unique and particularly interesting about the script is its inclusion of visual descriptions and omniscient insights into character response and motivation. As such, it is the most thorough literary companion to the films. The third script, called a 'Final Version Dialogue Script', much like the first provides dialogue only, though in a more finished and professional form. And though, unlike the first, it is entirely in English, it too seems a post-production document, perhaps meant for sound-synchronisation or, again, for translation.

As noted above, video copies of the Trilogy have been on sale since 1992 (limited in distribution if not number), though scripts were not published until late 1993: as part of *Bill Douglas: A lanternist's account*. The editors acknowledge that the scripts 'are clearly not substitutes for the films', though they present them as 'the centrepiece of this book' (29). They describe the history of the scripts they publish as follows:

> *My Childhood* was drafted by Bill Douglas for possible publication two years after the film was completed, and that is the version, part novelisation part script, printed here. *My Ain Folk* is the final draft which was the basis of that film's production. *My Way Home* did not exist fully in any draft; the version here was in part reconstructed by Peter Jewell and compiled from a number of sources including, principally, the first draft (the first part of the script printed here), the final draft (the second part) and the dialogue sheets for the whole film. (29)

The scripts that will 'variously remind us of the films' are supposed to 'act as commentary' and 'stand independently as terse, epigrammatic creations in their own right'. That may seem a reasonable editorial desire, but it suggests that, subconsciously at least, the editors were uneasy about their less than scholarly preparation of the scripts for publication. For as interesting as these scripts may be as literary 'creations in their own right', each stands

in different relationship to its respective film, though none gives a detailed and accurate representation. They all omit too much of the films and differ from the actual dialogue of the film's too often to be considered in any way definitive texts of the Trilogy.

It is good that the scripts of important British films, such as the Douglas Trilogy, should be made public. However, unlike theatre, in film the realization of the written document in material form is usually extant as a fixed text of its own. If what is published is meant to document a stage in the development of the film, its identity or likeness to the finished work is not what is significant. Indeed, the more the published document differs from the film, the more useful and interesting it may be as grounds for comparison and as an aid to understanding. Interest and usefulness do depend upon accuracy and identity, though, if what is published is presented as a representation of the film, or a literary surrogate for it.

To alleviate possible difficulties, and as a convenience to examiners, I have provided edited copies of the scripts of the Trilogy in an appendix to this thesis. These scripts are based on the available documents, but have been minutely compared, to conform as closely as possible, to the films themselves. They have received only positive alterations (with nothing taken out), and only such changes as were necessary to indicate dialogue unique to either the script or film, and for the provision of such descriptive material as might be needed to give a picture of Douglas's realization of the scripts on film, all in a uniform presentation.

CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Despite being commended as a cinematic poet and master of British filmmaking, Bill Douglas has received little critical attention and most of that is brief. His Trilogy, which is often referred to as a masterpiece of British cinema, has inspired no more than a dozen articles of

any substance. My discussion of the Trilogy begins with a brief, analytical look at some of the comment and criticism.

The first time any of the Trilogy was mentioned was in the 1972 Summer issue of *Sight & Sound* (143), where David Wilson reports on the first film of the Trilogy, *My Childhood*, as a 'fair example of the Board's [new] policy in practice': namely, its decision 'to promote features as well [as shorts], and not necessarily from tyro directors'. Wilson was so impressed with the film he judged it the product of an immaculate conception: 'it emerges as an imaginative and original work, owing nothing to anyone'. This seems brazenly romantic, though he may have been referring to the way this film differs from others about childhood. He says that, 'Much more than a kind of animated photograph album of images from childhood . . . [this film] delves into the mind of a child as it might be recalled in adult memory'. This is good. Unfortunately, he had seen only the first part (in 'rough cut') of what was to be, but was not yet, a Trilogy, and the unusual style and structure of the film mislead him. He finds the child's mind to be little more than an ad hoc album of its own, full of random experiences, haphazardly collected and preserved. A structural technique that in other films is used to create a sense of continuity, here conveys the opposite:

> The camera fixes on childhood experiences—friendship with a German prisoner-of-war, a pet canary devoured by a cat, an old woman found dead in her chair—which are at once random recollections and indelibly ingrained memories of a time when every event was important until tomorrow.

Wilson does not recognize that childhood memories provide a crucial context for the adult who remembers and reconstructs the past as art (which is not a Wordsworthian claim that 'the child is father of the man'). Wilson's problem is that he does not see *My Childhood* in the context of the whole work. It was impossible for him to do so, but it means that he cannot correctly read the details of the film because he cannot see their collective significance. It is an

instructive dilemma. His comments on *My Childhood* may be as close as we can now get to a pure experience of the film: as if viewing it outside the context of the Trilogy that would be, but was not yet. Now, only someone entirely ignorant of British film-history could possibly see *My Childhood* this way, free from the otherwise necessary contextual existence of the first with the second and third films.

This early piece by Wilson should remind us of the particularity of the film, which, if we are not careful, can be obscured by its structural context and the history of its reception. At the same time, however, the particularity of the first film cannot be addressed by attending to that film alone. This is the profound mistake made by most film critics studying the Trilogy. Almost all critical attention has been focused on *My Childhood* (to the great neglect of the other two films in the Trilogy), as if it were possible to see the first film entirely independent of the other two. The result, as I will show later, is that individual details in the film are missed and their corporate significance cannot be reconstructed. Sometimes, such detail can only be registered and made sense of if its place in the whole is known. However, Wilson's 'disorientation' may be more than instructive, since the film may not simply occasion his misunderstanding but contrive to elicit it. In my own discussion of the films, I will argue that both the topic and structure of *My Childhood* can be labelled 'disorientation', and that this is proper to its position as the first part of an exemplary—and not romantically idiosyncratic—retelling of the self. Wilson recognizes the presence of this without knowing its tradition, method or purpose:

> What emerges, in the film's deceptively simple style, is a vivid and curiously, even uncomfortably, familiar evocation of childhood. Familiar because these images, while obviously retaining their specific reference and resonance, invite comparison from one's own childhood memories. It's an authentic and oddly lingering record of the moral neutrality of childhood, and all those times when emotion was inseparable from circumstance.

In 1976, the first two films of the Trilogy were shown as part of a Production Board season at the National Film Theatre. Alan Lovell, who organized the season, also wrote an accompanying programme booklet. That season, and the programme booklet, led a prominent group of 'former Board members and grantees' to publish a 'Broadside' directed at the 'British Film Institute Production Board'. The Broadside appeared, along with an essay on 'British cinema in the 1970s' and an interview (recorded in October 1976) with past head of the Production Board Mamoun Hassan in a special issue of the Oxford periodical *Roughcut: Film* (1976). Although Douglas and the Trilogy are mentioned, nothing much is said about the films as films. They appear as pawns in the political brawl over purpose, procedures and products then engulfing the Production Board.[4] Depending upon point of view, they are examples of the success or failure of BFI production. Hassan notes 'that at the BFI there are a lot of people who think that the films should not be made' (15), adding that

> They don't like Bill Douglas' movies, or at least only in as much as they relate to the working class, which Bill is not interested in at all. (15)

That winter, Douglas was again discussed in the context of 'Production Board Policies', this time by John Ellis (*Screen*, Winter 1976/1977; 5–23). Ellis there refers to the Trilogy (that is, to the first two films, as the third was not finished) as a typical product of the Production Board's 'art-film policy' (17). He believes that, like other Production Board films—including *Winstanley* (Brownlow and Mollo, 1975), *A Private Enterprise* (Smith, 1974) and *Requiem for a Village* (Gladwell, 1974)—films of the Trilogy

> share characteristics which mirror their conditions of production, though this may well be coincidental since they are standard features of art cinema: a concern with marginal figures . . . a recreation of the irrecoverable past . . . a stripping away of the expensive surface trickery of straight commercial films . . . but a retention of orthodox narrativity and its positionality. (17)

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[4] This is referred to in the previous chapter.

When he says this, does he mean that the marginal figure in the film matches the filmmaker? A very romantic notion that, though it may be how Ellis reads art cinema—'they are standard features of art cinema'. Yet what are the figures 'marginal' to? And what other kind of past is there but 'irrecoverable'? And is it important that Douglas 'strips away' the 'expensive . . . trickery' (for he did use 'trickery'—what else is filmmaking if not trickery), or the superficial 'trickery', or 'trickery' of the type associated with commercial film? And, finally, what does it mean to retain 'orthodox narrativity and its positionality'? Less is said here than it seems at first. I hope to address some of these questions in my own analysis of the films.

The following summer, *Film Dope* (June 1977: 41–42) published a brief biography, filmography and critical appraisal of the first two parts of the Trilogy (the final film still had not been released). The critical review places Jamie within the 'cinema's brigade of brutalised children' (41), finding behind the presentation, not the idealistic premise 'uniting humanists and Christians' that 'there is something better in store', but the cynical one that the destruction of innocence entails the end of all hope (41). It says that here there is no 'Oliver Twist living happily ever after, or Mouchette splashing into her state of grace' (41). Indeed:

> The films are a daisy-chain of retribution and suffering, in large things (Jaimie has constantly to pay for being born in these circumstances, into this community) and small (when a cat kills Jaimie's budgie, it's inevitable that the next shot will be of a dead cat sailing over a wall). In fact, this uniformity of tone can cause difficulty for an audience . . . but it's worth bearing in mind that as their titles suggest, the films should be perceived as being in the past tense; and the elliptical editing does suggest the selectivity of memory, retaining and rerunning its grimmest data. (41–42)

In the end, *Film Dope* is convinced of two things: first, that an audience would have to 'go a long way to find a picture so unrelievedly bleak' (41)—even the 'few stylistic flourishes . . . in no way enliven the prevailing atmosphere'—and, second, that it is 'unlikely that Part 3 will provide any moderation from this' (42). Perhaps, it suggests, Douglas's 'philosophy' is

the same as Buñuel's, who once said: 'I would like to convey to the audience the absolute certainty that they do not live in the best of all possible worlds' (42).

This deserves some comment. First, I think the Trilogy presents something more insidious than 'brutality', and that it is important to identify the specific nature of the inhumanity these boys suffer. Their life is animal simple, at times savage, but the physical violence that 'brutality' implies is rare and mercifully brief (though, of course, that intensifies the shock when it does occur). The real cruelty, however, is emotional and intellectual: a spiritual corruption, effected in a context of twisted relationships, confused identities and a coarse and confined linguistic order. In addition, the apparent compliance and passivity that this produces in the boys is only a mask, for their guise is punctured by outbursts from the web of intense, unacknowledged self-doubt, anger and guilt hidden below.

Innocence suffers, and suffers terribly, but, as I will show later, it is the perspective of the films, first, that innocence of a sort is necessary to a stable, productive life, and, second, that somehow something of innocence can be resurrected or recovered against tremendous odds (something Douglas himself may only have discovered in writing and filming the story—that is, well after the *now* of experience, when he later turned memory into art). And if innocence is not obliterated, can Jamie's life really be without hope? I think not. True, much of the time hope is lost to sight, like his mother's pearls buried in the slag-heap that represents both the grim, economic means of their purchase and the corrupted environmental reasons for their concealment. Yet hope is there, if inarticulate and often frustrated.

This is evident at the end of the third film (admittedly not available at the time of the *Film Dope* article), where Jamie has a future that in the final scene entails the visible transfiguration of memory itself. But hope also exists in the first two films, where it is visualized in part as Jamie's persistent movement: something he specifically refers to in the last

film, as his real descent into despair is about to begin:

> If I run or walk it does nae make any difference.
> It always comes to the same thing at the end. (*My Way Home* sc. 18: 16)[5]

This movement is not a symbolic action: it represents neither a desire for something specific, nor a romantic belief in 'something evermore about to be' (Siskin 26). It is instead iconic: a repeated, physical projection of the self into the world, as an exposure to the possibility of possibility. This may be hope of a particularly low order, perhaps little more than a biologically-driven attempt at self-preservation, but it is the ground on which a more familiar kind of hope will eventually be built.

What of *Film Dope*'s assurance that those disturbed by Douglas's films can find consolation in the knowledge that 'the films should be perceived as being in the past tense'? 'Sure it's awful', *Film Dope* seems to say, 'But remember, it happened a long time ago; it's all over now!' That may be comforting indeed, but it simply turns an apparent, narrative weakness of autobiography into a virtue to soothe bruised sensibilities. One limitation of true past-tense cinema, which it shares with some autobiography and first-person narrative, is that we anticipate a satisfactory resolution of problems presented in the story. After all, the narrator, like *Moby-Dick*'s Ishmael, survives to tell the tale (allowing, of course, for the 'Owl Creek' phenomenon, where narration comes from beyond the grave).[6] Yet, even if these films were intended as 'unrelievedly bleak' portrayals of destroyed innocence entailing the end of all hope, should the audience be consoled? Would not a discomfited audience be an appropriate result? *Film Dope* tries to satisfy both the intellectual fashion for building a temple to despair, and the popular instinct to find a happy way out.

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[5] Script references appear in the form: 'scene-number: page-number (of appended script)'.

[6] See the Ambrose Bierce story, 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek'.

Is it true, though, that the films are in the past tense? I think not. The only way a film can really be considered as 'past tense' is for it to be narrated as such, which is not true of the Trilogy. Even then, it seems axiomatic that when we experience a film it speaks to us in the present tense: for surely a great part of film's fascination is that we feel ourselves present participants at events happening before our very eyes. Which is not to assume, as so many of those concerned with film's influence do, that we cannot distinguish the shadows on the wall from the world outside; or to pretend that we do not choose to indulge a suspension of disbelief (however film may work its influence, it will be more complex than that). It is the immediacy of our participation in the Trilogy that allows the films to 'cause difficulty for an audience'—and it is right that they should do so. The life and experiences depicted in the Douglas films would be terrible enough if they were those of an adult; that children suffered so is at times almost too painful to watch and contemplate.

Simultaneously, we know the films are autobiographical (though cinematically present-tense). Thus, something must have happened to transform this damaged child, or to allow this damaged child to develop into the writer and director of these remarkable films. The important thing for us to do is to use this knowledge, not to disengage with the unpleasantness of the films in the assurance of a happy ending, but as an incentive to search out the cause and occasion of the transformation, or the line of development (if it is that instead), in the full knowledge and experience of the misery that lies behind it. To do otherwise is to misjudge the nature of the Trilogy, treating it as rigorously *true*, in a historical sense, and denying ahead of time, or placing severe limitations upon, the possibility of fiction and the presence of artistry. These films involve more than a 'few stylistic flourishes', and their style is a crucial part of their design and our experience. Indeed, as I will suggest later, their style is inseparable from

their content and purpose. To read them as social history and forget their art is, at the least, to ignore their terrible beauty.

Leaving aside further differences of understanding, I wish to note some observational problems in the *Film Dope* article, of the sort that plague too much film criticism—and certainly the critical attention directed at Douglas. To begin with, the bird eaten by the cat is not a 'budgie' but a canary (this is, after all, a coal town), and it belongs to Tommy not Jamie (which is the correct spelling of the key character's name, not 'Jaimie', as throughout the article). The cat itself is not 'the family' cat: if it belongs to anyone, it belongs to Jamie (though, significantly, this is never made clear). The importance of the cat lies in its potential as a personal object of possession for the boy: diagetically, a stand-in for a parental giving that is not forthcoming, and, autobiographically, as a souvenir of the same. Finally, it is Tommy, not Jamie, who kills the cat and flings its lifeless form, not over a wall, but over the railing of the symbolically important front stairs of their grandmother's house. This adds up to a remarkable string of confusion, but then *Film Dope* does not even mention Tommy—though, it must be said, the omission saves it from being completely mistaken about the relationship of the two boys. Remarkably, the same cannot be said of *any other article to the present day!*

To accompany the broadcast of the films on television, a brief item appeared in *Radio Times* (26 Sept.–2 Oct. 1981: 19). In the article, Gavin Millar describes the Trilogy as 'a landmark in British cinema', suggesting that the films 'have about them the toughness of mind and the depth of feeling that belong to great work' (19). He finds no trace of self-pity or sentimentality in the films, but 'a remarkably steady, haunted gaze back into a landscape and a time, with its only object total, truthful recall' (19). Millar sets Douglas's portrayal of 'the sodden coalfields of Midlothian' apart from the

> picturesque, soft-headed associations non-miners like to make with steep Welsh valleys, rows of photographable little cottages . . . and ranks of healthy, black-faced but cheerful lads singing their heads off on the way to the pithead baths.

According to Millar, Douglas knew the people of Newcraighall were not like this:

> In Douglas' eyes they were beaten people with spirits as low as the landscape. Suspicion was as likely to be the animating emotion as good neighbourliness.

Yet, despite Millar's belief in the films as faithful records of a 'beaten people with spirits as low as the landscape', we see few villagers and do not properly meet anyone who is not part of the boys' disjointed family. Furthermore, those villagers we do see (who are not part of the family) are not uniformly beaten 'low as the landscape'. Often they are exactly what Millar says they are not: striding miners talking animatedly (perhaps, in fact, 'on the way to the pithead baths'); miners meeting their children after-shift with laughs, hugs and piggyback rides; neighbours, however dour, sharing the street's one unfrozen tap on a cold winter's day; pleasant, if unobtrusive, teachers; and children playing and singing.

And while the songs these children sing might be ironic—Douglas uses them this way in the cut from school to pit shaft in *My Ain Folk* (sc. 29: 13)—the irony (as usual) is extra-diagetic, between the filmmaker and the audience. There is no suggestion that the children themselves are ever aware of it, which is important both within and without the film. Such innocence, however short-lived, is perhaps universally believed to be an essential of childhood, and as such it is an essential area for judging the damage done to Jamie and Tommy, in comparison to the other children, and to children in general.

Like the anonymous author of the *Film Dope* entry, Millar believes that to see the films as 'realistic' is to see them in the best possible light. He is careful to note that Douglas avoids the weaknesses of Realism—what Rosen and Zerner elsewhere identify as the 'three enemies' of realist depiction, 'the sentimental, the picturesque, and the anecdotal' (*Romanticism and*

Realism 164)—but his implicit belief in Realism's veridical descriptiveness leads him to conclude that the director's 'haunted' retrospective gaze has as 'its only object total, truthful recall'. The trouble is, this all depends on a great bit of nonsense that still clings about film criticism (having been questioned in art history and literary studies for some time): namely, that in any form of creative production Realism and the *realistic* are unequivocally predicated on reality. This misconception is commonly heard in remarks of the type: in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, David Lynch reveals the dark underbelly of small-town American life.[7]

The historical persistence of this misunderstanding must depend upon a more fundamental mistake consistently made about the nature of film: namely, that at base, before and despite anything like human subjectivity, the film process mechanically records reality. The belief requires, and then appears to support, a remarkable blindness by its adherents to the effort, planning and artistry required to create a realistic effect or story. As an antidote, those so afflicted should read Flaubert's correspondence concerning *Madame Bovary* and consider the prodigious and legendary effort of style in the novel, an effort of making and shaping which its author considered essential to its pretence of realism.

Whatever stylistic category may be found for the Trilogy, the filmmaker himself has typically been cast as a troubled, romantic genius. This can appear complimentary, as when Tim Pulleine observes that the Trilogy, which is 'ranked by many as among not only the most singular but the most distinguished achievements of the past two decades of British cinema', makes it clear that 'Douglas bids fair to be considered the nearest thing to a British film poet since Humphrey Jennings' ('Bill Douglas A British Film Poet', *AIP & Co.* Nov. 1984: 20–25).[8]

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[7] Heard on *Jonathan Ross*, Channel 4, 19 October 1990.

[8] Part of this article reappeared on the cases of the Connoisseur videos of the Trilogy.

James Marriott repeats the high-art commendation (with painting added to poetry):

> Edinburgh-born Bill Douglas is . . . an auteur in the purest and best sense. Anyone who saw what has become known as his 'trilogy' . . . cannot fail to have been impressed by both his strong visual sense as well as his fastidious narrative skill. He is not only what his recent producer Simon Relph calls a 'master cinema narrator' but has the strikingly vivid imagination of the poet or painter. Like many memorable artists his is capable of transmitting the profoundest idea or emotion in the simplest way. His personal stamp is everywhere. (*Films & Filming*, August 1987: 18)

For Marriott, this crown of laurels has implications for the nation:

> If producers like Relph can tap the visual sensibility of directors like Douglas then we may well develop an indigenous film industry where directors do not just place ideas in the mouths of actors, but inventively graft them onto the fabric of the screen. Let's hear it for poetry. (19)

It all seems remarkable praise for a filmmaker so rarely given the opportunity to make films—a realization that begins to alter the legend, as critics seek ways to justify the neglect.

Six years after Marriott, the troubled artist is becoming the troublesome artist:

> Douglas, who died in 1991, hated having to compromise his vision in the slightest degree, insisting on cameramen and others following his precise instructions and speaking only when they were spoken to. (*TLS*, 24/9/93; 28)

Now his lack of directing opportunities, if not simply a function of his genius, is at least subtly confirmed by it, confirming Douglas as the tortured romantic:

> The Bill Douglas Trilogy is among the best films ever made in Britain, but it has never been shown on general release. Douglas made only one other film, *Comrades*, throughout the whole of his career, a fact that exposes the paucity of outlets for art-house films in Britain, but which also had something to do with the director's difficult personality . . . . (*TLS*, 24/9/93; 28)

One of the few opportunities we have of hearing what Douglas himself sounded like, and hearing how he approached his art, survives in an interview that appeared in the autumn of 1973 in *Jeune Cinéma* (Sept./Oct. 1973). Douglas was, as he says at the beginning of the interview, then 'en train de monter le second film de la trilogie annoncée' [busy arranging the announced second film of the Trilogy] (37). Asked, is that second film to be about his

adolescence, he answers: 'Non, non. Le second film se passe une semaine plus tard' [No, no. The second film takes place one week later] (37). He then goes on to comment on the structure and relationship of what would be become the Trilogy:

> Dans le premier, je parlais d'une partie seulement de ma vie d'enfant, avec partir à la fin du film. Je ne voulais pas faire un film très long, où à un moment les gens disent: violà, ça va finir, c'est la fin. Je n'aime pas les films comme ça, ce n'est pas bien, je trouve, parce qu'on perd le public, et après il faut le retrouver, le ré-intéresser. Alors j'ai décidé de montrer cette phase de ma vie, d'en faire un film et, dans la seconde partie, de parler d'un aspect tout à fait différent de mon expérience, qui aura un autre nom, différent. Et la troisième partie elle non plus ne sera pas directement reliée à la deuxième. Je suis passé par trois stades différents dans mon enfance, et ça m'a paru une raison suffisante pour faire trois choses différentes avec un lien assez lâche. En somme c'est une trilogie sur l'Enfance. (37–38)
>
> [In the first I spoke of one part only of my childhood, from start to finish of the film. I don't want to make a very long film, where at one moment the people say: there, this is about to end, it is the end. I don't like films like that, they aren't good I find, because you lose the audience, and afterwards it's necessary to retrieve them, to reinterest them. So I decided to show this stage of my life, to make of it a film and, in the second part, to speak of an entirely different aspect of my experience, which will have another name, different. And the third part will not directly be connected to the second. I passed through three different stages in my childhood, and that seemed sufficient reason to me to make three different things with one rather loose tie. In sum it's a trilogy on Childhood.]

This is an extraordinarily important passage. The interviewer asks if the second film is about Douglas's adolescence, taking it that the first, being *My Childhood*, might naturally be followed by one about his teenage years and perhaps another about his early adulthood. Underlying this is the assumption that Douglas views his life in terms of the developmental periods normative in modern Western culture. As Douglas's last sentence indicates, however, it is not just the first film (therefore the capitalization of 'Enfance') but the entire Trilogy that is about 'Childhood'. Also, we know in retrospect that in the final film Jamie is old enough for national service. How can the Trilogy then be about 'Childhood'? It is not as if Douglas did not know when the last film would be set, as he says: 'Je suis passé par trois stades différents

dans mon enfance, et ça m'a paru une raison suffisante pour faire trois choses différentes avec un lien assez làche' [I passed through three different stages in my childhood, and that seemed sufficient reason to me to make three different things with one rather loose tie] (38). In other words, he saw his life to the end of his national service, not as a normative passage through typical developmental periods, but as 'trois stades différents' of childhood, which suggests that at the end of that stage he grew up. As I will discuss later, he sees his 'childhood' as *typical*, because, as he reads and rewrites it, that childhood was not at all like the cultural norm.

The interviewer adds that it is now clear the films are autobiographical, to which Douglas responds:

> Oui, aussi authentique que j'ai pu. Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de film qui soit à cent pour cent autogiographique—ni de roman—je ne vois pas comment ce serait possible, mais j'ai voulu l'être autant que j'ai pu. (38)
>
> [Yes, as authentic as I was able. I believe there is no film which could be one hundred percent autobiographical—nor novel—I don't see how it could be possible, but I wanted it to be, as much as I was able.]

Douglas admits that the effects of such self-exposure were very painful during production, but says that to derive anything good 'On ne peut pas être objectif' [One can't be objective] (38). Adding to the discomfort was the fact the film was made in the same village where Douglas had lived as a child:

> Parfois j'ai placé le gosse exactement à la place où je m'assayais moi, voyez-vous, si bien que quand il est assis sur les marches, je me rappelle la marche, la troisième en partant du haut, et il est collé contre la balustrade, le plus près que j'ai pu. Mais placer un acteur si exactement dans un coin où on s'est assis soi-même, c'est une curieuse expérience. (38)
>
> [Sometimes I placed the boy exactly in the place where I used to seat myself, you see, so correctly that when he was seated on the steps, I remember the step, the third counting from the top, and he clung against the balustrade, even closer than I was able. But to place an actor so exactly in a small space where one sat oneself, it is a curious experience.]

There then follows a long, narrative answer to a question about how he found the boys to play Jamie and Tommy. As he puts it, 'C'est eux qui m'ont trouvé, pas moi' [It was they who found me, not me] (38). On his way to conduct formal interviews of children at schools near Edinburgh, Douglas is confronted with the beginning of significant coincidence:

> J'attendais l'autobus numéro 2, et violà ces deux gamins qui arrivent, vers deux heures de l'après-midi, alors que tous les gosses sont à l'école. (39)
>
> [I awaited bus number 2, and there are these two kids who arrive, around two o'clock in the afternoon, at the time when all the children are in school.]

As he waited, the older boy tried to cadge a smoke. Douglas refused, 'j'étais absorbé dans on idée—je n'ai plus fait attention à lui' [I was self-absorbed—I paid him no more attention] (39), so the boy threw himself on the bench next to Douglas, refusing to be ignored. Douglas tried to act 'comme s'il n'était pas là' [like he wasn't there] (39), but something happened:

> Le petit garçon qui est moi dans le film était debout à ma gauche, il ne me quittait pas des yeux, il n'a pas ouvert la bouche: un gosse extrêmement timide, extrêmement renfermé. Très, très timide. Il ne voulait pas dire un mot. J'avais à peine remarqué qu'il était là, tandis que l'autre, Hughie, qui joue Tommy dans le film, était curieux comme tout. Il voulait savoir qui j'étais, ce que je venais faire, pourquoi j'existais. J'évitais de mon mieux de lui répondre, disant seulement que je venais de Londres, mais quand je lui dis que j'étais Ecossais, il s'est esclaffé que ça n'était pas possible, que je n'avais pas l'accent. Alors je dis: « Ah, c'est que je vis à Londres depuis longtemps », et je me retrouvais en train de lui raconter ma vie. Et puis, au bout d'un moment l'idée m'est venue que peut-être ils pourraient . . . Il s'est passé quelque chose d'étrange. Je m'étais mis à parler à ce gamin, je n'étais plus dans mes idées à mois, et tout d'un coup j'ai réalisé que ce gosse à ma gauche, c'était mon Jaimie, moi, très semblable à moi alors, et l'autre, mon cousin. (39)
>
> [The little boy who is me in the film was standing to my left: an extremely timid child, extremely closed up. Very, very timid. He hadn't wanted to say a word. I had scarcely noticed that he was there, whereas the other, Hughie, who plays Tommy in the film, was extremely curious. He wanted to know who I was, what I had come to do, why I existed. I avoided as best I could answering him, saying only that I came from London, but when I told him that I was Scottish, he roared with laughter that that wasn't possible, that I didn't have the accent. Then I said: "Ah, it's that I live in London for long periods", and I got myself ready to tell him the story of my life. And then, after a moment the idea came to me that perhaps they would be able . . . Something strange happened. I had

> begun to speak to this kid, I was no longer in my ideas personally, and all at once I realised that this kid on my left, this was my Jaimie, me, very much like me at the time, and the other, my cousin.]

Douglas suddenly realizes that the boys are more than suitable, are as if reincarnations of himself and his cousin. As Douglas tells it, the story of the coming together of the writer/director and the boys parallels the films in a remarkable way. As he remembers it, the story is structured by coincidence, echo and epiphany, following the films in the implicit assumption that structure and significance are jointly constructed and discovered as given in life.[9] This has nothing to do with the absolute existence of numinous interventions, as traditionally understood. If anything, it is more like Frost's 'design of darkness' in its anonymity, though it does serve as a possible means of redemption rather than as something 'to appal'. Whatever the warrant for its absolute existence, it seems that Douglas (as I said earlier of Jamie) remained open to the possibility of possibility. He also seems to have instinctively structured memory with fortuitous occurrences punctuating a disjunctive, but linear, order. At the very least, we see here the consistency of the man's story telling.

When Douglas suggested to the boys that they play in his film, and asked for their names and addresses, Hughie's answer drew forth the smaller boy's first words. It is again a curious echo, or an eerie anticipation, of the confused family relations of the film (and of the later critical confusion over the relationship of the two boys):

> « M'sieur, il vous a dit un mensonge. Il vous a donné mon nom de famille et mon adresse, mais on n'est pas frères ». (39)
>
> ['Mr., he told you a lie. He gave you my family name and my address, but we are not brothers.']

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[9] A remarkable coadunation of two apparently opposed beliefs concerning significance: one, a belief in its essential giveness, though it must be recognized and responded to (like Pound's luminous moments); the other, a belief in the Viconian *verum factum*.

Curiously, Douglas never mentions the lad's real name, calling him only the 'little boy' or 'Jamie'. In contrast, he talks at some length and in a matey, familiar sort of way, about Hughie (who would be Tommy in the film). The strange and disturbing sense of coincidence and identity continues when he comments on the little boy's acting:

> Il est devenu très semblable à moi, très proche de moi, je ne sais pas bien comment, mais il a changé pendant le film, comme s'il m'assimilait à lui. Et même, certaines choses qui m'étaient arrivées à moi lui sont arrivées à lui aussi depuis le tournage, voyez-vous. Il a eu certaines expériences malheureuses qui sont toutes pareilles aux miennes. Lui aussi est d'une famille très pauvre. C'est étrange et assez troublant. (41)
>
> [He became very like me, very near to me, and I don't well know how, but it changed during the film, as if he assimilated me to himself. And in fact, certain things which came to me came to him also from the filming, you see. He has had certain unhappy experiences which are exactly parallel to mine. He also is from a very poor family. It is strange and also troubling.]

Leaving aside the odd personal parallels, Douglas finds between life, memory and its reconstruction in art, there remains only one more point of interest in the interview to be mentioned here. That is Douglas's response to the apparently technical question of whether he had used black and white stock for financial reasons. He says that, in part, he felt he did not know enough about colour, wanting to get to it gradually. He admits having a great affection for black and white, though he knew that 'Ce n'est pas aussi rentable commercialement' [It's not as commercially profitable] (42).

> Mais c'était le ton juste, je voyais *My Childhood* comme cela. En couleurs, le village a une beauté spectaculaire, à mon avis du moins. J'ai pris des diapositives: cela prend une allure très romantique, si délabré que ce soit. Souvent les endroits comme ça font romantiques, ont beaucoup de charme. Ce que je voulais, c'était cette dureté. . . . j'ai tourné en couleur, et tiré en noir et blanc. J'ai fait ça justement à cause de cette dureté métallique; j'avais expérimenté un peu avec la couleur tirée au noir [sic] quand j'étais à la London Film School, je trouvais qu'il y avait une qualité très spéciale . . . Bref, j'avais le film dans l'idée déjà à ce moment-là, je m'étais promis de l'écrire dès que je sortirai de l'école: à ce moment-là il a été écrit en quatre jours. Et je savais aussi que cette dureté métallique était ce qu'il fallait. (42)

> [But it is the right tone, I saw *My Childhood* like that. In colour, the village had a spectacular beauty, in my opinion at any rate. I took slides: it takes on a very romantic look, however dilapidated it is. Frequently the places that are romantic in this way, have great charm. What I wanted was that hardness. . . . I filmed in colour, and printed in black and white. I did that precisely because of that metallic hardness; I had experimented a little with colour printed in black [sic] when I was at the London Film School, I found that it had a very special quality . . . . Briefly, I had the film in mind already at that time, I had promised myself to write it as soon as I left the school: at that moment it was written in four days. And I knew also that that metallic hardness was what it needed.]

Another interesting perspective on the Trilogy is provided by the descriptive entries for its three films in the BFI catalogue *1951–1976 British Film Institute Productions* (apparently edited by John Ellis, though the only name to appear is that of Hilary Thompson, attached to the Catalogue's Introduction). According to the catalogue, the Production Board had 'taken a role in promoting works which adopt unconventional procedures within the narrative form' (66); and Bill Douglas is used to exemplify these 'unconventional procedures':

> His camera is objective in the sense that it observes from a point of view of its own, not identifiable with the position of any character in the drama. But the camera has a subjective form of seeing: it is that of a child's memory, caught within a specific family situation with no real understanding of its organisation. Some of the coordinates of conventional narrative are therefore lost: the viewer does have an independent position in relation to the characters, but it is not a position of being able to sum up or comprehend what is happening as it happens. . . . In Bill Douglas's films, nothing has a self-evident meaning, and the relations between each event have to be deduced: the spectator has only a fragmentary understanding of the narrative. The films can be seen as experiments in narrative form, producing a style that relies on certain narrative procedures, but radically reworks others. (66)

This has much of interest in it, though it is more like pieces of a puzzle thrown into an attractive pattern than a completed picture. The last sentence of this quotation, for example, has problems on two levels. It is a theoretical comment of a type that too easily distracts attention from the specificity of the film referred to and then provides an excuse for the failure to engage the film's details and complexities. It is also a facile but mistaken reflection on the Trilogy's formal concerns. I will show what I mean in my own discussion of the film, when I

argue the reverse of what is said here: namely, that the notable structure and technique of the Trilogy are not formal artifacts—not at all 'experiments in narrative form'—but the testament, indeed the very souvenir of a personal journey that is also their theme. But let us turn to the Catalogue's actual descriptive entries of the Trilogy.

Each film is given almost the same amount of space in the Catalogue (approximately 600 words each, which in total is about twice as much space as is given to any of the other six films in the section). Yet, despite being catalogue entries made by and for the films' producer, these entries are not free from simple errors. Some may be typographical, as calling Newcraighall, 'Newcraighill' (68 and 70). Others may result from the diction of the particular cataloguer: using 'tip' (68), for example, for the mine's 'slag heap' (Douglas's own usage in *My Ain Folk*—sc. 64: 29), or saying of Jamie's paternal grandmother that 'her hands and legs are wrapped in dirty bandages', when it is her hands and feet that are so wrapped (70). The rest of the errors, however, and by far the greater number, are the result of failures of attention, and, perhaps, of trusting too much to memory. Here are some of the mistakes and misunderstandings listed by film:

My Childhood (68)

- *My Childhood* is set in 1945, and deals unsentimentally with memories of the poverty-stricken childhood of the two brothers.
- A brief close-up of photos of two sisters is the only hint at the identity of the boys' mother.

My Ain Folk (69)

- An exemplary sequence starts in the school. Jamie listens to another child, reading a treatise on nature.

My Way Home (70)

- The past is recalled for the first time in company, indicated by the opening school photo.
- As the kindly teacher comforts a depressed boy, Jamie listens, dejected, until he suddenly hurls his dinner and present away and runs screaming from the room.
- Returning to the cottage [his grandmother's], he finds it all boarded up.

The first of these is a substantial error, though, as I said before, it appears in all the critical material from Wilson's *Sight and Sound* article of 1973 to Caughie's of 1991. Put simply, Jamie and Tommy are not brothers. They are cousins. This then connects to the 'photos of two sisters', which do not hint at the identity of the boys' mother, but depict the two mothers of the two boys. True, Jamie does have a brother, a half-brother, but it is Archie, the 'child, reading a treatise on nature' in *My Ain Folk* (another family detail no one mentions). Then we have the opening photo in the final film, which is not a 'school photo', but one of the Queen with an infant Charles on her lap surrounded by members of her family. Later still, when Jamie sweeps his Christmas pudding off the table and runs from the room, he does not scream, but remains silent throughout. Finally, when he returns to his grandmother's place for the last time, it is not 'boarded up'; rather he discovers a strange man in his father's house and a young Asian woman in his grandmother's.

Such failures of observation and attention must make the catalogue's interpretive effort suspect. How does it interpret the films? Well, the coherence and certainty of a brightly-buffed interpretive template goes some way towards masking the poor observational skills. The clear orientation of the analysis is symptomatic and past directed. Like the Freudianism it uses to sustain itself, its strength lies in suggesting connections between the past and present (however fanciful), but it shares Freud's weakness in its relative silence about the way forward. This is unfortunate, considering the direction taken by the Trilogy.

In the entry for *My Childhood* (68), we are told that 'each of . . . [the films] exists independently, trac[ing] the childhood and adolescence of Jamie, growing up in Newcraighill'.[10] I will not comment again on Douglas's own assertion that the films are all

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[10] Each entry takes one page in the Catalogue. This will be noted in parentheses after the first reference, but will not be repeated.

about his 'childhood', but I would suggest the independent status of each film is a product of their structural fidelity to what Douglas called the 'trois stades différents dans mon enfance' (*Jeune Cinéma* 38), which gives no reason to think of them as anything but the three leaves of a complex whole.

The entry for *My Childhood* suggests that the film is essentially interested in 'identity': 'The film is not simply concerned with physical deprivation, but with the deprivation of the routes by which identity is usually formed'. It also says that, at the expense of conventional narrative, this interest is explored 'according to the subjective logic of the memories of childhood: history, village events, the children's own familial situation are only given through particular memories'. Form and content come together as 'images of a strange, isolated childhood marked by absences; absences of comfort, food, parents and family structures'. Throughout, Jamie is marked as different. This is expressed, not through comment, but 'through allusion'. Even his friendship with Helmuth 'indicates [his] isolation and difference'.

The Catalogue then makes several observations that I will discuss later. First, it says that 'Jamie's childhood is never quite a childhood, hence the irony of the title. He moves between ineffectual childhood and an enforced adult responsibility . . . '. At fault are 'the incomprehensible relationships which lie behind Jamie's ambivalent childhood. He is excluded from these relations but they nevertheless determine his life'. Neither boy has 'access to understanding their lives; and the lack of dialogue stresses this'. Cinematically, 'This childhood incomprehension is marked by the almost gestural scenes . . . '. The entry concludes by saying:

> The images of the film are neither isolated, nor images of a hypothetised [sic] universal emotion of childhood. Nor is it a film tracing roots or origins. It is the absence of the latter which governs the images in the film. Memories of a specific childhood are placed in relation to a familial context whose significance is refused to the child but which is nevertheless forming his identity.

This analysis fails, in part, because it implies we do not identify with the characters so much as accept and learn from the director's technique of analysing "developmental psychology", "family structure" and "narrative"—as if the film were formally a stylistic experiment and thematically a case history. I think that it is a far more personal creation and far differently instructive. Furthermore, the Catalogue is in danger of suggesting that Jamie's 'identity' problems make him a nonentity. This is wrong: he has an identity that has been frustrated, abused and rejected by others, an identity that he is unsure of and perhaps out of touch with, but one that remains remarkably strong. After all, he survives; in the next film he resists his Granny and his Uncle; ultimately he is responsible for the films themselves.

The Catalogue says that 'identity' and 'deprivation' are *My Childhood*'s specific interest, both of which are supposed to be governed by 'absences' dependent upon the problem of absent parents. The trouble with this idea of 'absence' is it is now so popular, so much a critical cliché, that it endangers understanding by its very use. It distracts attention here from what is instead a tremendous sense of immediacy and presence in the films, especially as to the characters who seem so powerfully THERE. Absences are used in the film, both diagetically—things missing from the lives of the boys—and aesthetically the film itself partakes in a minimalism which throws the few characters and events into an intensely focused and projective prominence—but the problem of absence lies more in its use than its ability to define the films.

The interpretative problems of the first entry mean that *My Ain Folk* (69) is taken to be rather more of the same miserable tale. Yes, the first two films are of consecutive temporal periods (separated by only a week, as Douglas has told us), but if it is just more of the same, I think we should ask: 'To what end?' 'How much misery do we want or need to see, just for the sake of misery?'

The essay finds that the title of this film too is ironic:

> the family concerned are both Jamie's blood relations but also strangers to him, who never really allow Jamie a place. The definitions by which family relations are conventionally organised are confused—to Jamie the relations around him are enigmatic and hidden.

And in this, the essay finds the quality of the second film:

> The complexity and depth of the film is to do with this uncertainty. The static gestural scenes of *My Childhood* are multiplied and conventional narrative organisation disappears almost totally. The scenes revolve around sexual jealousy, guilt, hypocrisy and intrigue—always implicating Jamie but always also excluding him, refusing him a place. He is reduced to almost total passivity and inarticulateness.
>
> Again it is the confused and corrupt family situation that governs the lives within the

film and the film's structure:

> interests and memories of childhood are overdetermined by events which form Jamie's deprivation. The memories are not isolated images, nor do they follow the logic of consequent and temporally coherent action, as does conventional narrative.

This then indicates where we are to look for the film's significance.

