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Lindsay Anderson

Cinema authorship

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Series editors’ foreword

The aim of this series is to present in lively, authoritative volumes a guide to those film-makers who have made British cinema a rewarding but still under-researched branch of world cinema. The intention is to provide books which are up-to-date in terms of information and critical approach, but not bound to any one theoretical methodology. Though all books in the series will have certain elements in common – comprehensive filmographies, annotated bibliographies, appropriate illustration – the actual critical tools employed will be the responsibility of the individual authors.

Nevertheless, an important recurring element will be a concern for how the oeuvre of each film-maker does or does not fit certain critical and industrial contexts, as well as for the wider social contexts which helped to shape not just that particular film-maker but the course of British cinema at large.

Although the series is director-orientated, the editors believe that reference to a variety of stances and contexts is more likely to reconceptualise and reappraise the phenomenon of British cinema as a complex, shifting field of production. All the texts in the series will engage in detailed discussion of major works of the film-makers involved, but they all consider as well the importance of other key collaborators, of studio organisation, of audience reception, of recurring themes and structures: all those other aspects which go towards the construction of a national cinema.

The series explores and charts a field which is more than ripe for serious excavation. The acknowledged leaders of the field will be reappraised; just as important, though, will be the bringing to light of those who have not so far received any serious attention. They are all part of the very rich texture of British cinema, and it will be the work of this series to give them all their due.
Preface

A note on the archive

In August 1994 Lindsay Anderson died suddenly while on holiday in France, aged seventy-one. There being no immediate family to undertake the task, his close circle of friends, colleagues and relations converged on his London flat (which was also his office) to sort out his affairs. His secretary of many years, Kathy Burke, recalled the scene for David Sherwin, writer of a number of Anderson’s films:

Many of Lindsay’s friends rallied around and were very supportive. We had to organise his memorial celebration and the flat had to be cleared, a mammoth task as Lindsay rarely threw anything away.

The last fortnight was extraordinary. People were coming and going all the time. Representatives from the Cinema Museum and the Theatre Museum were introduced to each other as they came to collect their bequests, stretching to shake hands over the expert from Fitzjohns Books who was sorting out books crouched on the hall floor. Dr Sean Lewis and John Cartwright from the British Council, who had offered us some space to store files and papers, popped in to see what they were letting themselves in for. The furniture went off to Phillips to be auctioned, including my desk, so thereafter I operated from a card table.¹

As is often the case the most visible, colourful, valuable material was taken, leaving the mass of seemingly mundane papers behind. The large collection of framed cinema and theatre posters that adorned the walls of Anderson’s flat (poignantly recorded in his final film *Is That All There Is?*) was broken up and the more valuable books were sold. The remaining collection of personal and working papers, photographs and memorabilia was put in temporary storage in the offices of the British Council in London en route to its final home in the University of Stirling Archives. There it sits on the shelves next to the papers of another celebrated British filmmaker, John Grierson.

The Anderson Archive provides a unique insight into the life and career of one of the most important British film and theatre directors of the
twentieth century. It includes scripts, production notes, correspondence, photographs, promotional material and press cuttings for all his films, forty plays and much of his television work. His files include extensive correspondence to and from friends, colleagues and fans alike, numbering over 10,000 letters. His working papers detail the day-to-day requests for interviews, visits to film festivals and promotional work alongside his ongoing efforts to produce a number of unrealised film projects.

One of the major strengths of the Anderson Archive (the absence of a number of framed posters aside) is its completeness. As well as providing a detailed record of his working life it includes a variety of personal material including memorabilia from his childhood, school days, university years and military service. Over 2,000 of his books (mainly relating to film and theatre) are also held, many interestingly annotated by his fiery red pen. And the archive also contains the most personal of items, Anderson’s diaries – fifty years of private reflections on his life and career recorded in ninety beautifully hand-written notebooks.

Anderson’s calligraphic devices

The diary entries feature a variety of marks for emphasis. In quoting them (and his letters), we have italicised all the underlined words and the titles of films, plays and published works. We have not tried to emulate his use of coloured pens, often red deployed either for emphasis or to tag a particular topic. In general we do not replicate his liking for phrases in upper case except very occasionally when they reveal his feelings. With these exceptions, we have transcribed his writings verbatim.

Anderson frequently used three dots … as a punctuation mark and we have reproduced it when quoting him. Therefore we have indicated those elisions that we introduced into his writing as […]. Where the source quoted is not Anderson, three dots signify, according to the usual convention, that we have cut the text of an original document.

Pedants often misconstrue the title of If…. which is in fact correctly stated with four dots.

Notes

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Lindsay Anderson’s ideas about authorship in the cinema

Where in the period under review does one look for the British equivalent of Bergman, or Forman, or Rohmer, or Antonioni, or Truffaut, or even Godard? The answer is, nowhere. (Alexander Walker)

‘Thanks!’ (Anderson’s annotation on the above)

As Stephen Crofts has shown, notions of the film director as auteur had surfaced sporadically in Europe for thirty years prior to the moment often taken as the concept’s source – the publication in 1954 of François Truffaut’s ‘Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français’. Crofts believes that ideas of authorship originated in Europe because a larger proportion of directors experienced greater creative freedom than their peers in Hollywood where at that time the studios operated producer-led regimes.

For Lindsay Anderson (as later for Truffaut and the young Turks writing for Cahiers du Cinéma), the author was the director. Anderson believed this was the person who fused the contributions of all the other craftspeople involved into the finished whole. He certainly did cite European directors in his critical writing but he also gave careful attention to American films. As it turned out, that interest was to shape his understanding of cinema authorship by leading indirectly to his first experience of filmmaking.