> The film thus provides both a particularly interesting exploration of the formation of a child—the mixture of conscious and unconscious processes in the image—and also exposes the premises on which conventional narrative is organised. In the latter, it is identity which is finally ensured; narrative movement is created by the solution of enigma, or the resolution of a disruption, involving some kind of Oedipal resolution. The refusal of the usual structures of identification to Jamie govern the particularity of the subjective arrangement of the film. His depressive withdrawal, his inability to speak coherently and his passive removal away from his "ain folk" to "the home" all confirm the confusions of identity which structure the film.
>
> As I will show, however, these films, like 'conventional narrative', are driven by a

concern for the establishment or confirmation of identity—it's just that most of the reel-time is involved with depicting the disruption, malformation, or delayed development of identity. The 'solution of enigma' begins at the very end of the Trilogy, and is, by implication of the films themselves, worked out beyond the world on film—perhaps in their own production.

The Catalogue entry for *My Ain Folk* mentions some curious elements of the film, though it does not make much of them. It refers to the apple, for example, which it calls 'symbolic', without suggesting how Douglas uses the symbol or what it symbolizes. It also mentions the 'extraordinary sequence' when

> the film moves from Jamie's dispirited withdrawal in the classroom, through a blackboard diagram to a vision of stars in the night sky, hinting at the fragmentary extension of the child's horizon beyond the confines of the family.

Take away the three-dollar words, however, and what it describes is little more than a child's brief daydream. Surely there is more to the sequence than that.

The entry for *My Ain Folk* ends with the assertion that 'The overall organisation of the film lies in the merging of . . . particular memories with the emotional structures which govern Jamie's life'. Again, there is some sensitivity here to details of the film, but the film itself is taken as if it stood alone—nothing is made of its temporal and stylistic connection to the preceding film, and no mention at all is made of the succeeding film. There is, in fact, no awareness of the very thing that connects and governs all three, no consciousness of the filmmaker making the film: specifically, that this boy is also the considerable artist who here recreates the story of his childhood. Are the films then essentially retrospective, a recreation of a past that explains the screwed-up adult of the present? This would make the films a kind of Freudian, self-help therapy? If so, it is a desperately individual effort, of little lasting significance or interest to anyone: except perhaps voyeurs titillated by another person's misery. I would suggest, however, that there is instead a strong teleological orientation in the Trilogy, which, however obscured in the first two films, is the attractor that draws the whole Trilogy on to an ending that takes us back to where we started.

I will now move on to consider the entry for *My Way Home* (70), a film the Catalogue says continues 'in the unmistakable sparse style of the other two'. Unlike the first two films,

however, the third is divided into two parts, 'marked by Jamie's sudden departure to Egypt with the army'. Well, this is superficially true, but desperately imprecise: the division of *My Way Home* into two parts does make it different, but the mark of that division is not a 'sudden departure to Egypt' but Egypt's sudden appearance, its sudden presence before us. For one brief but extremely important moment, it is not clear where we are (it is clear only that this a desert location, which the soundtrack eventually suggests is Middle Eastern). Neither do we know who is present (no one is shown, initially the only sound is of two voices trying to talk over the noise of a truck—this in a Trilogy notable for silence and failed words). Finally, even when we recognize that one voice is Jamie's, we do not know how he came to be here. It is an excellent example of observation distorted by an obsession with a preconceived notion, here, the Cataloguer's obsession with 'departure' and 'absence'.

The Catalogue entry is not finished with prevarication, however, for we are next told that, in truth, both the film and the main character are different from the rest of the Trilogy, since, for the first time, they are both 'concerned with Jamie's struggle to master his own history'. Actually, says the Catalogue entry, it is really only the first half of the film that is similar in style and theme to the two previous films; although, then again, its opening 'is already slightly different', since

> The past is recalled for the first time in company, indicated by the opening school photo. Jamie is one amongst the other boys in the home . . . .

Well, as noted above, the photo is of the Royal family and never in the Trilogy is Jamie's past remembered in company.

As the essay goes on through its discussion of the first half of the film, it emphasises two things in particular about Jamie. The first is an increase in his isolation and despair, the second is an increase in his linguistic and sexual impotence:

> The film becomes increasingly desolate. Jamie may have language to scream replies at Grandmother's self-pitying accusations, but it is language only to name his lack, his inertness, his sense of being adrift. All that follows, even when he returns to the home, exacerbate this. He can neither articulate his misery not [*sic*] bear it when forced to work in the mine; his inadequacy is reinforced socially by class divisions and in his total inability to cope with girls.

Yet, when, in the next paragraph, the Catalogue moves on to discuss the second part of the film, we read that

> The shift to Egypt to a view of desert and palm trees is abrupt and appropriate. It indicates a different phase, distinct from the period preceding. In a truck, Jamie is 'in conversation'. An upper-class voice interrogates him. They barely understand one another. . . . They come together as a strange pair in an arid setting: their differences are very great.

Well, yes, so they are, but no less than the abrupt and distinct change in story and style between the two parts of the film (which is mirrored in the differences between these two paragraphs). This, however, does not seem to merit any comment or analysis. Now, it is praiseworthy that the Catalogue bothers saying anything at all about the last film: for no one else talks about it. Indeed, the last film of the Trilogy, and the second part of that film in particular, is a critical scandal in the brief history of Douglas studies. This too will be discussed in the next section, but let me say here what it is that I take to be the reason for this shameful behaviour. It is that *My Way Home*, and the Egyptian part of it in particular, determines the structure and significance of all that precedes it in the Trilogy. The trouble with this is it suggests such an unfashionable, and now unfamiliar, purpose and significance for the films that film critics avoid it in horror and confusion, if they do not miss it altogether.

By the time the author of the brief essays in the Production Board Catalogue has come to *My Way Home*, the interpretive direction taken earlier, regarding the first two films, has led to disorientation and interpretive impasse. Perception is betrayed by conception, which leads the commentator to trope the text he or she would interpret. The author of the entries is,

despite various, and rather too many, observational errors, still aware of much of what goes on in the film—indeed, if this were not so, the films themselves would be to blame, and would be unworthy of further consideration. The problem being that the films have not been looked at carefully enough, often enough, with a mind as free from preconceived critical ideas as is possible, for as long as possible.

Much of the evidence concerning a film is literally there before our eyes (rather more than most theoretical approaches would like to admit): when we see an apple that clearly is an apple, it is almost certain that we will all report that is what we saw. This does not mean, however, that we understand the apple's use or significance diagetically or extra-diagetically. I am not ignoring the inevitable existence of the ambiguous, but the uncertain should only be addressed after that which appears certain. This takes exceptionally careful, open observation, through multiple viewings (the immense attraction of preconceived critical approaches in film studies must have something to do with a perceived lack of time for such revision), followed by a humble critical approach,[11] in which any explanation is subjected to a concerted and continuing refinement towards the ideal goal of including every aspect of the film, thereby discovering *in the film itself* its purpose and significance.

> The item on *My Way Home* ends with a coda for the entire Trilogy:
>
> Thus the Bill Douglas trilogy is more than a series of subjective memories. It is also a profound exploration of the social and familial structuring. *My Way Home* ends with the camera wandering around the white rooms of the empty cottage in Newcraighill [*sic*]. The way home is not literally back to a home that never existed as such, but a journey through a bewildered history to a sense of what that history has made.

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[11] Coleridge somewhere gives the excellent critical advice: 'Presume yourself ignorant of a poet's understanding, until you understand his ignorance'.

How the audience is to judge 'that history' and what it 'has made' I do not know. As for Jamie, there is no sense in which this insight can be predicated of him without some reference, at least, to the fact that this mistreated and impoverished boy became the man who made these films. That, however, would require a different reading of the Trilogy.

I conclude this critical overview with *Sight and Sound*'s two-article memorial to Bill Douglas (Nov. 1991). Scottish film-historian John Caughie wants to deodorize film studies of 'a distinct whiff of institutional guilt' over having ignored Douglas while alive in 'The way home' (26–27). That is preceded by 'His ain man' (22–26), in which Mamoun Hassan, who was head of production at the BFI when the Trilogy was selected for support, gives a more anecdotal report of the Trilogy seen from the Board's perspective.

According to Hassan, making the Trilogy 'was, in fact, the result of a sleight of hand' (22). When he took over as head of production from Bruce Beresford in 1971, the script on top of the pile of projects that might receive funding was titled *Jamie*:

> I had never read anything like it. No standard 'slug' line for each scene—ext/int, location, day/night—spare description of setting, no emotional padding. Instead, the 'facts' of the shot were implicit. There was no depiction of an event which would somehow be filmed, but a series of images and sounds which, simply and concisely, communicated feeling. It was visual storytelling. It was cinema. (22)

The Board responded with most of the available money ('£3500'), to stunning effect:

> There was no coverage of scenes from different angles; uncompromising, he went for the unique shot. And each shot had an intense clarity of line and feeling. He was a poet. (24)

Hassan was then being constrained from supporting feature films at the Board, and he feared Douglas would not easily find backing in the industry. Fortunately Douglas, 'encouraged by Lindsay Anderson to admit the nature of his film, changed the title to *My Childhood*' (24). This gave Hassan his opening:

> With the echo of the two great childhood trilogies of Ray and Gorki, I felt I could sell the board the idea that we had not supported a whole film, but only part of a film—the first part of a trilogy—and that we were already half-committed to the other two parts. The chairman, Sir Michael Balcon, and Stanley Reed, then director of the BFI, supported the wheeze. And so the Trilogy was born. (24)[12]

However, filming did not go easily:

> During the writing he described the shot as it played in his head; during the shooting he did not have to *find* it, he had to re-create it. (24)

Douglas was so clear about what he wanted that 'it didn't leave much room for collaboration' (24). During production,

> If he didn't get the shot he wanted, both he and the unit paid for it. He would literally go mad. It was never a performance; he was not a *prima donna*. He didn't care much for status or money—it was the work. Still, I wanted to kill him sometimes. I was determined that nobody should do it but me. (24)

During the shooting of the second film, Hassan had to fly to Scotland to discourage a mutiny by the crew and steady a director who, the sound engineer reported, was 'breaking up' (24).

Despite the problems, Hassan feels that Douglas's distinctive style matured on *My Ain Folk*:

> His style consisted in creating gaps between scenes—scenes which were often single shots—which the audience would mentally have to jump across. . . . Sometimes he went too far and created a gap which the audience couldn't or didn't want to cross. But at his best . . . he touched the sublime . . . . (24)

Despite the artistry, Hassan's story begins and ends mourning the fact Douglas had been allowed to accomplish so little. He had been with Douglas at the 1972 Venice Film Festival, when *My Childhood* won the Silver Lion:

> I should have been able to add that his career took off. But we were living in Britain. Over the next nineteen years, one of the few authentic voices of British cinema made only three more films. (22)

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[12] The connection between the Douglas Trilogy and Donskoi's Gorki Trilogy is more one of homage than imitation—rather like Picasso's artistic tribute to Velázquez. Indeed, outside of a superficially similar title for the first film of each trilogy, their concerns and even their treatment of everything from cinematic technique to narrative character differ markedly.

When Hassan left the Board, funding for *My Way Home* was secure: 'When I returned Bill had finished the Trilogy and was a world name. At home, he did not receive a single offer' (26).

The elegiac note of unappreciated and unfulfilled genius is repeated in the companion piece by Caughie, though his stated purpose is more to analyse the craft and critical standing of Douglas. I have mentioned Caughie's nose for the 'institutional guilt' in much of what has been written about Douglas since his death, and he warns against the danger of letting such guilt serve as critical motivation. He also offers a solution for those who would be sincere:

> . . . I have the feeling that the guilt that underpins the sense of loss at Bill Douglas' death could perpetuate the lack of critical engagement with his work. We must not allow him to remain an obsessive misfit or marginalised genius and fail to grasp the productive unease which his work creates within the more secure traditions of British film culture. Don't mourn: analyse. (27)

What of his own analysis of the Trilogy? Well, according to Caughie, the films were

> Mistaken when they first appeared as yet more British humanist realism . . . too individualistic to point to film as a social practice, and too realist to open the way to the avant-garde whose absence had always (has always) deformed British film culture and whose advent was eagerly awaited after the events of 1968. (26)

What was worse, the films and their writer/director were rarely referred to afterwards:

> you could expect this of English filmmakers, critics and teachers—but in Scotland? . . . In 1982, when a group of us tried to build a polemic to attack the debilitating traditions of kailyard and tartanry, we 'forgot' Bill Douglas, whose films stand in . . . destructive relationship to the filmic kailyard tradition . . . . (26–27)

Fortunately, however, Caughie eventually remembered—that is, after he 'showed *My Childhood* on a double bill with Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* . . . [he] realised what a central film it was' (27).[13] He does not mention the Trilogy's other two films, but,

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[13] Interestingly, Davies had also made a childhood trilogy for the BFI—*Children* (1974), *Madonna and Child* (1980) and *Death and Transfiguration* (1983). The undoubted influence of the Douglas films on Davies would make a worthwhile study.

having confessed this much at least—and 'Confession is, of course, good for the soul' (27)—Caughie can now tell us how to go on. His advice is 'Don't mourn: analyse'.

But wait a moment! In the kailyard paragraph quoted above, what are the inverted commas around the word *forgot* meant to signify? Is it a quotation? Is the word used in a special or unusual way? I suspect they mark a slip of conscience. Four years after the Trilogy was completed, when, as Hassan says, Douglas 'was a world name', Scottish film academics did not forget him, they ignored him, or rejected him. Why? Possibly because unlike too many of the academics the films were uninterested in post-1968 millennial expectations, being more independent and more profound than intellectual fashion. The final problem Douglas presented for everyone was exactly his independence—whether of vision, aesthetic, production, politics or philosophy.

What probably occurred to Caughie, after his double-bill showing of *My Childhood*, was how he could finally subdue the too independent Douglas to his and his colleagues' 'polemical' project. The *Sight and Sound* article shows how this was to be done. Caughie settled upon seeing the Trilogy in terms of the first film:

> on the basis of the description [*My Childhood* sc. 13: 7], something can be said about this scene which may open out on to how the film and the Trilogy work, and why we need to understand Douglas better. (27)

The limited analysis that there is, is confined to *My Childhood* (but for one remark to be considered shortly). In this analysis, Caughie misreads the structural use of scene, frame and gesture as an established, 'highly formalised' technique for social analysis, drawn from a politically correct European tradition. This later warrants his declaration that Douglas is a European in his filmmaking, and that 'It is perhaps his Europeanness which made it so hard to recognise him as Scottish in the early 80s . . . ' (27). Thus for making this kind of film,

Caughie can define Douglas as a European of the sort who would make this kind of film, and this makes him truly worthy of our attention.

Yet whatever debts Douglas might owe for his cinematic skills (and no one works in a cultural and historical vacuum), for Caughie to see Douglas's technique as appliqué is to mistake his own critical method for evidence. It means Caughie can neither come to terms with nor move on from the stylistic nexus of the Trilogy, what Milton would have thought of as its decorum: that remarkable fit of technique to content in a serious work of art. This is of such a standard in the Trilogy as to suggest, not just that technique is closely allied to intent and content, but that it is in iconic relationship to it. Of course, the benefit of Caughie's point of view is that it allows him to suppress the intensely personal nature and purpose of the films. The article implies that they are examples of 'film as a social practice', but that this remains an implication only suggests how far off the mark even Caughie feels he has gone.

To look at this a bit closer, Caughie says nothing at all about the longest film of the Trilogy, *My Ain Folk*, and though the article is called 'The way home' he makes only a passing reference to the last film of the Trilogy, and that being a notable example of elision, and insensitivity. Indeed, the title of the article itself is a perverse use of the title of the final film of the Trilogy: the idea of home in *My Way Home* being exactly not that of a welcome return to bonnie Scotland, which is just what Caughie means by it.

Why does Caughie so confine himself to the first film? Well, as I have suggested before, I think it is because the first film seems the most amenable to his preconceived understanding: the structural use of frame, scene and gesture seems especially foregrounded there. Furthermore, his analytical technique leads him to conclude that 'scenes have to be read backwards' to be understood. While I would understand this to mean that we must study the

Trilogy with the final scenes always in mind, Caughie seems to think this means the opposite: that he only needs the first film to know the other two.

Unfortunately, even the analysis Caughie undertakes is suspect, for the same reason that has dogged all the critics so far: observational error. He draws attention to what he calls

> the intense net of family relationships and misrecognitions: Tommy's dead mother, Jamie's mad mother, Tommy's father who is not, as Jamie thought he was, the same person as Jamie's father. (27)

Now I am sure I understand that, but, however often I read it, I cannot understand how, five paragraphs earlier and four paragraphs later, Tommy can also be Jamie's older brother:

> More precisely: Tommy, the older brother, has brought home a bunch of dead and drooping flowers from his mother's grave.
> . . . . . .
> The shot is held until, just before the cut, Tommy's arm creeps round his brother's shoulder. (27)

Caughie is clearly caught in his own net of misrecognitions.

Elsewhere, his consideration of that most discussed scene—Jamie's use of a teacup to warm his Grannie's hands—has things to recommend it, but he goes too far suggesting that:

> Following the Soviet montage stylists whom Douglas admired . . . the scene, like the film as a whole, is built in blocks which exist in dialectical rather than causal relationship with each other. In many instances a change in the order of the scenes might damage the rhythm, but it wouldn't change the narrative. (27)

The qualification in the last sentence, for example, makes it too broadly applicable to tell us much, for all but the most simply plotted narratives have some scenes that could be so interchanged. True, Douglas does not use a classically-seamless narrative cut, but it is a narrative nonetheless. What is important is not how his notable style might fit an external narration of cinematic technique, but how it suits the story being told and the reasons for telling it, how they illuminate and contribute to one another. Until this has been explored, external stories rest on uncertain ground: 'Don't [fabricate]: analyse'.

THE TRILOGY

My Childhood, *My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home* tell the story of a young Scottish lad called Jamie. On this we might all agree. Beyond this, however, inclination, preoccupation, even observation itself, begin to confound understanding. Now Douglas wants us to share his protagonist's confusion living in an often senseless world, but the problem of understanding is made infinitely worse by a social failure external to the films, initially an educational failure, that forms part of the social context in which the films were created, viewed and reviewed. The disjunctive style of the Trilogy—the apparent lack of narrative sense and order in the films—mirrors a general, observational failure too common in academic and journalistic film-criticism. This, I believe, is no accident. For surely a self-conscious and devoted filmmaker like Douglas, who found the ringing praise of critics, film professionals and cultural apparatchiks so rarely led to the opportunity to make films, was keenly aware of the failure.

Leaving aside the biophysical limitations of human perception and intellection, the problem I refer to can be traced to our educational systems, which inadequately provide for the predominance of visual media today. We all are disabled in the face of the perceptual and conceptual demands such media make upon anything more than a precritical response, and we will remain so disabled as long as we are without a training and a trained experience in watching films and television that is as comprehensive and long-term as we receive in reading and understanding writing.

Despite Marshall McLuhan's intoxication with the idea, it is not print, but film, radio and television that are linear. As I read, I can mark places in a book, in memory, or with a pencil, slips of paper, or my fingers, and then turn forward and back at will and ease to remind myself of descriptions, events or the names, words or actions of characters. With experience I

then can build a more abstract sense of allusion, reference and structure; for I decide the absolute pace and direction of reading myself, as reader. All of this is possible in the normal course of reading, for it inheres in the *technology* of the book and the way we interact with it.

When we attend to the electromagnetic media, however, they do the driving—projecting at us a precisely linear stream of information, which, in the normal conditions of reception, is largely lost upon receipt. The electromagnetic media move us along at their pace in their chosen direction (or they leave us behind). The ability to understand details or build any sense of allusion, reference or structure depends, in the first instance, upon observation and memory, but since the data delivery is temporal and relentless (rather than spatial and static, as with print), we cannot easily flag information, even in memory. Of course, there are technical means that allow us to treat the electromagnetic flow as if fixed—in the case of film, these include editing tables, which allow frame by frame analysis, or video copies of films played on video machines with facilities for stop-frame, slow-motion and indexing—but these technical aides are almost never available under the normal conditions of reception. Thus the foundation of good film criticism should be a more than usual degree of scepticism about the precision of one's own powers of observation and memory.

The notable ease with which we become entranced by the visual media does not mean we can just as easily understand and judge *on the fly* the information stream they direct at us. Without formal training in the watching of film and television, most people still use and treat these media as little more than a means of escape,[1] while intellectuals are too often seduced into the lazy habit of treating them only through critical templates.

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[1] Even the news becomes little more than a product for consumption.

Of course, observation and memory have their limits. If we are to build a tradition of sound and useful film criticism, we must use all technical means at our disposal, under the guidance of proven scholarly procedures, to establish conclusive texts of films and their associated documents. Then, as importantly, we must use these means and procedures to attend carefully to the specificity of those texts. Despite the modernity of the medium, what film deserves, and desperately needs, is a commitment to a specific text followed by a scholarly attention to detail.

I will begin my consideration of Jamie's story by recounting noteworthy moments from the Trilogy's three films. This is not a futile recitation of the obvious, the study of film is new, its procedures unstable and its subject matter vast, and I cannot assume that anyone reading this is necessarily familiar with the films under consideration. That would not be true if I were talking about *King Lear*, *Pride and Prejudice* or 'The Waste Land': only rarely would I need to recount the story told by these works before engaging in analysis.[2] Film study still requires something basic: the selection of a text and the establishment of its details on which close critical attention is then focused. Too much criticism assumes a consensus (assumes almost a consensus of perception) about what are the details of a film. It then assumes further that the story is well known, or, worse, that it is transparently accessible.

I feel that recitation of details from the Trilogy is necessary since, at least for the reasons noted above, those who have commented on it cannot even agree on the names, identities, words or actions of its characters. Without some agreement on the details at least, we can never identify what is significant, and if we cannot identify what is significant, any talk of allusion, reference and structure is fantasy. This may be why criticism of the Trilogy has

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[2] Although, to take such canonical works as always, *invariably* available is to avoid the fluid question of textual authority.

been largely in the tradition of the *Lecturae Dantis*: namely, an episodic examination that picks out bits and pieces for admiration and discussion without seeing the fragments in the context of the whole work.

I do not retell the whole story of the films in what follows: such narration would distort the Trilogy's own disjunctive style and take up too much space. Instead, the material is presented in point-form under the title of each film. Also, the lists are not comprehensive, since the films are anything but dispassionate documents and are as rich in significant material as we could expect of such creative work. Simultaneously, however, the lists are not arbitrary records of my own creativity, but carefully prepared catalogues of focused observation. Details are taken from the scripts, films, and from Douglas's own comments.

As I begin, it is worth remembering that there really are three films, since almost everything written about the Trilogy spills ink only on the first. *My Childhood* takes place at the end of World War II (a village bonfire five scenes from the end of the film marks the war's end). *My Ain Folk*, as Douglas says in the *Jeune Cinéma* interview, begins a week later (in the Synopsis that opens the script held in the BFI, Jamie is then nine and his cousin Tommy eleven). *My Way Home* takes place some time after that, since by mid-film Jamie is old enough for National Service. The films take place in Newcraighall, Edinburgh and several locations in lower Egypt. Geographically and architecturally, space in the first two films is narrowly confined, while in the third film it opens out significantly in both areas.

MY CHILDHOOD

● [Title] A siren screams over the words: 'My Childhood'.

● [Sc. 1] A high-angle shot down on the mine & village.

● [Sc. 2] As children sing 'All Things Bright & Beautiful', cut to an aerial shot of countryside after: 'The ripe fruits in the garden,/He made them every one'.

● [Sc. 3] The maternal grandmother's house in sharp, hard contrast. Tommy & his granny climb labouriously to their door.

● [Sc. 4] Jamie digs for coal in a slag heap. A whistle marks the end of shift & happy fathers & children meet far below Jamie watching from the filth above.

● [Sc. 5] Jamie runs to a field & meets the German POW: birds sing throughout.

● [Sc. 6] Tommy chops their furniture for a fire, Jamie has brought home a few small pieces of coal. Tommy berates him & the boys fight.

● [Sc. 7] Jamie asks about his 'da and ma'. Tommy says she is dead, & that means heaven, & that is a beautiful house in the sky. There are photos on the wall of two young women. Granny moans: 'What have they done to you! God curse them!'

● [Sc. 8] Jamie stares at the sun & passing clouds.

● [Sc. 9] Jamie teaches Helmuth English from an alphabet book (starting, 'A' for apple). A left-to-right-inclined road along the horizon of a field is first seen. Jamie gives Helmuth the book. Later, pretending he is a plane, he chases a black cat.

● [Sc. 11] Tommy stands in a graveyard before a gravestone with some dry, dead flowers before it. He takes them when he leaves.

● [Sc. 13] The flowers sit in a cup of water on the table, Jamie dumps them on the floor to heat the cup to warm Granny's hands. Children can be heard playing.

● [Sc. 14] Tommy does not know it is his birthday. His father brings him a canary. Intercut on one of the photos of young women. Granny rages at the father.

● [Sc. 18] Granny smashes the birdcage with a broom.

● [Sc. 19] Jamie tells Tommy: 'Granny's lost.'

● [Sc. 20] Granny stands bewildered in a sea of tall grass, Jamie comes with a yowling, black cat & leads her off.

● [Sc. 21] Jamie watches a military plane, a man (his unknown father) wordlessly gives him a bright coin & goes off home.

● [Sc. 22] Helmuth teaches Jamie German (starting, *Apfel*). They laugh & hug. Jamie says: 'I want something easy'; Helmuth answers: '[*Ich muss nach Hause gehen*]', & they roll down the hill holding each other tightly, laughing.

● [Sc. 23–25] Tommy tells Jamie he has a different father & points to where he lives. Jamie gets no answer at the house. Tommy is punished for telling.

● [Sc. 26] Jamie shares Helmuth's lunch, then puts his arms round the man & says: 'I love you Helmuth'.

● [Sc. 27] A night bombing. In a shelter an old man sings 'O! Rowan Tree'. Jamie tries to take an apple from a sleeping girl.

● [Sc. 28] Tommy face a frozen mask of horror as the cat eats his bird. He kills the cat, & triumphantly appears on a pedestrian overpass, arms held high, in the steam & smoke of a train passing below.

● [Sc. 29] Old Mrs. Knox strokes her son, telling him: 'You're mine. . . . She was a whore son, all women are whores.'

● [Sc. 30] Jamie & Granny on a bus. A figure is glimpsed in a field. Jamie has an apple in his pocket. He studies a piece of paper & asks: 'Granny, who's Mary?'

● [Sc. 31] They have gone to an asylum to see Jamie's mother. Granny gives an apple to Jamie who puts it on his mother's bed. The nurse lifts it & Jamie accuses her outright. Granny begins to cry & Jamie's mother pulls the sheet over her head.

● [Sc. 33] Granny turns aimlessly in a field, nodding & moaning. Tommy & Jamie run to fetch her. She holds a dead bird wrapped in paper in her arms. Tommy leads her off.

● [Sc. 34] The end of war is marked by a village bonfire & singing. Cut to cold ash & unburned refuse in the street.

● [Sc. 35] A bus waits. In a field, Helmuth helps Jamie with a kite. Suddenly he says 'I have got to go home now' & flees. Jamie lets the kite go & runs after the bus calling out 'Helmuth'.

● [Sc. 36] Jamie sunk on the ground by a fence. The wind blows.

● [Sc. 37] Jamie, in bed. As Tommy tries to console him, he pulls the sheet over his head as his mother did in the asylum.

● [Sc. 39] Granny dies. Jamie flees to the railway, listens on the tracks, then waits for a train. He runs onto the bridge, climbs over the side in the steam & smoke & drops. Cut to Jamie: he sits up in a loaded coal car; the bridge retreats behind; he spits. The train goes past the mine & out of sight.

MY AIN FOLK

● [Sc. 1] Alpine scenery, startling colour, lush music & Lassie. Cut to black & white inside a cinema. Tommy cries in the darkness. Then a framed series of black & white shots at the mine. As its lift drops into the earth, a 'mountainous whine' begins.

● [Title] The whine builds over the simple title. Captions suggest how confused Jamie will be.

● [Sc. 5] Jamie, asleep in his Granny's rocker, as a man closes the lid on Granny's coffin.

● [Sc.6–7] Mr. Knox slaps Tommy for being late; grit clatters down on the coffin in its hole.

● [Sc. 10] Uniformed men try to take the boys into care. One grabs Jamie from the bed where he & his Granny slept, another takes Tommy from her rocker. The boys resist fiercely. Tommy shouts: 'Run for it, Jamie . . . I'll find you.' Outside, Jamie yells for his father as he runs off.

● [Sc. 12–14] Jamie bursts into his paternal grandmother's. The door is draped in flags. A sign reads: 'Welcome Home Son'.

● [Sc. 15] Jamie's tiny figure crouches below antlers. His war-hero uncle sleeps in a bed.

● [Sc. 17] Jamie's father hides in the toilet.

● [Sc. 21] A scared Jamie stands in the corner of the room: on the table beside him, a plate of apples. Old Mrs. Knox says her son would have been great but for Jamie's mother: who destroyed him. She asks, 'What made you think you could come here?' Jamie slinks off.

● [Sc. 23] Back at the other grandmother's, Jamie lies in his bed, the photo of the two young women above him, on the window sill sit two empty jam jars.

● [Sc. 25–26] Jamie, on a rock in a stream, is scrubbed by his father. He offers a place to stay but Jamie rejects the offer.

● [Sc. 27–28] Old Mrs Knox twiddles her thumbs, then grabs a knife & starts for the door. Jamie runs for his life, but she attacks the door opposite, shouting abuse. Jamie runs up over the left-to-right-inclined stubble-field.

● [Sc. 29] The village school. Children sing their thanks to God. Jamie, not singing, has wet the floor. The framed shot of countryside from scene 1 as the lift drops into the earth. In darkness of the pit, miners' lamps glint on water.

● [Sc. 30–32] Old Mrs. Knox refuses Jamie the use of the toilet where his father hid. He tries to get into his other granny's, then does his business in the ground near the railway. The white flowers of 'Dead Men's Flourish' waving before him.

● [Sc. 33–34] Jamie is left outside on a winter day. Agnes has had to depend on others for water, but she offers no shelter.

● [Sc. 35–36] Jamie climbs in through a window, sneaks into the kitchen, takes down a bottle of milk—its level marked on the glass—& drinks. He tries the taps but there is no water.

● [Sc. 37] Jamie pees into the dog's bed. The milk bottle is back at its level. Old Mrs. Knox returns drunk & showers love on her dog, then on Jamie, in the maudlin emotion of alcohol.

● [Sc. 39] Jamie prays his Granny is drunk every night.

● [Sc. 40] Old Mrs. Knox coldly reports his mother's death. Jamie hides under the table.

● [Sc. 41–42] In school, Jamie's half-brother Archie gives a report on 'Dead Men's Flourish'. Jamie puts some of it under his grandmother's bed as she sleeps.

● [Sc. 43] In silence, an ambulance slowly travels down along the left-to-right inclined-horizon of the stubble field.

● [Sc. 45–46] The ambulance stands outside Old Mrs. Knox's. Jamie waits at the corner of Agnes's as a stretcher is carried inside. Jamie's fingers are crossed.

● [Sc. 48–50] It has brought Jamie's grandfather home. Jamie sneaks into the house, takes an apple, goes into the bedroom & puts it on the bed by the old man. He looks beaten, hopeless.

● [Sc. 52] The old man sits on the grassy embankment of the railway & flirts with his daughter-in-law Agnes.

● [Sc. 53–54] John & Agnes arrange a rendezvous.

● [Sc. 55] Jamie & his grandfather on the embankment. The old man speaks fondly of Jamie's mother. Jamie bites into an apple, comments on his grandmother's unkindness to his grandfather. The old man ruffles the boy's hair in affection.

● [Sc. 56] Jamie has a letter from Tommy. It mentions the army, self-interest at the home, the fact he now wears long pants.

● [Sc. 57–58] Jamie visits Tommy, who cares about little but picking his father's pocket.

● [Sc. 59] Mr Knox rides a bike in circles as Jamie watches from behind railings.

● [Sc. 60] Old Mrs. Knox tells Jamie to take an apple: the plate holds one & a set mousetrap.

● [Sc. 62–63] The old lady asks Jamie about his mother's pearls. She tells him to get them & gives him a key to the maternal grandmother's house. There, he tears into the pillow on which he slept, feathers fly & the pearls fall to the floor.

● [Sc. 64] Jamie buries the pearls in the slag heap, & runs off with two jam jars.

● [Sc. 65] Jamie at a George Formby picture at the cinema.

● [Sc. 66] The war hero attacks Jamie, demanding the pearls, telling the boy 'laddies who tell lies . . . go to hell!' Jamie withstands bravely. Old Mrs. Knox sits unaffected by the fire. Jamie screams for his grandfather. Cut to a freeze-frame of Jamie's head against the fire-grate as if killed. Finally, the grandmother hold him to her & chants that she loves him.

● [Sc. 68] Jamie in his grandfather's bed, looks the victim of a violent death, the sheets twisted like crumpled shrouds.

● [Sc. 69] A bonfire roars in the street as John feeds it things from the dead grandmother's. He throws her rocker to the flames, but in mid-flight there is a cut to ashes & silence.

● [Sc. 70] The teacher gives her students a lesson on the solar system. Near the end, the camera treks out into the stars.

● [Sc. 71] Old Mrs. Knox's verbally abuses her husband in the presence of a distressed Jamie. The old man is frozen, silent.

● [Sc. 72–73] Archie on his way out of his house sees Jamie & tells him he is wearing his shirt. Jamie spies on John & Agnes in bed. His father & Archie return, but Jamie sees his grandfather along the rail embankment & runs after him.

● [Sc. 74] On the embankment, the old man asks Jamie if he would not be better in a home. Then he says he has not got the strength to fight for the boy any more.

● [Sc. 75] Old Mrs. Knox consoles her son over 'the whore' Agnes. Jamie is under the table.

● [Sc. 76–77] Old Mrs. Knox meets Jamie outside, gives him an apple & pushes him away. Inside, she & her son have tea with a young woman who wears pearls.

● [Sc. 78] Old Mr Knox stands on the railway line. The camera tracks round the figure in four shots that take it across cinema's traditionally unbroken 180° line.

● [Sc. 79] Old Mrs. Knox throws John out, then gets into a verbal & physical fight with Agnes in the street outside.

● [Sc. 81] Old Mr Knox's kills himself with gas.

● [Sc. 84] The hearse bears the corpse up, the left-to-right incline of the stubble field.

● [Sc. 85] A series of shots of Jamie, motionless, looking back over his shoulder. Each is intercut with shots of children playing happily against the horizon. Each shot of Jamie shows him further away from the camera.

● [Sc. 86] Jamie willing gets into the van to go to the home.

● [Sc. 88] A shot of the National Monument, Edinburgh. A pipe band comes down a hill playing 'Scotland the Brave' & 'O Rowan Tree'. The van goes up the hill, turns left & is gone.

My Way Home

● [Sc. 1] A framed photograph of Queen Elizabeth, an infant in christening gown on her lap, & the royal family about them.

● [Sc. 2] Framed by a black proscenium arch, children put on a nativity play. Jamie comes on stage at the end with flowers, but his trouser legs fall down from under the kilt he wears.

● [Title] A simple title, backed at first by silence. Suddenly a man shouts 'Hip! Hip!' & a chorus of boys answer 'Hooray!'

● [Sc. 4] Bright balloons fall in silence against blackness.

● [Sc. 5] Nighttime. A man's hands distribute identical presents. Hands unwrap one & a single harmonica rolls out, shining in the night.

● [Sc. 6] Jamie punches his name in holes in his harmonica, then blows a single thin note.

● [Sc. 7] Christmas day in the dining hall of the home. The director, Mr Bridge, is gruff but kind as he attends to the boys. He focuses on one small, unhappy boy, taking him to his table & offering to play a tune on his own harmonica. Jamie, looking more & more upset, finally explodes in rage. He sweeps things off the table, runs upstairs & is heard smashing things.

● [Sc. 8] Mr Bridge talks to Mr Knox talk about Jamie; he says Jamie wants to be a painter. Then Mr Bridge talks to Jamie & suggest he not leave with his father, but Jamie is oblivious, sucking sweets his father gave him. Outside a young woman taps insistently at the window with a string of pearls.

● [Sc. 9] Jamie & his father drive off, stopping in town to pick up the unhappy young woman with the pearls. She later gets out & who walks off across the field leaving the pearls on the seat. Mr Knox throws the pearls into a slimy pond.

● [Sc. 10] They make an unwelcome return to Agnes's house.

● [Sc. 11] Jamie reenters what is now the dark & dirty house of Old Mrs. Knox. She, like her house, is dirty & decayed. She scratches an inscription in a copy of *David Copperfield* & gives it to him as a welcome home.

● [Sc. 12] The house is completely transformed. Jamie, in an apron, whistles a holiday tune as he wipes up & prepares tea.

● [Sc. 13] Jamie flees Agnes's query about having eaten & returns to his maternal grandmother's to read the book. Archie throws coal at Jamie. Jamie's father offers him a place at Agnes's, but the boy says he wants to stay with his granny.

● [Sc. 14] Old Mrs. Knox's attacks for her name having faded in the book. The house is again dark & dirty. In a rage of denial, Jamie tears the book to shreds.

● [Sc. 15] Archie accuses Jamie of not being right in the head, like his mother.

● [Sc. 16] Jamie, filthy from the pit, before Agnes, his father & Archie, says, 'I want to be an artist.' Agnes savages the idea, tells him, 'This is your place in life!'

● [Sc. 17] Jamie is back at the home.

● [Sc. 18] On his bed, Mr Bridge holding his hand, Jamie says, 'If I run or walk it does nae make any difference. It always comes to the same thing at the end.'

● [Sc. 19] Jamie, starts a job at a clothier, & is given a too large suit to wear. He stares at himself in the mirror. Later he leaves the suit on the floor of a toilet.

● [Sc. 20] Making a delivery, Jamie confronts a kilted schoolboy. There are sounds of a rugby game. A bronze statue of a fallen, kilted soldier reaches to the sky with his right arm.

● [Sc. 21–22] A kindly woman takes Jamie home. There he stands in the corner by the door as at his granny's. The woman plays a recording of 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' from Handel's 'Messiah'. She offers him an apple. Later, as the soprano sings 'For now is Christ risen' & the woman sleeps in her chair, Jamie steals all the apples & leaves.

● [Sc. 24] In a winter orchard stands a gnarled old apple tree.

● [Sc. 25–26] Jamie takes a bed in a Salvation Army hostel, the only lad among many older, homeless men. At table, an old man offers Jamie his spoon so he can eat his porridge.

● [Sc. 27] At night, as the lost sing false songs of joy in the background, Jamie lies in bed chanting 'I want to die.'

● [Sc. 28] Jamie leaves the hostel & hopelessly looks up & down the street, uncertain where to go. Above him is the hostel sign: 'The Salvation Army'.

● [Sc. 29] The empty road into Newcraighall, the streets are empty, strangers are in Agnes's & Old Mrs. Knox's. There is the sound of a train, then a shot of a blank arrival/departure board, then many empty rail lines.

● [Sc. 30] Disembodied voices who cannot always understand what the other is saying talk. The camera looks down at endless sand passing by. Then there is an oasis & Arabic music.

● [Sc. 31] Jamie, last on roll call, marches his own way.

● [Sc. 32] Jamie repaints a row of black & white bricks that stretch across the sand—it is chaos one side, order the other.

● [Sc. 33] The pyramids: Robert (casual, interested) encourages Jamie (uniformed & uninterested) to: 'Enthuse!' But Jamie looks worried, confused, dead.

● [Sc. 34] Jamie & Robert cleaning, imposing order. As Jamie smooths sand round the barracks, a buried insect frees itself from the packed sand & scurries off.

● [Sc. 35] In the mess, Jamie has trouble deboning a fish. Robert says, 'There is a way of coping. . . . It's easy once you know how to get rid of all the rubbish.'

● [Sc. 36–37] Robert & Jamie meet shyly outside. Then as they play in the sand, Robert says: 'Be alive!' Finally, Jamie responds, & Robert cries: 'He is alive!'

● [Sc. 39] Robert stoops to watch an insect Jamie seems to have buried under foot. A plane passes over & he stands to watch. Jamie suggests they talk, but Robert says 'What about if it isn't you?' He pushes Jamie for an idea of something to do.

● [Sc. 40] In the barracks, Jamie's locker has Marilyn Monroe photos & clippings inside. On his bed Robert polishes uniform buttons. His side table is stacked with books & above him are photos of Kafka, Jung, Wittgenstein, Virginia Woolf & others. Jamie comments on the books. Robert says he has 'a lot more at home.' Jamie inspects *Maxim Gorky* but puts it back.

● [Sc. 41] Robert lies in the sun reading, the *Gorky* book unopened beside him. Jamie tosses pebbles & says he is bored. Drawing in the sand, Robert shows how divided they are.

● [Sc. 42] Jamie, on duty, visits an Egyptian village. A boy begs for money, Jamie indicates he has none. Cut to a mother, infant & donkey framed in the shell of a building. Jamie & the boy wave to each other as the truck drives off.

● [Sc. 43] The truck crosses the black & white boundary bricks.

● [Sc. 44] Airmen set a desert insect alight. Jamie does not stay to watch but goes to borrow a book, Kafka, from Robert.

● [Sc. 45] Robert makes a calendar called 'TIME', showing how long until he goes 'HOME'.

● [Sc. 46] Robert, writing home, says cannot think what to say & that Jamie is lucky for not having the problem. Jamie says he 'wouldn't mind' so Robert gives him the pad & tells him to continue the letter. At first Jamie protests, but soon he begins, asking, 'How many L's is there in 'wonderful'?'

● [Sc. 47] A yelling Jamie plunges a bayonet through a dummy.

● [Sc. 48] Outside a cinema Robert gazes off into space as Jamie reads a book. Later Robert says he will probably go to university when he returns. Jamie says he wants to be an artist, then laughs, 'Maybe even a film director.'

● [Sc. 49] Robert takes the picture of Jamie dressed like Lawrence of Arabia.

● [Sc. 50] Jamie (reading) & Robert relax outside an Egyptian café. A boy brings them a hookah & it is Jamie who tries it.

● [Sc. 51] Jamie & Robert wander along a street. Robert wonders what they should do & Jamie says, 'I know a place we can go'. He consults a map & looks up & down the street, then leads Robert off. A muezzin can be heard in the distance.

● [Sc. 52] In a mosque Robert & Jamie look around. The camera moves through 220° (again crossing the line). Robert & Jamie consult the book & look up at something above the entrance. Jamie's head drops slowly to rest on Robert's shoulder. The camera zooms out to show them standing in the centre of the geometrically patterned floor of the mosque.

● [Sc. 53] In the barracks, Robert & Jamie prepare to go leave. Robert gives Jamie a paper with his address & tells him if he wants he can stay, 'If you want . . . You can call it home'. As Jamie stares at the paper roaring, shaking noises become audible & segue to the next scene.

● [Sc. 54] Return to the maternal grandmother's house. The camera tracks round the room. Everything is white, even the ash that has spilt out of the fireplace. The roaring gets louder as the camera moves to the window & zooms into its brilliance as the sound reaches its climax.

● [Sc. 55] The orchard of sc. 24, only now in bloom & looking Edenic, including the old apple tree. The roaring noise clearly becomes that of a jet plane passing low overhead. When it is gone, the orchard is full of bird song. In the distance a dog barks.

Although the preceding summary will have done little to prove it, the Trilogy is a remarkable work of film autobiography that warrants more extended attention and reflection than it has been given to date. If it were a personal story only, in the fashion of most self-revelation since the end of the eighteenth century (whether literary or journalistic), our continued interest could become predatory and sensationalist, as that sort of story encourages.[3] There is something broader in the Trilogy, however, something universal and with a much longer lineage, something found in the experiences of the individual but only understood in the form of their reconstruction. To see what I mean, we must first consider the structure and presentation of Jamie's story in the films.

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[3] I suspect this is true of more romantic/post-romantic self-revelation than we would like to admit—may perhaps be central to that kind of unveiling.

According to the 1977 Productions Catalogue, 'identity' is the central concern of the Trilogy. I would agree, and suggest that any attempt to classify the films, or specify the *genre* of the Trilogy, would have to take account of this thematic attention to identity, cast over a temporal range of some ten years. Colouring this would be the knowledge that the Trilogy is also an only-slightly-displaced autobiography. Indeed, it is a portrait of the artist as a young man, though more like the Protestant, coal-town account we find in *Son's and Lovers*, than the urban, Irish-Catholic version of Joyce.

Knowing this, we might call the Trilogy a *Künstlerfilm*, coining our classification on the model of the well-known literary form, the *Künstlerroman* (the novels of Lawrence and Joyce being examples of the type). This sort of story tells of 'the development of the artist from childhood to maturity and later' (Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms* 478). Such stories are about both identity and aesthetics: the creation or discovery of the latter being directly connected to the nature of the former, serving either to effect the change from the ordinary into the artistic life, or as the sign and authentication of that change. Either way, personal history and art are inextricably intertwined, even identified, so that narrative (or whatever structuring of personal history takes place) faces past and present, exploring and refining self and self-expression.

Douglas's Trilogy tells the story of a young person who is subsequently an artist—*the* artist who creates *this* story about himself. So it seems that, taken collectively, the Trilogy might be a *Künstlerfilm*. But if we go back for a moment to Cuddon's definition of the *Künstlerroman*, we should take particular note of his use of the word 'development'. For it is here that we need to make a precise distinction between the *Künstlerroman* as a specific type of story (with its own particular literary history) and autobiography proper, which would include a more open class of what we might call *Künstlerbiographie*. The *Künstlerroman*

seems committed to the interpretation of change as development (it may even be as important as subject matter in defining the type). This is not surprising. As Cuddon notes, the form first appeared near the end of the 18th century, which

> coincides with the start of the romantic revival, a period when the artist (whatever his *métier*) was held in high esteem, and the man of genius . . . became an exalted figure. (478)

And as Clifford Siskin explains, in *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, change read as *development* is a specifically romantic understanding, especially as applied to psychological change and the 'growth of the poet's mind'. In Chapter 5 of his book he notes that when the *self* is subjected to 'the Romantic logic of vision/revision' (95)

> The insistence upon rewriting . . . is translated . . . into the necessity of change so that potential can be fulfilled; aimed at the human form, the mandatory labor of revision becomes the imperative of development. By analyzing . . . the invention of Literature, its work, and the 'natural' results, I can present that imperative not as a psychological truth, but as an all-encompassing *formal* strategy underpinning the society that places Literature at its center: as I shall use it in the ensuing argument, the term 'development' refers to our culture's characteristic way of representing and evaluating the individual as something that grows. Understanding how that strategy works is essential to tracing the profound shift from the self as static, metaphysical, and inherited to the rounded, psychological subject capable of the limitless self-improvement valorizing and valorized by an 'open' society and a 'free' economy. (95)

Change is a central concern of all autobiography (if only, though this is rarely the case, to show that the subject has undergone little or no change), but two distinct types of change may be discerned: namely, discontinuous and developmental.[4] Indeed, autobiography (which, as a more extensive category, subsumes the class of *Künstlerroman*) can be presented in one of two modes—*transformational* or *developmental*—based on how change is judged to take place. Further, these modes relate to two distinct types of autobiography, the *exemplary* and

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[4] In biology, a parallel distinction in the nature of change divides the catastrophic and continuous schools of evolution.

the *expository*—a distinction based upon the purpose of the work, whether it was meant to stand as exemplar or exposition. Indeed, autobiographical purpose and presentation appear co-determinate, deciding whether we read an interventionist history, in which change is read as transformation, or an evolutionary history, in which change is read as development.

Not that autobiography cannot serve as an example in both modes, just that it is common for it to do so in the transformational mode and unusual in the developmental mode. This is because only the transformational mode is truly *exemplary*. I use the word, as it was used in the Middle Ages, in the sense established by St. Basil, who 'calleth breade & wine αντίτυπα, or *exemplaria*, exempleries of the bodie and bloud of Christ.'[5] Contrast that to the ironic example of uniqueness and individuality set by developmental/expository autobiography: namely, 'take my unique and idiosyncratic life as an example for you to be utterly different'. This is not really an example at all, but an incitement to solipsistic exercise, which entropic model, taken generally, would lead to personal and social chaos.

We can now sharpen the earlier specification concerning *Künstlerbiographie*, relating aesthetics to the person's life. In the developmental mode, the creation or discovery of an aesthetic effects, or is the mark of, artistic *development*. In the transformational mode, the creation or discovery of an aesthetic *transforms* the ordinary life into the artistic life, or is the sign of that transformation.

We may also make a general placement of the two types in history. Exemplary autobiography is typically of an earlier period than expository autobiography. The former finds

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[5] OED, 'Exemplary', *sb. Obs.*, 1579, Fulke, *Heskin's Parl.* 374. [William Fulke, *D. Heskins, D. Sanders, and M. Rastel, accounted three pillers of the popish synagogue, and ouerthrowne (Heskins parleament repealed; A confutation of Sanders treatise; a refutation of Rastels confutation).*]

history subject to interventions, follows a pattern of death and resurrection and has, at least from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, been a particularly Christian form:

> Dante speaks of Augustine's life as giving an 'essemplo,' implying the transformation of personal experience into intelligible, perhaps even symbolic, form. We may observe in passing that it is the exemplary quality of the *Confessions* that distinguishes it from its modern descendants. Augustine's purpose is not to establish his own uniqueness (nor, therefore, innocence, in terms of the standards by which ordinary men are judged), but rather to demonstrate how the apparently unique experience was, from the perspective of eternity, a manifestation of Providence's design for all men. The scholarly debates about the historicity of Augustine's conversion scene . . . are paralleled by the scholarly debates about Beatrice who, on one hand, was a woman of flesh and blood and yet, on the other hand, seems to be surrounded at Dante's confession scene with unmistakably Christological language and mystery. The point is that in the 'then' of experience, grace came in intensely personal form, whereas in the 'now' of witness, the particular event is read retrospectively as a repetition in one's own history of the entire history of the Redemption. For both Dante and Augustine the exegetical language seems to structure experience, identifying it as part of the redemptive process, while the irreducibly personal elements lend to the *exemplum* the force of personal witness. Together, *exemplum* and experience, allegory and biography, form a confession of faith for other men. (Freccero 3–4)

In its modern, non-Christian form, exemplary autobiography leaves the source of the interventions into history unclear and unexamined. It becomes a *deus ex machina*, an alien interest, or just something like Pound's luminous moments. Expository autobiography, however, takes history to be of one's own making (a trace of one's self-development) and it follows a pattern of organic growth that is distinctly romantic and modern.

Now with Douglas, an example like the *Jeune Cinéma* narration of how the filmmaker met the boys who would play Jamie and Tommy suggests, as the Trilogy later reveals, that he did not see history, memory or life as developing smoothly along a continuous temporal line (a perception that depends upon an organic metaphor for time that is ultimately the same as, or traces its origins to, the cycles of myth). Instead, Douglas seems to have found history, memory and life disjunctive, cut into discreet segments by unforeseen interventions that gave

them shape, direction and significance. This is a perception dependent upon a teleological view of time that ultimately is the same as, or traces its origins to, the punctuated linear history of the Bible.[6]

Douglas's Trilogy differs from the narrative type of the *Künstlerroman* not in the actual, moment-by-moment presentation of the story (real-time presentation is simply more in the nature of film than literature), but in its understanding of what change is and how it works. The story told in the Trilogy is not a developmental but a discontinuous history, one that 'admits of gaps' (Siskin 99), and one that includes significant, fortuitous interventions (whether metaphysical in origin or otherwise remains to be considered). Thus, it is not right to call the Trilogy a *Künstlerfilm*, if that means seeing it in its essentials as a film-type like the *Künstlerroman*—better to place the Trilogy at a broader level of categorization, as a *Künstlerbiographiefilm*. This has the advantage of opening to consideration two important areas that have until now gone unrecognized in critical consideration of the Trilogy: namely, its presentational mode and autobiographical purpose.

In effect, rather than creating a modern, expository, narrative autobiography, Douglas creates a secular, transformational autobiography, which, perhaps surprisingly, has more in common with the exemplary autobiographies of St. Augustine and Dante, than it does with the romantic ones of Rousseau or Wordsworth. The similarity is easiest to see at the structural level, since it does not clearly parallel its early counterparts in their specific religious concerns. It is like the early exemplary examples, though, in its implicit belief in the necessity of creating a meaningful narrative structure of one's life: something Melville identifies in *Billy Budd* as necessary to a meaningful life, and Alasdair MacIntyre says is essential to a moral life. Melville

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[6] For one of the best discussions of the biblical understanding of time and history (and something of its later literary influence), see A. C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife*.

suggests, in *Billy Budd*, that we should do this while we live, and he uses Admiral Nelson as an epitome of one's life serving as one's art. Douglas recreates the narrative of his life retrospectively, which in a broad sense then serves as a model for us all. We may not write books or make films, but we should all watch for the opportunities for meaning that life offers gratuitously to those with the eyes to see. We should then use these to shape our lives into meaningful narratives, however impoverished and miserable they may have started. In this way, the Trilogy is exemplary, perhaps not as St. Augustine and Dante would have expected, *sui generis æternitatis*, but from that of the meaningful, creative life in relationship to others: a life in which one becomes aware of the luminous moments given in the nature of things, a life seen from a visionary perspective. Using this as warrant, and unlike all other critics to date, I place more emphasis on the final film of the Trilogy than on the first.

TITLES, DIVISIONS, ENDINGS

If the Trilogy is an exemplary autobiography and *form* is particularly significant to the type, then the beginnings and endings of the Trilogy's structural divisions should be a good place to look for important information peculiar to the type itself and to the specific material of the Trilogy shaped and conveyed by that characteristic structure. But what are the structural divisions of Jamie's story?

Absence of comment suggests that for most critics this is a non-question: the story is divided into three arbitrary blocks of three films. Most critics take even the titles of the films to be, at least figuratively, identical. The inside case-notes of the Connoisseur video-edition of *My Way Home* are not original, for example, when they say that the title of that film is ironic, for that is how all the titles are usually read. Unfortunately, irony has become something of an academic fetish, and so its use now is often imprecise. Perhaps the Connoisseur author lacked

critical vocabulary and chose to follow fashion rather than good sense. There is undoubted ambiguity in the titles of all three films, but the nature and purpose of the ambiguity is different in each case, because the Trilogy's divisions are distinct and significant, not arbitrary.

Yet everyone who comments on the title of *My Childhood* reads it as ironic (some childhood!); and it might seem that the opening juxtaposition of a howling siren and the word 'childhood' is meant to emphasise that irony: a mechanical howl underscoring the anguish of this childhood. The trouble is, in the immediate context of the following scenes, it is not made clear whether this is an air-raid warning, the all-clear, or an emergency signal from the mine that appears in the bright day of the opening shot. In fact, the material existence of the siren is unsubstantiated until well past the middle of the film (when the all-clear sounds after the night bombing in scene 27), while the significance of the siren's opening wail is *never* fixed. If the title is ironic, the irony is insecure since its underpinning refuses to set, and the counterplay to the express meaning of an ironic statement cannot itself be too fluid and uncertain if the irony is to work. However, the uncertainty itself is significant to the nature of the film that follows.

> Even leaving the siren aside, the title is not properly ironic; for irony,
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> > Since antiquity . . . has been thought of as an unexpressed negation of what is expressly affirmed, sometimes extended over an entire discourse simply by a gesture or tone of voice. Context is all important in evaluating the negation, but it is precisely in defining context that difficulties in interpretation arise. Ironic discourse is set off from context—in quotation marks, as it were—and constitutes a kind of citationality of some other discourse. A pragmatist such as Dan Sperber uses the philosophical distinction between 'use' and 'mention' in order to describe this setting-off. In irony, words are *mentioned* (cited) as though they were being *used.* (Freccero 107–08)

The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms puts it simpler when distinguishing 'verbal' from 'dramatic irony' (though, when put this way, the difference between expression and intention could point to a linguistic mistake as much as irony):

> *Verbal i.* is a form of speech in which one meaning is stated and a different, usually antithetical, meaning is intended. . . . Often a statement becomes ironic because of its context. (108–09)

Following either of these definitions, the title of *My Childhood* is not ironic. The author/director's childhood is the author/director's childhood: it is (was) a miserable existence, but there is no negation intended. 'Childhood' is exactly what the film is about, and that is neither a necessarily good nor bad thing (however much we may hope it is the one, and however much today's art and journalism may dwell on instances where it is the other). Any sense of irony springs from an association of expectations and memories in the minds of the audience (is an extreme instance of the creativity of reception), and is entirely external to the film. If felt at all, the 'unexpressed negation' does not inhere in the words of the title, or in the relationship of those words to the film they name.

So at this stage, the Trilogy is not clearly ironic, though a sense of potential irony may be constructed externally as part of a context of reception. This is appropriate, since irony can be taken as the unrecognized figure of communication and relationship in the extra-filmic world where reception occurs. The isolation of person from person and discourse from discourse (a burden of existence that we, at our best, struggle to overcome) is a product of our setting 'off from context—in quotation marks' other people and other discourses. Martin Buber has defined the struggle to overcome this barrier as the search for subject-to-subject acknowledgement and understanding, in his terms, as the search for I-Thou relationships.[7] This is exactly what Jamie and Tommy look for in *My Childhood*; though articulating such a desire is entirely beyond their ability because of age and the manifold nature of their poverty. What the title of *My Childhood* suggests is that the film it names is a depiction of the *real* world

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[7] See, Buber, *I And Thou* (1970).

stripped to the essence of experience, stripped of all explanation and constructed significance, where communication and contact are inherently dysfunctional and where we ironize others and are in turn ironized.

When we turn to the second film, we find a title that is ironic. The combined identity and possessiveness of the pronoun/adjective combination 'my ain', with its implication of warmth, fondness and safety, suggests a kindredness in the autobiographical subject's relationship to his family that the film shows is bitterly ironic. In Sperber's terms, these short words are '*mentioned* (cited) as though they were being *used*.' This brings the disjunctive and ironic nature of existence to the level of consciousness where it can be dealt with; there, perhaps, some progress can be made towards genuine, non-ironized communication and relationship. The film, however, does not make clear quite how this might be accomplished.

When we then turn to the title of the third film, we find something else again. This title is true: the film is about Jamie's *way home*. It neither describes, nor puts the lie to, its own expression. Its ambiguity is positive and prospective, pointing to a deeper significance for its apparently straightforward expression. Here, there is not even a hidden or externally constructed irony. The title is still figurative, but we have moved on to the other side of irony to a type of metaphor intimately related to exemplary autobiography itself.

This does not mean the final title alone is appropriate to its place in the Trilogy. All three titles have significant temporal associations that refer to both the structure of the Trilogy and the story told. The first title points to the past: 'my' referring to the adult who in the film's eternal, creative *now* tells the story of his long ago. The second title implies a present tense, for in the eternal, creative *now* (which lasts while we attend to script or film), the author's 'folk' are forever that and coexist with him. The third title, as I have just said, turns 180° from the first and points towards the future. For Jamie, that future is the present creative moment—

the film in which he appears—for it is what he will do and will create because of the story being told. But the new future also reverberates for the present adult—that is, for Douglas—pushing him to repeat his creative act and project his creativity into the future. Thus the story told and the telling of it (Jamie's life and Douglas's filmmaking) are intimately related to Douglas's post-Trilogy career—something I will return to at the end of the chapter.

Just as the titles cannot be dismissed as figuratively identical, so it is wrong to think all significant structure is given by the division into three films. Not surprisingly, the story is divided into three stages of distinct structure and significance, which I will initially call:

1. Disorientation;
2. Descent;
3. The way home.

These stages do not precisely coincide, however, with the start and finish of the films. The first section is coterminous with the first film, but the second, covering a film and a half, is divided in two parts: the first begins and ends with *My Ain Folk*, while the second runs from the beginning to the middle of *My Way Home* (sc. 29: 22). The third of the Trilogy's three significant divisions then starts at scene 30 of *My Way Home* (the cut to Egypt) and continues to the end of the film.

The names I have given to the first two sections reflect the diagetic and structural importance and the metaphorical significance of physical movement in the films (movement being a generalized form of gesture that other critics have noted as important in the Trilogy). I mentioned earlier that the title of the third film was conspicuous for being prospective, what I did not say then was that it also stands for the coming together of time and space through movement that marks the end of the Trilogy and has been throughout Jamie's unrecognized goal. For that reason, I have let the last section name itself. However, movement does more than get us from 'A' to 'B':

- It is the only way we have to mark time;
- All communication depends on it (all symbolic systems record movement);
- We use it to define our possession and understanding of space.

Movement also has a figurative use that stretches back to Aristotle, Plato and the Bible (and is often central in the exemplary form). For the movement of the inner self (intellect or soul) was taken to be analogous to the movement of the body.[8] In Dante,

> The figure of a man in the act of walking was quite literally the incarnation of the act of choice, for walking was simply choosing brought down to the material plain. (Freccero 42)

Although Douglas maintains a realistic presentation in the Trilogy, he too uses movement in just this sort of way. This suggests that, taken together, the three films represent a journey. The names I gave to the three sections can now be revised to take account of the role of choice and of the movement of the inner self:

1. Lost in a region of unlikeness;
2. Descent into an underworld;
3. The way home (ascent to likeness).

This redefinition of the Trilogy's sections now makes their connection to the tradition of exemplary autobiography clear. In that tradition, the story of the self is typically divided into three significant stages: 1) an initial period of disorientation and misdirection, 2) a descent towards a dissolution of the self, and 3) an ascent of a reconstituted, transformed self capable of new understanding and accomplishment. I will examine Douglas's use of the exemplary form by parallel reference to its traditional structure as it appears in one of its best known examples: Dante's *Divina Commedia* (which will involve references to St. Augustine's *Confessions*).

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[8] In the Old Testament, God's purpose (will) and human responses to it, are commonly presented in terms of paths and movement: see, e.g., the Exodus, Jonah, Isaiah's prophecies or many of the Psalms. Note too, the oldest self-designation of the Christian church was as 'the Way' (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

To ease our way through this comparative examination, I will draw on the work of John Freccero, who is, perhaps, America's best Dante scholar. In an extraordinary collection of essays called *Dante: The poetics of conversion*, Freccero examines exemplary autobiography as the fundamental formal feature of the *Divina Commedia*. The early essays in particular give a detailed structural and historical analysis of the form. Dante himself identified it in Augustine, speaking of the Saint's life as

> an 'essemplo,' implying the transformation of personal experience into intelligible, perhaps even symbolic, form. . . . it is the exemplary quality of the *Confessions* that distinguishes it from its modern descendants. Augustine's purpose is not to establish his own uniqueness (nor, therefore, innocence, in terms of the standards by which ordinary men are judged), but rather to demonstrate how the apparently unique experience was, from the perspective of eternity, a manifestation of Providence's design for all men. . . . in the 'then' of experience, grace came in intensely personal form, whereas in the 'now' of witness, the particular event is read retrospectively as a repetition in one's own history of the entire history of the Redemption. For both Dante and Augustine the exegetical language seems to structure experience, identifying it as part of the redemptive process, while the irreducibly personal elements lend to the *exemplum* the force of personal witness. Together, *exemplum* and experience, allegory and biography, form a confession of faith for other men.
>
> Conversion, a death and resurrection of the self, is the experience that marks the difference between such confessions and facile counterfeits. (Freccero 3–4)

As I said already, exemplary autobiography is typically divided into three stages, though the emphasis placed on the stages and their subsequent share in any given representation can differ widely, depending upon historical period and the beliefs and concerns of the author. Dante's story follows that pattern, though, because of Dante's specifically Christian interests, the emphasis in his poem falls on the last stage, which is divided into two *cantiche*: *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.[9] Although from Dante's perspective both books are

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[9] Despite their significance for Dante, popular attention since the Romantics has narrowly focused on the scenes of hell, with the *Inferno* standing in for Dante and the *Commedia* in everything from 'great author' textbooks to Peter Greenaway's *TV Dante*.

theologically and therefore poetically distinct, formally they are one since they concern the pilgrim's *climb* towards his goal, which is God. In exemplary autobiography and according to the logic of its world, these books make up the ascent stage that leads from the precursory necessity of personal transformation to the new life in the light of truth.

Preceding the stage of ascent is one of descent: in Dante, this, or course, is the *Inferno*, which occupies all but the first two cantos of the poem. This stage is concerned with the death of the old self, which is the occasion and sign of its transformation

> The descent into hell, whether metaphorical as in the *Confessions*, or dramatically real as in Dante . . . is the first step on the journey to the truth. It has the effect of shattering the inverted values of this life (which is death, according to Christian rhetoric) and transforming death into authentic life. (4)

Preceding the stage of descent is the first stage in the journey of the self, which is also the first stage of the exemplary form. According to Freccero, both the topography and critical history of this stage in Dante's great work are strange:

> In the shadowy world of the prologue scene, things both are and are not what they seem. For all its familiarity, the scenery seems to have no real poetic existence independent of the allegorical statement it was meant to convey. Moreover, the statement itself, judging from the vast bibliography dedicated to it, is by no means obvious to the contemporary reader. The ambiguous nature of the moral landscape lends itself too readily to arbitrary allegorization, but scarcely to formal analysis. In this respect, the prologue is radically unlike any other part of the *Commedia* and matches the abortive journey of the pilgrim with an apparent failure that is the poet's own. (1)

This preliminary stage is not only unusual, and often misunderstood; it is also brief, occupying only the first canto of the *Commedia*. Brevity belies importance, however, for these 136 lines of *terza rima* stand for Dante's entire life before the extraordinary events recorded in the rest of the poem (because of a different focus of attention in Douglas, this stage occupies the Trilogy's entire first film).

The same initial stage also appears in St. Augustine, who gives it a name in his *Confessions*:

> Augustine's journey to God, like Dante's, is immediately preceded by a journey that fails, an attempt at philosophical transcendence in the seventh book of the *Confessions* that amounts to a conversion *manqué* [sic]. Lost in what he refers to as a 'region of unlikeness,' Augustine turns to the light of Platonic vision, only to discover that he is too weak to endure it. He is beaten back by the light and falls, weeping, to the things of this world. At that point in the narrative, the author asks himself why God should have given him certain books of neoplatonic philosophy to read before leading him to Scripture. He answers: '[So that] I might know the difference between presumption and confession; between those who saw where they were to go, yet saw not the way, and the way itself, that led not to behold only, but to dwell in the beatific country.' (5)

The name Augustine gives to this stage, the 'region of unlikeness' (*regio dissimilitudinis*), is a technical phrase used from the time of Plato (*Statesman* 273d)—quoted by Plotinus (*Enneads* I. 8. 13. 15f), who is quoted by St. Augustine (*Confessions* VII. x. 16)—to Gide.[10] In Plato's *Statesman*, a stranger tells the myth of a universal, cataclysmic revolution, an upheaval that overthrew the Golden Age. The post-revolutionary result was an inverted order he calls the 'region of unlikeness': the term signifies both the disrupted nature of this world and the increasing chaos to which it tends. Neither Augustine nor Dante say much about the 'region' itself, in large part because they expect that their readers will be intimately familiar with the world they inhabit daily.

In the cultural tradition that followed on from Plato, the idea of this region remained and continued to refer to this life, our fallen state, 'which is death, according to Christian rhetoric' (Freccero 4). In fact, the 'unlikeness' of this region can be understood as the continued effect of the fall from paradise, since the knowledge of good and evil introduced a differentiated and a differentiating perception into an originally unified creation. This is a

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[10] For a relevant bibliography, see Pierre Courcelles, 'Tradition néo-platonicienne et traditions chrétiennes de la région de dissemblance' (1957/58).

world of inverted values, mistaken lineages, confused directions and fractured and incomplete personalities, a world in which reference, too often, is misdirected or denied, and where significance as often miscarries. This postlapsarian world is arbitrary and chaotic:

> all directions are reversed. What seems up is in fact down; what seems transcendence is in fact descent. (5)

In this world it is impossible to see and understand, read and interpret. According to St. Augustine, the human soul lost much because of the fall:

> Along with the fullness of immediate vision of God . . . it lost, as well, the immediate soul-to-soul perception it once enjoyed. Now it is consigned to the realm of symbolic mediation, condemned to 'labor' through the thorny foliage of sensation, language, and symbolic communication of all sorts not only to regain the vision of divine Truth but to receive as well the 'renewal,' the 'change into angelic form' that will make each soul again transparent to every other. (O'Connell 54)

Adam's ability to *observe meaning* is unavailable to us. Sensation is opaque, which is also true of 'the symbol, in Augustine's view of it . . . more hiding than revealing the truth that shines bright behind it' (O'Connell 58). According to Freccero, the problem is often represented as a natural synaesthesia in those living in the region (9).

So, with *My Childhood*, the Trilogy begins in this fallen world, this 'region of unlikeness'. It is here that we first find Jamie and, diagetically, it is here that he first finds himself. The striking, disjunctive style of *My Childhood*, which has received much of the critical attention afforded Douglas, is a remarkable attempt to depict on film the truth of this region. More has been written about the first film than the other two, in part, because it is so obviously noteworthy, unusual and striking. Form and content are matched so that the film is true to the 'region'.

The film presents a world—the world where we live—where no expression can express automatic meaning, since the means of expression are inadequate to the task. In

representing this world, the film means to elicit a response in us that makes us complicitous in its operation—that makes us behave as we do in this world, which is to see and not fully understand. In life, we try to mask or overcome the disjunction between sensation and understanding by the more or less spontaneous application (or, rarely, creation) of more or less conscious, more or less coherent, more or less structured beliefs. *My Childhood* refuses to give ground for that reassuring procedure, however, and it will not help us understand enough so that we are comfortable about our condition.

The film opens with the scream of a siren over the simple white on black lettering of the title. This is followed by an establishing shot ('A shot that introduces or defines the location where an action takes place; usually a long shot', Kawin 544), which fits squarely in the tradition of such shots: on a sunny day, with birds singing in the background, the camera moves in a slow, tilt-down, long shot from the sky to a mine below. In cinematic terms, the siren is an unmotivated but effective hook ('That which immediately captures the audience's interest in a story . . .' Kawin 546).

The siren that opens *My Childhood* screams from nowhere, accompanied only by the simple, white on black of the title. The juxtaposition of the siren and the word 'Childhood' is unexpected, though we are culturally attuned to accept similar openings, *in media res*, for their ability to spark interest, tension and expectation as they usher us into the fiction of a preexisting, functioning world. We wonder about the connection between this siren, the title and the story to come: What is happening? What has happened? What will happen? They are questions that typically induce an expectation and the acceptance of a narrative process. We are willing to be involved because we want to be involved; we place our faith in the story about to be told because we want to suspend our disbelief and enjoy ourselves. Furthermore, we expect by the terms of an unwritten contract with the filmmakers that they will satisfy our

expectations and answer essential questions about the story before the film ends. (Of course, it is never true that all such questions are answered, but part of the judgement we pass on a film relates to its success in answering the questions that the premises of its own fiction will have suggested are important and deserve attention.)

The expectation of narrative process that the opening of *My Childhood* seems to provoke is not, of course, fulfilled by the film that follows. In Douglas, because his focus of attention is different, this key stage occupies the entire first film of the Trilogy. Yet the incongruity in the brief opening sequence—the contrast between screaming siren, the reference to 'childhood' and the entirely conventional establishing shot of a sunny day (backed by the sounds of birds and industry)—are appropriate to the equivocal world of the film that follows. The presence of this disjunction in the midst of apparent normality serves to introduce structure and theme in a film concerned with the instability of reference. The rest of *My Childhood*, like the brief opening sequence, is constructed of discrete blocks (based on shot, action or speech) that are absolutely precise and representational of the childhood in question. However, there is no *necessary* progression or development from one block to another—there is change, but whether there is progressive or developmental between blocks is entirely conditional. Neither is there an overarching meaning to the story told at this stage of the Trilogy; the film denies interpretation because the child depicted could neither find nor construct meaning in his original experiences, and the artistry and integrity of the film is such that those experiences, in reconstruction, are equally meaningless. In a sense, the film is an entirely objective documentary of a world that does not make sense, a world in which meaning cannot consistently be constructed. Even the ethical standards in the film repeat the failure of signification and lack of referentiality. Unlike the second section of the Trilogy, the world of *My Childhood* is neither moral nor immoral, but amoral.

We might take this referential uncertainty, and the consequent failure of significance or meaning, simply to be products of the inarticulate and materially precarious existence of the characters, whether in history or art. For such a materialist interpretation the poor elocution and poverty would have substance, while the lack of understanding and meaning would be mere accident. It may be, however, that what the materialist judges substance is itself accident, is merely the particular means by which, in this instance, such instability of reference and subsequent lack of meaning is made known. There is a central, cultural tradition in the West that would call this state of failed understanding and meaning 'the human condition', the condition of any person, however eloquent or prosperous. Douglas avoids any glib social or economic explanations—as I said before, this film presents the essence of experience without veil, whether of beautifying aesthetic or explanatory analysis.

This is not to deny the perilous material circumstances of the boys and their grandmother, which are real and obvious. For example, in the first sequence after the title, it is presented as entirely routine that Granny should take Tommy from school (from 'All Things Bright and Beautiful') to chop up their furniture for a fire. Equally apparent is the characters' inarticulacy in the same sequence: not a word is spoken from the time Granny takes Tommy out of school until some time later, when she impotently tries to stop Tommy and Jamie from fighting over the four small bits of coal that is all Jamie has to show for his scavenging in the slag heap. This linguistic dysfunction is pointed by the relationship of the two most mutually sympathetic characters in the film—Jamie and Helmuth—who only clearly converse at the level of 'A' is for 'apple', or '*apfel*'. The rest of the time they suffer from a linguistic unlikeness that is not simply a difference in their languages, since they often speak at crossed purposes. Jamie tells Helmuth he loves him; Helmuth tells Jamie he is going home; each speaks

with sincerity, but in his own tongue. Even the longest speech in the film, delivered by the nurse in the asylum, is for the most part directed at the catatonic figure of Jamie's mother.

Douglas constructs this sense of material and sympathetic poverty and failed communication, through an uncertainty of reference based on skeletal scripting and elliptical editing. The unmeeting lines of speech and human interaction in the film are repeated at the level of structure and representation. Chronological sequence is constantly disrupted by the cut of the film, so that sequence can be confirmed only in retrospect—ideally, only after repeated viewing. Referential uncertainty works similarly to disrupt expectation, even denying resolution. There are multiple instances of the use of referential uncertainty in the film, including such things as the lumps of coal Jamie collects, the cat, the birds (alive and dead), the grave, the apple, the kite and Jamie's actions in the final scene.

The first diagetic example of referential ambiguity occurs in scene 2. The children in the village school sing 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'. The song, like the titles of the films, is usually taken to be ironic. As I said earlier, however, any irony associated with *My Childhood* is extra-diagetic, constructed at best between the audience and the film. There is no suggestion that the children themselves are aware of it. The children sing another song, 'Summer suns are glowing', in *My Ain Folk* (sc. 29: 13). There the context for the song, in the only film with an ironic title, is constructed to suggest the wink-and-a-nod knowingness between filmmaker and audience typical of irony; but this is not so with the song in *My Childhood*. First, we do not hear the song in an established, contrary context, so, like the title, irony could only be associated with it retrospectively. The song comes so early in the film, however, that our impression is one of wait-and-see, in the expectation that, by the end of the scene, or soon after, we will understand and can then judge the significance of the singing. The story, however, takes two different and diverging lines in the scene, a split accentuated by two

chiastic contrasts: one between this scene (2) and scene 3, and the other in the scene immediately after that (sc. 4: 5).

The first of these contrasts involves the rising line of the children's song, its lifting idealization of the world, which reaches its odd climax in the brief, tilted, blurred, aerial shot of countryside, over which we hear repeated the first two lines of the song's chorus: 'All things bright and beautiful,/All creatures great and small'. However, it all ends abruptly—song, shot and scene with the cut to scene 3: a hard, brightly lit and sharply focused shot of Tommy and Granny climbing the steps to their house with a slow, mechanical step that I suspect would be familiar to prisoners and slaves. This is quickly superseded by scene 4. Here the cross-contrast is between Jamie, high up and alone in the filth of the slag heap, and the laughing children meeting their fathers far below. Jamie then runs off to meet a man working in a field, who greets him happily. Audience expectation must be that this is Jamie's father, but when he speaks German we realize he is one of the prisoners of war referred to in the film's opening subtitle.

Another example of the use of referential uncertainty can be found at the end of scene 7. It is nighttime and the two boys and their grandmother are in bed. Jamie asks, 'Granny, where's my da and ma?' She does not respond but Tommy says, 'Ma's dead'. There follows a shot of Granny, near tears, then a close-up of a double photograph of two, similar young women (in such situations, the close-up on a photograph or other representation of the deceased is a film convention). Granny then moans, 'Oh my poor girls. What have they done to you! God curse them!' It may seem straightforward, even familiar, but Douglas handles it with a difference.

Jamie asks about 'da and ma', but Tommy *refers* only to 'ma', who is dead. We then take Granny's tears as *referring* to this dead woman and Douglas gives us the apparently

conventional shot of a photograph (supposedly of the woman concerned). However, the shot of the photograph is not placed where most films would have it, after Tommy's *reference* to the deceased, which leaves the reference highly ambiguous. Further, Douglas does not simply cut to *a* photograph, but gives us a close-up of *two, matching* photographs, of two remarkably similar women, in one frame. The shot is ultimately informative, but only retrospectively. What we do not know throughout the scene, and it appears the boys themselves do not know either, is that each *refers* to a 'ma' who is different, probably the two women in the photographs. Only careful observation and retrospective analysis confirms this, for it is not made conveniently available to any of us, even at the end of the film. As the scene ends, Granny *refers* to her 'poor girls' (plural), and what has been done to them by a pronominal 'they' for which, again, there is no clear *reference*.

It is a cinematic commonplace to make an early, elliptical reference to someone close to the central characters who is missing. Introduced as a mystery-that-is-not-a-mystery, it is a willingly taken 'hook' for easing audience involvement in an arbitrarily constructed interpretive game that both the filmmakers and the audience know will be resolved by the end of the film. We fully expect to learn, in due course, everything the film knows about this person and their absence. Douglas, however, simply refuses to go along. Referential uncertainty in *My Childhood* is an accurate representation of a world in which such contracts of understanding and meaningfulness are rarely made and less often kept, a world where things do not naturally cohere, where sense is not given and expression is no guarantee of communication. This is the world of *My Childhood*, and the film's greatness partly lies in its ability to represent this world so well its audience is complicitous in its faults.

The persistent critical error of taking the boys to be brothers proves that even for students of film, viewing is no guarantee of understanding. The error created through the

referential uncertainty in this and other scenes like it is intended by Douglas. To take the boys as brothers is to be heir to the human condition, since mistaking vision for understanding and reading for interpretation is an insidious but universal frailty of that state. Critics who do so trope the film they would interpret. Of course, all this does not just apply to a fictional state, but to the world we live in daily, and this is where Douglas gets personal, not about himself but with us (though he involves us personally by being so involved himself).

The common response to *My Childhood*, which is to see and not fully understand, is exactly the response the filmmaker intended we should have. Understanding will not be falsely withheld by the filmmaker for the sake of playing interpretive games. If at the end of the film we believe that we do understand, then we have missed the point altogether. In the Trilogy's first section, we are meant to share the boys' incomprehension in a shattered reality. As I have said already, it is the world we live in all the time, a world once described as fallen, which makes only the little sense that we manufacture. But because we tend to forget this, we too often make the wrong kinds of sense because the construction is unconscious, uncontrolled and not directed at the right ends, which should be redeeming ourselves and our world. The film is about Jamie in the confused state that is our natural, given condition, and it is also about that condition and ourselves in it. However, Douglas does not leave us in this state, since he himself found a way to escape.

To want to flee the *regio dissimilitudinis* has been considered natural from earliest times. The literature of flight goes back at least to the Platonists, with Plotinus a most influential source for 'the flight of the soul from the terrestrial to the spiritual realm':

> 'Let us therefore flee to our dear homeland . . . But what manner of flight is this? . . . it is not with our feet that it can be accomplished, for our feet, no matter where they take us, take us only from one land to another; nor must we prepare for ourselves a team of horses or a ship . . . it is rather necessary to change our sight and look with the inner eye.' (*Enneads* I, 8)

Both St. Augustine and Dante would be inclined to agree: flight is desirable—indeed, as Christians, they would believe it necessary—and the goal is 'our dear homeland'; but they would agree with each other that the intellectual flight of the Platonists is certain of failure:

> The division between body and soul was of course a commonplace in ancient 'flights' of the soul. For Christians, however, it was not the body *per se* that constituted the impediment, but rather the fallen flesh. It is not physical reality that the soul must flee, but sin itself. (7)

The escape is not a physical act but something inwards. At the same time, the flight is more than an intellectual exercise.[11] Indeed, the primary interest of St. Augustine and Dante in the 'region of unlikeness' concerns their own self-directed (and therefore prideful), but failed, neoplatonic attempts to reach enlightenment as a way of escape (attempts that, from their later, fully Christianized perspectives, had to fail). Each of these, being 'a purely *intellectual* attempt at conversion, where the mind sees its objective but is unable to reach it' (5), is an example of what Freccero calls 'a conversion *manqué* [sic]' (5). Not all exemplary narratives contain a self-directed attempt to escape from the 'region of unlikeness' to freedom and enlightenment, but, if present, the attempt does typically fail.

I will say more about the goal of the journey in a minute, but I want to note that, in effect, Douglas adds the train to Plotinus's list of ships and horses as ineffectual means of escape. However desirable escape from the 'region of unlikeness' may be, physical flight is hopeless. This is confirmed by the ending of *My Childhood*, which is not even the limited resolution to Jamie's situation that it might seem. It suggests instead that there is neither

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[11] Romantic, expository autobiography, which takes life as if confined to the *regio dissimilitudinis*, strives to go no further itself. Its purpose is to assert the value and potential of self-directed attempts at escape, or understanding, or creative development. The emphasis being clearly and heavily upon *self*.

lateral nor terminal escape from the failure of reference or lack of sense in the world. For Jamie, as for us, neither running away nor ending all movement altogether is an escape.[12]

Again, Douglas presents a complex of philosophic speculation and intensely personal experience in the simple actions of a small boy. Jamie's final act is suitably uncertain. Does he jump from the bridge to die beneath the train, or escape on it? When the film cuts to Jamie, as he sits up in the full coal-car, there is a moment when his expression and movement convey the sense that he is as uncertain as we are. Coal-trains, however, are no escape, and though Jamie lives he is still not free and alive. Metaphorically, and as we last see him in the film, Jamie continues to face back towards the world he would escape. What the film and the story need is a different ending, a death of the self accomplished by a descent through the uncertainty of this world in search of some certainty beyond.

In St. Augustine, the final vision granted to the enquiring soul is of a *mansio*, which is the soul's proper dwelling place. Early in *My Childhood*, Tommy shows the continued popularity of this image when he tells Jamie that heaven is 'a beautiful house up in the sky'. More important for the Trilogy's structure, though, is the title of the last film, *My Way Home*, and the way the film and Trilogy end: with a return to a visionary dwelling, which is in some ways Jamie's 'homeland'.