In the late 1940s Lois Sutcliffe Smith became one of the first readers of Sequence, a new British film journal edited by Anderson, Gavin Lambert and Peter Ericsson. She was sufficiently impressed by its articles on Hollywood films that she distributed the magazine to members of her Film Society in Wakefield and made a point of meeting its editors. When, early in 1948, the Sutcliffe family business wanted a short film produced to promote the mining machinery that they manufactured, she invited Anderson to make it, confident that, despite his complete want of production experience, his analytical acuity and appetite for directing would equip him well.
Anderson had just concluded his undergraduate studies in December 1947 and published *Sequence* 2 – the first issue over which he, Lambert and Ericsson had control. Years later, Philip French compared the moral stance and puritanism of Anderson’s writing to F. R. Leavis – whose combative, denunciatory style in the literary journal *Scrutiny* had much influenced the *Sequence* editors. French added that Anderson’s writing likewise had an immense influence on his contemporaries. Evidence to this effect is found in a 1954 letter from the director of the BFI, Denis Forman, inviting John Grierson to respond to a blast from Anderson.

In many ways [the *Sequence* group] have given me a hell of a life and the number of scrapes into which they have dragged the Institute could not be numbered on the fingers of two hands. In spite of that I believe them to be, as I am sure you do, the most vigorous, the most talented and certainly the most fearless group of people writing on films today in Britain, or anywhere else.

Notwithstanding his engagement on other fronts, a few weeks after launching *Sequence*, Anderson was starting his first job as a director (propelled by the urgency driving a generation whose careers had been postponed by war service). This sudden doubling of his professional life shaped his concept of the film director. Stimulated by this new beginning, Anderson welded into a seamless whole his ideal of the director as both the *filmmaker*, active through every stage of production and also the *author* subject to the critic’s evaluation of his or her work. Indeed, he developed an argument designed to clinch this fusion, claiming that if critics were to fulfil their role, they needed to play a central function in cinema and complement the director. This is a theme in two early articles for *Sequence*, ‘Angles of Approach’ (1947) and ‘Creative Elements’ (1948). They express his aversion to the intellectual apathy of British film critics whom he charged with aspiring only to a position of middlebrow complacency and showing a very low degree of commitment to film.

In assailing these critics for their reluctance to grant the cinema a place alongside the older, well-established art forms against which they often measured its value, Anderson was contributing to what Edward Buscombe identified as a project typical of the film magazines that emerged post-war. They aimed to raise the cultural status of cinema and claimed it was an art form which, like painting or poetry, offered the individual the freedom of personal expression. For Anderson, in the making of those films of highest quality in which the director has a personal input, the authorial role becomes guarantor of the claim that the cinema is an art. Indeed, he often referred to the director-as-author as an artist. John Ford’s scenarist Nunnally Johnson took issue with
him, resisting the elevation of the director over the writer who provides story, plot, character and dialogue.10 The two men debated the issue (which Johnson called the cult of the director) both on and off the pages of Sequence.11 Not persuaded, Anderson often reiterated the idea of the director as author – see, for example, ‘Stand Up! Stand Up!12 and an unpublished piece ‘The Film Artist – Freedom and Responsibility!13 As John Caughie pointed out, Anderson was one of those who sought to install the individual, expressive and romantic artist in cinema.14

Anderson also argued that British critics dodged the core role they ought to play in the filmmaking process. Making a film involves, he wrote, ‘the fusion of many and various creative elements’,15 which conversely makes the process dependent upon the presence of each and every component. The film critic’s reluctance to engage fully with the medium breaks the perfect circle which ought to sustain the creative process. This was so because, ‘It is by their instinctive appreciation of what the critic distils by careful analysis, that the few great men of the cinema have made [their] rare and treasured works...’ 16

In his own critical writing during this period, Anderson sought to do what he advocated. He tried to provide (albeit in the comparatively short form inescapable in journal publication) the kind of guidance that he thought should help young British filmmakers. He did this initially in ‘A Possible Solution’ (1948) by analysing the difficult economic structures of the British industry and recommending that small-scale independent production might be the best (though far from easy) hope for the tyro director in the bleak environment of the day.17 Then in ‘British Cinema: The Descending Spiral’ (1949) he wrote sharp analyses of seven films using six of them to exemplify specific, but typical lacks of stimulating material.18 Rather than merely observe the current state of affairs, he argued that while new directors should by all means be brought on, the far more urgent need to supply British cinema’s wants was for new writers to rectify the endemic failings that spoilt the work of even the best British directors: ‘clumsy dialogue, poverty of invention, lack of dramatic structure’.19

By acknowledging the centrality of criticism, Anderson’s articles advance the idea of cinema as a perpetually ongoing, circular process. The film critic should be a responsible observer and commentator engaged with and informed about all the stages involved in filmmaking, from the elaboration of the scenario, right through to the shooting and exhibition to the public of the finished product.

That agenda highlights Anderson’s view of a further failure of British critics. They fall short in their duty to expose the public to that ‘almost miraculous fusion of many and various creative elements’20
which the director must have brought about to make the work of art possible and available for audiences to fully understand and therefore enjoy.21 ‘Competent criticism – merely a syllogism, after all, for full appreciation – demands the capacity to analyse, to comprehend “what” through “how”.’ 22

Anderson returned to the topic of authorship as late as 1991 in drafting an Introduction to a proposed reprint of Sequence.23 He recalled that,

Sequence... was quite untouched by the French influence and the aesthetics of Cahiers du Cinéma. We certainly had no time for the auteur theory. From the start we knew that the film director was the essential artist of cinema; but we also knew that films have to be written, designed, acted, photographed, edited and given sound. We tried to look for the creative elements.24

Had Anderson changed his mind about the nature of authorship in the cinema in the forty years since co-editing Sequence? In a Sight & Sound essay of 1955 he had written sardonically about ‘the covey of bright young things’ then newly writing for Cahiers du Cinéma and alleged their enthusiasms were spoiling the reputation of a journal for which he had noted his admiration only three months earlier. The immediate causes of his disfavour were first, the ‘absurdity’ that these young writers (the incipient Nouvelle Vague) should elevate Hitchcock into their Pantheon of the greatest auteurs; and second, their comparison of Hitchcock’s films with the works of Dostoevsky, Faulkner, Nietzsche and a dozen other literary heroes reaching back to Homer.25 But notwithstanding his dismissal of these French upstarts, Anderson remained constant to his theme that the director was the individual who brings all the disparate elements of a film together in a unified whole (a notion he returned to time and again in both his diary and interviews).

This usage, which ‘the covey of bright young things’ writing for Cahiers had initiated in the early 1950s and Andrew Sarris augmented in the 1960s, was an ill-conceived offspring of la politique des auteurs. The politique was in effect a polemic call for the director as auteur to be the creative source for truly cinematic films.26 It depended on the belief that the energetic expression of the true auteur’s personality brings about the organic unity of the work. That made it possible to compare his or her films with, for example, the work of great writers and painters.27 Truffaut heightened the auteur’s profile by contrasting it with the director as metteur-en-scène. The metteur merely brought onto the screen a filmed version of someone else’s original novel (usually psychologically realistic and sometimes socially conscious).28 The auteur (for Truffaut, the only type of director worthy of being considered an artist) used cinematic rather than literary skills to express him or herself.
Well before the Cahiers du Cinéma debate distinguished the work of metteur-en-scène from auteur, Anderson derived a broadly comparable dichotomy that differentiated two ways in which the film director might operate. He did not belittle the importance of contributions made by the principal talent; in particular he identified the scriptwriter and cameraman as indispensable creative members of a team. However, he argued that those writers who claim the dominance of their profession’s contribution most admire those films ‘in which the director’s function approximates closely enough to that of a stage director’. For Anderson this view ‘puts the film director severely in his place, demanding of him technical capacity, sensibility to the ideas and characters provided for him by his author, but no independent response to his material, no desire to present it in the light of his own imagination, illuminated by it, or transformed.’

In its origins, the politique (to which campaign Truffaut, Rohmer, Godard and others contributed in the pages of Cahiers) amounted to a loose manifesto for the kind of films that its writers would attempt to produce a few years later as members of the Nouvelle Vague. However, their clarion call for directors to introduce into their filmmaking deeply experienced personal values (the divine spark of the Romantic artist-as-genius) transmogrified by degrees into something different. This was a dogmatic approach to critical evaluation unsteadily based on passionate assertions of quality (or its absence) rather than the firm bedrock of evidence. In, for example, Truffaut’s and Jacques Rivette’s advocacy, the effort to discover roots of artistry in Hollywood’s output pushed to extremes the idea that directors could and should be ranked according to their supposed success in investing their personalities in their films. This renegotiation of aesthetics soon translated into a compulsive categorisation of film directors, as Buscombe notes. This was the aspect of the so-called theory that Anderson dismissed in his 1955 piece with scorn for the elevation of Hitchcock to the Pantheon. Its arbitrary nature and susceptibility to the private enthusiasms of the commentator are evident in Rivette’s selection of Nicholas Ray, Richard Brooks, Anthony Mann and Robert Aldrich as four auteur directors. Rivette claims that these directors had hitherto been all but ignored prior to the raising of awareness by those interested in American auteurs; and indeed, as Buscombe noted, ‘the auteur theory’ did have the merit of opening previously unknown areas of the cinematic map. But the ‘theory’s’ demerits are also clear in Rivette’s words.

Why four names? I would have liked to have added others (those for example of Edgar Ulmer, Joseph Losey, Richard Fleischer, Samuel Fuller, and still others who are only promises, Josh Logan, Gerd Oswald, Dan
6 Lindsay Anderson

Taradash), but these four are for the moment incontestably at the front of the queue.36

The subjectivity of this judgement is so naked that Rivette’s ‘incontestably’ could be replaced with ‘because I say so’. Among his critics was André Bazin who (in 1957 in Cahiers’ own pages) surveyed the state of the politique and identified two further weaknesses inherent in ranking auteurs according to their supposed value.

[The process] consists, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next.37

Bazin also said that he felt uneasy at the subtlety of an argument, which was completely unable to camouflage the naïveté of the assumption whereby, for example, the intentions and the coherence of a deliberate and well thought out film are read into some little ‘B’ feature. And of course as soon as you state that the film-maker and his films are one, there can be no minor films, as the worst of them will always be in the image of their creator.38

Andrew Sarris became, as Buscombe said, the American apologist for the Cahiers du Cinéma’s Young Turks.39 In 1962 he derived the phrase ‘auteur theory’ to replace la politique des auteurs.40 This would almost certainly have been the original source for Anderson’s use of the phrase in his 1991 draft paper. Buscombe shows that Sarris’s auteur theory borrowed Cahiers’ penchant for ‘cultism’ and turned it into a more radical approach: auteurism verges into a conception of authorship in which the director remains untouched by the circumstances of time and place.41 Through Sarris’s prism, auteurism entailed an extreme personalisation of the art of filmmaking.