It may seem that *My Childhood* is far removed from such self-directed attempts at escape. However, the real difference is that when the story occurs Jamie is a boy, not a man at the height of his intellectual and creative powers, like Augustine or Dante. In his own way, Jamie too tries to flee, though his reasons are his own and his immaturity and ignorance make

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[12] However popular the association, death is not an escape but an end, for escape entails freedom. Even in Christianity, death before salvation, or when self-induced, is terminal. Death is manumission only if an escape through conversion has already been realized: 'all salvation is a consequence of the death of the self' (Freccero 68).

the attempt ambiguous (as I asked earlier, does he mean to jump under the train or onto it?). The differences do not matter, though, since the *details* of the story are and in the exemplary form *must always be* personal. It is the structure that is the same. A structure that in retrospect is seen to have been present at the time of the original, personal experiences, giving them the significant shape revealed in their retelling. Freccero refers to the same balance of the personal and the universal in is discussion of the *Divina Commedia*,

> in the 'then' of experience, grace came in intensely personal form, whereas in the 'now' of witness, the particular event is read retrospectively as a repetition in one's own history of the entire history of the Redemption. (4)[13]

This passage from Freccero also highlights a crucial feature of the exemplary form: namely, the retrospective glance of the artist/author, which can convey through reconstruction the meaning of personal experiences, by discovering a universality of structure in their absolute individuality. Remarkably, this retrospective look is not a given of all autobiography. Exemplary autobiography, for example, differs from expository autobiography in this, for the latter, even when recounting the past, gives the illusion, at least, that its gaze is always directed towards some definite/indefinite future at the end of the individual's continued, unfolding evolution. Exemplary autobiography looks back from a *completed* life to see the coherence and significance of that life, and bear witness of its significance for others. And what is true of the life, is true of the artistic form of its recreation as well. As Freccero says of Dante:

> The coherence of the [*Divina Commedia*] may be grasped only with a view to its totality, a view from the ending, just as the coherence of the poet's life could be grasped only in retrospect, from the perspective of totality in death. Clearly the same may be said of universal history, whose coherence may be perceived

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[13] We now know that such curious and apparently absolute oppositions between the unique and the conventional, between irregularity and order, exist throughout the natural world—as in the weather.

> only from the perspective of eschatology . . . . In the linear time that is ours, such a perspective is impossible, for it implies a survival of our own death and the death of the world. For Dante, however, as for Augustine, there was a death which enabled the mind to grasp such totalities, not by virtue of linear evolution, but rather by transcendence: a death of detachment. (26)

Exemplary autobiographies privilege endings, and the present analysis depends upon a retrospective critical glance over the entire Trilogy, 'with a view to its totality'. Only through the lens of its final scenes does the whole structure, story and purpose of the Trilogy come into focus. Interestingly (and so far this seems to have gone unnoticed), the final goal or object of the journey, as it appears at the end of *My Way Home*, is presented in a visual metaphor that is identical to the one used by Augustine and Dante to represent the goal of their respective journeys: light. In Douglas, of course, there is the added dimension that light is also the phenomenal form of the artwork itself. That alone should have set alarm bells ringing about the importance of the final scenes for an understanding of the Trilogy; that and the fact that, only with the return to the maternal grandmother's house in the final scenes, does the camera become active and intrusive. Here the camera is the only character, which points to the sudden presence of the filmmaker, who has now openly joined the boy and the audience.

Remarkably, even an intransigently-romanticist film critic can sense that end-privileging plays some sort of part in the Trilogy. I have already marked the Scottish film historian John Caughie as an excellent example of the critic for whom the romantic vectors for significance and interpretation are taken as ahistorical fact, orienting his understanding of the Trilogy's films from first to last. True to his compass, Caughie only *refers* to the last film and says nothing at all about *My Ain Folk* (which is the longest film in the Trilogy). Yet, his *explicit* analytical technique 'scenes have to be read backwards' to be understood suggests that somehow he sensed how the films really needed to be approached. Even the title of his article, 'The way home', implies as much. Unfortunately, Caughie does not seem to have had

the appropriate experience or knowledge (and is anyway too thoroughly romanticized) to make his intuition conscious and see how best to use it. He does not know that central to the nature of exemplary transformational autobiography is the requirement that it be viewed retrospectively, from the end of the work. The end marks the completion of the recreation process, which is the subject of the story. Caughie holds in his hand the key that would unlock the Trilogy, but he mistakes it for something else and uses it instead to tear the Trilogy to pieces. Our present awareness of the types and modalities of autobiography, however, puts us on better footing. We now know that Caughie's is not the only way to read the films, because it is not the right way to read this kind of autobiography.

To return to the exemplary form and its use in the Trilogy, we may observe that after opening in a 'region of unlikeness' (which may take a few lines of verse, or make an entire film, and which often includes a purely self-directed but failed attempt at escape), exemplary autobiography enters a ubiquitous, structural phase of descent into some sort of underworld, where the self is gratuitously transformed. The phase is infernal since the change involves the destruction or death of the self; it is ubiquitous, because the transformation of the self that depends upon that destruction is the central event of the exemplary form:

> the difference between the . . . journey that fails, and the successful journey that it prefigures is a descent in humility, a death of the self represented by the journey through hell. . . . The descent into hell, whether metaphorical as in the *Confessions*, or dramatically real as in Dante's poem, is the first step on the journey to the truth. (Freccero 4)

The 'descent into hell' represents the death of the old self, which is a dying to that self and to the world of which it is a part: to its values and understanding and truths, all of which are eventually seen to be inversions and distortions of truth. But this death also leads to rebirth, and its issue is a new self. Once the transformation is accomplished, the journey to what

Plotinus called 'our dear homeland' can be pursued with some assurance of success, for only the true self, which is the new self, can hope to find the 'way home'.

In Douglas this infernal descent to death occupies the second section of the Trilogy (*My Ain Folk* and the first part of *My Way Home*). There is a dramatic descent into the earth in the opening sequence (last shot of scene 1), while Jamie's transformational death occurs in scene 27 of *My Way Home* (where he lies in a Salvation Army hostel chanting 'I want to die'). The force of the story at this stage in the Trilogy, the direction and purpose of Jamie's movement or journey, is not yet felt to be externally directed or inherently shaped ('providential', in the earlier terms of the tradition). There are two reasons for this: one is personal and therefore diagetic, the other impersonal and formal. The first reason, which is part of the personal dimension of exemplary autobiography, is that Douglas *was*, and Jamie *is*, a suffering, confused, impoverished boy, with only a boy's understanding to help him, living in a secular, material, immanentist world.[14] We can hardly expect him to see much shape or sense in his experiences. By comparison, Dante's pilgrim is a mature poet at the time of his journey, an intellectual committed to a then dominant theology that constantly asserted the presence of a providential force working in all things.

That the shaping of the story is providential (or otherwise transcendent) also goes unrecognized for a reason that is formal and part of the exemplary structure. Because of this, it is found in Dante as well. As Freccero describes it, the problem lies in the difference between the perspectives of the author of the story (the person he is now) and the character he writes about (the person he was once). It is only when 'the particular event is read retrospectively' that it can be seen 'as a repetition in one's own history of the entire history of

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[14] As R. Stivers defines it: 'the belief that the world is self-contained and thus can be understood without reference to anything transcendent' (*Culture of Cynicism* 16).

the Redemption' (4). Jamie cannot see that his experiences have a significant shape, nor that his life is a formal journey, until, as the writer/filmmaker who recreates the past, he can look back at that life as having ended. Then he can tell its story:

> In a Christian context, all salvation is a consequence of the death of the self. In a literary context, the poem, the triumph of the author, entails a death of the protagonist, a detachment of the self that was from the self that is. (68)

Freccero calls the infernal descent an *askesis* ('ascesis' a process of self-discipline). If this is true, why, we might ask, does Douglas make Jamie's suffering so unrelenting and void of any positive counter-response from the boy? Neither in the context of the second section of the Trilogy, nor from the absolute perspective of the end of the Trilogy, do we see Jamie 'coming to terms' with his situation, 'rebelling', finding an 'emotional outlet' somewhere else or, perhaps most importantly, 'sublimating' his experiences. We hear secondhand that he has artistic inclinations, we even hear him say, 'I want to be an artist' (*My Way Home* sc. 16: 15), but we *see no evidence at all* for accepting this. In terms of the film, his comments seem more localized rebellion than personal insight. If anything, the creation of the film of the boy by the man he becomes is extraordinary, to the point of being miraculous, and a sensitive audience must ask itself how this work of art could possibly have come about.

From a purely creative perspective, it is only when Douglas discovers the aesthetic in his past that he becomes the artist who can recreate that life as art. However, 'aesthetics', in the exemplary tradition, is only the patterns traced by the moral conditions of the person concerned. In exemplary autobiography, morality is the ground of fully human existence (just above purely biological life, but ultimately defining what it means to be human). There is no place in its structure for the Nietzschean aestheticization of the moral, which leaves only will, desire and power in its place. This is also the formal reason for the infernal 'descent in humility' being so terrible and frightening. As Freccero implies in his comments on the

pilgrim's terror in the infernal region of Dante's poem, the descent, indeed the whole exemplary structure, is not just an aesthetic ploy, but a record made in earnest of extraordinary and utterly transforming experiences:

> The fears expressed by the pilgrim along the way constitute the very *askesis* that makes rebirth possible; if this were not so, they would have to be dismissed as an example of dramatic coyness on the part of the man who knows from the beginning that everything will turn out alright. It would be as if we refused to believe that the Dostoevskian hero is really frightened by the firing squad, because we know from the existence of the story that the reprieve from the Czar came through. . . . Short of the barrier [death], progress is impossible; beyond it, there seems to be only extinction. The story is testimony of the fact that this extinction of a false self in an inverted world is a necessary step before authentic life, and the story, can be born. (68–69)

What we confront in the central character of Douglas, Dante and Augustine is a man both storyteller and story told, and we must come to terms with the distinct perspectives of who he was and is, and understand how he stopped being the one and suddenly became the other.

The figurative key to the infernal stage of exemplary autobiography is irony, though its exemplary purpose, in part, is to reveal the true face of the 'region of unlikeness' in which we daily live. Amid 'unlikeness' we mistake or ignore the irony of our existence; in the infernal region, if we choose to follow the path mapped by the exemplary structure, we come face to face with the death of signification that is inherently part of the fallen world, and by coming face to face with it we can die to it and free ourselves from it.

Dante recognized that writing about the infernal region presented a formidable problem—that an entirely accurate presentation of the infernal region would require the duplication of its reification of significance (a grappling with representational difficulty that does not seem to have become typical in the history of the exemplary form). For Dante, that meant trying to create *real presence* in poetry, something that is unnatural in literature since, as Freccero explains, writing is an applied symbolic system that relies at its most basic level

upon interpretation. Dante confronted the problem directly in the very opening of the infernal section (*Inferno* canto 3) with the gates of hell and their famous inscription. It begins:

> PER ME SI VA NELLA CITTÀ DOLENTE,
> PER ME SI VA NELL' ETTERNO DOLORE,
> PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE.
> . . . . . .
> Through me the way into the woeful city,
> Through me the way to the eternal pain,
> Through me the way among the lost people. (Ed. & trans. by Sinclair 46, 47)

With this creative tour de force, Dante attempts to bypass the limitations of poetic representation by negating the literary nature of its presentation altogether:

> In modern editions of this passage [as in Sinclair, above], some effort is made to set off the inscription from the rest of the text with quotation marks, block letters or italics, as if to warn the reader to suspend interpretation until the passage is concluded. In a medieval text, however, devoid of such visual clues to interpretation, our hypothetical first-time reader would be obliged to wait until the fourth tercet in order to realize that the pilgrim has been thrust in front of the infernal portals and *sees* the text that we read. The extraordinary quality of this beginning has been masked by its very familiarity. The journey through hell begins with an interruption that serves to establish the fiction of immediacy: for the first and only time in this poem, perhaps in any poem, we directly share the protagonist's experience. That is to say, we read a text and imagine a gate on which we *see* the text we have read. In terms of C. S. Pierce's theory of signs, we might say that the words on the page cease to be symbols and become *icons*, signs that resemble their own significance. They have been used in that way in the history of illustration of the *Divine Comedy*. When artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth century wished to depict this moment in the poem, they had no choice but to represent the gate by the text itself, as though God has written in hendecasyllables.
>
> The poetic strategy of the opening scene is to pretend that there is no poetic strategy, to represent the inscription with an implied replication of the text. The pilgrim's difficulty resides in the interpretation of what he sees, comparable to the confusion of our supposed naïve reader who comes upon these words for the first time, without benefit of quotation marks. It is only retrospectively, in a second moment, that we are drawn into the fiction that would have us see the words that we in fact have read. Of the two processes, the interpretive trajectory of the first moment is in fact the normal movement from sense impression to conceptualization, while in the second moment we are drawn in the other direction, from the understanding of the text back to the visualization of the text, as though it were not written, but inscribed. Thus, mediation is turned back upon itself and reified in the letter of the text. (98–9)

In an extraordinary parallel to the opening of the *Divina Commedia*'s infernal section, the infernal stage of the Trilogy begins with a cinematic example of the same kind of play between representation and presence, highlighting and then calling into question film's representational nature and our too easy and open response to it. As Freccero says of the same stage in the *Divina Commedia*,

> The descent begins when the pilgrim sees the inscription and wonders about its meaning. . . . the descent begins by calling attention to the fact that vision is not interpretation, precisely the fact that is passed over in silence in discussion of Dante's realism. (96)

I have already noted that the title of *My Ain Folk* is ironic, but there is much more to the film's opening than the title, which does not appear until *nine* shots into the film. *My Ain Folk* actually begins, in stunning fashion, with a false establishing shot, a quoted location that is not the location of this film: with a crescendo of lush, string and voice accompaniment, we suddenly see on screen brilliant, black-framed, Technicolor shots of ideal, alpine scenery. Then over the rocks comes Lassie.[15] In the audience, we wonder what in the world is going on. Is this the right movie? Am I in the right theatre? Has the projectionist made a mistake? This starts a series of questionings that take us out of the movie and our typically easy, deep, but unconscious, involvement in the kinetic media. I become conscious of the film as an object out there, of myself sitting here in the dark before a modified wall on which it appears, of the arbitrary gathering of people around me, of the building in which we sit, of the faint sounds of traffic and the city beyond.

Suddenly the colour scene appears at an angle along a wall in a dark room; below it are visible the heads of another audience sitting, watching, like us. This cuts to a close-up,

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[15] The sequence is taken from *Lassie Come Home* a title that has ironic resonance for Jamie at this stage in the Trilogy.

reaction shot of Tommy's dirty, intent face in the darkened cinema as he gazes in tears in the direction of the implied screen. The shot, like the film that follows, is in black and white. This is followed by an apparently reverse-angle shot from Tommy's gaze, which is again of a black-framed shot exactly as if it were another cinema screen (which is how we might naturally read it) in which we see a wet road, an old shed and in the background a pithead wheel and smokestack. This cuts to a close-up of the motionless pithead wheel against the sky. Then in medium long-shot we see a group of miners at the pit shaft gate, waiting, static, like images in a dream, brilliant light streaming into the semi-dark from a large open door on the right. The men then drift silently into the lift mouth. We return to a black and white, black-framed shot, this time of countryside: fields, hedges, mist and far off hills. Suddenly, the camera drops and pitch blackness rushes up to shut out the light. A long, mountainous whine builds in volume as the simple white title appears on the now black screen.

Critics of Dante's 'Gates of Hell' scene 'cannot decide whether the pilgrim is *seeing* or *reading* the inscription' (Freccero 99) on the infernal entrance. We are in the same situation at the beginning of *My Ain Folk*. Accustomed to watching films in a way that confuses *seeing* and *reading*, this opening should bring us up short, and for a brief moment, at least, we should tremble between seeing, reading and a self-consciousness about our own presence in the cinema. What Douglas does in this opening sequence is comment on the relationship of film and life, cinema and reality, and suggest that film itself, by its representational technique is naturally ironic. He does this by placing an open-ended bracket before the story of *My Ain Folk*, placing it in open-ended quotation marks that imply the film is part of another tale. Dante's problem was that literature is naturally imaginative, not mimetic, and it inherently requires interpretation at both the perceptual and conceptual levels. Douglas had to deal with

the fact that the reverse holds for film: film is naturally mimetic, not imaginative, and is inherently accessible perceptually and conceptually without immediate need of interpretation.

As in Dante, the infernal opening works sequentially to effect two distinct and remarkable reversals: first, of the powerful sense of presence that film so easily creates, and, second, of the signifying process through which it communicates. *My Ain Folk*, like all films, creates an immediate and irresistible sense of presence, which is suddenly reversed when we realize that the film we are watching is not the film we have been watching. This not only highlights film's false sense of reality, but should make us very uncomfortable about our too easy and unquestioning involvement in filmic representations. There is more, however, for when the illusory presence of film is shattered, the more dangerous belief in film as a transparent means of signification is also destroyed.

Now, in Dante, hell is the place where signification turns back upon itself and significance is reified. Yet, this is exactly what naturally happens in film (except, perhaps, in the extremely rare instances, like Douglas, where this is the very subject being examined). Film's sense of presence is so strong and convincing that the complex representational system and created structure of film is forgotten and goes unrecognized. Signs of all sorts are taken to be significances, objects are taken to be subjects characters that are reflected collections of projected photons filtered through pigments are taken to be real people this is the strength and the wonder of film. From this we take much pleasure. However, here too we see film's dishonest and potentially corrupting nature. Indeed, this is so extreme in film (and, of course, television) that these media actually have become the standards by which we judge reality.

Here at the beginning of *My Ain Folk*, for example, art is Technicolor, while life is black and white. As in Dante, however, reversed signification involves the reification of the signified: meaning becomes its own sign. As a key aspect of ironic representation, the reversal

of significance involves turning representation into presentation—that which is by nature ephemeral, like an 'object' in a story, is given genuine identity and becomes a real presence. This is what happens with the *Lassie* scenes. They are actually a diagetic representation, they exist only within the world of the film, but they are presented to us without introduction, as if this was the film we were about to see. What should be taken as existing at a remove from ourselves as audience, is instead presented as if it were being shown to us *ab initio*, and not to another audience who are themselves the projection we are really watching.

For both artists, the ultimate problem of working in the exemplary form was not one of artistic creation but of result: how to achieve the right effect in the reader or audience. In both cases the intention is to make it clear that seeing is not understanding. Douglas accomplishes the same result that Dante achieves in the *Inferno*. Film just comes at it from the opposite side. The poet must struggle to fake representation, while the filmmaker does so without trying. In both cases, however, we mistake a created world for an objective one.[16]

The Trilogy's infernal stage, *My Ain Folk*, opens with this forceful reminder that observation does not equal understanding, but it also alludes to the start of *My Childhood*, which had tugged at the audience's memories and expectations of idealised childhood but had given them no firm connection or place in the first film. Now, however, such memories and expectations are incited in the most maudlin and extravagantly sensory way possible by the *Lassie* scenes, only to be brutally crushed by the story that follows. The opening siren of *My Childhood* also finds its parallel in the mountainous whine accompanying the title of *My Ain Folk*. There the sound accompanied a camera tilt-down shot of a brightly lit scene, but it was

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[16] In a visionary state (as Blake would have us assume), we would turn this around and transform the objective world into a created one, which is exactly what happens at the end of the last film of the Trilogy (see Frye, *Symmetry* 48).

never entirely fixed so that it stayed just outside any specific signifying process. Here the sound accompanies a shutting out of the external world altogether by darkness, as the camera plunges down in to the earth the whine representing lift, camera and perhaps even projector.

The second part of the second section (the opening of *My Way Home*) also begins by drawing attention to itself and the representational process, with two framed *family* shots, neither of which clearly establishes location. First there is a simple, brief close-up on a photograph of the Queen holding an infant on her knee, (possibly Charles, the preeminent secular boy in the land) surrounded by members of the royal family. This cuts to a static shot of a stage, framed by its proscenium arch, on which children are caught as if posed in the midst of a minimally staged Nativity play (a play about the birth of the preeminent sacred boy in the land). Unlike the second section of the Trilogy, where we questioned film, the cinema and our own involvement, here, armed with the knowledge that seeing is not understanding, we ask: Who is this? Why is this shown to us? What does it signify? Indeed, does it have any significance at all?

In the specific terms of the framed images we see, it is worth remembering that the family photograph is often used in film to suggest a context for the story about to be told. Here we are given a thumbnail sketch of the presence of family at the centre (or apex) of state and religion. This appears at the beginning of a film that sees Jamie, abandoned and brutalized by his 'ain family', finally leave his folk, as he slides deeper into isolation and despair. The pictures also implicitly compare the static two-dimensionality of another representational form with cinema's more involving reality. In this instance, however, because the framing moves from photograph to part of the diagetic world of the film, the two-dimensionality of the filmed presentation is implicitly emphasised, which not only denies the spatial quality essential for a true establishing shot, it reminds us with considerable emphasis that the sense of cinematic

space, which is so important to film's power and influence, is an illusion. In another, important sense, the world depicted in the film is already becoming more clearly 'staged' or framed, it is being set up by Douglas/artist for the intervention to come. Life and the world of Jamie are themselves now becoming, in a foreshadowing or anticipatory way, formal, shaped, produced though by whom or by what means is not about to be made clear in the Trilogy.

Interestingly, the opening of the third movement (in the middle of *My Way Home*) also plays upon the establishing shot, with the camera passing suddenly over featureless sand, while a pair of disembodied voices struggle to speak over the noise of a heavy vehicle. The shot actually works to deny or negate location altogether, in favour of a temporal sequence emphasised by the sense of movement and overheard dialogue. The use of disembodied voices is a familiar film technique, which is used to play sight and sound against each other, thereby doubling information transfer and achieving, or implying, depth of significance. This is minimized here, however, for initially there is nothing to see. All of which serves to emphasise, after the repeated images of Jamie's lost past and empty, directionless future (sc. 29: 22), the attempt to establish some contact, communication and identity (sc. 30: 22).

Before I say anything further about the last stage of the Trilogy, though, I need to comment on the conclusion and point of the infernal descent. Early in *My Way Home*, Jamie returns to Newcraighall, giving his 'ain folk' another chance; which they do not take. Of particular note here is the miraculous transformation Jamie effects—by means of his own self-directed activity—in the life of his demonic, paternal grandmother (sc. 12: 12). Two scenes later, however, and his attempt to transform their lives collapses in bitter failure: his grandmother's house returns to its dirty, dark, decay, as she attacks him for letting her name fade from the book she had given him. Over the next two scenes, Jamie's father gets the boy a job in the mine, which leads to a confrontation between the father, Agnes, their son Archie and

Jamie, during which Jamie expresses his desire 'to be an artist' (it is the first time he has ever made any allusion to such interests). Agnes savages the idea and tells him, 'This is your place in life!' Jamie must not have agreed, for we next see him back in the orphanage where he delivers the following memorable lines to the director, Mr Bridge:

> If I run or walk it does nae make any difference.
> It always comes to the same thing at the end. (Sc. 18: 17)

Jamie now doubts his own ability to move forward, to improve his lot or accomplish anything of value. He has at least despaired of being able to reform, or transform and redeem his past.

From here, Jamie sinks further into ineffectualness and despair. His ability to operate in the present is tested very quickly over the next couple of scenes as he takes on a job delivering packages for a clothier. But as the misfit of the suit they provide for him suggests, this is not Jamie's place. The lesson is brutally driven home by a kilted schoolboy who humiliates Jamie for his linguistic, material and social poverty. There is a cut to a statue of a fallen, kilted soldier reaching to the sky with his right arm. Beyond the aid of his fellow beings, he makes an endless bronze gesture for something, someone, anything to come to his assistance.

As Jamie slides towards despair, a last attempt is made to give him a home. The kind woman who takes Jamie to her neat little bungalow in the suburbs is 'the charitable Christian' in one of its traditional and most familiar guises, though it is noteworthy that the *mise-en-scène* of the woman in a chair by the fire and the boy against the wall by the door, next to a table on which apples will be placed, mirrors that so often seen in the house of Jamie's paternal grandmother. Not that I doubt the sincerity of this woman. Douglas does not doubt it, but Jamie's despair has taken him beyond the pale of such comfortably contained goodness: she freely offers him a bowl of apples, he takes one but does not eat it, then when she falls

asleep he steals the lot and leaves. On the soundtrack throughout, a loud recording of a soprano aria from Handel's *Messiah* provides the background.

There is more to be said about this scene (23), but its significance lies in the context of the next six scenes (24–29). After Jamie slips out of the house, there is a very brief intercut shot of an orchard in winter, in the centre of which stands a gnarled and lifeless old apple tree. Then, over the next three scenes (25–27), we find Jamie in a Salvation Army hostel, the only lad among the old, homeless men. In a poignant moment, in the middle of the series, one of the destitute makes the fatherly gesture of lending his spoon to Jamie, so the boy can eat:

> DOWN-&-OUT: [I'll give you my spoon] son.
> I'm finished. (Sc. 26: 21)

This small act of charity anticipates an important, parallel scene between Jamie and Robert in the Trilogy's last movement (*My Way Home* sc. 35: 24). But the peace is shattered by a loud noise, like a metal screen being pulled down over a cafeteria service-area. Then, at night, as the lost sing, in the background, of their boundless joy, Jamie lies in the dormitory alone, chanting into his pillow 'I want to die.'

Then, in a series of significant intercut shots we see: 1) Jamie leave the hostel, though with nowhere to go, he wanders back and forth on the pavement beneath the sign of 'The Salvation Army'; 2) the streets of Newcraighall, empty of life; 3) Jamie trying the doors of his ain folk, where he finds strangers; 4) the back of the houses, with windows bricked up and tall weeds everywhere; 5) a blank, railway departure-board; 6) an empty railyard, with empty lines shining in the sun. Then there is Egypt.

Through this sequence Jamie reaches the nadir of his life. In a sense it evaporates into nothingness. Here too, and for the first time, we can see situation and events beginning to take on a purpose of their own. And the whole piece is mirrored and defined by the background music from Handel's *Messiah* that we hear playing in scene 23.

Of course, the *Messiah* itself is a trilogy, divided into three parts covering the following in sequence: the Nativity, the Passion, and the significance of those events in the present, and eternal, lives of human beings—what, in medieval terms, would be called their tropological or anagogical significance. The music used in the film, which comes from Part III of the *Messiah*, is highly appropriate for its place in the exemplary structure of the Trilogy. I say appropriate, for on the soundtrack the soprano first sings about the archetypal instance of life miraculously following death—'I know that my Redeemer liveth'—which warrants the bold belief that, in the lives of mere mortals, the potential for life in, or after, death is both utterly impossible and absolutely certain—'And though worms destroy this body, / Yet in my flesh shall I see God.'

The coordination of sound and movement in this scene has significance beyond any simple desire of creating aesthetic rhythms or allusions. For this piece of music is exactly concerned with what is happening here to Jamie, concerned with the kind of change that even now is taking place in his life—a gratuitous change (unexpected and unsought), a change that occurs neither through his own merit nor by his own effort. It comes to and for Jamie in no predictable manner and in no pious fashion. It is not spiritual, nor is it even faintly religious—not as those words are usually understood. If it is the result of some divine doing—and, let it be clear, Douglas makes no assertion that it is or that it is not, but if it were of divine origin—then divinity is indeed working in strange and unexpected ways. All of which is in keeping

with the tradition, however, and not least if the change that *comes into* his life were entirely unwanted.[1]

In case we are tempted to think that the soundtrack is merely fortuitous, action is choreographed to music in the scene. This not only suggests their inseparable significance, but implies their continued coordination beyond the absolute confines of the scene. It is as if the music had always been playing somewhere just beyond hearing and had, just now, finally broken through so that the dancer, if he wished, could consciously begin to keep step (a dance that he may seem to do despite himself, initially, but one he is never constrained to do).[2] The choreography is almost painfully clear towards the end of the scene, where Jamie steals the apples previously offered to him by the woman who now sleeps in her chair. Over this theft, the soprano sings of 'The first fruits of them that sleep'. Then, as Jamie turns and slips stealthily out the door, and we see in close-up the curiously-crossed hands of the sleeping woman, the soprano sings in rising notes and crescendo: 'For now is Christ risen. / For now is Christ risen.' Then sound and scene are cut, at the very moment she hits the last note, and in silence we are confronted with a shot of an old, gnarled, empty tree in a winter orchard.

Jamie's theft is highly specific and realistic in terms of the film. We must see it, however, as an echo of the original act of fruit-theft in Eden (so strong is the popular mythology and so bare the construction of the action in the scene).[3] Further, at this close

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[1] Biblically, such intervention leads to unpleasant, dangerous, impossible situations and is desperately unwanted. The prophets and Christ were not the naïve, submissive do-gooders of popular opinion. Isaiah's gut reaction to Yahweh's call to prophecy is unambiguous: 'Woe is me, for I am undone' (6:5). See Robinson, *Inspiration & Revelation* 164ff.

[2] The Old Testament does not draw a simple equivalence between God's will and history. Man often goes astray; he is not constrained to do otherwise. (See Charity 36.)

[3] '. . . [W]hen there was only a Latin Bible, the forbidden tree was assumed to be an apple tree, because *malum* in Latin means both evil and apple' (Frye, *Great Code* 148).

approach to Jamie's own fall and symbolic death, the act is highly ironized by the soundtrack: over the theft of the apples, as the woman dozes in her chair, the soprano sings of 'The first fruits of them that sleep'. This seems such a cheap and offhand connection that it is tempting to take this as a feeble joke, or think that Douglas simply faltered in his filmmaking. We hear the soprano's words as an almost silly, mocking reference to this petty theft of mere apples, and that only encourages us to think the Edenic echo is truly superficial and pointless. But look closer and Douglas's art and genius are almost frightening as they swiftly construct profundity out of simplicity. Here, irony is turned on its head, and the result is typology. 'The first fruits' of the *Messiah*, as in its biblical original, is Christ's resurrection, which is the typological counterpart to the fall from Eden, which is the event mirrored in the petty actions of the boy. Adam's transgression was the act that both condemned humanity and led to its redemption. In the *Messiah*, the choir refer to this in the four lines they sing immediately after the soprano's aria:

> Since by man came death,
> By man came also the resurrection of the dead.
> For as in Adam all die,
> Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

This is referred to in the film in the fleeting scene of the winter orchard: we see a dormant fruit tree, a tree stripped of its fruit, the Edenic tree dead since the fall, which is also the now empty tree on which Christ was hung.

I should add that another significance of the stripped tree, which reaches back to the first two films of the Trilogy, relates to the fact that trees have traditionally been associated with patrimony, lineage and descent (see Frye, *Great Code* 150). For example, Jamie's gift of an apple to his mother in the first film and to his grandfather in the second were both gestures of filiation and kindness. The first gift/gesture was thwarted by the nurse, just as the boy's

relationship to his mother is broken by her institutionalization. The second gift/gesture is returned by the grandfather. He admits that he does not have the strength to protect Jamie (from his 'ain folk') and suggests, in essence, that Jamie would be better off without his 'folk'. In other words, by returning the gift of an apple he offers Jamie freedom from his patrimony, though to no effect.

This extraordinary transformation in the signifying process and power of the film just slightly precedes the transformation in Jamie himself. They are, as it were, not yet fully resolved, still slightly out of focus—in cinematic terms, they have not yet been drawn into a circle of least confusion. Reservations about Douglas intentionally referring to 'redemption' actually depend upon a narrow and highly conventionalized understanding of the term. Such reservations can be set to rest, if we look at the beginning of the scene, where the whole process begins with the soprano's first line: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'.

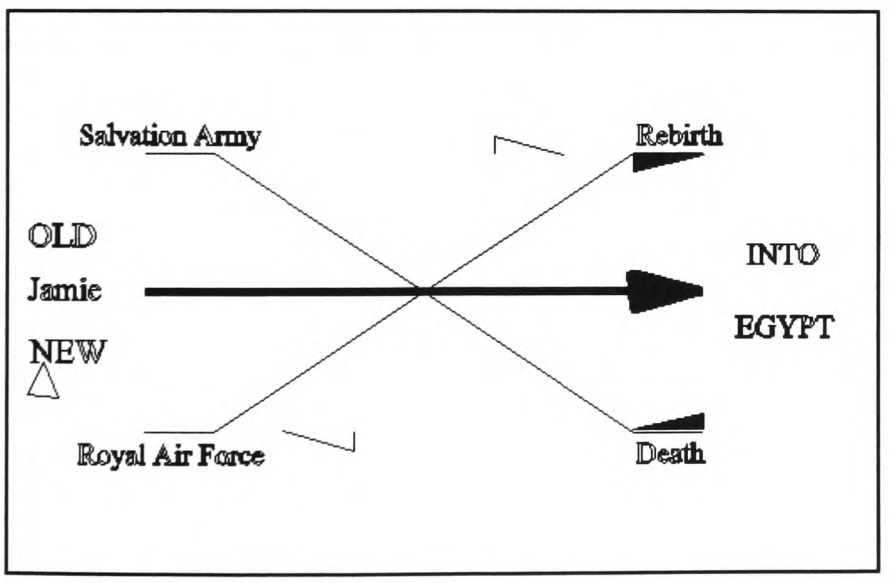
The sleeping woman, Jamie and most of the film's audience would think this a theologically technical reference to Christ, a word taken to be meaningless or meaningful, according to personal inclination and belief, but which few could honestly deny has become almost phatic in its abstraction. The beauty of its appearance here in the film, however, draws on its true, biblical use, which is concrete and specific. First appearing in the Old Testament, it means in the original Hebrew 'kinsman-vindicator' (Robinson 57–58).[4] It was the role of the 'redeemer' to deliver or avenge, but fundamentally to 'act as a kinsman' for, the bound and oppressed, delivering them from harm, debt and bondage, a 'responsibility "to redeem" [that] belonged to the nearest relative—brother, uncle, uncle's son, or blood relative . . .' (Vine 194). The sudden, prominent use of a line from the *Messiah* that so emphasises the certainty

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[4] For more on the word, see *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

of a personal kinsman-vindicator, at the beginning of a scene where a woman, however charitable in nature, offers Jamie a home based neither on real kinship nor on any evidence of the personal affection that might substitute for blood relation, brings the whole bitter irony of the second movement of the Trilogy to a point so sharp that it pierces to the heart of the story and the form of exemplary autobiography. If the Trilogy's second movement (which we may take under the title *My Ain Folk*) has shown anything, it is this: Jamie's kin are so far from being his 'redeemer' as to be the very oppressors from whom he needs deliverance.

Interestingly, what so often stands for the family in the Trilogy are institutions, substituting and occasionally serving as the matrix for personal relationships. There is the village school, the mental asylum, the mine, the boys' home/orphanage, and here Jamie is about to encounter two more.[5] The Salvation Army and the Royal Air Force will be source and location of his death/rebirth in another of those extraordinary, chiastic relationships that seem a structural mark of Douglas's genius. In this instance, we have the pattern:



Here Jamie's abstracted, spatial/temporal lifeline (represented by the heavy, straight, central arrow in the diagram) simply goes on in space and time, while the concrete process of Jamie's

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[5] Of course, the significance of institutions continued beyond Douglas's early years: the Trilogy itself being a memorial to the relationship between Douglas and the BFI.

present life, mapped on its significant (typological) structure (both actual and potential), proceeds according to the finer, solid and broken arrows in the diagram. In an abstracted sense, Jamie continues from 'here and now' to 'somewhere and sometime'. In concrete experience, Jamie goes to the Salvation Army for the most fundamental material salvation of all, food and shelter (not for religion or for the sake of his spirit). There he chants for death. After a brief period of suspended existence, he is suddenly in Egypt doing National Service in the Royal Air Force. In typological terms, Jamie *turns to* a 'salvation force' and there physical sustenance leads to spiritual death—the symbolic counterpart to, and necessary step towards, rebirth and liberation. In the limbo following the loss of the old self, a military force (that is, appropriately, a force of death) *turns to him* and takes him into Egypt. There he is saved, through the immediate intervention of a young mentor.

The RAF's providential intervention takes Jamie to a new life in a very old world. However, it is not just any old place, for now as the Trilogy enters its last phase, and we turn from irony to typology, there begins what will be a repeated luminescence of imagery, in which one of the typical (typological) images that ground the significance of Jamie's experience actually appears in a totally realistic but no less powerfully metaphorical fashion *inside* Jamie's experience. These are epiphanic moments that allow us simultaneous views of multiple levels of structure and significance.

They are also inherent parts of the exemplary structure that Douglas used in the Trilogy. This is evident, for example, in the first and most obvious of these remarkable instances, the geographical location itself (which is also the underlying structural metaphor of the entire Trilogy). The transformation of the self in the exemplary form is typically represented by a spatial displacement, a displacement that is emphatically not a *symbol* of the movement, but a concrete, external trace of the internal journey of the self. It exemplifies the

constant grounding of the abstract in the concrete that continues to attract comment on the form's 'detailed realism'. It also demonstrates the essential, signifying relationship that holds between content and structure in exemplary autobiography.

As I said earlier, though, the journey of the self in the exemplary tradition does not take place just anywhere; in that tradition, the preeminent *type* of the self's death and rebirth is Israel's escape from Egypt to the promised land—a journey that begins in Egypt.

> This structural principle, which Eric Auerbach called by its medieval name, *figura*, gave to the otherwise linear course of Christian history (of the self or of the world) a recurrent pattern of meaning. . . . the drama of exodus might be embodied in the experience of every individual soul, thereby recapitulating the essential outlines of universal history in the justification of each sinner. (Freccero 55)[6]

So it is in Douglas. The Trilogy, 'while reserving its uniqueness as the experience of a single man, nevertheless embodies the figure of exodus . . . . the figure of conversion' (55–56).

Here too, Jamie meets Robert who helps him learn and grow and return to life, which once would have seemed impossible. Interestingly, both Robert's role and the location of Jamie's rebirth have their essential place in the exemplary tradition, particularly in its early form. I said before that, in Christian terms, the ancients' were wrong in believing in an intellectual flight from the 'region of unlikeness'. From the same perspective, they were also wrong in their ardent belief in the solitary nature of the soul's flight and that there was:

> no need for a guide on such a journey. Plotinus explicitly says that one requires self-confidence to reach the goal, rather than a guide. This self-confidence was precisely what Augustine interpreted as philosophical pride, the element that in his view vitiated all such attempts. (9)[7]

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[6] Again, there is a remarkable resonance between the creative structure of the Trilogy and Douglas's life. After *Comrades*, the next big project Douglas planned and worked at for years was a film of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Never having been funded, it was left in script form at his death.

[7] The great religions of the East tend to have it both ways—there is an initial need for a guide (guru), but the final goal is for the self alone, with no sense of corporate redemption.

Christianity, and the exemplary tradition, held the opposite to be true. Both Augustine and Dante, for example, insist upon their need for assistance:

> The Platonic conversion toward the light is doomed to failure because it neglects to take account of man's fallen condition. To put the matter in Platonic terms, the pilgrim must struggle even to reach the cave from which Plato assumed the journey began. That struggle, the descent in humility, helps remove the barrier that philosophy leaves intact. (9)

This influenced the subsequent shape of the exemplary form, so that in Douglas the guide is present and no less significant. Unlike Virgil in the *Divina Commedia*, Jamie's guide in the Trilogy only plays his part after the transformational death of the self. Until then, Jamie is led by something providential (perhaps a teleological history), though Douglas does not identify it. It is not fate or luck, however, both of which are by definition undirected.

Anyway, here in the Egyptian desert Robert guides Jamie's purgatorial rebirth. This is not presented as the sudden and immediate transformation it really is, in part because Jamie is unconscious of what happens until it happens, in the last series of shots in the film, when he and the filmmaker are imaginatively one. Furthermore, it was important to Douglas that we are given time to perceive and explore the elements of this change and the ways this new life differs from what has gone before. As a result, the change occurs over several distinct stages, though these stages can be thought of as the phenomenal dramatization in space and time of a momentous event that occurred inside Jamie.

I have already noted that presentation in this last phase of the Trilogy is highly metaphorical, with profoundly typological structures grounded in the hard, truthful reality of the present moment. The whole movement of this last section now openly confronts the two interdependent dimensions of exemplary autobiography. I noted earlier that this kind of story is about identity and aesthetics, and that the creation or discovery of an aesthetic transforms, or, more accurately, is the sign of the transformation of an ordinary into an artistic life—an

artistic life that is also fundamentally moral by virtue of being visionary. In the last twenty or so scenes of *My Way Home*, we can trace Jamie's reawakening to life and relationship—not just with other humans (though this is profoundly important) but to the principle of life itself—while different notions of art and creativity repeatedly confront and involve him until he responds to that which is most comprehensively creative. Both dimensions occur together, so that Jamie moves from death, through a material, manipulative stage of art and morality to a final stage in which both are visionary and redemptive.

Before considering these stages in greater detail, let me give them a brief listing (scene and page numbers appear parenthetically after each item):

- Jamie names himself for the first time in the Trilogy (30: 22);
- A name, however, is of no more significance than a number when it enforces an individuality that is a setting off from others (31: 23);
- Jamie paints bricks, helping impose a kind of order on the world (32: 23);
- But Jamie sees no 'wonder' in Egypt's ancient artifacts of order (33: 23);
- Jamie smooths sand, continuing to order the world (34: 24);
- Jamie's healing begins with a symbolic, shared feeding with fish (35: 24);
- Physical and material needs, however, have no more significance than sand, when compared to the communion of human spirits (36: 25);
- Jamie returns to physical life and relationship (37: 25);[8]
- He rejects all but he who saved him, so he is not yet fully alive (38: 26);
- Jamie is challenged to reach out, participate and contribute (39–41: 27–28);
- Jamie admits his material poverty during a humane response to an Egyptian boy; afterwards he crosses another boundary (42–43: 29);
- Jamie is uninterested in the petty brutalities of the other servicemen, turning instead to Robert's books (44: 30);
- Reading and writing further release Jamie from his past, so that in a great release of emotion he can symbolically slay it (46–47: 30–31);
- Filmmaking is a possible response to the 'raging torrent of emotion,' but his view of art is still material, manipulative, exploitative (48–49: 31–32);
- Jamie, now leading Robert, becomes aware of the relationship between visionary art and moral responsibility. This knowledge takes him to the symbolic centre of the human universe (50–52: 32–33);
- Now Robert offers Jamie a place he 'can call . . . home' (53: 34);

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[8] 'It should be noted that resurrection comes before life, because for mortal men new life is the product of resurrection' ('John 11:25', *New Bible Commentary* 954).

- Jamie's salvation, redeeming time and place, is realized as his past, present and future become one (54: 34);
- The result is paradise regained (55: 35).

These stages, as I say, bring together in one instant profound questions of art and morality—profound questions presented in the most mundane terms and in the most commonplace events and situations. This includes something as apparently banal as the marking of the boundary of the RAF base, by a line of bricks laid end-to-end across the desert and painted, alternately, black and white. On the RAF side the sand is ordered, smooth without mark; on the Egyptian side it is chaotic, littered with markings. At one obvious level of significance, this serves as a demarcation line between European order, which is meant to appear intrinsically and effortlessly superior (the mask of an imperialism conceived in materialism and imposed by military power) and Eastern disorder, which is meant to suggest a natural and impenetrable inferiority (masking real difference in a rhetorically justified subjugation). The relationship between *order* and *power* is central to both the obvious, political implications here (which are not directly part of Jamie's story, but of the external world in which it takes place), and to the Trilogy's central, but more subtle and complex concern for Jamie's life and art. In this view, the superiority of oneself and inferiority of the 'other' are taken to be truths immediately accessible. However complex the artistic structure, this is essentially the moral stance of the ironist.

Jamie is drafted into the perpetuation of this distinction when he is put the task of repainting the bricks. If we look for the typological relationship (here, a secular one), it is easy to see. Jamie's creativity, his painting, can be like this: a materialist marking based on a categorizing, classifying, delineating aesthetic. It is an art that can easily juxtapose and distinguish, but has trouble with the moral possibilities of art: interpreting, exemplifying, uniting. Jamie is painting, and that is a very good step. As we can see on screen, however, the

result is a less profound art than the films we now possess.[9] Douglas is concentrating here on art as material manipulation, and what better way to emphasize the point than bring it down to the level of working with paint, bricks and sand. In this kind of story, the subject needs to become aware of how his or her complete life and individual actions resonate to the historical, typological patterns that structure their occurrence. To see themselves this way is to perceive clearly and avoid error, much as Blake once suggested:

> Error is Created. Truth is Eternal. . . . I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action . . . . 'What,' it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I Question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it. (*A Vision of the Last Judgment* Keynes 3:162)

Painting a line of bricks in the Egyptian desert is an admittedly servile task, yet it associates Jamie with similar, if incomparably more ancient and ambitious activities. This is made clear in the next scene, where Jamie and Robert visit the pyramids.

These greatest of all symbols of human pride, ingenuity and toil are also artifacts of belief and of a once holy order. Robert touches the great stones and looks at the mass in wonder and admiration. He asks Jamie for his opinion, but Jamie sees no 'wonder' in these monuments of Egypt's past. Partly because of his difficulties with his own past, he remains closed to the significance of such creations beyond the shared dimension of the toil behind such works (bondage in Egypt leads to his salvation, as it did for those who once slaved on the pyramids). Robert calls for him to 'Enthuse!' He pleads with him to 'Enthuse!' He reminds Jamie that his spiritual sterility, his deathly lack of interest and involvement, is in the face of

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[9] I can hear the surprise: 'Art . . . painting! Come on now, it's only a line of black and white bricks across the desert.' But imagine Carl André transposing his sculpture *Equivalent VIII* into one of his later Earthworks projects. It could look just like this.

'. . . one of the seven wonders of the world' (sc. 33: 23). What is the enthusiasm Robert calls for? In the Trilogy, it is more than the excitement of a tourist, more than passionate and lively interest or eagerness. Robert's call connects to the roots of the word *enthusiasm*.[10] He calls for Jamie to be inspired by the wonder before him, brought back to life, sociability and creativity. Can Jamie respond?

Well, in the next scene (34) Jamie returns to the imposition of order upon the landscape, smoothing the sand that lies within the boundary of the bricks he repainted earlier. This scene has been thought of as an example of the mindless military routine to which Jamie and Robert are subjected (Robert cleans graffiti off latrine walls). But there is a significant difference in the visible approach of the two to these tasks. Robert is clearly tired and bored, for him this is indeed one of those mindless tasks to be endured, and he goes about it with a curious mixture of languid persistence and careless abandon. Jamie, however, is dully absorbed and intent. There is no sign at all that for him this is the same sort of routine task. This sort of effort, as before with the painting of the bricks, is manipulative and materialistic. It constrains freedom in a way that romantic notions of the self can never let loose. Jamie still needs to struggle free from this type of aesthetic. It is a struggle mirrored in the last shot of the scene, an extreme close-up of a desert insect struggling to be free of the sand Jamie has compacted (oppressed and oppressor resembling one another).

As I said before, this whole section of the Trilogy stretches out an intense, almost instantaneous, transformation of Jamie's spirit on both the moral and aesthetic planes, stretched out and mirrored at the phenomenal level so that the whole experience, and the

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[10] 'Enthusiasm . . . from Late Latin *enthusiasmus*, from Greek *enthousiasmos*, from *enthousiazein* to be possessed by a god, from *entheos* inspired, from EN[2] + *theos* god' (*Collin's Electronic Dictionary*).

Trilogy of films, can truly be *exemplary*. Neither stand alone. What we see is a kind of dialectic between the two dimensions, with each positing, refuting, confirming, synthesizing—the issue and initiation of the other. Before Jamie can undertake a new kind of activity, the kind of activity that will lead to the type of art we have before us in the Trilogy, he first needs to be made whole, to be healed, and that process begins with another, extraordinary, typological scene: this time between Robert and Jamie in the mess (sc. 35: 25). Jamie has trouble eating a fish, and in a strong echo of a sequence earlier in the film, in the Salvation Army dining hall (sc. 26: 21), he is given assistance. Robert helps him, teaches him. The exchange between the two is highly metaphorical, yet obvious once the nature of this movement of the Trilogy is known:

ROBERT: Why aren't you eating?

JAMIE It's all bones.

ROBERT All kippers have bones.
There is a way of coping.
Do you want me to show you how?
You set about it like so . . . .
See, it's easy once you know how to get rid of all the rubbish.
Try it.

Jamie makes a messy attempt and then gives up in disgust. Robert gently exchanges plates with Jamie and both eat the fish before them. Here is good advice and good example about life, family and art.

Given the pattern of the Trilogy so far, this scene can also be read as a type of the feeding of the five thousand with a bit of fish.[11] Then, the miracle had followed hard on a tremendous healing of the multitude. Such healing was always of immediate efficacy and worth in the physical realm and the present moment. That is never denied, but of greater

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[11] See, e.g., Matt 14:14ff; Mark 6:30ff; Luke 9:10ff .

importance was the spiritual healing of which the physical was both type and corollary. With the feeding of the five thousand, the lesson is taken a step further; the gospel was not to be understood as a message that just made better what was wrong and whole what was broken. That sort of goodness (good as it may be) is only a balance for what is bad. The message was to be understood as a nutritive, desirable good that outbalanced what was negative. To be made well, is to be brought into the present moment, for illness and injury are a kind of living with the past—whether it began with an accident, infection or deterioration—in a real sense the future is cut off.

Healing, however, only implies promise of the future. Feeding suggests the healthy activity of need and desire. It is a sign and the natural result of healing. It prepares one for endeavours of the future, though it does not itself deliver the future. Such material needs and satisfactions are by their nature confined to the present. In the biblical antitype, the ultimate significance and purpose of the miracle of the feeding is then presented by Christ, who teaches that what the people need is not physical but spiritual nourishment. Just after this, he calls Lazarus back from the dead.

This revelation of the more-than-physical significance of an entirely phenomenal event continues to be parallelled in the next two scenes of *My Way Home*. It is not physical nourishment Jamie needs. Outside the mess (sc. 36: 25), as Jamie and Robert lean in the heat of day against the side of the building, Robert makes one of those profound, small gestures so typical of Douglas's work. Someone whistles somewhere, attracting Jamie's and our attention, just as Robert slowly raises his cup and pours out a stream of sand. What a cinematically precise and beautiful way to suggest that the needs of the body are little more than dust. The healing needs to go, and eventually we will see that it has gone, deeper. Indeed, as the scene ends, Jamie and Robert end up looking at each other almost coyly, with a smile and a slight

nod. Jamie is not fully aware of it yet, but he has awakened to the possibilities of life and relationship.

Jamie's reawakening is completed in the very next scene (37: 25ff), which also completes the healing/feeding type with a Lazarus event. We find Jamie and Robert at play, that is, we find Robert at playing, for Jamie is still barely animated. At one moment in the scene, Jamie falls and lies on the sand like a rag doll. Robert picks up the silent, limp figure in his arms and spins about with him chanting: 'Come on, be alive, be alive, be alive, be alive!' Within moments they are rolling around on the sand together, with Robert shouting: 'He's alive! He is alive!' (I feel compelled here to remind my readers that this is not Christian evangelizing—by Douglas, Robert or me. The pattern is largely biblical, because it is an exemplary autobiography. Douglas's spiritual concerns, however, if they can be called that, are moral and aesthetic, not religious.)

Physical resurrection is not enough, however, for Jamie still rejects everyone but his own, immediate saviour—'I don't think I like people', he says to Robert (sc. 38: 26). This is an important step forward, for now at least he begins to be able to acknowledge, if only by rejecting others, the rejection that he himself has felt. Now he needs to open to others and learn the lesson of *charitas*: until then he will not be fully alive; until then he will not be truly free; until then visionary art will remain beyond his best efforts and power.

The lesson in compassion can be learned at the lowest possible level, even from interactions with the biologically-lowest forms of life (as with the progressively more conscious and moral encounters with insects, in sc. 34, 39 and 44)—a lesson in compassion that becomes more human, complex and mature for Jamie, (say, from sc. 42: 29—in the Egyptian village), until finally the lesson and the learning bear fruit (as in the creation of the Trilogy itself). For the moment, Jamie still cannot understand what he must do, for in the next

scene (sc. 39: 27) he again buries a sand insect, this time while walking along the fenced perimeter of the barracks compound (still marking boundaries, though in a different way this time). When Robert enters the scene, he walks along the same perimeter until he comes to the spot where Jamie had stood watching him enter. There he stops. A plane approaches and, as it nears, Robert looks down, sees something in the sand and gets down to take a closer look. Before him, an insect struggles from the sand. As the plane passes, Robert looks up after the plane. The plane and the insect like two structural extremes of the same essential, physical design also both represent freedom: one at the most basic level of lowly, individual life, the other as the symbol of freedom in its most expansive, constructed sense, traversing great distances of space. One of the lessons Dante learned, and passed on through his works, was that we rarely succeed or fail with the difficult, extreme and obvious virtues and vices. It is the smallest, simplest and most trivial grounds on which we constantly slip up.

Through the rest of the scene, Robert challenges Jamie to open, reach out, participate and contribute. It is not enough that Jamie 'be alive' or that, as he says at the end of the previous scene, he wants 'to do something'. Robert tries to expand Jamie's horizons, which have remained tightly constrained: walking is limited to the fence line, and apparently talking has been equally Sisyphean (Robert suggests that there is nothing to talk about if Jamie cannot talk about himself). Jamie's response—'Well let's go to the pictures or something'—is telling. This not only marks art's reentry in the dialectic of aesthetic and morality that we have been tracing, it also illustrates Jamie's present attitude to art, which will be the next subject dealt with on the aesthetic side of the argument (and, of course, Jamie/Douglas eventually makes a picture to tell us about himself). Its appearance here, as the moral dimension temporarily recedes, shows again how typical it is for Douglas to give an extremely complex, multidimensional narrative structure a chiastic form.

Robert says they have already seen the film that is showing. At this stage, Jamie's interest in film is really consumption for other ends; going to the cinema, for Jamie, is simply an 'or something', a distraction and a time-killer. He certainly would not be interested in the films in which he appears. What sort of film would interest him? Well in the opening shots of the next scene (40: 28), we see inside his locker, which is covered with photographs of Marilyn Monroe along with a clipping for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). Interestingly, the Monroe/film connection is made again in scene 48: 31, where Robert and Jamie lean against the outside of a cinema with a poster for *Niagara* (1953). This also marks another instant of Douglas using a crisscrossing structure. In scene 40, the (slightly) later of the two films, *Blondes* (a film that marked the real beginning of Monroe's cinematic exploitation), is referred to in a scene where Jamie has only a cursory interest in the books that are central to Robert's world. In the later scene (48: 31), the earlier of the two films, *Niagara* (a 'compellingly tawdry and nasty' movie, but 'the only [one] that explored the mean, unsavoury potential of Marilyn Monroe's cuddly, infantile perversity'[12]), is pointed to in a scene where Robert daydreams and Jamie casually reads.

When Jamie sits next to Robert, on his bunk, as he polishes his tunic buttons (sc. 40: 28), we are presented with a view of art (in this case literature) that contrasts strongly to the kind of exploitative cinema represented by *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Photos are out in the open, here, and books are piled on books on the side table with the assurance that there are 'a lot more at home'. Jamie carelessly flips through a volume on which we can see the words *Maxim Gorky*. Robert does not miss much, for in the next scene he lies in the sun reading, with this book lying by his side. It is a cultural hook meant to catch Jamie when he comes up.

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[12] Pauline Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies*, as quoted in *Cinemania '94*.

Jamie, however, does not rise to the bait, because he is not yet sensitive to the needs or presence of another person. Perhaps Robert reveals more than he realises when in frustration he makes their separation, and Jamie's problem, explicit by drawing 'X's in the sand with a line between. Robert tries so hard in these scenes to reach Jamie and pull him out of himself, and he does much for the troubled lad. Perhaps, ultimately, they are too different—intellectually, socially, linguistically, materially—for Jamie to reach out freely and express his affection. What Jamie may need is someone as impoverished and disadvantaged as himself, since the next step requires his recognition that he can give to others. Robert may seem to have too much for Jamie ever to believe that he could give something to him. This brings us to a key scene of this last movement.

After the mutually painful, unmeeting ways of Robert and Jamie in scene 41, Jamie (sc. 42: 29) has the opportunity to respond to the needs of someone of equal or lower status and in equal or greater need than himself. This is the Egyptian boy who begs at the back of the truck in which Jamie rides as guard or escort. In this scene, Jamie admits his absolute material poverty and his inability to help anyone else in those terms. Doing so, however, frees his spirit for a humane, charitable response to another person, who, though foreign and a complete stranger, is no longer objectified. Jamie has no money for the begging boy, but he is gentle and kind in response. By now, it might be asked, if such a soterial mission is really going on here?

Well, in this scene, we also glimpse a manifestation of that enduring ancient/present figure of a Madonna and child. In the biblical tradition back of the exemplary form (as in the mythical patterns that structure many legends and fairy tales), it is common for trivial acts of kindness (or unkindness) to be directed unknowingly at apparently insignificant figures who turn out to be disguised representatives of great power. In the New Testament, this takes a highly theological and personal form, in the well-known words of Jesus: 'Inasmuch as ye have

done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matt 25:40). The genuine charity of spirit called for here is also the demonstration, in works, of that spirit's salvation. In Christian terms, the type, or figure, of salvation is Christ's triumph over death—the resurrection (which I am suggesting Jamie repeats in his own experience). Beyond that, in Old Testament terms, lies the Exodus, of which the resurrection is the fulfilment. In fact, the flight into Egypt, which was itself a type of the fulfilment to come, was also one of the early demonstrations and scriptural proofs that Jesus was the Messiah. When Jamie responds to the Egyptian boy, much as we can imagine he would like to be treated himself, we witness the beginning of the transformation of the moral dimension of his existence that must ground his eventual maturation into visionary creativity. To confirm this, Douglas intercuts an extraordinary shot of a shawled mother, sitting on a stool in the gutted interior of a building. On her lap is a swaddled infant and behind them stands a white donkey. In biblical terms, Jamie is saved. From now on he is correctly oriented and will symbolically be moving out and away from Egypt.

Now the change in Jamie begins to show in every scene. Back at the RAF base, in scene 44, we return to the lowest level of life: meaning both the insect tormented by the airmen and their brutal amusements. Jamie separates himself from their cruelties. With this, the RAF has completed its providential role in Jamie's story. Yet, amazingly, we do not leave the scene before Douglas creates another typological connection, this time secular and literary (are the secular ones connected to art and the religious ones related to morality?). What literary connection might be made between a beetly insect, for which utter cruelty is expressed in the world, but which needs, and on moral grounds deserves, compassion? This is clearly an anthropomorphism of the insect, but what story of 'insectomorphosed' humanity is suggested if that pattern is reversed? (And reversal of this sort is highly appropriate at this stage of the

Trilogy, for now what we are seeing is the reversal of the entropic patterns of the natural world, from dissolution and disorder to created order and permanence.) Perhaps most people would think of Kafka. And what does Jamie do when he leaves the scene of cruelty? He borrows a book from Robert, committing himself to other kinds of activities and interests. And on the cover of the book we can read KAFKA. With this extraordinary scene art and morality interconnect in Jamie's life, and this time they take!

Now it is time to think of going home (or 'HOME' as the word appears in the film), suggested by the brief scene with Robert's homemade calendar (45). Soon—perhaps already—this particular home will be for Jamie too. In the next scene (46), Jamie can now write, and he writes to Robert's folks (at Robert's suggestion) as if he were writing to his own. Jamie is now alive to love and wonder (the spelling of the word *wonderful* is sharply pointed), both of which are essential to well-being. However, true creativity springs from these by the exercise of active energy.[13]

The scene has also brought Jamie close to the heart of his personal problems, his own family, and this leads to the symbolic slaying in the equally brief scene that follows. Notice again how, in the real world, that is exactly what happens. He bayonets a dummy—which symbolically stands for the enemy—and he symbolically kills off his family demon.

After this, Jamie suddenly appears (outside a cinema) quite casually and naturally reading. Art in a more positive sense has entered his life, by his becoming a more receptive audience/reader. His potential for truly positive artistic agency has not yet changed though. In this scene (48), he refers for the first time to filmmaking. Jamie asks Robert: 'What are you

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[13] See Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 48ff.

going to do when you get back then?' (Notice that it is 'back' and not 'home'.) The interchange between them is interesting:

ROBERT: Suppose I'll eventually go to university.
How about you?

JAMIE: Well, I want to be an artist.

[Cu: The movie poster, advertising "Marilyn Monroe and Niagara, a raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control".]

JAMIE: [Laughing] Maybe even a film director.

ROBERT: Wow!

Robert is casually indefinite (not unsure but noncommittal); Jamie is precise and definite. Between them is 'a . . . torrent of emotion'. Contrary to the previous assertion of his artistic intentions, confirmation this time is right there before our eyes, in the straightforward connection between the desire and resulting film we watch.

However, at this stage Jamie's art, his filmmaking, would still not be visionary, would still be fully materialist, part of the exploitative world of power and money—here the Marilyn Monroe poster links his ambition to Jamie's pictures of her (sc. 40: 28), and to the pseudo-Lawrence of Arabia shots (though here Jamie smiles, happy, perhaps for the first time in the Trilogy). Of course, Monroe herself stands as a symbol of the ultimately deadly nature of exploitation. Jamie has yet to see and understand the existence of visionary art (the very thing he eventually creates in the Trilogy). The sort of art that has real compassion, and has an exemplary purpose. This recognition will require one last step, and this is one of the most extraordinary sequences in the whole Trilogy. This is the sequence that fulfils and completes the transformation of Jamie—and of Robert too (for after this last sequence together they become as one, and Robert offers Jamie his home as home).

That last sequence is the series of shots (50–52: 32–33) of the two young men in Cairo and their visit to the mosque. The sequence begins with the two of them relaxing outside, at a sidewalk café. For the first time in Egypt, Jamie is casually dressed and well groomed. And for the first time anywhere, he looks genuinely happy and at peace. It is also notable that Jamie carries a book with him: that it turns out to be a guidebook, does not diminish its significance, indeed, it adds a further metaphorical reference (precisely by being a *guidebook*) to what is going on here. When they leave the café, Robert sighs and asks, 'Okay, what shall we do now?' Jamie responds with confidence: 'I know a place we can go'. He orients himself with his guidebook and its map, takes Robert by the arm and leads him off smiling. In the background can be heard the sound of a muezzin calling the faithful to prayer.

Jamie takes Robert to a great mosque somewhere in the city. They enter together, respectfully removing their shoes, but as tourists. The scene harks back to the pyramids of scene 33 (23). However, this creation in stone is still, for the faithful, a holy place, while its very structure represents a holy, universal order. As they turn and move across the great geometrically patterned floor, Jamie calls Robert's attention to something, pointing it out high up over the camera (we cannot see what it is). They read in the book simultaneously, seeking information together. As they stand close, looking up at what Robert has identified as a mosaic, Jamie's head drops slowly and gently onto Robert's shoulder. The scene, one of the rare moments of affectionate, physical contact in the entire Trilogy, mirrors that in scene 6 of *My Childhood*, when Tommy puts his arm around Jamie's shoulder and they lean their heads together. Here in the mosque, the camera slowly zooms out, away from the two figures—one of the very few camera movements in the three films. What we see is Jamie and Robert standing together at the centre of a great, geometrically patterned floor. Symbolically, the pattern represents the centre of the universe, and the unity of time and space in the eternity of

the divinity.[14] Here art, as architecture, is visionary: ethic and aesthetic in subtle and creative relationship. The mosque is the human, constructed parallel of something that appeared briefly in the opening scene of this last movement of the Trilogy. The disembodied voices of these two young men struggle to speak over the mechanical noises of a motor vehicle. As they make contact, an oasis suddenly appears with the sounds of Arabic music. As Frye has noted:

> The Bible begins with man in a paradisal state, where his relation to nature was of an idealized kind suggesting a relation of identity on equal terms [the opposite of the region of unlikeness]. The imagery of the garden of Eden is an oasis imagery of trees and water. . . . the oasis is the inevitable image of providential order, a garden directly created and sustained by God, a habitation that makes sense in human terms without human transformation, the visible form of the invisible divine creation. (*Great Code* 142)

Humanity cannot return to this garden. Some would say that it is the role of art to re-imagine the garden for us, and for us to work to recreate it by means of our own creative power. This is the unifying effect of an integrated creativity of ethics and aesthetics. It recreates the region of likeness that was our original home (even if only in imagination).

Now Robert offers Jamie a place he 'can call home', in lines that now strike the ear like poetry. With this salvation redeeming both time and place, Jamie's past, present and future become one (whole and healthy). The past is revisited in the light of this new life and new perspective, a light that is the light of the window, the camera's recording frame, the projector's illuminative beam and the illuminated, reflecting screen from which we draw our knowledge of this particular art form and the story this master of the form is telling. The result is paradise regained, and the film ends with a shot of the orchard first seen in scene 24 (20) of *My Way Home*. Now everything is in bloom and the tree of life is restored.

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[14] Similar symbolic patterns and constructions were common in ancient and medieval architecture. Three widely divergent references will stand for the relevant literature: Doxiadis, *Architectural Space in Ancient Greece*; Walls, *Geometry and Architecture in Islamic Jerusalem*; Foster, *Patterns of Thought*.

CONCLUSION

In his recent 'Memoir' of Douglas (*Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account*), Andrew Noble makes a profound observation:

> Though his medium involved the most intense realism, Bill was a visionary storyteller, not a factualist. In his creative conception of character as writer and as director he was a perfect exemplar of Blake's dictum that the imaginatively good is achieved by way of minute particulars. (13)

Unfortunately, Noble backs away from the daring suggestion of the first sentence, which may be the most innovative suggestion I have come across in the body of Douglas criticism. What we needed was to hear more of Noble's belief in the 'visionary' quality of Douglas's work.[15]

I have not suggested anything in this analysis that *should* be considered radical or outrageous. My discussion of the Trilogy in terms of its structural principles was not meant to underplay the realism of the films—if anything, the Trilogy is too realistic, too painful in its depiction of Jamie's condition and suffering. However, there is more than straightforward, autobiographical documentation going on here. After all, the narrative structure, the techniques and the complex of images that I have been mapping in Douglas can be traced back to the very beginning of our culture's literary tradition, and until very recently, at least, they were central to creative effort in almost all aspects of that tradition. Too few of us realize that the structures, images and patterns of religion, myth and folk and fairy tale permeate our thinking and language, inhering at the very core of our ways of understanding and communicating. We are too often misled into thinking that such influences and structures must be laid on from the outside, in an appliqué fashion that leaves the seam between *reality* and fictional belief clear to anyone who would look. The truth is, however, that from the earliest times, there has been the most profound difference imaginable between those who superficially

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[15] Although, whether or not Douglas was Blakean would require serious analysis.

apply such mythological, metaphysical or theological patterns and meanings to their own lives or the stories they tell, and those who find such patterns and meanings in their lives and construct any stories they consequently tell from those patterns and meanings outwards. Again, I am not going to argue or assert an ontological status for such beliefs—though, when sincerely held and understood in the heart, they can produce an effect that is as convincingly truthful as it is possible to imagine, a believability dependant upon two paradoxical things, which go on simultaneously in such stories. First, there is this incredible retelling of the same situations and events, often using many of the same details, that have been told and retold from the beginning of recorded history. Second, and simultaneously, the events and details are always specific, genuine and in the here-and-now of the unique individual involved. Further, not all aspects or elements of the original occur in each retelling, and not all aspects or elements of the retelling have a correlative in the original. In a way, this only serves to give those details that are the same a profoundly numinous quality.

All that aside, it is certain that what I say about Douglas/Jamie and the intrusion of 'grace' (or what you will) into his life, will not be popular among the highly conformist critics of culture, film or literature, who are largely immanentist/materialists for whom morality has been entirely aestheticized (since Nietzsche) and replaced by economic and technological considerations. However, neither will it please any who cling to bourgeois Christianity (that is, Christianity in its common, modern, Western guise), for they will have trouble accepting the fact that Jamie/Douglas *deserved* such providential intervention. For them, Douglas's subsequent lack of success, health and happiness will only confirm that such an intervention did not take place.

I do not know what Douglas's personal beliefs were, nor, for the purposes of this analysis, do I care. He may not have been clear about them himself.[16] I would never suggest, nor would I believe it if someone else were to suggest, that his purpose in the Trilogy was to tell the story of a Christian conversion—at least not in the way that that is typically understood in modern society. He was not interested in anything half so trivial or superficial as that is usually understood. I have no doubt, though, that he came to believe that there was a curious and profound shape and significance to his experiences, which seemed not to be bound by the normal limits of the storyteller, and that they echoed in extraordinary ways a tradition that could be traced back at least to biblical examples of method, structure and image. What Douglas knew or believed beyond that I do not know, nor does he make it more specific. Our final response must be either to take him at his word (or *image*), or think him deluded. In either case, we must be in awe of the art he created from such belief. One thing can be said about the man, however, in his view of his own past, his history (Jamie's story), we see a humility that, despite his reputation for belligerent, intransigent filmmaking, continued to be a telling personal trait. This is evident in his willingness to help others with their work, in his complete, attested openness and support for the ideas and techniques of students' film projects, despite his own obsessively fixated vision when it came to his own story.

This leads me, finally, to my long delayed comment on the response that *exemplary autobiography* implicitly expects it will elicit from its audience. It is that each member of the audience will reconstruct his or her past as a meaningful narrative, so transforming their present life in the belief that this will assure a meaningful and purposeful future. Exemplary autobiographies declare the necessity of such creative action and serve as models for its

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[16] Few of us are absolutely clear about our beliefs, though they comprise a large but largely unexamined part of the mental life of all people—scientists not excluded.

accomplishment. Douglas recreates the narrative of his life retrospectively, which in a broad sense then serves as a model for us all—we may not write books or make films, but we should all watch for opportunities for meaning, even for meaningful moments that life may offer to us gratuitously. And we should then use these to reconstruct our lives as meaningful narratives, however impoverished and miserable they may have started. In this way, the Trilogy is also exemplary, viewed not as in St. Augustine and Dante *sui generis æternitatis*, but from that of the meaningful, creative life in relationship to others: a life in which one becomes aware of the possibilities for the creation of meaning given in the nature of things, a life seen and lived from a visionary perspective.

Again, some may think it unlikely that Bill Douglas could possibly have repeated the conventions of the exemplary tradition, and that he would then have had anything like its pedagogic concern for his audience. Such doubt says more of our limited expectations of film's relationship to our cultural history than it does about film or individual filmmakers.

Lindsay Anderson has recently commented on Douglas's purpose in making films:

> He was not attracted to cinema because he wanted to make a career for himself, or because he wanted to please an audience. He made films from the heart, and from his experience of life. His work, like that of all good artists, was didactic. By which I mean he wanted his audience to know more about life and to understand it better. (Foreword, *A Lanternist's Account* 11)

Anderson like few others senses the truth, though predictably he cannot break free from romanticism. Douglas made his films from 'the heart', only if intellect and will are taken to reside with sensation and the emotions. Further, he wanted his audience to get more from his Trilogy than an inescapably vague sense of 'knowing . . . about life'. As for the repetition of conventions, well, as Frye says of poetry,

> any serious study . . . soon shows that the real difference between the original and the imitative poet is simply that the former is more profoundly imitative.

> Originality returns to the origins of literature, as radicalism returns to its roots. (*Anatomy* 97–98)

We should not, of course, mistake the differences that exist between the works of Douglas and predecessors like St. Augustine and Dante. Douglas tells the same story, but each story told is individual and unique—this, both Augustine and Dante themselves point out. I suppose what is distinctly different in Douglas's work is that his story is about a child/youth whereas his illustrious predecessors tell of themselves as mature men and in keeping with the nature of their art, they tell their stories at the height of their powers, as mature thinkers and writers. Douglas's Trilogy was created at the beginning of his career, and however significant his work may be, it must be immature by its very position in his creative history. His death before he could create a larger body of work and so reach greater creative maturity is a tremendous loss to this nation and film universally. Praise needs to go to the BFI Production Board for allowing this much of such a considerable ability and sensitivity to be made known.

4

THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT: CONTINGENT EVENTS & FALSE FICTIONS

This chapter looks at the third and most ambitious of Peter Greenaway's BFI projects, *The Draughtsman's Contract* (the date of which, 1982, marks the terminal date for the period under study in this thesis).[1] Originally budgeted at £120,000 (for which the Board allocated £80,000 with £40,000 from a Channel 4 grant), the film came in late, over-budget (at almost £300,000) and over-long (at almost 240 min.). The Board insisted that it be cut to its present 108 minutes (and as far as I know, the longer version is not extant). My discussion, therefore, refers specifically to the shorter version of the film, the version shown in cinemas and on television. This is also the version for which a script is held in the BFI Library (see the edited copy attached). How far the release-form of the film matches its author/director's *intentions* can be questioned—it is a notoriously problematic notion in any case—but the release-form of the film is its public form and the version for which the director has accepted wide recognition. I take that as an admission of responsibility. Until the earlier, or any other, versions of the film are made available, I will consider that discussed here to be the authoritative version, giving us our best view of what its creator wanted to present to the world.

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[1] Greenaway had already made *A Walk Through H* (41 mins., 1978) and *The Falls* (185 mins., 1980) for the Board, and would make *A Zed and Two Noughts* (115 mins., 1985).

The Draughtsman's Contract proved to be an important collaboration for both the filmmaker and the Board, for through it, both individual and organization came to the attention of a broader section of the cinema audience worldwide than had previously been the case. That Greenaway gained more from this than did the BFI (and has done little to acknowledge the Institute's significant contribution to his career) could be guessed from the nature of this film or from what it reveals of its author/director's perspective on filmmaking—which is committed to the technical/romantic ethos of modern culture.[2]

It is fashionable to respond to Greenaway's films (particularly to *The Draughtsman's Contract* and later films) as international standard-bearers for 'the avant-garde', remarkable and praiseworthy for often achieving relative box-office success, while retaining their legitimacy as avant-garde creations. This tendency to iconise the films oversimplifies their nature, not least as part of any international avant-garde (however that might be defined).[3] I will argue instead that, along with much other creative effort normally identified as avant-garde, Greenaway's films stand as distillations of the cultural and ethical core of modern, Western civilization. Whether such works were intended to highlight, test or subvert that culture, their realization often entails a brilliantly inventive use and true refinement of that culture's technical and materialistic means of representation.[4]

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[2] Following the neo-romanticism that dominates modern thinking on aesthetics and ethics, historical and creative debts are *naturally* hidden by masks of originality and self-generation.

[3] For problems concerning the definition of 'avant-gardism', and the idea that it is a transcultural, transhistorical movement, see Josephine Guy, *The British Avant-Garde*. See also Appendix 4 for an extensive list of further readings on avant-gardism.

[4] I will suggest later that avant-garde art can no longer be seen, uncritically, as the natural opposite of commercial media (if this was ever true), but as an abstracting and heightening their distinguishing characteristics—even as a developing ground for representational syntax and technique, feeding the commercial appetite for novel methods of attracting attention and creating impact. More surprising are the philosophical and moral beliefs they share.

I will suggest further that, as films, such work is also complicit in the 'compensatory' role of cinema (and TV)—alleviating anxiety about the modern, technical world by addressing and feeding, through modern, *technical* means, an obsession with the visual that is a definitive part of our technological age.[5] Late in the chapter, this will take us back to issues concerning the Production Board, the BFI and film in Britain, with which this thesis started.

Now what of *The Draughtsman's Contract* itself? Well, when I first saw the film with a group of friends back in 1982, we were variously confused, disappointed and dissatisfied with the film. The immediate focus of those feelings, we agreed, was the film's ending, which was not at all what we expected. I hasten to add that the expectation was not one we had taken into the cinema with us. We were avid (usually, twice-weekly) patrons of foreign, unusual, repertory and art-cinemas—several of us had even made low-budget, non-narrative films and videos while at university—and we did not go to see a film, especially in an art-house context, with anything like simple or unexamined expectations. The lack of preconceptions concerning this film was heightened by the fact that none of us had seen anything by Greenaway before *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Yet as we talked in a café after the film, we agreed that this film, for all its obvious attractions (and perhaps because of those attractions) had left us feeling angry and offended—'cheated' was a word often used.

We had judged *The Draughtsman's Contract*, as we did every film, however banal, bizarre or complex, largely in terms of those expectations, which by the conditions of its own structure, content and technique, the film seemed to set for itself—and we found this film wanting. Granted, we were responding to a first-viewing and ours was what Northrop Frye calls a 'pre-critical' response. Yet we were not a naïve audience, and we could not get over

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[5] See Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism* (1994), esp. 131–159, for an excellent discussion of the role modern, visual media play in our highly technical age.

the feeling of having been manipulated by the filmmaker for his own pleasure and profit, without comparable exchange value for ourselves. Were we right—were we justified in feeling the way we did? Interestingly, no one at the time suggested poor or careless filmmaking as the cause of our unhappiness. Attention to detail was clearly part of this filmmaker's way of working, and we could not help but sense the focus and strength of his intentionality.

Multiple reviewing of *The Draughtsman's Contract* for this thesis, confirms the film's manipulative power, while critical analysis establishes its strategic intentionality—a strategy I now see developing in his earlier, and confirmed by his later, work. To understand more of that power and its strategic purpose, I will focus primarily on the structure of the film—as I did with the Douglas Trilogy. I will not get caught up in the story-line, for, as I will show, the point of the film, in part, is that interpretation is pointless, because narrative is meaningless.

Perhaps I should start by saying something about how I analysed the script and film. Of course, as I said, I saw the film when it was first released in 1982, and since then I had seen it again on video. When I came to do the research for this chapter, the first thing I did was make a transcription of the script held in the BFI Library, which I then compared to a video copy of the film, altering the script as necessary to show words spoken and not spoken by the actors in performance. Then (through three further viewings of the video), I added a shot-by-shot description to the script, which I compared to the 16mm copy of the film held by the BFI. Using this script (and four more viewings of the video), I established the layout of Compton Anstey (see the plan on page 256), so that camera, character and curriculum locations could be identified. Finally, using diagetic information—stated times, clock chimes, etc.—the angle of lights and shadows and my growing knowledge of the orientation of the house and grounds (and three more times through the video), I plotted the movement of camera and characters and the temporal sequence of shots. All this I checked against the BFI's 16mm print.

To help in this identification and plotting, I created two types of analytic tool: lists and diagrams. For example, I made lists, by scene, of specific references to time, direction and location, and I compared those lists to others that included Neville's drawings listed by time and location, and shot-by-shot lists of time, location and camera direction for each scene in the film. I also listed scenes by character (those present or proximate, speaking or spoken of), and by dialogue (the subject of conversations, for instance). I also divided the film and scenes according to both diagetic and running time, and noted the times and places (again diagetic and cinematic) of sex and eating. In other words, I listed and annotated everything that might help fix and clarify the fluid and uncertain structural patterns and interrelationships that films typically present in the first stages of analysis. Two of those lists appear below.

DIVISION of the SCENES by DAY

Prologue	sc. 1	The night before the drawings are begun.
1st contract		
DAY I	scs. 2–6	
DAY II	scs. 7–9	
DAY III	scs. 10–13	
DAY IV	scs. 14–16	
DAY V	scs. 17–19	
DAY VI	scs. 20–22	
DAY VII	scs. 23–28	
DAY VIII	scs. 29–31	[This ends half-way through the running time.]
2nd contract		
DAY IX	sc. 32	
DAY X	scs. 32–33	
DAY XI	scs. 34–35	
DAY XII	scs. 36–37	
DAY XIII	sc. 38	Finished drawings are shown.
	scs. 39–43	A day not long after Mr. Herbert is discovered.
	scs. 44	The next day.
	scs. 45–48	An autumn day on which Neville is murdered.

TIME & DIRECTION of DRAWINGS

drawings for 1st contract

time	*7–9*	*9–11*	*11–1*	*LUNCH*	*2–4*	*4–6*	*6–8*
FROM:	e	n	n		w	n	n
DRAWING:	**1**	**2**	**3**		**4**	**5**	**6**
TO:	w	s	s		e	s	s

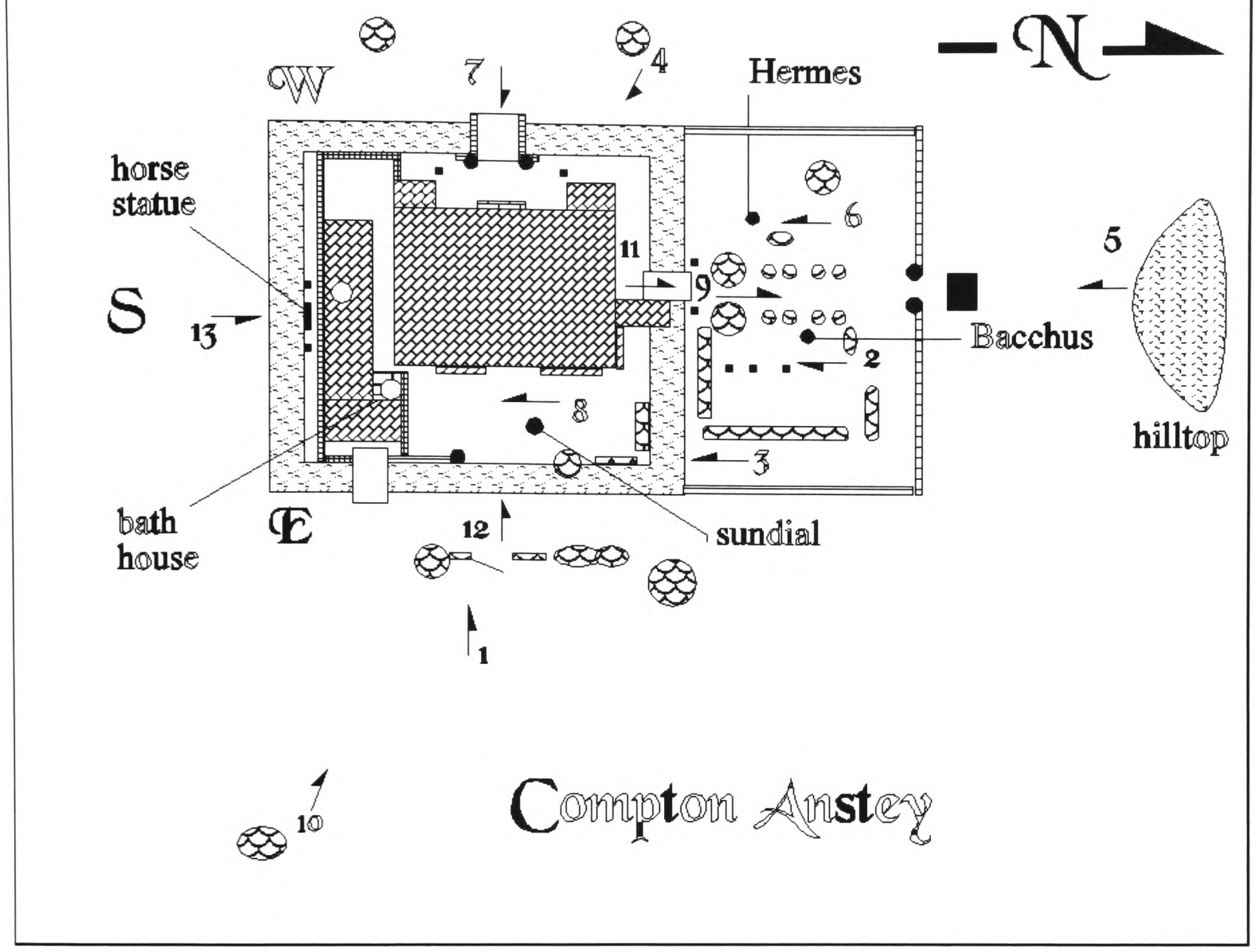
drawings for 2nd contract[6]

time	*7–9*	*9–11*	*11–1*	*LUNCH*	*2–4*	*4–6*	*6–8*
FROM:	w	n	s				
DRAWING:	**7**	**8**	**[9**	**. . . . . 9]**			
TO:	e	s	n				
FROM:	s	e	e				
DRAWING:	**[12**	**11**	**10]**				
TO:	n	w	w				

I also drew a basic plan of Compton Anstey, showing the location and direction of view of the drawings. The plan, which is included below, is not drawn to scale (that would have required information unavailable in the film), but it is correct in essential details and in relative locations and placement of features. Those features are, for purposes of identification, shaded or marked as follows: 1) in brick pattern, the house and main buildings (with bathhouse and barn cupolas as empty circles); 2) in a wave pattern, the moat; 3) in curved hatching, notable trees, shrubs and hedges; 4) by black squares, significant obelisks; 5) with numbers, the drawing sites (the direction of each view being further marked with an arrow).