The ... ultimate premise of the auteur theory is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art... Dare I come out and say what I think [interior meaning] to be is an élan of the soul? Lest I seem unduly mystical, let me hasten to add that all I mean by ‘soul’ is that intangible difference between one personality and another...42

If Sarris proved to be a most effective amplifier of the Cahiers Young Turks, it was less through any soundness inherent in ‘the auteur theory’ than its rejection by that irascible (and widely read) film critic and self-publicist, Pauline Kael, and the ensuing controversy she and Sarris flamed. Reacting to the passage cited above, Kael wrote (not without justification):

‘Interior meaning’ seems to be what those in the know know. It’s a mystique – and a mistake. The auteur critics never tell us by what
divining rods they have discovered the élan of a Minnelli or a Nicholas Ray or a Leo McCarey. They’re not critics; they’re inside dopesters.43

Thus, when rejecting in 1955 what in 1991 he called ‘the auteur theory’, Anderson (like André Bazin two years later) was rebutting a specific critical practice which deployed the idea of authorship as an implement to evaluate individual directors’ artistic quality and then rank them in a fixed, pyramidal hierarchy. He was not reneging on his belief in the centrality of the director (emphatically including himself) in the process of making a film, but continued to believe that ‘cinema at its best and purest belongs to the director’, as he wrote once again thirty-five years after first expounding the same opinion in Sequence.44

There was another facet to his rebuttal of auteurism. He voiced it in a 1973 interview about O Lucky Man! with François Maurin of L’Humanité. He said that the ambition to become an auteur had harmed both the artistry and careers of several competent directors whom he knew. They had been seized by this mysterious desire to be an auteur, to be the Proust of cinema. Yet ever since silent cinema, named directors such as Eisenstein, Dovjenko or Dziga Vertov had been discussed, everyone knowing that the role of director was very important. So there was no need to create a theory, or a myth.45

As indicated by this collapsing of the roles of the director in action and the perceived director as object of observation, Anderson was a critic but never a theorist. In 1981 he wrote a review of three recently published film studies textbooks for The Guardian.46 He made use of this platform to go well beyond a critique of the books in question and launch a searing attack on what he characterised as ‘the Trahison des Clercs’.47 This was ‘the indiscriminate proliferation’48 of film studies in higher education (he did not mention his own considerable experience as a nomadic, paid guest lecturer). After reviewing briefly the evolution of ‘the auteur theory’ he proceeded to attack the then new theoretical writing deriving from structuralism and semiology. He judged as harmful its gracelessness, its ‘attempt to substitute rule for taste, formula for intuition … [and] stylistic analysis – as if a film were some kind of chemical compound – for interpretation, for examination of meaning, for human interpretation’.49 This vigorous rant reveals that, while Anderson succeeded in identifying those whom he thought of as intellectual adversaries, he did not understand (although he did identify certain failings in the books under review) what the theoretical framework they proposed was designed to achieve.

The foregoing pages summarise Anderson’s understanding of authorship as expressed through his own critical writings. The questions that remain to be examined centre on:
whether, in the light of further evolution of theoretical ideas about
the nature of authorship, his films reveal aspects of authorship of
which he had no knowledge; and
how best authorship of his films can be attributed some twenty years
after his death.

We shall return to these topics after considering how each of the films
reveals both his authorship as a practitioner (including his reflections
on the work) and his perceived presence as the subject of observation
by others.

Notes

1 Alexander Walker, Hollywood England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties
2 François Truffaut, ‘Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français’, Cahiers du
Gibson (eds) The Oxford Guide to Film Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1998) 312.
4 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Creative Elements’, Sequence 5 (Autumn 1948) in Never Apolo-
5 Lois Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’, unpublished paper, 1997 (LA 7/2/1);
Anderson, Never Apologise, 50–2; Gavin Lambert discussed the opportunity with
Anderson by mail, 27 January 1948 (LA 4/1/1).
6 Philip French, ‘A Rough-and-tumble Sporting Life’, The Observer (4 September
1994) Review 4 (LA 7/1/1).
7 Correspondence. Denis Forman (Director, BFI) to John Grierson, 17 September
1954. The John Grierson Archive, University of Stirling (G6.33.13).
8 Anderson, ‘Creative Elements’, 199. See also his ‘Stand Up! Stand Up!’ Sight &
Sound (Autumn 1956) in Never Apologise, 220. There he quotes C. A. Lejeune,
cinema columnist at The Observer, who on two occasions – and nine years apart –
made it clear that she did not deem the cinema to be an art form. In 1973 the editor
of a Norwegian journal asked for Anderson’s permission to reproduce ‘Stand Up!
Stand Up!’ alongside his answers to questions on O Lucky Man! The editor wanted
to compare the by then well-established film and theatre director with his work as
‘a once revolting critic’ (correspondence, Silvi Kalmar to Anderson, 22 November
1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/9)).
9 Edward Buscombe, ‘Ideas of Authorship’ (1973) in John Caughie (ed.), Theories of
10 Lindsay Anderson, ‘The Director’s Cinema?’ Sequence 12 (Autumn 1950) in Never
Apologise, 204.
11 Some of Johnson’s letters are published in Lindsay Anderson, About John Ford
(London: Plexus, 1981) 245–6; see also correspondence, Nunnally Johnson to
12 Anderson, ‘Stand Up! Stand Up!’, 218–32.
13 Lindsay Anderson, ‘The Film Artist – Freedom and Responsibility!’ (1959) in
Never Apologise, 210–14.
14 Caughie, Theories of Authorship, 10.
16 Ibid.
23 The project did not come to fruition almost certainly because the cost of printing 2,000 hardback copies of a 700-page illustrated book had more than doubled to almost £20,000 in the six years since negotiations had begun over publishing the journal in its entirety (correspondence with Routledge and Kegan Paul, 31 July 1991 (LA 4/1/14)).
26 Caughie, Theories of Authorship, 35.
28 Caughie, Theories of Authorship, 35.
30 Anderson, ‘The Director’s Cinema?’ 207.
31 Ibid.
34 Jacques Rivette, ‘Notes sur une révolution’ (1955) in Caughie, Theories of Authorship, 41.
42 Sarris, ‘Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962’, 64.
43 Pauline Kael, ‘Circles and Squares’ (1963) in Grant, Auteurs and Authorship, 54.
44 Lindsay Anderson, Introduction to The Old Crowd (1985) in Never Apologise, 139.
On the diaries:
Lindsay Anderson’s private writing

Diary or journal?