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[6] By the curriculum, Drawing 10 should be undertaken between 2–4 p.m., but in sc. 32 it is more like 11 a.m. We are never given a curriculum entry for Drawings 11 and 12, so for those, we must depend on close analysis, especially of sc. 38: 41, when the drawings are briefly seen.



The plan of Compton Anstey, along with the shot, time and location lists and my descriptive edition of the script (a copy of which is appended to the thesis) greatly aided my viewing and understanding of the film. On first viewing, the film seems to be made up of distinct and often unconnected shots. The more I looked, the more I found information in the shots, and in the story, that suggested there was a rigid structure for the film. That information (which needed collection and collation, but not interpretation) included the following. First, obviously the entire film took place in one, relatively contained, geographical location, even if I had no clear idea at all where many specific shots occurred. Second, there was Neville's narrated 'curriculum' for the drawings, which specifies times and locations. Third, some shot sequences, particularly those following the movements of one or more characters around the

grounds, are clearly continuous (give or take a few seconds and a few feet, as if to allow for a new position by the viewer), and these can be used to establish landmarks and views, the layout of considerable parts of the garden and the shape and, in part, the layout of the house. This information, in turn, can be used to check time and location in other, less obvious parts of the film. Fourth, the film contains specific indications of time: for example, in scene 5 (12), during the afternoon shot of young Augustus drawing, a clock strikes 2; in scene 14 (20), another clock strikes 2; in scene 25 (27), Mr. Talmann says he has just heard the clock strike 4; in the last scene (47: 65), just before Neville is murdered, we hear a clock strike 12. Further to this, there are the night scenes (1: 2; 9: 15; 16: 21; 22: 25; 28: 28; 37: 39; 41: 49; 47: 65), which help orient us as to the passage of days. Fifth, locations inside and outside the house are limited in number and the film often returns to the same sites more than once. And, finally, there are lights and shadows within scenes—important concerns of painters and cinematographers—and these can be very useful in fixing location and time (for example, if we know primary information about a site's layout and orientation, and are given one variable of time, location or direction, it is possible to work out an unknown quantity of one of the others). By objective analysis and testing, all sorts of temporal and geographical information can be recovered or calculated from what is freely available in the film.

To my considerable surprise, I found that the basic cinematic structure of the film is quite simple, though tightly controlled.[7] Perhaps the best way to see this is to begin where I first noticed it, at the level of shot sequence. I began my analysis here, to see if I could make some sense of what had always seemed a confusingly complex, if not at times nonsensical

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[7] Control is evident even in the relationship of running time to plot-structure: for example, half-way through the films's 108 mins. finds the draughtsman starting on the second contract (sc. 32: 35).

succession of scenes. To my amazement, I discovered that the film is precisely sequential, geographically and temporally, shot by shot and scene by scene. Of course, the film does not present, in its 108 minutes, a precisely sequential 108 minutes in the lives of its characters—it is not continuous in the way of, say, Warhol's *Empire* (1964). Still, Greenaway's film is constructed as if all shots were taken from the sequential segments of a continuous footage. Based on an unsupported viewing of the film, this would seem an extraordinary claim. Nevertheless, it is true; indeed, *The Draughtsman's Contract* is temporally and spatially more coherent than the Bill Douglas Trilogy, more so, in fact, than many classically-constructed commercial films.

Once I realized that a precise structural technique was used in the film (and recognized some means by which this is often disguised, as I will elaborate later), I found that some cuts in time or space could even be anticipated, while the movement of characters (within scenes and between temporally associated shots) could be followed round the house and grounds of Compton Anstey as if the film's sequence had been plotted on a map. Of course, they were; indeed, the whole sequence of the film was plotted according to two very precise maps: the geographical plan of the house and grounds, and the map of the heavens—or, at any rate, of the movement of the sun across them. The structural plan of the film has both a diagetic and a cinematic presence. The first, appears in the curriculum of the drawings; the second, appears in the actual camera setups around Compton Anstey. In almost all cases, these two aspects of the plan are parallel. Both Neville and the camera follow the light of day to get the best or most interesting, or perhaps only the *contracted*, view. Basically, of course, the story follows Neville, and Neville follows the light and his curriculum, but there are interruptions, for sex and food in particular; though even these, during the term of the first contract, at least, tend to occur according to schedule: as sex during the 1–2 p.m. lunch break (diagetic disruptions

become much less predictable after the second contract is signed, though they also become more prominent and more significant, as I will discuss shortly).

What Greenaway has done in *The Draughtsman's Contract* is create a film of spatial and temporal containment: time being essentially sequential, and movement over time through space being geographically confined and congruous. For example, in scene 2 (9), Neville is found on location for Drawing No. 1, on the east-side of the house, sometime between the hours of 7 and 9 a.m. Then the first shot in the next scene (sc. 3: 9) is a view to the west (of the Nurse and Augustus), taken along the south-edge of the formal garden, which is found on the north-side of the house (see the Compton plan). Next, there is a long-shot of Neville walking left to right along a pathway—his approximate position on the plan would place him near the word 'sundial'. This is only a short distance in time and space from the last shot of scene 2 (9), and precisely along the way to where he will appear in shot 9 of scene 3 (10), standing before the drawing-frame set up in the formal garden for Drawing No. 2 (to be undertaken 'From 9 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock'). However, because Greenaway uses a static camera here, we cannot immediately, or easily, see the connection. Pan and tracking shots would in classical-cinema have made all clear—which, in part, is the point of the scene. Such easy, *facilitated* and familiar, not to mention passive, ways of acquiring information make us lazy, unwary and unaware. Greenaway wants to assert and prove that observation is all, is the key to whatever information and truth there is in the world. He also wants to accentuate the fundamental need for us to be conscious in our use of perception, and diligent in guarding against the multiple mis-observations, missed opportunities, obscurities (natural and created), distortions and disguises that can interfere with, hijack, stop or otherwise influence perception.

As more information about location and time accumulates, it becomes possible to establish some quite extraordinary details about spatial/temporal unknowns in other, more obscure shots in the film. Take scene 45 (59), for example, where Neville and Mrs. Herbert meet for tea, in a room of the house, on the autumn day Neville returns to Compton Anstey. It is possible to establish where the room is situated in the house, and the relative *geographical* positions of the characters, based on a combination of information available in the scene, and what has been learned, before the scene, about the house and grounds.

The layout of the room and placement of the windows suggests right away that it is in one of the short, projecting wings on the west-front of the house. Neville stands before a fireplace, which is located on an outside wall. From earlier shots in the film, it is fairly easy to identify and place the chimneys on the house—of which, there is one each on the west-wings. The location of Mrs. Herbert and the windows, to the left of Mr. Neville, means that it must be the North wing, with Mrs. Herbert facing east and Mr. Neville facing south. Now, if we look again, more closely, at the scene, corroboration of this geographical reconstruction can be found in a gesture that might previously have gone unnoticed. Neville says to Mrs. Herbert—

> NEVILLE: Madam, in making my arrangements here, I concluded with the possibility of thirteen sites . . . . The site that was rejected was, as you will recall, south of the house . . . .

—at which point he makes a slight gesture with his hat, pointing in the direction of the site, the direction in which he is facing. That gesture (to the south) is in perfect accord with the proposed geographical layout and location of the room and characters. There may be more, since the fireplace Neville stands before is identical to the one in scene 7 (13)—an important scene in other ways, of which more later. A growing confidence in the coherence of location in the film suggests that the earlier shot probably took place in this same room.

And so the film goes, precisely constructed and easily followed (especially with the help of a plan)—except for two noteworthy exceptions. The remarkable sequentiality of shots is interrupted in scenes 7 (13) and 32–36 (35–39). The first instance occurs near the beginning of the first contract; the second runs from the first scene under the second contract (that with Mrs. Talmann) to the last scene in which any work is undertaken in fulfilment of either of the two contracts.

In the first exception (sc. 7: 13), the film cuts in the sixth of twelve shots to an interior with Mrs. Herbert and Mr. Noyes standing before a fireplace. Cinematic convention teaches us to read this kind of editing as an assertion of relatedness or simultaneity, and there is nothing startling or peculiar in either the shot or editing to suggest anything unusual here. Only when we recognize the general sequential structure of the film, and pay close attention to what we are told of time and location in scene 7, do we realize that the filmmaker has used the cut to disrupt structure at two levels: breaking both cinematic sequence and diagetic curriculum. The scene's containing shots—before and after the inserted shot—are of Neville and Talmann on the hilltop location for Drawing 5 (between '4 o'clock . . . [and] 6 o'clock in the afternoon'). In the inserted shot, Mrs. Herbert refers to a time that cannot logically fit with the context; and to emphasise the continuity/discontinuity between the two, Mrs. Herbert's voice segues over the following shot of Neville on the hill:

> MRS. HERBERT: Thomas, see that Clarissa does not go to the laundry around noon.
> And, come to my withdrawing room this afternoon with some ink. I want to send to Mr. Herbert to know by which road he intends to return.

The scene is out of place, in time and space, and there is no way we can even guess where or when it belongs—though it is the only instance of this during the first half of the film.

The second example of disruption begins at the exact middle of the film (with the start of sc. 32: 35), and involves all five scenes that cover Neville's work after the signing of the second contract, and which close the contracted period of Neville's stay at Compton Anstey. We might suspect that under this second contract, it will be 'Second verse, same as the first'—indeed, we are pushed towards believing this by various factors, including the re-introduction of the voice-over curriculum, and the apparent scheduling of shots to coincide with drawing times and locations, which, in scenes 32–36 (35–39), continues to be easily plotted against the curriculum for the last six drawings. There is profound disruption here, however, and it occurs first, diagetically, in a dissociation between the artist and his curriculum that is sometimes spatial and sometimes temporal, but which seems to disorient the cinematic structure and presentation as a result.

Scene 32 consists of nine shots, and initially, the camera plays a misled observer. The first three shots follow Neville's voice-over curriculum for Drawings 7–9, in time and space, although in the first two shots, no artist is present to fulfill the assignment:

> 1—shows the west-front location of Drawing 7, with drawing apparatus, between '7 o'clock in the morning . . . [and] 9'; but without Neville.
>
> 2—shows the east-side location of Drawing 8, with drawing apparatus, between '9 o'clock in the morning . . . [and] 11'; but without Neville.

It is as if the film crew had only the character's diagetically stated schedule to go on; and though they were in the right place at the right time, Neville had decided to be somewhere else. In other words, a diagetic disruption of order is allowed to impinge on cinematic representation. Of course, this is a perfectly familiar occurrence, for in a typical, story-centred film (as in mainstream, commercial cinema), this is an idiomatic, narrative technique, used to create in the audience something of the uncertainty and probing curiosity that is supposed to

be felt by a personified camera or characters in the story (who, of course, feel nothing because they are fictional).

Thus, Greenaway begins his scene with a narrative convention, which triggers in the audience a simulation interpretive-process that is unconsciously projected into the film (and which, thereby, makes the audience feel they have been taken along with it), as if it (and they) were a natural part of the story.[8] At the same time, however, the audience is also comfortably sure that the story will work out in a familiar and expected fashion, however novel the situation and presentation. And, of course, typical, narrative films reassure, and in the end justify, those expectations. The process discourages perceptual acuity (reinforcing the suspension of disbelief), suspends real interpretive effort and masks the true context of reception. Greenaway will have none of it. The cosy conventionality that seems to be established in the first two shots of scene 32 is profoundly (if slyly) disrupted by shots 3–8.

In the third shot, the film seems to catch up with the artist, as the artist catches up with his curriculum:

> 3—shows the north-side location of Drawing 9, through the drawing-frame, between '11 o'clock in the morning . . . [and] 1'; with Mrs. Talmann in view.

The next shots seem to confirm the apparent coordination between the three levels of artistic representation—drawing, draughtsman, filmmaker:

> 4—a reverse-angle of shot 3, showing Neville at work on Drawing 9.
> 5–8—a shot/reverse-shot interplay between draughtsman and subject.

However, all is not what it seems. The trouble begins in the third shot, for what seems a straightforward visual representation of the site for Drawing 9, as reported by Neville's voice-over curriculum during shot 5, is correct in terms of space (location) but not in time. The view

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[8] In this way, the visual media try to mask the highly externalised relationship they have with their audience and approximate the highly internalised one of literature.

down the walk is almost due north, and the shadows cast by the yews across the walk could only occur in mid-afternoon, say, between 2 and 3 p.m. That something is not quite right here is confirmed by shots 4 and 6—the reverse-angle shots of Neville behind the drawing-frame. Careful attention to the direction of lighting and shadows suggests that these shots were taken, as the curriculum says, between '11 o'clock in the morning . . . [and] 1'. That the shadows cast in shots 3, 5 and 8 are not consistent with this can be confirmed by comparison with other shots round the grounds, particularly those taken on the north-side, at different times of day (for example, those associated with Drawings 2 and 3).

Remember, at no point in these intercut shots are both of the characters seen simultaneously, neither do we ever hear them in dialogue. Knowing this, we must be sceptical about any interpretations of the quizzical and bemused looks we see on Neville's face, as of the significance of the only line spoken in the series: Mrs. Talmann's 'It is time Mr. Neville'. Time for what? The temporal reference seems highly suspicious in the context of such temporal game-playing between shots. Indeed, we have another example of what, in a typical story-centred film, would be a narrative convention. Intercutting is typically used to create an impression of a coming together in time and space that further insists upon an interrelatedness of significance between those things represented in the intercut shots. Again, too, this is supposed to be a sensation that is in part known to the characters in the film, and part privileged information of the audience. Of course, as before, it is neither true insight nor unique information, but conventional, arbitrary and untrue.

When I suggested that analysis of lighting and shadows was necessary to understand the scene, I was not asking that analysis be taken too far. Perhaps nothing is more important to a successful look for a film, than coordinating shooting to maintain continuity—especially in spatially adjoining shots that are to be intercut. For the contiguous intercut implies simple

camera movements, in this case, a flat turn through 180°. And that means two camera setups, precisely coordinated in space and time, which in practice can take a long time to accomplish—infinitely longer than the time the shots will occupy on screen. In fact, the shots might have to be taken on different days, which adds to the complications of getting angles, views, lights and shadows correct (not to mention the objective *mise en scène*).

Such complex effort put into the creation of a realistic effect out of a straightforward falsehood, means that a technique like intercutting is synecdochic of the fundamental and large scale falsifications and fabrications that are filmmaking—falsifications and fabrications papered over in typical story-telling cinema, since we are expected to experience what we see on screen as if it really happened, and really happened this way. What Greenaway suggests through *The Draughtsman's Contract* is that the games played by traditional, narrative filmmakers are deeply, and perhaps unforgivably, dishonest. Of course, he plays games himself (they are an inescapable part of filmmaking[9]), but the games he plays are meant, in Blake's terms, to clarify the organs of perception—though with a non-Blakean proviso to be discussed shortly.

It should come as no surprise now to learn that the final shot of scene 32 (35), which is, incidentally, the last new-location for a drawing shown in the film (we never see the setups for Drawings 11 or 12), continues the disjunction between narrative and cinematic time. It may appear that—

> 9—shows the east-side location of Drawing 10, through a drawing-frame, between '2 o'clock in the afternoon . . . [and] 4'; again without Neville—

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[9] Recent comments by Greenaway suggest that is, in part, why he has given up cinema in favour of large scale art installations, interactive exhibits and opera (see below, 280ff).

but, again, internal evidence of light and shadows suggests the shot was taken between 7 and 11 in the morning (that is, during one of the curriculum's first two, set drawing-times).

This wavering in focus and unusual use of time and location continues into scene 33 (36). The scene probably takes place in Neville's room at Compton Anstey. It is the only time we see a place that is Neville's. However temporary his possession may be, this is the artist's space, and here, there is an even more radical, artistic internalization of temporal reference. Although, as noted, the last shot of the previous scene seems, cinematically, to occur in the morning, we have been told that, diagetically, it is late afternoon (2–4). If we follow the artist, and the film followed us in sequence, scene 33 should occur sometime after 4 p.m. And, in the painting that occupies the attention of characters and audience throughout the scene, we see a remarkable detail that suggests just that. When Neville asks whether the reason Mr. Herbert owned this painting was, perhaps, because he shared with it an interest in 'the passing of time', we see an extreme close-up on a sundial. Sundials use shadows to mark the passing of time, and the shadow on this sundial tells us it is 5 o'clock! (I will return to Neville's discussion of the painting in a moment.)

If we now turn to scene 34 (37), we find that it presents a kind of reverse-angle of shot 2, scene 32 (35). The latter presented the location for Drawing 8, outside the bathhouse, while this scene provides the interior, except for the fourth shot (of eight), which parallels the earlier, external shot. In a sense, the scene suggests that the camera has discovered where the missing artist was in the earlier scene, and is now sharing its knowledge.

Scene 35 (38) then presents, from inside the house, another, similar reverse-angle setup; although, remarkably, this one is of the location for Drawing 12—of which we see nothing further but for a very brief glimpse of the drawing itself during the review of the finished work in scene 38 (41).

Finally, scene 36 (39) returns to Neville, in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, however, the camera seems to be in on the know—at least, it knows where and when to find him. The first shot shows another character (Mr. Clarke), at the right time and place for Drawing 7 (according to the curriculum), who clearly expected to find Neville there at work. The camera has returned to being a kind of character in the story, and this shot is presented almost in the fashion of one who knows better than this poor fool—and to prove it, the camera cuts to Neville and Mrs. Talmann sitting out on the opposite side of the house, at the site of Drawing 10. To confirm that this is a return to, or reestablishment of a kind of cinematic coordination between film and story, and not another wrongly or arbitrarily inserted shot, a clock chimes 7 in the background. Then, finally, there is an exact repetition of the last shot (9) of scene 32 (35), which internal evidence suggested was taken not between 2–4 p.m., as the curriculum there states, but sometime in the forenoon, as we find here.

What is the point of these remarkable injections of disorder into what is generally so structured and public a plan? Well, for one thing, it is clear Greenaway did not discard, nor was he distracted from, his usual formal obsessions and interests for the sake of a story (as has often been suggested)—however powerfully engaging, or foregrounded, that story might be. Indeed, the relationship of cinematic structure to content is essential to the purpose of the film, though it functions in a way that is quite subtle and is constructed to appear almost coincidental—in a sense being nothing more than the fact that the draughtsman and the filmmaker follow the sun and look for the view, while the other characters go about their activities round about the pursuit of light and location by drawing-frame and camera-mount. When the paths of characters, camera or drawings cross something, in plot terms, *happens*, which cinematically means only that something is recorded.

This is not to deny the easily-felt hook of the story, which appears built around a familiar enough murder-mystery plot. And, however mannered the characters and their dialogue, the film has a powerfully realistic, if theatrical presence. Despite the apparent realism and familiarity of what seems a traditionally plotted story, there is actually *no narrative substance* to the film at all. That is, *The Draughtsman's Contract* contains no *story* in any traditional sense of the word. Yes, the characters are active, scheming, interacting and doing, as living creatures do, but what they do is essentially and broadly meaningless. Their actions have no real significance or meaning beyond occurrence, and the largely unpredictable and uncontrollable effects they produce. These are actions and reactions with no more *significance* than the collision of billiard balls—however elaborately plotted or dressed. Indeed, Greenaway plays an interesting game here, for he presents characters living in the first days of the modern world that we now inhabit. Newton had just formulated laws of motion (his *Principia* appeared in 1687) that seemed to promise descriptive and predictive powers that would eventually put the action and interaction of all objects within our grasp (and those objects were very quickly taken to include people and societies, as Marx, for one, later believed).[10] Greenaway presents his characters in their neophyte-modern world, through an entirely modern, technical product of the scientific revolution then developing. More importantly, he constructs a film world precisely in accord with the modern, philosophical perspective on reality and knowledge that developed from that 17th-century world—and here we approach the essential point of the film.

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[10] However, Greenaway is a thoroughly modern man, unlike Newton or the characters in the film. Greenaway knows that the certainty of outcome that Newton sought is guaranteed only for the simplest interactions. Anything more complex is largely indeterminate. Of course, his characters could not have known this in 1694, but because few seem aware of it today, they can stand as surrogates for most of any possible audience the film might attract.

Greenaway looks back to the origins of a world view that probably few even today fully understand or accept—even though it is the foundation of our modern, technical civilization and is central to what we are individually and socially. Greenaway projects back to its origins the now-more-complete, modern view of reality and knowledge—which holds that the former is strictly material and the latter immanent and only available empirically.

As Greenaway seems to comprehend it, *meaning*, traditionally understood (and as many may still think it can be understood), has no place or significance in this world. That is, *meaning* understood as a transcendent, or underlying, significance, tying individuals and events together into narratives that, in turn, may or may not be connected at ever greater levels of complexity into meta-narratives. Indeed, in Greenaway's world (and I think, for Greenaway, this means both in the film and in life) even human creativity, if we take this to be something beyond mere busyness, is no more than a kind of cataloguing, more-or-less arbitrary and manipulative. Whatever claims creativity in its many guises may make, and whatever forms and degrees of order it can impose, it is profoundly and unavoidably meaningless—that is, it can convey no meaning beyond the truth of reality, and that is only knowable ideally in the original experience and then, only if empirically examined and presented. Thus, artistic kinds of creativity simply *are*, as kinds of activity; they simply *order/disorder* and variously *present*, but they do not, because they cannot, *reveal*—at least, what they might seem to reveal is not *true*, for *truth* is not available to them (it they could only conceal). Furthermore, however much long-range planning or foresight may seem to go into it, however much it may pretend to, such planning and foresight is ironic in catalogic application (the Poulencs reference to foresight at Neville's death is important in this regard and will be considered further). In this world, all human activity is contingent, manipulative and, as often as not, brutal. However pretty nature may appear, and however attractive artifice may be made

to appear, Greenaway's world is one in which truth and reality are reduced to an economy of power and sensation, dominance and submission.

No matter how well-formulated or explicit a plan, narrative or 'curriculum' in this world may be (and each is no more than human desire, often based on an interpretation of the past, projected into the future), the actual course of events is contingent and subject to disruptions and diversions that are unpredictable in number, reason and occurrence. Plans have to be changed, and new, but no less arbitrary or temporary, patterns of order constructed. Another dimension of this concern can be seen in Neville's apparent failure to control each location and view as he imperiously demands. Mr. Talmann complains that 'Mr. Neville has planned his stay' at Compton Anstey 'like an officer in a hostile billet' giving occupants and guests alike 'orders to appear and disappear, to wear cocked hats, to eat meals in the open air and to prepare furniture for inspection' (sc. 22: 25). However, the truth is that from the very first day's drawing, when a maid opens an upstairs window to air a quilt, despite Neville's specific order that 'no person shall . . . interfere with the windows . . . of the back part of the house' (sc. 2: 9), nothing fits to plan or order as demanded. Critics of the film have generally misunderstood this and other similar incongruities. These incongruities do not foreshadow portentous and more significant intrusions to come, for even those later disruptions of order (centrally, the pieces of Mr. Herbert's clothing that appear around the grounds) are not significant clues *to anything*. None of these things are signs, pointing elsewhere to meaning and truth. What the whole thing does point to, however, is the purpose of the film, which is to present a particular view about the nature of reality and about our endless efforts to impose some sort of order upon it, to explain it, to find meaning in it. In Greenaway's world, no planning or narrative pattern is comprehensive, long-term or even entirely coherent enough to

accomplish such ordering. All these constructs (and others like them) have failure built in, and display this to a greater-or-lesser degree on first being put to the test.

Still, if the film is structurally coherent about time and space, how can this be related to the point of view that actions, events and fictions are meaningless? The answer lies in the fact that the film presents what appears to be a typical narrative (made up of diverse fictions of human motivation and desire);[11] but narratives, by definition, rely on event-time. The story in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, however, is told according to a durational pattern of time that is almost pure succession, a pattern that the film and, I believe, the director take not just to be the temporal order of reality, but the temporal order of significance. To put it the other way round, whatever significance there may be in the world, it does not and cannot exist outside the successional time of reality. The film takes this further, to establish that *events* in time are by nature purely arbitrary. Taking this understanding of time and events together makes nonsense of any notion that connecting structures of significance (that is, narratives) could possibly, *realistically*, be constructed.

How does this lack of meaning—or, at least, the impossibility of meaningful fictions—actually work in the film? Well it can be found in both the structure and the narrative. In visual terms, for example, we are not given establishing shots to help us clearly and easily orient ourselves in the diagetic space of the film (we have already seen the analytic effort required to discover that the film is constructed in a relatively simple and straightforward way). Even when something like one of these classical, *providing* shots seems present, there are ways in which the information we should be getting is held back or disguised. Notable among these are the careful framing of shots, to limit what is seen (made doubly effective by the use of a static

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[11] Perhaps even an archetypal narrative, since some have suggested that the detective-story/murder-mystery could stand as the epitome of narrative structure.

camera), and the use of naturally motivated lighting indoors (candles, for example), which severely limits what can be seen. More subtle, however, is the use of various lens tricks to disrupt the spatial relationships of objects in the shot, the most common of which is the use of telephoto and, less often, wide-angle shots.[12] *The Draughtsman's Contract* has been compared to Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), though for nothing more specific than 'its fastidious visual evocation of well-to-do, bygone England' (McVay 24). Greenaway despaired of the association, but there are grounds for comparison: both in the use of candle-lit interiors (though Greenaway does not take this nearly as far as Kubrick did) and in the use of zoom-lens shots. The great difference is that Greenaway's use of the lens is static and therefore subtle; he never uses an active change-of-focal-length shot, nor does he use extremes of focal length. The use of these lens techniques, however, is spread throughout the film. I will give two examples, which must stand for the rest.

First, there are the shots in scene 8 (14)—on the north lawn, near the statue of Hermes—which form our first view of the site for Drawing 6. The first, long shot past Neville and his servant and towards the house and group of people standing on the lawn talking are taken with a normal focal-length, but the medium-long shots taken next (as the servant approaches the group and asks them to move) use a slight telephoto lengthening, for the shot distorts the distance to the house, which includes the moat and a bridge between the furthest group and the house. This use of the telephoto technique is especially common in just such long-shots as this, but it is also used in the very first shot of the film, to provide an extreme

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[12] A telephoto lens 'takes in a much narrower field of view than that of a normal lens . . . and that flattens depth relationships'; wide-angle 'takes in a broader field of view than that of a normal lens and that deepens or exaggerates depth relationships' (Kawin, *How Movies* 555–56). In practice, this is usually done with a zoom lens (a lens with variable focal length), with the focal length changed during or between shots, depending upon the desired effect.

close-up of Mr. Noyes' face and the candle before him. Slight wide-angle shots occur less often, but are used, for example, in scene 18 (22)—the long-shot over the back of the red settee as Neville works on Drawing 2, the formal garden—and in scene 23 (26)—the long shot through the drawing-frame in position for Drawing 1, the back of the house. Again, the degree of displacement of focal length from normal, in this case its shortening, is slight and selective, but it is effective nonetheless. In these scenes, the act and/or apparatus of drawing is made to overpower the house and grounds it is used to represent. The implication is not deeply hidden: the techniques of representation can dominate and distort the original. In most traditional contexts, this is often taken further to imply that by these means, representational arts can reveal something new, which is code, in this context, for something *true*, about the original (though it is rarely stated by what warrant this corollary is added). In the context of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, however, and the philosophy of truth and reality it represents, there is no further truth, or truth beyond, that representation can either contribute or point to. The truth lies in the original experience and usually in the experience of the moment. Representation may be variously amusing and attractive, but it leads us no closer to that truth, nor does it show it in a new light (which is a euphemism for the same thing).

Without digging too much into the details of the story (to avoid its planned interpretive entrapment), we can find an epitome of the film's techniques of distortion, or, in this case, of the withholding of information, in the opening song. Here are all the lines of the song that are even faintly audible:

> At last the glittering Queen of Night
> With black caress kills off—
> Kills off the day.
>
> At last the glittering Queen of Night
> With black caress kills off—
> Kills off the day.

. . . for those that walk, that walk
with hopeful step in garden, in garden
in garden love to find . . .

For those that walk
That walk . . .

. . . their hope to find success,
they're sure to make . . .

. . . the very statues breathe.

She loves, and she confesses to—
There is then at last, no more to do—

The song, as I say, epitomizes the narrative in the film. Key areas of the song are missing. We cannot figure out what it might mean in itself, at the diagetic level of a song being sung inside the story, nor what metaphorical or symbolic role it could play for interpreters of the film's narrative. It remains obstinately uninformative. As a cinematic function, however, the placement of the song's phrasing implies a connection to accompanying visuals that *is not there*—like with the reference to 'She loves, and she confesses to—'placed over shots of Mrs. Herbert. It seems allegorical, but it is not significant at any level (to use the jargon we have come to apply to such critical analysis).

The same is true, for example, of Mr. Noyes' two stories. The first one is told of a Mr. Chandos and his plum trees (sc. 1: 2):

> MR. NOYES: Mr. Chandos was a man who spent more time with his gardener than with his wife—they discussed plum trees—ad nauseam. He gave his family and his tenants cause to dread September for they were regaled with plums until their guts rumbled like thunder and their backsides ached from over-use. He built the chapel at Fovant where the pew seats were of plumwood so the tenants still have cause to remember Chandos through their backsides—on account of the splinters.

The other is told of a Mr. Lucas and his named fruit trees (sc. 9: 15):

> MR. NOYES: Mr. Lucas was a man whose enthusiasms were divided equally between his garden and his children. Whenever his wife conceived, Mr. Lucas planted fruit-trees. His wife seldom came to um successful labour, and those children she was blessed with died before weaning. Mr. Lucas threatened to cut his trees down, but he never did. To date there are eleven trees in his fruit-garden, and he knows them all by their Christian names.

The two stories may be amusing, but they offer nothing beyond brief diversion—though they are noteworthy for that, being two, of perhaps only three or four, genuinely amusing bits of dialogue in a film some critics have mistakenly praised for its witty repartee. Indeed, Greenaway's dialogue is mere pastiche, and there is less wit in the entire film than in a single speech out of Congreve—though, that is not what the film is about.[13] Beyond amusement, the two stories give nothing; they are as they are in the film's narrative, other narratives overheard or simply proffered without request, purpose or context. It is interesting that in both cases, Mr. Noyes opens the respective scene telling the story. There is no context for its existence, and there is no direct response to either of them; although both are echoed in later statements made by other characters (in the first case, by Mrs. Clement, which we do not hear, and by Mrs. Talmann, which we do hear, regarding the relative status of a wife; while in the second case, the story seems to spur Mr. Talmann to comment on English fecundity). In both cases, the point is that the initial anecdote is offered arbitrarily and unexpectedly, while any effect they have on subsequent conversation is equally arbitrary—indeed, subsequent, apparently associated comments may be nothing more than the effects of the initial stories, equally arbitrary except for that connection.

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[13] Whether the removal of significance is itself significant—whether in the end the film has any real worth—is debatable. Derek Jarman, for one, thought not. Greenaway's attempt at a historical linguistic style certainly does not compare well to Edward Bond's, in the play *Restoration*, where much of the wit and complexity of the 17th-century original remains, while it is used to expose the social and material injustices and disorders upon which it depended.

The larger *story* that contributes the content of the film is relatively simple, like the film's structure—despite narrative puzzles and complexities and obscurities of presentation. Things seen and heard—whether language, reference, objects or actions—often appear variously symbolic, calling for interpretation. However, none of these actually offers any clear signification in itself; in characteristic fashion, the filmmaker obfuscates and plays games with process, presentation, expectation and understanding, while rejecting the idea of interpretation altogether. The story is a kind of narrative game, played perhaps in part for the amusement of its creator, but to no *diagetic* end—at least, a concern for a diagetic end is not this filmmaker's concern—instead, the story works to further formal, rather than narrative ends.

Some of this is made explicit in scene 33 (36) when Neville surveys a painting as he indulges his predatory sexual appetite with Mrs. Herbert. With the painting on a chair before them, Neville conducts his inquiry as he undresses his now unwilling, contractual partner:

MR. NEVILLE: Your husband surprises me with his eccentric and eclectic taste. [While] most of his peers are content to collect portraits, mostly of an edifying family connection, Mr. HERBERT, seems to collect anything. Perhaps he has an eye for optical theory. Or the plight of lovers. Or the passing of time. What do you think? Perhaps, Madam, he has—and I would stand by him in this—an interest in the pictorial conceit. Can you see why your husband had reason to buy it?

MRS. HERBERT: It is of a garden—that is probably reason enough.

MR. NEVILLE: True, true, but what of the events that are happening within it, um? Shall we peruse it together? Do you see, Madam, a narrative in these apparently unrelated episodes? There is drama is there not in this[. . .]overpopulated garden? What intrigue is here? Do you think the characters have something to tell us? Would you know, Madam, if your daughter[. . .]had any particular interest in this painting? Madam, could you put a season to it? Madam, do you have an opinion? What infidelities are portrayed here? Do you think[. . .] murder is being prepared?

Now it might seem that we have here a metaphor for the interpretive reception of art, perhaps even an allegory of the critical analysis of visual art, including film, or, perhaps even a specific allegory of interpretation regarding this film. But it is none of these. Indeed, it puts the opposite case altogether. Neville finds grounds in the painting to suggest four different reasons for Mr. Herbert owning it—'optical theory', 'the plight of lovers', 'the passing of time' or 'an interest in the pictorial conceit'. All Mrs. Herbert can suggest is that 'It is of a garden—that is probably reason enough' (though what is presented is not a garden so much as some allegory in a landscape). In the end, Mr. Herbert's tastes remain as they began, 'eccentric and eclectic'.

As for the painting itself, Neville asks Mrs. Herbert to search the events depicted for meaning: is there 'a narrative?'; 'there is drama'; 'what intrigue is here?'; do 'the characters have something to tell us?'; did Mrs. Talmann have 'any particular interest in this painting?'; what time of year does it depict?; does Mrs. Herbert 'have an opinion?'; 'what infidelities are portrayed'?; is 'murder . . . being prepared?' It is a noteworthy litany of interpretive approaches to a work of art; but there is no answer given for or by any of the approaches. Indeed, the painting remains as silent as the woman addressed—though both are subject to the imaginative and appetitive domination and exploitation of the man with the words and the power. This is no allegory of interpretation, but one that suggests that interpretation is relative, fanciful and arbitrary, and always in some way an exercise in subjection and exploitation. A chilling verdict by an artist—Neville or Greenaway—on those of us who would comment on his work.

As we saw in the case of the opening song, or in the two stories told by Noyes, and again in Neville's critical discussion of the oil painting, narration in *The Draughtsman's Contract* is little more than a sequential process, without the proper rhythmic structure

(traditionally either cyclical or cycloid) that narrative normally assumes. In the examples cited, story seems ephemeral and circumstantial. This is not new in Greenaway's work.

An excellent route towards understanding this is to consider an early *Sight and Sound* article about *The Draughtsman's Contract* by Robert Brown, where he comments on Greenaway's pre-*Draughtsman's Contract* work. He begins his discussion of Greenaway's early work with a remark on authorial apparitions:

> In Greenaway's early shorts, either the images insist on the ghostlike presence of an author while the commentary ridicules the notion, or vice versa. Image and narration often seem arbitrarily related. (35)

The diagetic 'ghost'—if there is such a person—is the plot-master (or mistress) of the story, while the ghostly presence at the cinematic or structuralist level is more easily and confidently identified: he is the camera-master, Mr. Greenaway.[14] Of course, there is no commentary in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, as in earlier films, but the ridicule is there, accomplished through the relationship of structure and story. For in *The Draughtsman's Contract* too, 'Image and narration . . . seem arbitrarily related' (if we take 'narration' to mean narrative itself). Indeed, their relationship is ironic, for they are carefully constructed to have an exactly arbitrary connection—except for one thing, and that is the chord struck between the representational work undertaken by Neville and Greenaway. That harmony (though both activities are, themselves, determined by arbitrary conditions) holds together the two elements of structure and narrative, to the extent of providing spatial and temporal coordinates, for which the ubiquitous drawing-frame serves as an objective correlative (of which, more later).

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[14] It is likely that the story was written with Mrs. Talmann as the plot mistress, and then elements of the story were removed to push her control into an indistinct background. Her plan, which may include her father's death, and does include being impregnated by Neville, can be traced throughout the film—though it must be adapted to circumstances and opportunity, as is required by the film's position on the contingency of plans, fictions and events.

If I were to talk any further about the narrative, it would probably be to consider the question of planning and of stratagems. Who in the film has a plan or stratagem, and of what sort? How does it seem that those with plans wish them to turn out? How do they work out in fact, and to what end? Mr. Neville and Mr. Talmann both have something like plans, while many others have what we might more fruitfully think of as stratagems. Neville is, perhaps, too naïve and arrogant to have more than a plan (although the one he does have, which is written up in the contract with Mrs. Herbert, is immoral, if not entirely illegal); while Mr. Talmann is probably too stupid (although his plan, to kill Neville, which arises late in the film, is both immoral and illegal). As for stratagems, Mrs. Talmann has what are perhaps primal ones from the beginning of the film; Mr. Noyes has them, largely through circumstance, in the middle; and Mrs. Herbert has them at the end. All of the characters, however, are more-or-less manipulative and immoral in response to circumstance and opportunity.

The Draughtsman's Contract represents Greenaway's belief that fictions are always arbitrary manipulations—are, in common parlance, 'fictions', *untruths*, however enjoyable and distracting—and though they may create attractive juxtapositions, they cannot convey truth (perhaps not even accidentally). Representational arts, at their best, could only re-present an image of truth, which always resides solely in reality and is only knowable in an experience of reality (truth is wholly immanent)—though even then most experience gives only a poor and partial view of truth. To see more than that requires absolutely clear—which means artistic—observation. This suggests why Greenaway has rather abandoned filmmaking of late, and is instead occupied with experience-the-world-around-you art installations. Greenaway talks about this in an interview printed in a recent supplement to *Sight and Sound*:

> The first was at Rotterdam, an exhibition called 'The Physical Self'. It examined my interest in physical reality, corporeal reality.
> . . . . . .

> [A new project] began in Geneva in May this year, a project called 'Stairs'. It is, I suppose, an examination of my disenchantment with some to the issues of cinema. . . . We lit locations throughout the city . . . . We have erected 100 staircases . . . each of which has a viewing platform on the top that frames up some part of the city. In some cases the viewpoints are very touristic, sometimes banal, sometimes quite surreal and sometimes, maybe, even dangerous. ('Art into Film' 18)

A little further on in the interview, Greenaway discusses his use of art history to examine the relationship between fiction and reality in his films. He refers to 'death and copulation' as the 'two big themes of contemporary cinema', even though in truth, of course, 'the actors don't die' or copulate ('outside the genre of pornography') (18–19). At first, he seems concerned about film's ability to maintain the fictional side of the equation, but it soon becomes clear that what worries him is that film too easily lapses into pretending fiction is reality, and further, that because fiction is almost limitlessly malleable, we can be misled (as Hollywood tries) into believing that reality is similarly, easily controllable, open to neat solutions and happy endings:

> So how can we sustain—how can the cinema sustain for us—these two opposing attitudes? One of the reasons why the Baroque is so important in my work is that it is centred upon the suspension of disbelief in its most extreme form: it uses all the details, all the decoration, all the light to that end. Bernini's fountain in Rome manifests, re-creates a desire for a miracle. And cinema portrays something of the same kind. Hollywood cinema tries to find the pie in the sky, it tries to find solutions. My films don't offer solutions, they don't offer intimacy, they don't offer condolences. They are removed from the phenomenon, they watch it without judgment. They go against the grain of a deodorising, romanticising and sentimentalising attitude towards sex and death. (19)

It has been suggested from the time of the first appearance of *The Draughtsman's Contract* that in the film Greenaway 'explores the relation between fact and fiction, "truth" and "beauty"' (Forbes 'Marienbad Revisited' 301). I will refer again later to this early article (Autumn 1982), which has something else of interest to say. Here, however, Forbes is misled by the philosophical tradition she inhabits. The West's traditional view of reality and

understanding (part Greek, part Judeo-Christian in origin) is implicit in her formulation of an essential equation between 'fact and fiction'/'truth and beauty'; and it further posits that anyone interested in the nature of the equation, must 'explore' or treat of the functional relationship between 'truth and fiction'/'truth and beauty'. Greenaway does no such thing in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. At best, he opposes these terms as categories, but, breaking with tradition, he does so in the belief that one is illusion/delusion and the other is everything. Greenaway's real contrast is between the apparently meaningful narratives we think we find in the world, and expect others to create for us (to interpret and act upon), and the real fiction, which for him is that of the omnipotent author, whether of little or universal fictions. There are instead only more-or-less complex numbers and combinations of objects and events in the world, for which our typical categorisations and narratives are completely arbitrary. From this point of view, there is no transcendent order of truth, which such fictions would require for the establishment of more than contingent meaning. Instead, there are only more-or-less complex machinations and manipulations accompanied by more-or-less humiliating accommodations and submissions—activities that mark the fundamental distinction between the two kinds of people who inhabit this world: those who exercise power and those who are subject to it. For Greenaway, the truth about the conundrum between seeing and knowing is that seeing—seeing clearly (as with an artist's eye) is knowing. In other words, reality is truth, though a universally arbitrary truth that is easily manipulated by those with the power to do so—in particular, by those in possession or control of information and the means of its generation and transfer (especially, we might add, via modern media). Beauty is turned into a banal commodity, arbitrarily constructed and arbitrarily pleasant or enjoyable.

What Greenaway represents is a philosophical point of view regarding truth and reality that is entirely at odds with his culture's historical perspective, but one that is remarkable for

being so modern. What Greenaway opposes, and what his characters and cinematic practice implicitly show is false, is the view that there is a transcendent order of truth, variously revealed to us, by which we are to judge, not just our behaviour, but our very ideas of truth and reality. The distinction must not be understood simply as the difference between a quasi-religious and a scientific point of view. It is more profound than that. For, as H. W. Robinson notes, in his study of *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, the traditional view has been shared by prophets, poets and scientists:

> In our modern world the psychological processes most often suggested as a parallel to those of ancient prophecy are seen in artistic creation or scientific discovery. In these realms . . . there is notably the consciousness of a much larger body of truth or beauty already existent behind and above the particular product of the scientist or artist. This as yet unseen reality is often thought of as a compelling force to which the artist or discoverer must yield. Again, the creative work is always shaped in terms or within the scope of a particular personal endowment, in order that it may body forth the unseen, and receive 'a local habitation and a name'. . . . we may safely say that in every such experience both compulsion and intuition are integrated . . . . It is worth noting also . . . [the impulse] to do something . . . . just as a prophet was often moved to the 'symbolic act' which expressed and also initiated the larger activity to come [i.e., it was *exemplary*]. This instinct to make visible the invisible probably belongs to all creative work, and goes deep down to the very object of divine creation, to bring forth in a new realm and category something that already exists but is not yet revealed to men. (192)

It is worth noting, in passing, that this passage echoes what I said, in the last chapter, of what makes the Douglas Trilogy an exemplary autobiography and how such creations work. This is entirely the opposite, however, of what Greenaway presents to us in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Not only does Greenaway differ as to the nature of truth and reality, that difference entails an entirely opposed view of present, temporal change and of the nature of history as well. Robinson himself goes on to discuss 'the pattern of history' derived from the Old Testament, which, in essence, became the central view of history in Western culture—a view for which he does not really believe there is any sane alternative:

> It was, indeed, from the prophets and their successors the apocalyptists that the very conception of the unity of history was derived. The conception of that unity as based on the ultimate control of God can still maintain itself, in spite of all apparent contradictions of what in our human judgement that control should be. Is there any better interpretation that can displace it? Or are we to believe that human history has no meaning at all, and is but 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing'? (197)

According to Greenaway's view, there is no 'better interpretation that can displace' this traditional understanding of history, there is only the truth, perhaps frightening, that 'human history has no meaning at all'.

The quotation from *Macbeth* is interesting, for that play deals with these two opposed philosophical perspectives, but stands as a tragedy, at least in part, because there Macbeth is ultimately, damnably wrong for having opted for what we might now call the 'modern' perspective (though not quite so simply wrong as some readings of the play would have it). The characters in *The Draughtsman's Contract* live and breathe in the atmosphere of this new philosophy, believing in it implicitly, though they may show at times that they have not entirely shed the linguistic and rational patterns of the older point of view. Still, to a greater or lesser degree, they have all learned to function, struggle to succeed, and at times do seem to enjoy, living according to this new view of truth and reality. Several speeches in *Macbeth* reflect tellingly on this later work, where what is taken to be normal and abnormal has been turned utterly on its head. Most critics, however, have not looked this closely at the formal structure of *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

Before closing my discussion of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, I want to consider the film briefly in terms of the possible, internal relationships that may exist between cinematic form and content. In other words, I am not immediately interested in the reception of the film, or in its social or political role—though I do not deny interest in the film's effect, or that this

may be of ultimate importance. However, due to the nature of the film in question, I believe it is necessary to focus our attention upon its internal relationships.

As to form and content, we might first identify those films in which form follows the demands of content—these are typically commercial, narrative films, although most documentary and news work is of this type as well. Second, there are those films in which content follows the demands of form—these films are typically thought of as experimental or avant-garde films (that is, aesthetically—as opposed to politically—avant-garde),[15] and although these are sometimes freely referred to as 'artistic' films, they are properly a subcategory of art-films. Finally, there are those films in which form and content are essentially one—and I do not say this in the way similar statements are used in film journalism, suggesting a vague compatibility of form and content by way of complimenting a filmmaker. In this third group of films, which are few in number, there is a fundamental and essential *identity* of form and content. Film criticism often sounds as if it thought of itself and its subject as culturally 'post-historical', so these films are rarely recognized as distinct from the previous two types, even though they often follow structural patterns of presentation, and may have epistemological associations, that are quite ancient. The three films of the Bill Douglas Trilogy were of this last sort (as were, say, some of Andrei Tarkovsky's films—the last of which, *Sacrifice*, was also a Film on Four production). The films Greenaway produced pre-*Draughtsman's Contract*, however, were clearly films of the second type (aesthetically avant-garde if you will); and despite apparently significant differences from his earlier work, *The Draughtsman's Contract* is another film of the type.

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[15] Again, I would direct readers to Josephine Guy's *The British Avant-Garde*, for an excellent discussion of definitions and distinctions, and, of course, to Appendix 4.

Still, when I turned to the critical history of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, it came as something of a surprise to discover that critical opinion has concentrated on content rather than form, essentially viewing the film as of type one: as a narrative film driven by considerations of plot and character. For almost ten years these critics (and they are by far the greater number) have spoken of *The Draughtsman's Contract* as:

> ● [an] original, delicate period piece that looms the best film [the BFI] has backed and a fitting one in the year of the 50th anniversary of the BFI.
>
> Though seemingly a comedy of manners . . . there is an underlying viciousness of these rich denizens that foreshadows coming upheavals. . . . Well-lensed, with a fine limpid narration that switches from observation of this landed class to a sort of foreboding tale of murder and the house people [sic] taking execution into their own hands. (Moskovitz *Variety* September 1982)

> ● a 'conversation piece' in the literary as well as the painterly sense. On one level it renews a national tradition of artificial social comedy and drama stretching back to the Restoration itself. The subjects dealt with are the archetypal ones—brass and class; wealthy ambition, lust and violence; the predictable failure of a *parvenu* to survive in a corrupt, manipulative *milieu*. . . .
>
> Once the corpse is found . . . the bartering and blackmailing that ensue aren't invested with sufficient verbal wit and sting, the tensions among the murder suspects aren't developed with enough psychological complexity or dramatic impetus of situation, for our interest to be kept at its earlier pitch. As in *Barry Lyndon*, the impeccable pictorial surface can't disguise a degree of academic dryness in the story's conception and execution. The piece becomes too fond of conversations which gradually grow turgidly verbose: and even the *mise en scène*, for all its lustrous tableaux, underlines the literary limitations by its frequent recourse to stationary, long-held medium and long shot, adding static imagery to a tale which slowly runs out of creative steam. (McVay *Films and Filming* November 1982)

> ● . . . cinema's first Restoration comedy-mystery. It's a none-too-solemn, enigmatic tale of murder set in a great English country house . . . .
>
> Peter Greenaway creates an extraordinarily detailed picture of a historical period, not as it was, but as it is imagined by a somewhat surreal artist today. . . .
>
> Mr. Greenaway recounts all this coolly, with an eye for detail as keen as the draughtsman's, but also with a number of not immediately explainable images that are simply absurdist. The performances are as comically arch as the material . . . . Though the settings and landscapes are nothing less than opulent, the excellent photography by Curtis Clark is spare, unfancy, unhackneyed. (Canby *The New York Times* June 1983)

> ● a teasingly enigmatic elaboration of a 17th-century sexual conspiracy . . . . (Wyver *The Moving Image* 1989)
>
> ● an intellectual detective story set amongst the bewigged cynics of seventeenth century English rural society . . . . (Park *British Cinema* 1990)

Even within the terms of their own arguments, such critics rarely attend carefully enough (if at all) to the appropriate, corollary significance of form for the type-one film. They want to respond to form conventionally: treating it as successful as and when it advances the story, and unsuccessful when, as so often in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, it seems to confuse or otherwise frustrate the story. They do not pay close enough attention to Greenaway's use of structure and technique for them ever to question whether the film is in fact of type one.

At the same time, there is another, smaller group of critics who recognized, or at least wanted to consider, *The Draughtsman's Contract* a type-two film (if for no other reason than Greenaway's prior reputation and record as an avant-garde filmmaker). Though they are, as a result, inclined to pay primary attention to the film's form, and to query the filmmaker's possible, structural intentions, they often seem confused and sometimes not a little put-out that the *content* should be so insistent and so adamantly conventional in structure. A general lack of depth of analysis (the result of those old problems of faulty observation and inadequate attention to detail), means they find it impossible to maintain what they know to be the appropriate relationship of form and content in a discussion of a film of type two.

Examples of this critical approach have also appeared since the film's release. I want to refer to the three earliest examples since their early date gives them the clarity of a largely intuitive response, and by their attempts to treat the film, largely, as a formal project, they raise issues and face problems central to the nature and success of *The Draughtsman's Contract* that subsequent writers have never fully addressed.

The articles I refer to were written by Robert Brown and Jill Forbes. The first article, by Brown, (which may be the first article about *The Draughtsman's Contract*) appeared in the winter 1981/82 issue of *Sight and Sound* (34–38). This was written, at least in part, at the time of the film's production. Brown had visited the film on location near Tunbridge Wells, and the piece includes several interesting quotations from Greenaway himself (part of an interview recorded in greater detail in another piece considered here). In the first third of the article, Brown tries to balance observations on the film's narrative with those on its structure. This gives him some trouble and he seems to have considered it worthwhile, and perhaps necessary since the film was not then finished, to consider Greenaway's earlier work: a list that includes *H is for House* (1973), *Windows* (1975), *Water Wrackets* (1975), *Dear Phone* (1976), *A Walk Through H* (1978), *Vertical Features Remake* (1978), *The Falls* (1980) and *Act of God* (1981). Although Brown spends the remaining two-thirds of the article on those earlier, formalist films (clear examples of aesthetic avant-gardism), the result is less worthwhile than might have been hoped. It does provide history for the work then in production, and perhaps by that Brown hoped to cast an illuminating light back on the structural concerns, and the narrative differences, he has already, tentatively identified in *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

Brown begins his article by noting that '*The Draughtsman's Contract*, at first reading of the script might appear to lie right outside the main concerns of his [Greenaway's] earlier work.'[16] He goes to the heart of the issue, putting quite directly the essential problem of the

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[16] Reading provides another category of difference between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and the Douglas Trilogy. Generally, Greenaway's script can be read as a complete, sequential document—though it is not a *conventional* narrative, since it follows a durational pattern of almost pure succession and only nods at event-time. Here, structure governs story, using site of drawing and camera (based on demands of view and lighting) as the immediate means of control. Douglas's scripts are different. They do not read well sequentially. Yet, because they subscribe to transformational time, which is where structure and story become one in these excellent examples of type-three films, they represent an *archetypal* form of narrative.

essential tension that exists between the force of the film's narrative (attributable, in large part, to its apparent genre) and the filmmaker's less obvious, structural purpose:

> A plot of intrigue and murder . . . provides a strong dramatic perspective to the artist's contemplation of the peculiarly English landscape of the country house. One might have thought that such a theatrical framework would have been anathema to a film-maker whose previous eighteen films . . . have all been constructed in the form of either documents about fictions or fictions about documents. (34)

Though no one has resolved the problem, Brown clearly believed he had himself found the explanatory connection between narrative content and structural formalisms when he visited the film on location:

> It became apparent that the elaborate devices of the period film themselves instituted the formal conceits within which the film-maker has always liked to place his own highly personal preoccupations. (34)

Elsewhere he identifies these 'devices' as the hairstyle, costume, physical movement and dialogue of the characters, and also the location and set. In other words, the formalist-structuralist concerns of the filmmaker are contained within the generic constraints of the story told, are in fact simply heightened or exaggerated elements of the dramatic structure. In essence, this makes *The Draughtsman's Contract* a type-one film of the commercial-narrative class, and turns what had at first appeared to be the formalist-structuralist concerns into *style*, serving the multiple functions of style in films of the type: being flags of originality, markers of directorial identity, goads for novel sensation.

Brown does not distinguish between internal and external origins of any structural and formalistic concerns that a film may possess: that is, whether such concerns spring *from* the narrative, and are some sort of extension of diagetic concerns and activity, or whether they are *imposed* on the narrative, so that the narrative is made to work out, or is constrained by, or simply (more passively) mirrors the extradiagetic structural concerns of the filmmaker (albeit,

unknown to its characters and despite whatever diagetic strategies, acts and motives are involved). What Brown really fails to distinguish are, on the one hand, *artistic* type-one films (that is, films that try to do more, or be more profound than average for the type), in which the origins of any structural concerns—if present—are internal, and, on the other hand, the categorically *aesthetic* art-films of type two, in which the origins of structural concerns are extradiagetic. Because of plot strength and narrative puzzles in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, Brown looks for Greenaway's formalistic, structural concerns to have a diagetic origin and motivation (which I have suggested is in the nature of type-one rather than type-two films). He feels this search is justified by what Greenaway reported to him of the film's provenance—

(quoting Greenaway as saying)

> 'Summer of '76, beautiful summer, drawing the rather nondescript Victorian house near Hay-on-Wye belonging to a friend. I was interested in the ways that either the drawings reflected or did not reflect what was in front of me. The question of whether the draughtsman draws what he sees or what he knows. Thought what a nice idea, how could I use it in a larger scenario?' (38)

—and by what more Greenaway apparently told him of the nature of its central character:

> . . . Mr. Neville, is intended, in the manner, if not the matter, of a self-portrait, as an English landscape artist torn between drawing what he sees or drawing what he knows. (35)

The fact that Brown's attention to structure is directed from the inside out, and that his search for its function and significance is diagetically determined, means he takes this contrast between *seeing* and *knowing* as the thematic, narrative centre of the film and can only attach this to the filmmaker's structuralist concerns, which he feels must exist there somewhere, through the autobiographical suggestion. He finds that

> the drama of Mr. Neville's enterprise accurately reflects the internal dynamic of all Greenaway's work, that tension between the Romantic inclination of the painter trained at art school and the Materialist discipline of the documentary film editor once employed by the Central Office of Information. (35)

And he quotes Greenaway himself in support:

> 'It's my particular problem . . . this balance between a rigid extra-frame consideration of filmmaking and a very English romantic concern with visual imagery. There is this romance and structure battling all the time.'

As is generally true of Greenaway's comments on filmmaking (and this is true of his films as well), what he says is often less, and much less complex, than what he seems to say. Here, Greenaway admits that, as a painter and a filmmaker, he is tempted by the visual immediacy of perception—and by the sensory pleasure found in the English landscape in particular—while at the same time, empowered by his visual literacy, he is also tempted by the uses to which he wants to put his perceptions.[17] There is no doubt, however, that Greenaway is a tough, confident and businesslike artist who only indulges his perceptual vices, or savours their delights, in his art as and when they serve his creative purposes—or, at least, who finds ways to indulge them as he goes on with his creative purposes.

Although Brown seems caught by these misdirected, diagetically determined observations, he does briefly leap to a crucial insight, suggesting that Greenaway's

> deep attachment to domestic landscape, a literary turn of mind and the learnt procedures of structuring an often arbitrary selection of footage are the foundations of that ironic contradiction, central to Greenaway's work, between the Romantic author of a fiction and the Structural fiction of an author. (35)

The thought may have sprung originally from his ruminations on the director's earlier work. It appears later, in a less rhetorical formulation, in the opening paragraph of the long, last section, as Brown turns, to consider some of the earlier work:

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[17] This parallels Richard Stivers' identification of the two polar, but interdependent, vectors along which the function of the visual media in modern, technological society can be mapped. These media are the central means for the manipulation of meaning and the obliteration of real significance that occur as a function of technology's power. At the same time, they provide *the visual* as a powerful compensation for this manipulation and lack of meaning (131–159).

> In Greenaway's early shorts, either the images insist on the ghostlike presence of an author while the commentary ridicules the notion, or vice versa. Image and narration often seem arbitrarily related. (35)

This is really significant for understanding *The Draughtsman's Contract*, but the reference to Greenaway's interest in authors and fictions is never connected to the film; while the first reference (quoted in the excerpt before last) ends with Brown's return to the story:

> The plot of *The Draughtsman's Contract* hinges on the inclusion or exclusion of certain objects within the artist's drawings, an issue which comes to relate directly to the wider question of whose authority and desires really lie behind the draughtsman's contract. (35)

Even some of this, the bit about 'authority', for example, is on the right track, but its power is dissipated by being so firmly attached to the 'plot'. It does not help that Brown gets the 'plot' wrong as well. As I will discuss later, what Neville draws and does not draw has only a coincidental and quite contingent influence on the story, with no motive force at all in the furthering of events.

Brown is misled, first (like so many others since), by the bits and pieces of Mr. Herbert's belongings that begin to crop up in the grounds of Compton Anstey (though, of course, the list includes a horse, a ladder and a dog that is only seen in the company of Mrs. Talmann or Mrs. Herbert). The apparently *interpretive* distinction between seeing and knowing, when taken to be diagetically grounded, turns these items into clues to be solved internally by the characters, and signs to be interpreted externally by the audience and the film's critics—the prize being the solution to the mystery (or a solution to a mystery). The introduction to the Channel 4 'Film on Four' transmission of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, for example, takes the bait, hook, line and sinker:

> . . . [the] draughtsman's eye for detail leads to strange and inexplicable features in the drawings, details which prove to be clues in a case of domestic intrigue and murder. (Channel 4, 30 June 1983)

Interestingly, Brown continues the section of his article on *The Draughtsman's Contract* by quoting Greenaway stating quite directly what the film is about:

> 'The film is essentially about a draughtsman drawing a landscape . . . and the facets of the drawing and the landscape are compared on another level of representation, the film. I want those three ideas to be present in the whole structure of the movie, so that one is aware that we are making comparisons all the time between the real landscape, Mr. Neville's image of it and, ultimately, us as viewers seeing those ideas represented on film.' (35)

Whatever Brown thinks, however, this does not support what he has said, for while he has been talking apples, Greenaway is talking oranges. Furthermore, they have not even been looking at the fruit-basket from the same side. As I have said before, Brown looks to the story to bear the weight of significance, and then looks out from the story for structure and formal significance, both of which, nevertheless, remain grounded in the story. Greenaway does the opposite, looking from structural questions of observation, creation, recreation and re-observation back in towards the setting and characters, where the formal questions and concerns are given arbitrary life.

Brown concludes his discussion of *The Draughtsman's Contract* with the observation that this was the first film Greenaway fully scripted before hand. He again quotes Greenaway, this time saying that the film is unusual if for no other reason than the '"text became a written object before it became a filmed object'". Brown's response is illuminating:

> No longer, perhaps, will the previous excesses of narrative content and methods of representation be used for the wilfully obscurantist ends of building heretical systems of classification, only then to laugh in the face of their hopeless inadequacy. Rather they may serve to raise more directly that question of authorship which lies at the heart of all Greenaway's films and which places him within, not just an English tradition of landscape art, but the international centre of avant-garde film.

Here the very characteristics that made Greenaway an avant-garde filmmaker of the first order, are rejected in favour of restraint and clarity of expression and representation—techniques that

would make Greenaway anything but a type-two filmmaker. Moreover, to say that if Greenaway actually followed these techniques they might 'raise more directly . . . [the] question of authorship' only points out how badly the 'question' has been misunderstood. Brown refers to 'that question of authorship which lies at the heart of all Greenaway's films' as if it were a research proposal. What lies at the centre of Greenaway's films, however, and at the centre of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, is not a process of intellectual inquiry, reassessing and refining our notions of the author and creative activity, but a shattering act of iconoclasm (less savage at first, but more so from *The Draughtsman's Contract* on), a rejection of any traditional notion of authorship altogether. The belief in authorship and creativity is replaced by one in authority (power) and efficiency (effective action). Greenaway may not build 'heretical systems of classification' in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, but, using the greater resources at his disposal, he takes as his material orthodox systems instead. The end, however, is still 'to laugh in the face of their inadequacy'.

The other two articles I briefly want to consider appeared a year after the first, on the release of *The Draughtsman's Contract*. The first of these was a *Sight and Sound* review of the film by Jill Forbes (Autumn 1982). Knowing that Greenaway, at the time of the shooting of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, was keenly interested in Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, Forbes hopes to use this connection to bring out the formal concerns of Greenaway's film, thus treating it as an instance of British, avant-garde filmmaking, perhaps so that it might share in the eminence, or notoriety, of the French example. Unfortunately, she finds *The Draughtsman's Contract*'s narrative content far too captivating to deal adequately with formal considerations. Unable to get past the who-done-it hook, Forbes actually begins her piece asking, 'Who killed Cock Robin?' From there it is logically a short step—though for

her critical purposes a tremendous leap—for her to suggest that the essential question to ask of the film

> is what narrative might be attached to these unrelated elements and how Mr. Neville's testimony is to reveal its allegorical implications. (301)

The philosophy of film-narrative that lies behind this question, and the assumed method for answering it, is, of course, very familiar. The story itself is taken to insist that the order of reality—'these unrelated elements'—requires interpretation, internally (by the characters) and externally (by ourselves), to be intelligible, but more than that, to reveal its relationship to, and communicate to us something—perhaps something significant—from a categorically transcendent order of truth.

If anything, that leaves the problem, or insight, of a connection between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* looming larger than ever. In *The Draughtsman's Contract*, the power and intrusiveness of narrative alone should have made Forbes more tentative about the nature if not the significance of such a connection. For this narrative characteristic in Greenaway's film makes it entirely unlike Resnais's, which I would argue is not 'avant-garde', in the sense of being a type-two film, in which content serves form. Rather, it is another of those rare films of the third group. Form and content are truly one in Resnais's exploration of time, which Andrei Tarkovsky believed to be film's natural subject matter. Only film has the ability to represent our subjective experience of time—present tense and in memory—while simultaneously embodying an objective temporality.[18] In contrast to this, what Greenaway explores in *The Draughtsman's Contract* is space, and an objective

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[18] According to Tarkovsky, filmmaking is a process of *Sculpting in Time* (the eponymous title of his 1986 book on the cinema). See Stivers, *Culture of Cynicism* (131–159, esp. 140), for a brief but excellent discussion of our different experience and representation of time in narrative and visual media.

temporality of succession—specifically of a durational time that undoes the apparent knots of event-time set up by the story.

At the end of her article, when Forbes comes to consider what the relationship between the two films might be, she offers another instance of, what should have been, a generic or archetypal influence being turned into one of a style. She says that Greenaway owes to *Marienbad*,

> the slightly stilted visual repertoire, and especially the way shots are framed and figures are placed in the landscape, and also the nature, if not the detail, of the intellectual quest concerned (Greenaway considers representation where Resnais considers memory, and the contrast is perhaps a pointer to the subject of the film). (301)

Greenaway may indeed owe something of his *mise en scène* and camera placement to *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, but, whereas Resnais does pursue a kind of 'intellectual quest' in his film (which is typical of many films in which form and content match), there is no quest in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. This profound difference between the two films also confirms the difference that exists between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and the Bill Douglas Trilogy.

Although it seems that type-one films (of which type the narrative of *The Draughtsman's Contract* pretends to be an example), could, at least in part, be defined by an apparently ubiquitous search for meaning and a resolution to problems posed in the film, this is really a false quest—diagetically false, because information is wilfully withheld, and cinematically false, because the visual impact of cinema naturally replaces narrative authenticity. For type-two films (of which type *The Draughtsman's Contract* is truly an example), the quest is not even an epistemological category (although some critics speak metaphorically of these films being part of a quest by their creators).

Forbes is right, in a way, however, when she says that the difference in 'detail' of the filmmakers' 'intellectual' concerns is 'a pointer to the subject of' *The Draughtsman's Contract*. She continues:

> the reference to *Marienbad* is chiefly important because it underlines Greenaway's concern—no doubt a personal one—to make an English film, an anti-*Marienbad* perhaps. The way he explores the relation between fact and fiction, "truth" and "beauty" is ingeniously carried out in the context of the English tradition, not least of film-making, and this is why the landscape is so important, for it is in landscape design that, if Pevsner is to be believed, the true Englishness of English art is revealed.

Greenaway is certainly concerned with 'representation', though he neither *explores* it, nor analyses 'the relation between fact and fiction, "truth" and "beauty"'.

What the film is about is the difference between the truth of observation (open as it is to sensory illusion and perceptual error) and the utterly meaningless *fictions of significance* wholly created by the mind—they do not exist in reality and, therefore, do not in reality exist, according to this view. Until the modern period (and this still holds true for many people), our culture pretended (or was fooled into believing) that even potentially random objects of observation called forth interpretation and rewarded it in the most profound ways possible—whether materially or spiritually. Our culture further pretended that these acts of interpretation were necessary to the point of defining what it meant to be human, and that they were verifiable according to a transcendent order of truth. Greenaway takes exception to that viewpoint, to the belief that *reality* presents any sort of allegorical opportunities through which we can discover a *truth* greater, or other than, the reality itself—that is, that significance is determined by a naturally transcendent order of truth, which, for some *mysterious* reason, manifests and reveals itself through observational clues found in the order of reality. In *The Draughtsman's Contract*, what Greenaway presents are observations of the house, grounds and characters of Compton Anstey, viewed in different aspects and in the varying lights of

different times of day. Allowing for taste, the house and grounds are beautifully lush and well-tended, while the people who wield, or submit, to the power that lies behind this representation of a bettered nature are, each in his or her own way, petty, perverted, vicious and stupid. Beyond that, however, neither house, grounds, people nor their representation in art have any *significance* beyond the narrow limits of their existence.

In his discussion of the early films, Brown makes a noteworthy comment on Greenaway's use of time and space and his attitude to truth and reality:

> The feature-length *A Walk Through H* and *Vertical Features Remake*, both released in 1978, bear the more noticeable marks of a strangely haunting obsession with the passage of time and space. In *A Walk Through H*, fictional map drawings evaporate into a single meaningless symbol either just before or just after the narrator reaches their place-scale. In *Vertical Features* . . . the interest in the film's time-scale is brilliantly matched to the director's own sense of place. Real places, not just artefacts, vanish before they can really be seen or, in Greenaway's terms, known. The 'vertical features' are choreographed with Michael Nyman's pulsing chords in three separate dimensions of landscape. They are born with the light of dawn, live during the day, decay in the dusk and are resurrected again in any and every order that they may ascend into eternity with the last frame of the film. 'None of these objects was ever manipulated,' Greenaway has said. 'Everything was found.' In other words, the central question the film implicitly addresses is: How can an author reconcile his own time and space with those of his fictional representations?
>
> Greenaway has approached this question not theoretically but through practice and intuition. And perhaps his work can best be 'known' if it is compared to that of the avant-garde film-maker Raul Ruiz for whom the matter of the relationship between the author and his subjects, both documentary and fictional, provides a basic conceptual premise. . . . for Ruiz, what is real is that cerebral truth that cannot be represented transparently. While for Greenaway, what is real is precisely that physical truth which cannot be represented.
>
> This is most clearly articulated in *Act of God*, Greenaway's documentary about people struck by lightning. Here the essential intrigue revolves round the practical problem of how to represent the incomprehensible nature of an act by the Supreme Unknowable Author Himself. Not only is a lightening strike an exact metaphor for the arbitrary relationship between subject and author, it also provides the ideal correlative for Greenaway's own fictional universe. The film's mixture of statistics and apocrypha at once shows up the absence of both the real Author and the real Act (of creation/death). The film is a real metaphor for a fictional universe, it is at once Romantic and Semantic.

> The apogee of the author and his art/facts/artefacts from the real world is reached in *The Falls*. . . . Greenaway is . . . concerned with organising diverse forms, stills, documentary, live-action, interview, reportage, within a coherent text. 'I was just interested in all the different ways that you could put pictures together,' he said. . . .
>
> With *The Falls* Greenaway's structuralist quest for coherence is seen to collapse into nothing more than a rather despairing mirror image of his own romanticism. Both look back to his own past as a film editor with the COI and to the forebears of that organisation, the GPO and EMB film units of the 30s and 40s. The marks of Griersonian aestheticism, however, are always undercut by the film's amusement at its own status as a cultural object. Greenaway's statement about *The Falls* might be interpreted as implying that the film-maker had finally accepted that the splintering forms of the world were ultimately unclassifiable. And so the only truth left to represent was his confession that, as the spurious inventor of self-consistent artefacts, he himself was a fiction. Hence the film discourses with neither its subject matter nor its authorial style but its audience, ninety-two random people gathered to watch a white screen. ('Greenaway's Contract' 35, 38)

When Brown came to write the *Monthly Film Bulletin* entry for *The Draughtsman's Contract* (the second of the 1982 articles I want to consider here), he was still no closer to understanding the formal dimensions of the film, a year after he first wrote about *The Draughtsman's Contract* in *Sight and Sound*. He is still not sure whether the (aesthetic) avant-garde dimension of the work is imposed on the story or springs from it—though here he suggests that the *formal* concern is about 'property, art and sexuality'. Of course, *Monthly Film Bulletin* requirements would limit the analytical extent of the piece (however hard it might also be to summarise an aesthetic-avant-garde film). Brown does little more, however, than retell the story (and is not entirely accurate at that). Attention to form is limited to a brief observation, followed by an adverse judgement replacing the desire to understand:

> . . . structural concerns are highlighted in several musical montages showing the draughtsman at work. Unfortunately, these sequences are executed in a most conventional fashion and lack the rigorously controlled structure which might have offset the more inventive mystifications of plot and theme. Whatever ideas are thrown up on the interconnection of property, art and sexuality clearly take second place to Greenaway's delightful play with narrative expectations. (254)

So it continues: the seemingly insurmountable problem of a strong narrative, of an apparently familiar shape and style, in perpetual conflict with the film's formal elements (whatever they might be)—though, now, even Greenaway himself is unable to avoid the traps of plot. If that were true, then it would be an indictment of both film and filmmaker. It is not true, however, and merely marks the transfer of a critic's puzzlement onto the filmmaker's shoulders.

The problem, both for those critics concerned with *The Draughtsman's Contract* diagetically, and those who want to take a structural approach, is the power of the narrative puzzle over who did what, when, why and to whom. They are indeed trapped (and I think set up by Greenaway) by the fact that the story is such an insistent who-done-it. That Greenaway sets us up as critics is evidenced by the dramatic use of music (using tone, pace and rhythm, for example, in remarkably conventional ways), of natural and appropriately motivated lighting and by the apparent overabundance of clues—auditory, visual and dialogic—which support the sense of a grand, murderous stratagem afoot, and imply the possibility of a complete picture of the mystery being put together by someone clever enough to get all the pieces in the right place and order. Greenaway demands the film be treated as of type one—though with an obviously heightened formal appeal—even though it is never anything but a type-two film. He does this by using for his content what might be a kind of detective story, a genre some have suggested is the epitome of narrative itself (a real clue that, with a filmmaker like Greenaway, something besides murder might be afoot). Thus the film's content *determines* a type-one critical perspective, while this film itself happily goes about its business playing with that perspective and all its assumptions, using it to serve the filmmaker's formal concerns. Greenaway, who is himself a painter, has said that the film is essentially about seeing and knowing, observing and understanding, and especially about the English relationship of these sensory/epistemological pairings to landscape. This may have suggested to him that the

content could most appropriately take the shape of a country-house who-done-it. The narrative of *The Draughtsman's Contract* pretends to be a questing example of type-one filmmaking, but it is not only a false quest—*à la* type—the false quest is denied as part of the film's formal concerns, so that the audience is not even allowed the conventional reassurance of a phoney conclusion to the false quest. The trouble with focusing attention on the story told in the film is that there is no diagetic puzzle to be solved, no solution to the puzzles presented. Form is all. Greenaway has used what is perhaps the most typical of narrative forms to trap us into interpretive effort, when the whole point of the film is that interpretation is arbitrary, contingent and partial, when not pointlessly impossible. Furthermore, it provides no grounds at all for any claim of metaphysical truth or understanding.

Despite my criticisms of Brown and Forbes, it remains true that by being the first to tackle the difficulties of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and by falling prey to its stratagems, they are an excellent starting point for a new, rigorous examination of the film's formal, as opposed to its narrative characteristics (though, of course, from that perspective, certain aspects of the narrative will become clearer, since the former governs the latter). No later consideration of the film has done more than cloud or avoid the central issues and problems.

The trouble with a content-determined and event-driven approach to *The Draughtsman's Contract* (as the few, early examples just cited show) is that it cannot make clear how Greenaway's typical, structural concerns are to be discovered, let alone examined and understood. Such an approach either trails off into some degree of praise for the *look* of the film, for its scenic landscape, the theatrical presentation and performance of its characters, for its historically novel and *artistic* repositioning of the country-house, murder-mystery tradition; or the approach ends up adversely criticizing the film (as Brown did in his *Monthly*

Film Bulletin article) for letting content dominate or sidetrack formal concerns.[19] Both results are guilty of not really looking at the film closely enough—objectively or metaphorically—to see just what is and is not on the screen.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I return to the film's beginning. It is often true that the title of a poem, play, novel, painting, sculpture, photograph, video or film suggests something precise about the nature, subject, orientation or purpose of the respective work (true, at least, until the modernists—though even an arbitrary, modernist title may still tell us something, however little, about the work it is affixed to). For *The Draughtsman's Contract*, what should be considered is the identification of 'Draughtsman' and 'Contract' and the nature of their relationship.

According to the *OED*, there are two kinds of 'draughtsman' (or 'draftsman'):

> 1. One whose profession is to make drawings, plans, or sketches; a man employed or skilled in drawing or designing. [1663]
> 2. One who draws up, or makes a draft of, a writing or document; one whose office it is to draw up legal or official documents. [1759]

Thus the word refers to both artistic Mr. Neville and legalistic Mr. Noyes, who draws up the contract between the artist and his patrons (this last perhaps reinforced by the implication of legal precision in the association of the date with Noyes' name in the credits).

The word 'contract' too is interestingly ambiguous, signifying the expected commercial agreement, but also having two further usages that reflect on its use in the film:

> 3. *spec.* as to marriage. a. The act whereby two persons take each other in marriage. b. Formal agreement for marriage; betrothal.
> †4. The action of drawing together, or condition of being drawn together; mutual attraction.

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[19] Just as those who take a narrative-driven approach often think of the film's structural, or, in their terms, stylistic elements as misleading and disruptive of plot and characterisation.

> **1626** BACON *Sylva* §944 Whereupon followeth that Appetite of Contract, and Conjunction, which is in Louers.
> **1654** WHITLOCK *Zoo:omia* 337 Nothing more dethrones the mind of man, than the flatteries of a woman: or that contract of Hearts without which no wedlock.

When dealing with a filmmaker like Greenaway, such references to the multiple, even obsolete, uses of a word found in the title of a film is relevant. First, he delights in the uses of arcana, numbers and the connotative and allusive power of words. Second, in this case, these meanings were not obscure or obsolete during the seventeenth century, when the story is set.

So the contract is not only a commercial agreement between Neville and the ladies, it is also a commercialized version of betrothal and, as the 'draughtsman's' contract, is the attraction Neville feels towards the women—perhaps, his seemingly natural, but surely powerful and dangerous attraction to women generally. In the case of Noyes, the document is a mockery of the marriage once proposed between him and Mrs. Herbert, as well as hinting at his agency in drawing together Mrs. Herbert and Mr. Neville. I will not go further in a vain attempt to tie down the *real*, or *overriding*, meaning, because there is none in this film. It is, in fact, the nature of this film to present a plurality of possibilities, weighted with clues suggesting that each possibility is part of an interpretive network of relatively fixed significance, and that we could if we wished ferret out the real or central significance of the story, on which each symbolic act, word and image would have its right and meaningful place. Because the film is this way, we could extend our list of characters for whom the term 'draughtsman' could apply to the filmmaker himself. He both creates a visual representation for the audience, and engages in a commercial agreement with them. And for Greenaway, the 'contract' is the, not merely metaphorical, agreement with his paying audience, and by extension with the BFI as producer of the film, but also his attraction to the visual medium in which he works, an attraction powerful enough to 'dethrone . . . the mind of man'.

For both Neville and Noyes the contracts serve as ostensibly legal grounds for the manipulative exercise of power and pleasure. This is obvious in Neville's case; for him power and pleasure combine in his art and his abusive sexual appetite. The two are drawn neatly together in the egotistical self-assessment he makes early in the film:

> NEVILLE: I hold the delight or despondency of a man of property by putting his house in shadow or in sunlight—even possibly, I have some control over the jealousy or satisfaction of a husband by depicting his wife, Sir, dressed or—undressed. (Sc. 1: 5)

Mr. Noyes demonstrates the same sort of material/commercial sexuality in his early advances to Mrs. Pierpoint—though she is equally materialistic:

> MRS. PIERPOINT: My meretricious conduct in the company of Mr. Seymour has been my invitation. I am strictly not of the company but a part of its property.
>
> MR. NOYES: Since that is what the company is here to discuss and to revel in, you should be well favoured. I would well favour you myself above two parterres and a drive of orange trees. (Sc. 1: 4)

He also demonstrates a brutally manipulative desire for power in his attempts to blackmail Mrs. Herbert (sc. 39: 43ff), tying this to his material/sexual interests as he solicits Mrs. Pierpoint's help in bringing off the scheme.

> MR. NOYES: . . . I'm in a position to invite you to help me elaborate and decorate . . . an entertaining item. We need not work too hard for the rump of the matter has been well laid.
>
> MRS. PIERPOINT: And what [real] benefit do you think I might gain from this exercise?
>
> MR. NOYES: Amusement—and a certain delight in a symmetrical stratagem, and the satisfaction that our betters might be seriously discomforted . . . and who knows, perhaps two parterres and a grove of orange trees . . . if Mrs. Herbert is generous. (Sc. 39: 47–48)

How should we understand Greenaway's relationship to the manipulative morality of power and pleasure that the title suggests, and that is diagetically borne out in Neville and Noyes? Well, I think that Greenaway is in a similar position to his characters. He too seems to operate according to the values of that manipulative morality in his relationship to his co-contractees: whether audience or BFI. His power is that of the author/director, his pleasure, the exercise of that power and the visual material of his art that gives him such power. Was the group in the café back in 1982 justified in finding Greenaway and *The Draughtsman's Contract* manipulative? Yes, but . . . in terms of the film's own values, that is only bad if it goes unrecognized and can then be mistaken for the truth.

CONCLUSION

ART/INDUSTRY
CRAFT

The broad and continuing discourse concerning the nature and role of culture in our modern, technological, consumer society has had to address, at different times and in different ways, the economics, ideology, history, rhetoric and sociology of culture. The recurrent shape of this discourse, however, has in large part been determined by a belief in a fundamental distinction, or, as seen from the perspective of a competition for limited resources, by a belief in an essential and at times bitter conflict, between *art* and *entertainment*—culture as masterpiece vs culture as marketplace—a distinction that, in terms of production, rather than of product, takes the form *art* vs *industry*.[1]

This belief in a fundamental art/industry opposition has a powerful and culturally central history stretching back at least 100 years before the invention of cinema and appears in the cultural debates of academics, artists, journalists and governments, often at such a profound level as to pass for a *natural* distinction. One need only attend to the arts programmes on radio, or their television equivalents (like 'The Late Show'), or to the culture-pages of the newspapers for examples of the discrimination in various guises. This thesis is

[1] For an extensive list of books and articles concerning art/industry issues, as well as cultural criticism and avant-gardism, see Appendix 4.

concerned with scripts and films, so I am not interested here in the place or economy of the traditional *high arts* in Western society—which is not to concede that film is not, or cannot be, an art form, but only a recognition that film is not a *traditional* art, being most often classified under the rubric of 'popular culture' or 'mass art'. Under such headings, the opposition *art/industry* seems natural, and its influence is felt even in the philosophical discussion of art. Richard Shusterman, for example, in a recent article on 'Popular Art' lists six typical charges made 'against the aesthetic legitimacy of popular art' (337), of which three involve some form of the distinction between art and industry. In terms more immediately relevant to a study of the British Film Institute, Edward Buscombe points out, in an essay in *The Hollywood Film Industry* (1986), that the art/industry opposition is nearly always present in studies of film:

> On the one hand we are given to understand is the industry, churning out product for financial gain. On the other are artists, creating enduring works of personal expression or comment on life and society. (45)

A survey of the material for this thesis soon revealed that, historically, nearly all discussion of film in Britain assumes the existence of a natural opposition between art/industry.

It might be that the belief in an art/industry opposition is the result of an ideological bias. Many prominent critics of culture, for example, have been Marxists or deeply influenced by Marxism (which is true particularly about popular culture, where the Frankfurt School has been especially influential). Such critics are led, *a priori*, to an unfavourable critique of any industrial, capitalist relationship to artistic production—which, along with much else, always begs the question of the nature of the relationship. Even if they were correct in identifying some *natural* and *necessary* opposition between art and industry (and any idea of the 'natural' or 'necessary' would have its own history), their analytical and predictive powers, which are their proudest claim, are limited.

A sleight-of-hand is attempted involving the abstraction of *process* or *relationship*—whether between absurdly well-bounded and absolutely non-individuated economic classes and their desires, or equally broad and tidy ideological, social or aesthetic groupings—in the belief that this can render *process* non-problematic. Supposedly, the trick can be accomplished if one can control the abstraction. That requires the 'right' positioning (for Marxism, this means being able to see the 'totality' of society) and the 'right' methodology (whether neo-Hegelian dialectic or Frankfurter 'Critical Theory').

However, it is instead true that the relations and processes of dynamic systems (physical or social) are inherently troublesome and, at anything beyond a radically individuated focus, unresolvable. In their desire to simplify dynamic process, theories such as Marxism have a twofold failing: they hypothesise into existence absurdly large and inclusive groupings in individuals or objects as the respective terms of a relationship they have already redefined to fit such groupings, and they then presume to have discovered a determinism in the relationship's workings. Neither of these is likely to be true. Indeed, since we now accept the probabilistic and indeterminate nature of the physical universe, it is remarkable that we indulge so much pseudo-scientific theory that believes that mind, emotions and social systems are simply deterministic.