Lindsay Anderson’s diaries surprised the archivists in our team because they are so neat and well ordered. For the most part they read as though everything had been planned out and sifted through before being written down. This suggests that he went through a careful decision-making process, whether conscious or subconscious, about what to remember and what to omit. Occasionally we found entries which he had read over and either extended or revised, sometimes on the original page, sometimes as a separate entry – but this was rare. Occasionally he referred back to earlier passages which he had read again. But his usual, extensive practice appears to have been to write well-crafted prose in a single, uncorrected draft and an elegant hand. This capability is confirmed by the diary he kept in 1988 while shooting *Glory! Glory!*. Lacking time to write, he recorded his observations on audiocassettes for later transcription by his secretary, yet the prose has the same elegant quality as the handwritten pages.

He recorded his intentions in the first entry, written when he was eighteen, on New Year’s Day 1942.

One of my principal New Year’s Resolutions is to keep a Journal – not, please note, a diary, for a diary besides being, for me, far too exacting an undertaking will also inevitably include a large mass of uninteresting and unnecessary detail (Got up, had breakfast etc.) In this journal I shall write only when I have something to say; its purpose is both to remind me in after years of how I felt and what I did at this time and also – quite unashamedly – to give me literary exercise. It should help improve my style and my ability to express myself and many of the incidents it records will no doubt prove excellent copy. I will not however tell lies in order to improve a story, or if I do, I will say so.

I am not sure whether or not it will be absolutely frank; I am not used to writing solely to myself – and that perhaps is why I am so quick to
mistrust published diaries... So at first at any rate I will probably be fairly reserved. And yet this is absurd: either I am writing for myself, or for a friend or friends or for publication. Well I can cross out the last – though of course I can easily expurgate it if necessary. Nor am I writing for my friends. I will therefore resolve to be utterly frank – a resolution which I do not think I can possibly keep!4

Over the next fifty years much of this private writing can be seen as reflective journal entries; but there are periods (for example, while he was suffering extreme tension in making *O Lucky Man!* when it becomes primarily a chronological record of events. Accordingly, just as he eventually did, we use the terms journal and diary interchangeably when referring to the volumes. As for his uncertain resolution to be frank: after a few months, the pages display a blistering openness – a phenomenon we shall take into account as we consider the ways he used them as well as the ways open to us to construe them.

**Public or private?**

Reading these immaculately achieved writings, our initial impression was to think that Anderson might have meant them to be published. But, quite apart from the fact that he left no instructions concerning the volumes’ disposition after his death, he soon abandoned even vestigial discretion concerning his sexuality, emotions and fantasies, not to mention his opinions of people he knew or worked with. In fact, after his first year of keeping the journal, he admonished himself, ‘On looking through this book, by the way, I find it more & more incredible to reflect on the way I’ve been leaving it about the house for anyone to look at. I must be more careful!’5 During the previous year he had by degrees moved towards writing explicitly of his homosexuality and his attraction to various male friends.6 The naked self-revelation makes it extremely unlikely that he had in mind the journals’ publication in that form. By no means incidentally, it was one of the factors (the length of the original text being another) that caused Paul Sutton to compile his edition of *The Diaries* from extracts rather than the complete text.7

Janet Bottoms discusses diaries as both a private medium and a literary genre.

The diary may be a private form of writing, but it is remarkable how many diarists do, in fact, address themselves to someone or something, to a fantasized reader who is a part of themselves and yet separated in order to give the affirmation, the appreciation which they dare not claim consciously. The way that the reader is conceived of must therefore make
a difference to the selecting and shaping process by which experience is translated into written record.  

Bottoms illustrates this argument with the example of Alice James’s diaries in which she addressed ‘Dear Inconnu’, a male observer of her solitary life. Likewise Anderson addressed himself through his private writing. On numerous occasions he made the journal his confessional, and not infrequently it was his consolation. In December 1944 on landing at Bombay as a junior Army Intelligence officer, he notes,

My journal is becoming quite a habit with me – an old friend to whom I can turn and talk when idle or depressed or just garrulous. And after all who else is there who can provide so frank, easy and sympathetic a companionship? Who else is there to whom I can talk without reservation, affectation or the need to temper my thoughts and veil my emotions? I am, it seems, fast becoming my most valued companion […]

Almost thirty years later, feeling severely stressed while bringing *O Lucky Man!* into shape, he once again addressed his diary as ‘my only friend’. It was thus always the confidante of a man who, despite being constantly busy with fellow professionals, was alone in heart: ‘Since there is no one else to talk to – this can only be a chapter of groans’. Self-doubt and unhappiness made him treasure this way of putting himself in command of a version of events that nobody could deny him. This fits closely with Richard E. Grant’s belief that to a great degree all diaries are a way of dealing with loneliness: if no one else has understood you, you are trying to understand yourself in writing down your thoughts.

**Reflections on his own personality**

An extended encounter with Anderson’s journal is a bruising experience. It is hard to study the manuscripts and not feel the misery and pain that pervade so many of the entries. Questioned when he was in his fiftieth year about his statement that *O Lucky Man!* would be his last film, Lindsay Anderson answered, ‘when I’m in pain, I believe in groaning a lot’.

No one who has read his journal would take issue with that. It functioned sometimes as ‘a safety valve for emotions dangerously compressed’; on other occasions it provided him with a means of feeling that he had control over difficult circumstances; and sometimes it served as an aid to grieving (‘groaning’ was indeed his preferred term) over events that he could not order to meet his wishes.

Early in 1971 Lindsay Anderson was researching material for a documentary about Alan Price that was to focus on the bandleader’s life on
the road. In a February journal entry Anderson describes the musician as manifesting wild swings of exaltation and depression. Although he knows there is a medical term for the condition, he cannot recall it; nevertheless his description makes it clear that he believes Price to be manic-depressive. That failure of memory at this moment is ironic (if not revelatory) since, viewed through these private writings, he himself displayed symptoms that might be ascribed to bipolarity. Those symptoms include his sudden and unpredictable reversals from sweet good humour to self-righteous, blinkered rages; his feeling that he should be able to change everything and everyone who annoyed him; and his fury when he found that he could not do so. However, he never wrote of being a victim of manic-depression, instead mentioning from time to time that he suffered from paranoia – but he used that term as it occurred in common speech rather than as a medical diagnosis.

In some entries he ascribed to paranoia behaviour which in retrospect he found cringe-worthy and speculated that it was brought on by the anguish of unanswered love. For example, he asked himself of his friendship with Jon Voight, ‘Why, I wonder, do I find these narcissistic, self-powered personalities so attractive? Is it because my own passive personality (unsuspected by most people who know me) needs such contacts, as it needs specific situations, to spark it off?’ Elsewhere he ascribed his ‘paranoia’ to pressure of work.

It’s tempting to psychologise the dead because they can’t answer back. However, it hardly needs saying that Anderson’s public response to any suggestion that he might be bipolar would have been lacerating (all the more devastating if it had come from people like ourselves involved in critical evaluation of his work). On the other hand he might have acknowledged a hit – were he to think it such – in his journal. And we can be reasonably confident of his willingness to have recourse to painful self-observation because, as in the instances just mentioned, he often reflected on his psychological make-up.

While there are good reasons for not performing an autopsy on the mind of an individual one has not met (not least because his colleagues’ and friends’ accounts of his personality do not explicitly refer to bipolarity), it needs to be noted on the other side of the balance that, with one exception, those same friends do not comment on his self-diagnosis of paranoia. The exception was Gavin Lambert, one of the very few people to have read the diaries in their entirety. He summarised astutely the personality revealed in them and presented abundant evidence from friends’ recollections of Anderson’s liability to devastating public mood swings.
The diaries are a dark mirror. The abrasively unhappy and overly judgemental person who inhabits them reflects all Lindsay’s negatives and few of his positives. Some experiences, Nietzsche wrote, either kill a part of you or make you stronger, and in Lindsay’s case they did both. The alienated child who perceived himself as an emotional orphan became a young man who sentenced himself, at the age of twenty-one, to grievous psychological stress for life. But by this time, as he later noted, Lindsay had also discovered ‘a mysterious appetite for drama’. He began by responding to movies and the theatre ... as a way of escape. Then they awakened a sleeping talent. By directing films and plays, Lindsay was able to work through the feelings he’d locked away, release his imagination and live out loud as an artist.

Anderson’s reflections on colleagues, friends and family

The private suffering that Anderson so often recorded is just one of the journal’s recurrent themes. He reflected on the world around him too. In many entries he vituperated colleagues and friends. For example, while making O Lucky Man! he made stinging observations about people with whom he had worked for years. Of his producer he wrote: ‘Michael Medwin (of course) has no kind of substance, presence, resolution of his own’. He expostulated about his scriptwriter, David Sherwin, at a time when the latter’s personal life was disintegrating spectacularly.

Well, the script of O Lucky Man is even more of a shambles, a disappointing nothing, than I had expected. All David’s worst faults: the lack of concrete imaginings; the attempt to pass off a string of notes (usually directly transcribed from a conversation we had several weeks ago) as a scene; lack of dramatic ability – no idea at all how to construct a scene; lack of characterisation; lack of work. I read part of it in the train coming down, as David bleated his incapacity to write anything for the scene on the roof, his incapacity to believe in Patricia or Mick... An encouraging start! So I gave him some ideas and he sat there blankly. Is he a writer at all?

In his own published diaries, Sherwin confirms the chaotic scenes in which the script emerged. For example, in July 1971, Anderson took him to Hythe to spend a weekend writing a scene on which Sherwin had got completely stuck. The latter recorded that the director checked into a three-star hotel with his mother, but put him into a cheap guest house.

There’s no table in my room, so I set the typewriter on the chair by the bed. But feel so depressed about the script, and the unwritable scene on the roof, that I go to the nearest pub. Drink and read the Daily Mirror over and over.
That evening Lindsay phones Malcolm [McDowell]. ‘The author’s lying drunk on the floor and the script is in ruins ... I think we’ll seriously have to consider forgetting the whole idea.’

Although Anderson repeatedly lamented his inability to work without a collaborator to test ideas on, the two men were mutually dependent. Sherwin asked Anderson to edit the typescript of his own ‘Diary of a Script’ and adopted Anderson’s amendments wholesale. The resultant text was included with the published screenplay of O Lucky Man!. Over twenty years later it formed part of Sherwin’s memoirs Going Mad in Hollywood and Life with Lindsay Anderson, from which the extract above comes.

Anderson’s criticisms of his crew on O Lucky Man! touched every department. There are many damning entries concerning his production designer and friend, Jocelyn Herbert, in which by degrees she becomes in his story the exhausted heavy who won’t let go of anything of which she had first conceived. Anderson also writes with gathering hostility a long series of entries about his cameraman Miroslav Ondricek. He resents, for example, the ‘more pretentious, international Prima Donna Persona that Mirek is becoming’ when the latter abandons the shoot to attend the Cannes film festival. Anderson’s editors come off no better. He thinks of them as ‘dolts’.