In large part, this folly can be traced to a misunderstanding of the processes and results of the physical sciences, whose rigour and certainty such methodologies desperately wish to emulate, even if, as with the Frankfurt School, they seem to set themselves in particular opposition to empiricism. Unfortunately, the two-culture split in modern education means few disciples of theories like Marxism know their epistemological claims, however interesting, are unscientific, as is shown by a classic problem in physics: the motion of three bodies under the action of gravity.

Now Newton's Laws of Motion can elegantly describe the collision between a cue ball and a coloured ball on a snooker-table. They can even predict the outcome of the collision, but neither Newton nor anyone else can say what would happen if just one more ball were involved in the initial collision. The social implications of this fact are profound, as the mathematician Ian Stewart reminds us in his recent work on chaos. Namely,

> . . . the 'inexorable laws of physics' on which—for instance—Marx tried to model his laws of history, were never really there. If Newton could not predict the behaviour of three balls, could Marx predict that of three people? any regularity in the behaviour of large assemblies of particles or people must be *statistical*, and that has quite a different philosophical taste . . . . In retrospect we can see that the determinism of pre-quantum physics kept itself from ideological bankruptcy only by keeping the three balls of the pawnbroker apart. (40)

Surely few applying archaic, deterministic models like Marxism to the texts and contexts of literature or film (to say nothing of their application to general social studies) know that when they claim legitimacy for their work, they dodge a fundamental, epistemological problem.[2] Recognition of this fact would limit such analyses to only the simplest of relations.

It may be true, however, that the distinction art/industry is based on something in the structure or praxis of human society. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, points to a key distinction between 'practices' and 'institutions':

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. (187)

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[2] An intuition that their epistemological foundations may be dangerously shaky may explain, in part, why such theories tend to argue so vehemently for the philosophical priority of being over knowledge.

> Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with . . . external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. (194)

The art/industry distinction seems to parallel that between practices and institutions. Thus, filmmaking, as an intrinsically 'coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity', would be a *practice*: which would cast the film industry as an *institution*, a member of the same class as the British Film Institute and the Production Board.

Yet, despite the apparent similarity between the distinctions art/industry and practices/institutions, there is an important difference: the opposition art/industry is believed to be fundamentally and actively oppositional. According to MacIntyre, however, institutions 'sustain . . . the practices of which they are the bearers'. In fact, as he goes on to say, institutions and practices are fundamentally related and actively supportive:

> For no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. (*Virtue* 194)

As MacIntyre suggests, there is always an inherent delicacy in the relationship, for the proper ends of institutions and practices differ.[3] But the relationship itself, between institutions and practices, is fundamental. Moreover, the exercise of *virtue*, which is MacIntyre's chief concern, is in large part measured by our ability to maintain the proper balance of this relationship, pursuing the ends proper to its two terms. This is entirely unlike the moral stance associated with the art/industry opposition—a distinction that is always, if only implicitly,

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[3] On the respective ends of institutions and practices, see *Virtue* 187–196, esp. 190–191.

moral—namely, art is good and industry is, if not bad, at least corrupt and corrupting. This is evident in the particular formulation of the opposition Buscombe identifies—film industry as mindless machine versus film artist as creative hero—though it can appear in other forms:

- Art means HIGH ART, culture for the few; film is entertainment for the many and, hence, is not art.
- Commercial film is big business, *ipso facto* it promotes reactionary-capitalism; film-art rejects and subverts this.
- The film industry is a business and government must not intervene; film-art is unprofitable and government must protect and fund it.[4]

As the assumptions implicit in the different forms of the opposition suggest (again, see Kerr for more on this), the distinction between art and industry, though usually taken to be the result of a disinterested determination of fact (aesthetic if of product, political-economic if of production), is actually the trace of a moral choice made in favour of a predetermined aesthetic, political or economic perspective. Recognizing this key difference between the art/industry opposition and the relationship of practices and institutions, may, however, point us in the right direction for identifying the origin and developmental context of the former.

MacIntyre points out that virtue and morality are a result of our actions in the world (how we participate in the institutions and practices that structure our existence), and that they do not inhere in nor characterize, neither are they *naturally* nor *necessarily* attached to, the structures or activities themselves (*means* help define *ends*). The morality of the art/industry opposition in practice, however, takes it that *good* and *bad* do belong, naturally and necessarily, to structures and activities—which is to say that ends can condemn or justify means. MacIntyre says virtue and morality exist at the level of personal choice and individual behaviour, working within a teleological framework. From the perspective of the art/industry

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[4] For a discussion of the types and their failings, see Kerr's Introduction to *The Hollywood Film Industry* 1–30.

opposition, however, morality is taken to be a part of social structure (judged in a synchronic rather than a teleological framework), used to commend or condemn, influence and control, the present social order. In other words, the art/industry opposition is part of an ideology. For ideologies are, as Northrop Frye says, 'structures for social authority, so far as verbal structures can articulate and rationalize authority' (*Words with Power* 16).

Edward Buscombe comes to the same conclusion, in his consideration of the art/industry opposition. He first suggests that, with regard to film,

> . . . a little common sense would tell us that such a distinction is nonsense, that all film is both industry *and* art, in some sense. (45)

He realizes that in practice, however, 'the mutual exclusion of art and industry operates at a level too deep to be affected by mere common sense'. Proof of this 'can be found not only in the dominant critical attitudes but in the organisation of social institutions' (45). He cites the origination and organisation of the British Film Institute as an example:

> . . . the BFI was set up, as its Memorandum of Association states 'to encourage the development of the art of the film'. At the same time it is stated that the BFI is not permitted 'to control nor attempt to interfere with purely trade matters'. Art not only can but must be divorced from industry. And the split is preserved even in the structure of government. Whereas the BFI is administered by the Department of Education and Science, the film industry comes under the Department of Trade and Industry. Thus the opposition art/industry has to be seen not merely as a 'mistake' in film criticism which can be easily rectified by a more careful look at the facts, but as the result of a whole practice of thinking, talking, writing and disseminating inscribed in institutions like the BFI, those parts of the education system that handle film, plus also exhibition/viewing practice—the art-house circuit and its audience(s) —the 'immaterial' thought both reflecting and being part of this apparatus; in short, as part of an ideology. (45–6)

Whether the distinction is 'part of an ideology', or mere rhetoric, its presence and influence have been felt throughout the history of film in Britain. From early in this century, those concerned about film found that the opposition offered a culturally privileged, home-grown, intellectual tradition that suited their interests in describing and controlling film. This

applied whether they argued for censorship or suppression, artistry or entertainment, state-sponsorship or commercial profitability. In turn, the relationship of government, educationists, artists, moralists and others to film helped shape the ways the art/industry distinction was defined and applied. The role of the Production Board means that it can illuminate, in perhaps new and significant ways, the art/industry distinction as it applies to film in Britain.

In the historical first-section of this thesis, we have seen how the traditional belief in an art/industry opposition influenced government concern about film and its films legislation at a time when the distinction remained external to film and when film was widely regarded in Britain as a social and cultural threat. We also saw how belief in this distinction influenced the founding and establishment of the British Film Institute—which was created as an educational response to the perceived threat of the cinema, with the purpose of helping save British culture by encouraging 'the art of the film'. Then, cultural and rhetorical changes were causing the art/industry distinction to be internalized to film, and the creation of the BFI contributed to those changes.

We also saw how the Festival of Britain origin of film production at the BFI, by means of the Experimental Film Fund, was also deeply influenced by the *art-opposed-to-industry* belief. Despite any inherent limitations in the organization, whether in terms of self-conception or practice, the work produced by the Fund and, later, by the Production Board, was of a high standard. I even suggested that at certain times in their history, when their oppositional role was properly perceived and carried out, the Experimental Film Fund and the Production Board offered a profound national model for filmmaking in Britain. The bulk of the thesis, consisted of detailed examinations of Bill Douglas and Peter Greenaway films. Their work confirmed that it was time to redefine what so many had for so long taken to be a *natural*, cultural opposition between art and industry. Before discussing how that redefinition might be

rewritten, however, perhaps it is time to look, all too briefly, at the history of this persistent and powerful distinction.

Earlier, I quoted Edward Buscombe's assertion that 'the mutual exclusion of art and industry operates at a level too deep to be affected by mere common sense', operates at such a profound level that it 'can be found not only in the dominant critical attitudes but in the organisation of social institutions'—for which he cites the origination and organisation of the British Film Institute as a prominent example ('Notes on Columbia Pictures' 45–6). Unfortunately, in his discussion of the art/industry opposition, Buscombe goes no further than to assert that it is 'part of an ideology', saying his 'Main concern . . . is not with the origins of such an opposition but with its consequence for film criticism' (46). I do not see how we can properly concern ourselves with consequences, however, before we understand something of the origin and nature of the opposition. This at least is necessary if we are to recognize and assess its activities (which will often be displaced or masked), and so respond properly to its advantages, errors and limitations.

The opposition *art/industry* seems first to have appeared around the turn of the 19th century as a central tenet of romanticism, an association with this still powerful cultural ideology that continues today.[5] Raymond Williams observes in his study of *Culture and Society* that the words *art* and *industry*, which are so important 'in our modern structure of meanings' (xiii), took on a new sense around this time:

> The changes in their use, at this critical period, bear witness to a general change in our characteristic ways of thinking about our common life: about our social, political and economic institutions; about the purposes which these institutions

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[5] The art/industry opposition may depend on and result from a fundamental contradiction in romanticism, which the music scholar L. Meyer identifies as its 'élite egalitarianism'—an apparent paradox that still dominates romanticism (*Style and Music* 163–183).

> are designed to embody; and about the relations to these institutions and purposes of our activities in learning, education and the arts. (xiii)

Williams comments on how *industry*, which before the end of the 18th century had meant '"skill, assiduity, perseverance, diligence"' (xiii)—a synonym for what we would call 'craft'—'became a collective word for our manufacturing and productive institutions, and for their general activities' (xiii). Meanwhile, *Art*, which had also meant a 'skill',

> had come . . . to be a kind of institution, a set body of activities of a certain kind. An *art* had formerly been any human skill; but *Art*, now, signified a particular group of skills, the 'imaginative' or 'creative' arts. . . . *Art* came to stand for a special kind of truth, 'imaginative truth', and *artist* for a special kind of person . . . . *The arts*—literature, music, painting, sculpture, theatre—were grouped together . . . as having something essentially in common which distinguished them from other human skills. . . . *Genius*, from meaning 'a characteristic disposition', came to mean 'exalted ability', and a distinction was made between it and *talent*. (xv–xvi)

Thus, as far as it embodied a real distinction, the art/industry opposition started as a perceived and apparently *natural* difference between Art (or the Arts) and commercial, productive manufacturing—that is, between activities that were *different in kind*. Why the distinction needed to be made in the first place, with the collateral emphasis on the artist's importance, has never, as far as I know, been fully examined. Williams believes that, although tempting, it is a simplification to see the distinction 'as a direct response to the actual change in relations between artist and society', because 'the response is not merely a professional one' (36). Rather, he feels that

> It is also (and this has been of the greatest subsequent importance) an emphasis on the embodiment in art of certain human values, capacities, energies, which the development of society towards an industrial civilization was felt to be threatening or even destroying. The element of professional protest is undoubtedly there, but the larger issue is the opposition on general human grounds to the kind of civilization that was being inaugurated. (36)

Surely this is the simplification, however, for it requires little more of the critic than to accept at face value the claims made at the time by artists and other interested parties. Of

course, to have put more weight on the role of 'professional protest' would have required a different book than Williams was writing. It is interesting, though, that the chapter from which this discussion comes is titled 'The Romantic Artist'. Williams sees, quite correctly, that these ideas and conflicts are part of romanticism. Yet Williams' interpretation (or lack of it) is symptomatic of the very problem I am trying to illuminate. For his failure to explore the dimension of 'professional protest' and his implicit acceptance of the model for art that sees it as naturally transcendent and uniquely profound, perpetuates the romantic discourse—the very discourse in which art and industry are *naturally* opposed.

Williams is not alone. In an interesting article called 'Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism', Sayre and Löwy argue from a Marxist perspective that the '*essential* dimension' of romanticism is '*opposition to capitalism in the name of precapitalist values*' (26)—which demonstrates how close and natural the tie between romanticism and the art/industry opposition is usually perceived to be. Like Williams, however, Sayre and Löwy do not speak from outside the discourse of romanticism but perpetuate it, for romanticism subsumes Marxism. To right the imbalance, and so distinguish what might be necessary distinctions between art and industry from those required by romantic ideology, would require diachronic explorations of the field of 'professional protest' *vis-à-vis* the art/industry opposition—all the while conscious of what Clifford Siskin calls *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*. My present, brief survey continues with that perspective in mind.

Not that I question the sincerity of romantic concern for social and political issues in the late 18th to early 19th-century, particularly with what at the time seemed problems *necessary* to 'the kind of civilization that was being inaugurated' (Williams 36). However, concern for others does not rule out concern for self. Personal difficulties may offer the most immediate example of more general problems—indeed, they may initiate an awareness of

social problems. In the same way, the sharp distinction between art and industry rested in part upon a perceived need to (re)assert the power, prestige, status, wisdom and profundity of the artist-as-artist, in the face of the sheer agency and mechanical productivity of industrial processes. This need became acute as that mechanical productivity came to bear upon the arts themselves, which it did initially through such productive and distributive means as publishing. The acute nature of this concern was further magnified by the influence of the marketplace—the commercial term that with industry completes the capitalist equation. The influence of the marketplace on the arts was felt through the great changes in the public response to the arts: for example, in the literary arts it was felt through greatly expanded numbers of readers, lending libraries and book sales.

The growth in manufacturing and commerce throughout the 19th century led those involved to look about for other areas of potentially profitable commercial/industrial activity, and their gaze fell on the arts. This led to the further consideration of art for profit. By the late-19th century, industrial and technical growth and development had also led to the realization of something entirely new: not just industrial application to the production and distribution of art, but actual *mechanical/industrial creative-processes*: including photography, lithography, phonography and cinematography.[6] These processes facilitated the move to full, commercial, mass-production, mass-distribution, mass-reception and mass-appreciation of art (and presently, to the mass-participation in creativity itself through mass-marketed cameras, computers, sound production, recording and mixing systems, etc.). At the same time, and probably because of the changes in the modes of production affecting the arts,

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[6] Walter Benjamin is obviously the first place to look for a discussion of art and mechanical reproduction. For histories of these and other mechanical, art procedures see: J. Biggs; D. Cook; D. Diringer; R. Gelatt; A. Hind; B. Kawin; R. McLean; M. Weaver; J. Wyver.

the ideologically and culturally significant part of the distinction between art and industry was internalised to the arts alone. It became an evaluative distinction between different modes of artistic production—an aesthetic, economic and political, but more importantly a moral distinction that continues to this day.

The basic shape of the internalised division is clear. One mode of production, idealized and highly individualistic, can be expected to accomplish, quite naturally, work of great aesthetic and moral worth. The other, naturally opposed mode is industrial mass-production (with its corollary, mass-consumption), which provides not merely spurious satisfaction, but as many would read it, actually

> encourages totalitarianism by creating a passive audience peculiarly responsive to the techniques of mass persuasion. (Gans 19)

The first mode can produce *Art*; while the latter produces what can only pass for art—though of course that begs the question of what constitutes *art*.

The developments and changes were not as clear-cut as I make out in the limited space available here. For example, it is possible to see Ruskin and Morris (despite their avowed opposition to the mechanical-industrial culture of their time) as considering, and with Morris moving towards the realization of, a kind of industrial, commercial production of *High Art*—on a more human scale than the 'dark Satanic mills' of their time could realize.[7] Such attempts were bypassed at the time by the ideological adjustments to the conditions of the day: those changes that re-centred the art/industry division within the arts, contrasting means of production so as to define the absolute merits of the product. It might even be that the

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[7] This reading puts the Arts and Crafts movement in direct historical line with decentred corporate structuring, integrative, team-based models of personnel management and current developments in parallel-engineering. See, e.g., J. Black and P. Ackers; B. Dankbaar; D. Grayson; G. Jones; M. Poole; R. Stern and C. McCarthy; G. Taguchi.

ideological change was given impetus by the ideas and work of Ruskin and Morris: perhaps encouraged by those who might wish to subvert any notion of an industrial, commercial, democratised art (whether as socialism or only as a cottage industry). Such change threatened artistic and intellectual, critical and educational élites. For it contained the seed of a great denial: a denial of the fundamental superiority or otherness of artists and by extension of those few who could properly appreciate and understand them.[8]

Central to the canon of 'mass' or 'popular' arts generated by mass-production was film—although from a romantic perspective, film was initially looked down upon as a compromised art (if an art at all) since it was clearly mechanical in nature and had largely developed as an industrial-commercial process. In the internalised division between *real art* and industrially produced mass-culture, film was initially taken to be simply of the latter. Eventually, film gained acceptance as having at least the potential of being a serious art form (something realized perhaps as late as the 1960s, if becoming a subject of institutionalized, academic study is any standard for such acceptance).[9] All of this was not simply the result of an evolutionary process (itself a romantic way of viewing change) through which film was supposed to have found the maturity of purpose, form and content necessary for its entry into the temple of art. Rather, film was allowed in once it was recognized that its production could be divided between art and industry. After that, critical application and preconceived assumptions made film a key area for the employment of the art/industry opposition, and as that application became more confident it tended to take on the moral tone common to such

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[8] Consider the role of the intellectual élite of Bloomsbury, for example, (particularly Lytton Strachey), in obscuring Ruskin's significance by trivializing our interest in him.

[9] By spurring the internalization of the art/industry distinction to the arts themselves, the arguments and concerns about film in the 1920s and 1930s, which led to the founding of the BFI, may ultimately have been responsible for film being treated as an academic subject.

oppositional heuristics. As a result, industrial/commercial production was *naturally* and openly stigmatised; and it generally remains so as too much film journalism and too many film monographs demonstrate. That is a romantic perspective, however, perpetuating the discourse of romanticism.[10]

My reading of the history and work of the Experimental Film Fund and the Production Board suggests that the art/industry distinction should be recast in a different form. The proper cultural distinction concerning film-art and film-industry, taken at the level of production, is one between scales, structures and methods of organization and production—as between the work of an artisan and an industry—*either of which can produce art, and each of which may have something like a high-art form especially representative of that mode of production.* This is borne out by the Douglas and Greenaway films studied here. Read in the light of Josephine Guy's work on avant-gardism and of Richard Stivers' on *The Culture of Cynicism*, the original art/industry distinction is seen to be a blind, pretending the term 'art' cannot be as associated with the industrial, commercial ethos.

We must remember though that a craft/industry distinction drawn in terms of production is a difference in the scale and level of productive mechanization and of the rationalization of the worker—whatever theory may be constructed to justify it, it is a practical distinction. Thus, identification of a production mode under this redefinition would be non-evaluative (*pace* Marxist critiques, whose economic underpinnings involve *industrial* ambitions as much as any capitalist). As I said at the end of chapter 2, an art/industry

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[10] The connection between romanticism and avant-gardism is one that even Guy does not engage. However, in his discussion of *Style and Music*, Leonard Meyer identifies key romantic characteristics—such as the paradoxical rejection and obsession with the past, the importance of novelty and experimentation (particularly in terms of technique and technology), and the celebration of the individual, iconoclastic vision—which would suggest that a primary identity may exist between romanticism and avant-gardism.

distinction is a profoundly confused and misleading distinction that can never provide the philosophical or practical grounds for effective policy or practice by an Arts Institution. It makes it too easy to continue, for example, in the mistaken, romantic notion that all avant-garde work is *naturally* opposed to the commercial/industrial order.

I want to close historically near to where I began. For one of the clearest and most perceptive statements I know of just what type of film production Britain ought to pursue, and the British government ought to encourage, was heard in Parliament, way back in 1925. Sir Frank Mayer MP then suggested that

> we in this country can never by any possible means expect to rival the Americans in the production of what are known as features. . . . On the other hand, the smaller and shorter films of an educational and commercial character could be developed very largely in this country. That is where I think that the Government, the Board of Trade and, incidentally the Board of Education, could be of the greatest value. By an examination of resources, by encouragement and by inquiry, they could do a great deal to encourage the making of good educational and commercial films which could be shown in this country and be sent to our Dominions and Colonies. (*HC Deb.* 6 July 1925; 186: 157–58)

If such insight had informed an equally clear application of will when education, industry and government came together, some six years later, at the creation of the BFI, and had it been allowed to pursue an active role in film production (despite all industry objections), I believe this nation would have been spared the endless roller-coaster ride of film production boom-and-bust, a ride that continues today, as it has for most of a century, leaving Britain with little in the way of a viable, sustainable, independent British film industry *qua* industry.

Of course, all is not lost, for television has taken on the task, reaped the rewards and, I suspect, experienced the joys of producing exactly the kinds of programmes—essentially 'the smaller and shorter films'—that Mayer refers to: whether they are artistic, documentary, educational, investigative or entertainment. This is the work (which is in constant production

and is, indeed, promoted in part by the BFI) for which Britain is justifiably respected and honoured throughout the world. It must be recognized, however, that the model for this kind of production can be found in the operation of the Experimental Film Fund and the Production Board over the period covered by this thesis, when with few resources and often in the face of fierce opposition they provided courageous support for just this sort of distinctly British filmmaking.

APPENDIX 1

IVAN BUTLER'S HISTORY OF THE BFI

One interesting issue in film study is the different kinds of film history that can and have been written. In an essay on 'Color and cinema' (Kerr 120–47), Edward Branigan identifies four types of film history: 'constructed from the perspectives of . . . adventure, technology, industrial management, and ideology' (122). He also distinguishes 'the analytical methods of the four histories' by their use of what he calls 'the three criteria of cause, change, and subject', which he describes elsewhere as 'the role or function ascribed to the individual' (122). It is an interesting and fruitful line of inquiry and, though there is not room here to go into the kind of historical detail Branigan recommends, I will take a small step that way with a brief consideration of Ivan Butler's *'To encourage the art of the film': The story of the British Film Institute* (1971). To learn the kind of history Butler writes, I will use a basic, though revealing schematic analysis of his book.

Butler opens with a one-page forward by (the then untitled) Richard Attenborough and a brief author's preface. This is followed by nine chapters telling the BFI 'story', five appendices and an index. There are forty-five black and white photographs included on separate plates, of which number thirty-two (71%) are personality or star shots. Only ten of

the photographs (22%) are of the BFI proper. The other three photographs are of regional theatres. The five appendices take fourteen pages in all and cover the following topics:

- Appendix A—1 page diagram of the 'Structure of the bfi';
- Appendix B—2 page list of 'Chairmen . . . Directors . . . [and] Governors of the bfi';
- Appendix C—4 dense pages listing films shown at National Film Theatre seasons from 1953–1970;
- Appendix D—half-page list of 'John Player Lecturers';
- Appendix E—6 pages of 'Features screened at the London Film Festivals'.

In summary, eleven pages (79%)—Appendices C, D and E—are on personalities and films exhibited, and just three pages (21%)—Appendices A and B—are on the BFI proper. The relative division and size of the nine chapters also reflects the book's skewed focus:

Chapter	*Title*	*Pages*	*Percentage of*	
			Total	*Chaps. 2–7*
1	'Organisation'	38	23	—
2	'Preservation'	28	17	23
3	'Education'	14	8	11
4	'Presentation'	52	31	42
5	'Production'	8	5	6.5
6	'Distribution'	9	5	7
7	'Publication'	12	7	10
8	'Film Societies'	3	2	0.25
9	'The Future'	3	2	0.25
		167	100	100.00

Even without a detailed examination of its chapters, it is possible to recognise in this simple enumeration something of the interests, biases and weaknesses of Butler's book. It is also possible to guess its position regarding the proper nature and role of the BFI and perhaps its general assumptions about the cinema, art and industry, products and production.

Three-quarters of the photographs (75%) are personality or film oriented, and four-fifths of the appendices (80%) are the same. Of the body of the book, only the first chapter is focused on the history and organisation of the BFI (although individual chapters on

departments or activities of the Institute make cursory remarks about historical matters. Of the chapters concerned with the actual divisions of the Film Institute (ch. 2–7), the bulk are again concerned with films and personalities. Indeed, over half of this material (52% of ch. 2–7) appears under 'Presentation' and 'Publication', with both chapters taking a kind of fan-magazine approach to 'The Ten Best Films' and the famous faces seen. Interestingly, less than a quarter of this central mass of the book is devoted to 'Preservation' (just 23%), which must surely be one of the BFI's most important operations—indeed, as Attenborough says in the foreword to the book:

> think for a moment of the calamitous void in the fabric of the British Film structure that would be brought about by the total absence of the National Film Archive. (11)

Throughout Butler's story there is a clear emphasis upon the *viewing* of films and personalities; that is, upon the observation of aspects of the art that are essentially external to the BFI, which come to the BFI from elsewhere. This turns the Institute into a sort of facility for hire, rather than an autonomous productive force. The whole is centred on the showing and seeing of films and film personalities, that is, on the consumption of *product*, with very little attention paid to the product itself and almost nothing to its production, distribution and reception (that would include criticism and education in and about film, supported by the BFI). This fits with the title of the book and even the photograph on the front cover of the jacket contributes to this attitude remarkably well. The photograph shows a projector, apparently 16mm (the gauge especially used in schools and village halls), which is shot from a very low angle at a slow shutter speed with synchronous, single-point flash. The photo not only fixes the focus upon the *screening* of films, but suggests something of the traditional British distaste for overt professionalism. The whole suggests an interpretation of the BFI as an amateur, or amateur-support, organisation undercutting the Institute's real professionalism and separating

it from the Trade or Industry (constitutionally forbidden ground), as well as damping any pretensions to the presumably transcendent world of Art. Butler's title assumes the proper attitude: the Institute is there 'To encourage the art of the film'—with emphasis upon 'encourage'. It operates from the outside as a nanny might when encouraging the development of another person's offspring.

'To Encourage the Art of the Film' simplifies, petrifies and simply ignores the details and dynamic systems of the Film Institute. By doing so, it commits the error of separating products from their production. Yet the fan-magazine approach taken by Butler, though it may be judged a less serious approach than those identified by Branigan, is just one version of the type 'history as adventure story'. Thankfully, the type seems to be giving up its position as the most common form of film history written, in favour of documented histories of the details of products and productions.

APPENDIX 2

FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE

The following is taken from the final chapter of *The Film in National Life*: 'The Constitution of a Film Institute'. Towards the end of this chapter, the Commission on Cultural and Educational Films considers possible forms and funding of a National Film Institute:

> An Institute may be a Department of State. The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research has its own Parliamentary vote and is under the control of the Lord President of the Council. (151)
>
> An Institute may be administered as a subordinate section of a Department of State. The Victoria and Albert Museum . . . is administered by the Board of Education. (151)
>
> An Institute may be State-aided but not State-controlled. The Government, while closely associated with the conduct and control of the Imperial Institute, makes only a partial contribution to its maintenance. (152)
>
> An Institute may be a national organisation, with public responsibility, aided or financed by Government funds, but constitutionally an independent Corporation. The British Broadcasting Corporation was established as the result of the rapid development of the work of the British Broadcasting Company Limited. Unlike the National Telephone Company, which became a section of the General Post Office, the Company was made an independent Corporation acting under a Royal Charter. (152)
>
> An Institute may be supported wholly from voluntary funds and may be incorporated under Royal Charter. The Royal Institute of International Affairs is an example of this type of organisation with an interesting history. (153)
>
> An Institute may be supported wholly from voluntary funds, and incorporated, but not under Royal Charter. The National Institute of Industrial Psychology

> was incorporated in 1921 under the Companies Act as a scientific association making no profit, and by virtue of its classification is also legally a charity, entitled to receive charitable donations and bequests. (153)

The report concludes that whatever shape the National Film Institute might take some form of support from public funds would be essential,

> if only as a guarantee of solidity and independence, whether those funds are directly voted or are derived from a source such as a tithe on the proceeds of Sunday Cinema performances, and administered by a Government Department. We believe, on the other hand, that an Incorporated Institute with Government backing would have more freedom and elasticity to develop a new service than a Government Department. (155)

The Film in National Life closes with its formal recommendations:

> We . . . have the honour to recommend:—
> **That a National Film Institute be set up in Great Britain financed in part by public funds and incorporated under Royal Charter.**
> We have considered the organisation and establishment which would be needed for an Institute with public status. We recommend:—
>
> (1) that a Board of Governors be appointed by the Government; that they be seven in number; and that their term of office be for five years and renewable;
>
> (2) that it be the duty of the Governing Body to set up an Advisory Council, including representatives of learned and scientific societies, educational associations and education authorities, and of the film industry, together with persons nominated by Government Departments concerned, or individually co-opted, and representatives of the self-governing Dominions and of India appointed by the Governments concerned.
>
> (3) that the duties and powers of the Advisory Council include advice and assistance to the permanent staff in carrying out the work of the Institute, together with power to submit to the Governing Body suggestions for new activities;
>
> (4) that the staff consist of a Secretary or Director with an adequate body of technical experts, and an administrative and clerical staff;
>
> (5) that, in addition to ordinary office accommodation, there will be needed an experimental theatre for the projection of sound and silent films, a room for 'cutting' films, and accommodation (not necessarily on the same premises) for a library of films and of books on cinematography.

We are of the opinion that the functions of the Institute would be:—

(1) To act as a national clearing-house for information on all matters affecting the production and distribution of educational and cultural films, including information as to research which is being undertaken abroad;

(2) to influence public opinion to appreciate and demand films which, as entertainment, are really good of their kind or have more than entertainment value, by, *e.g.* the publication of a review or of press articles or by lectures and meetings at important centres such as Universities;

(3) to advise teachers and institutions who want to use films, as to sources and conditions of supply, types of film, and the apparatus and conditions of projection; to secure the services of expert teachers to co-operate with the trade in the production of teaching films made expressly for the schools, and to organise their distribution;

(4) to act as the means of liaison between the trade, producers, distributors, exhibitors, cultural interests and educators;

(5) to undertake continuous research into the various uses of the film and of allied visual and auditory apparatus;

(6) to be responsible for film records, and to maintain a national repository of films of permanent value; to compile and maintain, with the aid of expert advisory panels, who might be paid for their services, a descriptive and critical catalogue of educational films;

(7) to act as an advisory body to all Government Departments concerned with the use and control of films;

(8) to undertake for the Government any task of certifying films as educational, cultural or scientific, whether national or international, for import or for export, which the Government sponsors;

(9) to undertake such duties in relation to the Dominions, Colonies and Protectorates as may be allotted to it, *e.g.* the approval of films as suitable for backward races; and

(10) generally to undertake such duties as may be assigned to it under conditions not inconsistent with the terms of its Royal Charter.

In conclusion, we repeat that we conceive the work of the Institute as constructive, not restrictive.

APPENDIX 3

MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION OF THE BFI

[The only material cut from the Memorandum is legal details of financial arrangements.]

MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION
OF
THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

I. The name of the Company (hereinafter called "The Institute") is "THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE."

II. The Registered Office of the Institute will be situated in England.

III. The object for which the Institute is established is :—

(*a*) To encourage the development of the art of the film, to promote its use as a record of contemporary life and manners and to foster public appreciation and study of it from these points of view.

(*b*) To explore and promote new or extended uses for the film and to encourage, support and serve other bodies working in the same field.

(*c*) To advise education institutions and other organisations and persons as to sources and conditions of supply, types of films and apparatus, and the conditions of production, distribution and exhibition.

(*d*) To act as a means of liaison between the trade (producers, distributors and exhibitors) and cultural and educational interests.

(*e*) To promote and undertake research into the various uses of the film and of allied visual and auditory apparatus.

(*f*) To develop the National Film Library to form a comprehensive collection of significant films; to arrange for the loan and exhibition of films from such a Library, and generally to evolve facilities for individual and group study of films and the showing of special programmes.

(*g*) To act as a clearing house for information on all matters affecting the production, exhibition and distribution of films at home and abroad.

(*h*) To undertake if required the certification of films as educational, cultural or scientific.

(*i*) To establish district or sectional branches, and local and other associations for the promotion of all or any of the objects of the Institute.

(*j*) . . . to acquire . . . real or personal property, and any estate or interest therein, and any rights or privileges necessary or convenient, or capable of being used or applied for any of the purposes of the Institute, and to hold, sell, lease or dispose of . . . the same . . . with a view to the promotion of the objects of the Institute.

(*k*) . . . to accept any bequest, devise, gift, or donation . . . towards the objects of the Institute . . . .

(*l*) . . . to obtain money for the objects of the Institute in any lawful manner, and invest, apply or deal with the same in such manner as may be considered most desirable for effecting such objects . . . .

(*m*) To establish or encourage the formation of and to affiliate, combine or co-operate with any other association, society, or corporation in all or any parts of the world having objects similar . . . to . . . this Institute or . . . capable of being conducted so as . . . to benefit this Institute, or promote the objects which . . . [it] is formed to promote, but so that none of the funds of this Institute shall be paid or applied to or for the benefit of any such other association, society or corporation which does not prohibit the distribution of its income and property amongst its Members to an extent at least as great as is imposed on the Institute . . . .

(*n*) Generally, to aid and to receive aid from any such other association, society or corporation, as aforesaid, and to subscribe to any society, corporation or association with a view to obtaining any advantages or benefits for or promoting the objects of this Institute.

(*o*) . . . to invest any moneys of the Institute upon such investments, and in such manner as may from time to time be considered desirable.

(*p*) To borrow . . . raise money . . . issue debentures and other securities, and for . . . securing any debt and obligation of the Institute to mortgage and charge all or any part of its property and assets, present and future.

(*q*) To apply, petition for, or promote any Act of Parliament, Royal Charter, or other authority, with a view to the attainment of the above objects, or any of them.

(*r*) To do all such other lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.

Provided that the Institute shall not support with its funds any object, or endeavour to impose on or procure to be observed by its Members or others any regulation, restriction or condition which, if an object of the Institute, would make it a Trade Union.

Provided also that in case the Institute shall take or hold any property subject to the jurisdiction of the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales or Ministry of Education, the Institute shall not sell, mortgage, charge, or lease the same without such authority, approval or consent as may be required by law . . . . In case the Institute shall take or hold any property which may be subject to any trusts, the Institute shall only deal with the same in such manner as allowed by law, having regard to such trusts.

Provided further that the Institute shall neither seek to control nor attempt to interfere with purely trade matters in the Film Industry or with the censorship of films for public entertainment.

IV. The income and property of the Institute, whencesoever derived, shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects of the Institute as set forth in this Memorandum of Association; and no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly, by way of dividend, bonus, or otherwise howsoever by way of profit, to the Members of the Institute. . . . [This did not limit payment for legitimate services rendered.]

V. No addition, alteration, or amendment shall be made to or in the regulations contained in the Articles of Association for the time being in force, unless . . . previously submitted to and approved by the Board of Trade.

VI. The fourth and fifth paragraphs of this Memorandum of Association contain conditions on which a licence is granted by the Board of Trade to the Institute in pursuance of Section 18 of the Companies Act, 1929.

VII. The liability of the Members is limited.

VIII. Every Member of the Institute undertakes to contribute to the assets of the Institute, in the event of its being wound up while he is a Member, or within one year after he ceases to be a Member for payment of the debts and liabilities of the Institute contracted before he ceases to be a Member . . . such amount as may be required, not exceeding one pound.

IX. If upon the winding up or dissolution of the Institute there remains, after the satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, any property whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed among the Members of the Institute; but shall be given or transferred to some other institution or institutions having objects similar to the objects of the Institute . . . .

X. True accounts shall be kept of the . . . moneys received and expended by the Institute . . . .

WE, the several persons whose names and addresses are subscribed, are desirous of being formed into a Company in pursuance of this Memorandum of Association.

[The Memorandum, dated 21st September 1933, is signed by:
C. J. Cleland, Wholesale Stationer;
A. C. Cameron, Secretary for Education, Oxford City Council;
J. W. Brown, Secretary, British Institute of Adult Education;
R. S. Lambert, Editor of *The Listener*;
F. W. Baker, Director to Limited Company (Butcher's Film Service Ltd.);
W. R. Fuller, Barrister-at-Law;
R. V. Crow, Company Secretary (Past President, Cinematograph Exhibitors Association).]

APPENDIX 4

FURTHER READINGS ON CULTURE, ART/INDUSTRY & AVANT-GARDISM

For those wishing to read further on art and industry, film avant-gardism or on broader questions concerning modern culture, the following list should serve most needs. A good place to start might be Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts* (1964)— although the book is dated by its preoccupation with anti-Leavisite arguments *for* popular culture (despite which its authors retain highly romanticised views of creativity and the leisure activities of the European peasant). Hall and Whannel's heartfelt 'school project' was written to promote, and to give practical aid to teachers in the teaching of, popular culture at the earliest stages of education. This highly valuable effort was undoubtedly a daring challenge to established opinions regarding education, and much needed and influential in its time.

For a scholarly, philosophical approach to the question of modern and popular culture, readers should perhaps start with the important, Marxist, cultural-criticism of Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Lukács, Marcuse and Ortega y Gasset. One of the things that made these such seminal thinkers on questions of modernity (including its general irreverence, use and misuse of the past, its obsession with novelty and its imbrication with all things technical) was that they themselves were ever sensitive to the tradition(s) and cultural context(s) in which they worked and thought. A clear and broadly telling example of this is picked up by the

most influential of present-day Marxist critics, Fredric Jameson, in his study of the 'Marxist Hermeneutic' of Walter Benjamin:

> Indeed, it seems to me that Walter Benjamin's thought is best grasped as an allegorical one, as a set of parallel, discontinuous levels of meditation which are not without resemblance to that ultimate model of allegorical composition described by Dante when he speaks in his letter to Can Grande della Scala of the four dimensions of his poem: the literal (his hero's adventures in the afterworld), the moral (the ultimate fate of his soul), the allegorical (in which his encounters resume one aspect or another of the life of Christ), and the anagogical (were his own drama foreshadows the progress of the human race itself toward the Last Judgment). (60–61)

This passage is accompanied by the following footnote:

> It is at least a more familiar and less intimidating model than that proposed by Benjamin himself in a letter to Max Rychner: "I have never been able to inquire and think otherwise than, if I may so put it, in a theological sense—namely in conformity with the Talmudic prescription regarding the forty-nine levels of meaning in every passage of the Torah" (quoted in "Walter Benjamin," *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 August 1968).

No one reading, even cursorily, on the subject of modern culture could be unaware of the particular influence of Benjamin's essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'—an essay that has developed, despite mass reproduction, a curious aura and authority of its own. Unfortunately, I suspect Benjamin is more often cited than read, for if 'The Work of Art' essay is to be treated as the *Ursprung* of modern/popular cultural-studies, we should be particularly cautious invoking its name (as of any object raised to such levels of cultural authority).

We need not subscribe to anything like Adorno's élitist counterposition (or follow only his Marxist critique of Benjamin's 'dialectical' failings in the essay) to recognize that despite its many virtues the evidence is not always well gathered and that the argument often progresses by the rhetorical imperatives of a frankly belletrist logic. In any case, and in Benjamin's own terms, our continued critical and cultural well-being should *demand* that a

work so inherently stimulating and with this much accumulated influence *deserves*—in Benjamin's own words—to be pried 'from its shell, to destroy its aura' ('The Work of Art' 217). In practical terms, we must be guided by Professor McKenzie's good sense and remember that:

> As a locatable, describable, attributable, datable and explicable object, the text as a recorded form is, pre-eminently, a *bibliographical* fact. (*Bibliography and the sociology of texts* 45)

In the present case, very little bibliographical research reveals that Benjamin's essay was originally published in French translation, in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5.1 (1936), because Benjamin and Horkheimer felt that with German culture virtually destroyed by the Nazis the essay's 'propaganda value' would be greatest in France. Yet the Institute for Social Research agreed to publish only after substantive changes in the essay:

> For example, in the printed version of the essay references to 'communism' were replaced by the euphemism 'the constructive forces of humanity,' and references to 'fascism' were substituted for by the phrase 'the totalitarian state.' Moreover a controversial first paragraph in which Benjamin's left-wing political convictions were set forth in stark and unambiguous terms was stricken altogether. (Wolin, *Walter Benjamin* 183)

Moreover, 'The Work of Art' essay now circulating in English (as found in *Illuminations*) is based on a German version first printed in the 1955 two-volume edition of Benjamin's *Schriften*—edited by Adorno and his wife—which is actually a *second* German version of the essay composed by Benjamin after the publication of the French version, which he hoped to have published in the Moscow-based German émigré publication *Das Wort*. This last was edited by Brecht (among others) whose influence on Benjamin was deplored by Adorno—an influence that became a keynote of Adorno's critical attack on the essay. Undoubtedly, a full *bibliographical* study of 'The Work of Art Essay' is called for, may refocus our view of its value, and should at least inform our further use of the essay.

On film avant-gardism, an important paper in the British tradition is Peter Wollen's essay 'The Two Avant-Gardes,' which first appeared in *Studio International* (December 1975) and was reprinted in his volume *Readings and Writings* (1982). As the title of the essay suggests, Wollen is interested in a division within avant-gardism, and as the opening of the essay makes clear specifically interested in Europe's 'two distinct [film] avant-gardes'. He quite rightly notes that for us 'To understand the split which has developed within the avant-garde it is necessary to go back into history' (93)—yet his historical lensing seems oddly selected. His depth-of-field does not go back beyond the 1920s, and his focal width takes in only a few, obvious, modern painters of the period to provide context. I suppose what is most surprising now is his complete ignoring of the early years of cinema, which after so much good work having been done over the last ten to fifteen years we now know has key relevance to any focused discussion of film avant-gardism.

The lack of historical depth and breadth—both within film history proper and outside it—(and a real lack of analytical rigour and procedure) means that in the end, after a certain amount of conjuring with important names and a few semiotic terms, the essay does not really advance beyond a restatement, in other terms, of the clichéd division of avant-gardism into formal and political camps. Still, in its day, the work was highly influential and should be read.

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