This, merely an indicative selection, is so characteristically forceful as to leave us sceptical concerning an opinion about the entries’ veracity that we have heard expressed by some of Anderson’s strongest supporters. They urge that Anderson didn’t mean what he wrote in these vitriolic attacks on colleagues for their gross ineptitude, and on friends for their want of style, grace and understanding. It is probable that in voicing this opinion, they may have reached it after reference only to the published selection from the diaries. Many of the more acidic personal entries were suppressed from that volume. But it also needs to be said that this protection of his reputation exhibits a tendency found in many people who have known celebrated and powerful individuals during their lifetime. It’s a phenomenon all the more marked when the dead hero had formerly led a group who came to regard themselves as a coterie privileged through their relationship with the deceased. The surviving disciples tend somewhat uncritically to buoy up his memory – not least because their own sense of professional self-worth is to some degree invested in the reputation of their late mentor. Thus, for example, John Grierson’s memory, post mortem, was exalted along with the films he had supervised in the British Documentary Movement. Similarly C. G. Jung’s immediate followers, often referred to as the second generation, lionised his works passionately. In each of these instances it took the
entry of a third generation of commentators, untrammelled by personal
acquaintance, to reach an assessment of the dead hero’s output ruled
less by personal indebtedness than judgement.

David Storey recognised this tendency in his introduction to the
celebration of Lindsay Anderson’s life and work held at the Royal Court
in November 1994:

A great deal of idealisation goes on invariably when someone important
to us dies. Not infrequently it’s followed by a polarisation of feeling, the
axis which unites the two extremes often, if not invisible, obscure. But
after a while, the extremes coalesce and something like a cohesive and
recognisable entity thankfully returns.\(^{28}\)

So there is no doubt in our minds that Anderson did mean what he
wrote about his collaborators and friends as well as his enemies. His
condemnations recur frequently and their insistence cannot be missed.
However, it is important to recognise that these bilious passages do not
provide the full account. The journals’ scathing entries do not represent
everything he thought about the individuals who became objects of his
fury. In earlier years he had loved or admired many of them, sometimes
extravagantly, as in the case of Ondricek. Sometimes, even when upset
with colleagues, he wrote with fine appreciation of their circumstances.
For example, a few days after cursing Sherwin’s incompetence with \(O \text{ Lucky Man!}\) he revisits the topic not without sympathy for his writer’s
suffering.

David admits that he really was hoping (whether consciously or not) that
it would somehow be written for him by Malcolm, or by me. And then
when he knew it wouldn’t he panicked... I still respect his intuitions
greatly – but his invention is lagging, I suppose because he is in a state
of complete exhaustion. But what alternative have we to continuing?\(^{29}\)

Anderson’s friends speak with one voice in celebrating a loyalty to
them that lasted through his life. One of his endearing characteristics –
mentioned in passing in the diaries – is that he would cook for friends
even when they had just been having a monumental row. He sometimes
fed Sherwin when the scenarist was exasperating him over \(O \text{ Lucky Man!}\). Indeed Sherwin was one of those – including not only members
of his own family but Patricia Healey, the Grimes family and Rachel
Roberts – to whom Anderson gave a home at times of crisis.

After his death a number of his friends and colleagues reciprocated
his loyalty by forming the Lindsay Anderson Memorial Foundation to
keep his memory alive and publicise screenings and events that cele-
brate his work.\(^{30}\) Five of his closest collaborators honoured him with
signal public generosity. Two, Sherwin and Lambert, wrote books;\(^{31}\) and
two, McDowell and Mike Kaplan, made a film. Lambert was a lifelong friend from their schooldays together; Anderson was professional mentor to both Sherwin and McDowell; and Kaplan produced his last feature film. We shall benefit from the work of all four in later chapters.

The fifth was David Storey (with whom Anderson’s relationship was considerably less fraught than that with Sherwin). He spoke with unmistakable passion about Anderson’s nature at the commemoration of his life, finding his internal contradictions as evident in public as in the ‘dark mirror’ of his journals. Likening his physical appearance in middle years to a short and somewhat stout Roman emperor, Storey used this as a cue for an account of his moral qualities.

The imperiousness was always there … together with a set of values which had been in place seemingly since birth … They were values with which he observed, scrutinised and judged everything around him. He was a man of vivid contradictions, authoritarian … and yet he was unmistakably a liberal. He was a stoic, and yet undeniably sentimental. He was … a vigorously self-confessed atheist, and yet he was imbued with what could only be described as a religious spirit … He was cantankerous, he was vituperative, he was obdurate and acerbic, yet he was incorrigibly loyal and unfailingly generous. He was in many respects perhaps human nature turned inside out. What normally might have been contained if not constrained on the inside, he wore vividly and explicitly on the outside. He loved what he hated and hated what he loved in a seamless circle of retributory affections… With this in turn went an ability to look at the worst in human nature … But above all there was his appetite for a world which was nobler, more charitable and above all more gracious than the one in which he found himself and which he struggled unfailingly to enhance.

Storey’s tribute not only characterises the man but also reminds us that Anderson was, from his early days in Oxford, a critic. The critical attention could never be missed in his writing about films and theatre. When he had control of his productions, it also imbued his commentary through both screen and stage on the decline of Britain. The critical, even hypercritical verdicts he passed on colleagues and friends partake of the same mercilessly sharp-eyed quality. The ex-cathedra pronouncements of the professional critic and the private person form a seamless entity. And as we shall see, the tensions across which his personality was strapped have their counterpart in the perceived authorial personality that can be discerned as a construction underlying several of his major films.
From the earliest entries in 1942, Anderson used the journals for what he called ‘self-analysis’. These reflections on his own personality illuminate his input to films in the production of which he claimed an authorial role.

In February 1944, a few weeks before his twenty-first birthday, he drafted a binary list of oppositions that formalised some of his earlier self-observations. He did this at the moment when his studies were interrupted by conscription to wartime service in the Rifle Brigade. He was on the point of taking over his own platoon as a junior subaltern, a responsibility causing anxiety not least because he considered himself a loner.

There are two sides to my character

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In 1947 he returned to this theme: ‘I find myself writing as though to myself – with a personality clearly split, one half trying to extract the other from the bog of introversion and hopelessness where it desires to wallow’. Two days later he elaborates, ‘I seem at times to be two people, so clear is the divergence between my two states of mind. One, which I am meant to be escaping from in this book, introspective, repressed, defeatist, incapable [sic] of nothing but lassitudinous imaginings; and the other alert, humane, full of ideas about all sorts of things, ambitious, socially conscious’.

It seems likely that his outsider perspective on the world was instilled by an absent father, a stepfather who failed to meet his stepson’s needs and a mother preoccupied with herself to the point of coldness towards her three boys. The family background corroborates his motivation as a diarist wherein the writer (as Richard E. Grant said of himself) becomes his own archivist to store memories of things that he was unable to share when they occurred. The psychological disposition of the Anderson family did not change during Lindsay’s absence in India in the Intelligence Corps. Following demobilisation, he resumed his studies at Wadham College, Oxford and in April 1946 spent his first vacation at Cringletie, the family home. It remained for him an uncongenial environment.
Mum and I get on each other’s nerves: to me, at her worst, she seems selfish, inhumane, cynical and lazy – about any but material duties. To her I seem lazy, self-satisfied, selfish, conceited, interfering. No doubt there is wrong on both sides, but I feel the chief trouble is the lack of a proper husband to shoulder his share of her family responsibilities. Though probably it was not altogether his fault, Father should have insisted on taking on that side of the marriage too, instead of occupying this unsatisfactory half-and-half position, bad for Mum [...].

On a later visit he felt deeply offended by the selfishness of his parents who, living in a house stuffed with food, did not feed the German prisoners of war working in their garden.

Despite his doubtless self-fulfilling sense of being an outsider, Anderson tried hard in his forties to help his fractious relatives by taking on family responsibilities. When his brother Murray’s marriage broke up, Lindsay committed himself to doing what he could to support the ex-wife Mary and their children – notwithstanding repeated searing rows between every adult in the family and the erratic behaviour of the unhappy couple.

Very occasionally compassion and relief broke through his irritation. He found it difficult, lacking natural affinity with children, to act in loco parentis, yet felt delighted when occasionally he succeeded, as on one Sunday in May 1967.

Lunch with Murray and family, the children playing on their swings seem very happy, and the whole atmosphere a miracle of harmony. I suppose this is one achievement that will be to my credit when the last great roll is called...

A week later in another untypical passage, he reflected with sympathy on his mother’s circumstances, feeling guilty for his failure to talk to her about ‘age and loneliness and change’. He recognises the suffering occasioned her first by the death of his younger brother Sandy and later by his stepfather’s passing. Noticing that she keeps a picture of Sandy on which the imprint of her kisses can be seen, he finds that understandable. Nevertheless his sympathy had its limits: he reports that he cannot bring himself to sit and talk with her for hours about her grief.

It is not hard to see how his childhood and adolescent experience of family life taught him that his longing for love (which the journals frequently mention) would always be frustrated. He learned early and well (as so many generations of British upper-middle-class children have done) to internalise that expectation so deeply that he soon frustrated his own desires and revolted against physical attraction.
Self-analysis and authorship: 2/ sexuality

Although Anderson's overt behaviour was repressed, his sexual appetites were no secret to himself. He often wrote about his erotic fantasies, of which he had first become conscious during the Easter term in 1941 when he experienced powerful desire aroused by a schoolmate.

My feelings about him are also interesting & (I suppose) I like thinking them because they afford stimulation. (What a horrid word & horrid thought!)43

After conscription in 1943, finding himself constantly in the company of young officers (not a few of them fellow undergraduates whose Oxford studies the war had disrupted) he reported passionate feelings for two of them.44 Posted to New Delhi late in 1944 as a cryptanalyst in the Intelligence Corps, he found himself among interesting fellows.45 Soon he experienced ‘the very exstasy of love [sic]’46 for a new friend which, typically, he was not able to declare openly. However, a few weeks later Anderson sensed the indifference of this individual and his clique. Thereon, Anderson’s emotions swiftly modulated into the doubts and jealousies that became integral to his account of all the virtual relationships that haunted his lonely hours.47

Anderson’s homosexuality must have added to his sense of being an outsider. Although from the late 1950s (when he was in his mid-thirties) he moved in a community of talented theatre, opera, ballet and cinema people who readily accepted same-sex relations, homosexuality was illegal until he reached his middle years. After 1953 gays well placed in arts organisations were apprehensive about witch-hunts, as Jann Parry records. In that year Sir David Maxwell-Fyffe, the Home Secretary, declared war on ‘a vice infecting the nation’ and an intimidating, high-profile court case was brought against Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. That year too John Gielgud was arrested for importuning.48 In England and Wales gays remained liable to prosecution until parliament passed the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, marking the first legislative step in a slow process of decriminalising private acts between consenting males.

Since British society at large stigmatised homosexuals as pervers whose desires put them beyond the pale, the sense of ostracism that many gays felt impacted on their everyday life more deeply than fear of the law. With the exception of a brave minority of flamboyant characters, gays kept their sexual orientation private. In Anderson’s case, as we have seen, psychological conflict cut deep. Timidity and a fastidious revulsion from physical contact locked him into celibacy even though he knew that, ‘Unfortunately, what I seem to need above all is the personal stimulus of affection. If love is not to be found’.49 While editing a film
in Wakefield in 1951 loneliness drove him to search for a lover in public places, a search which, although he did not write of it in those terms, inevitably exposed him to the risk of prosecution and certainly reinforced his sense of being an outsider.

The question remains: am I to go upstairs, put on my overcoat, put on my cap, and go out on to the cold dark streets, and make my way to the market, where it is colder and darker than elsewhere. And, with my heart beating faster and perhaps my hands sweating slightly, and my prick thickening and extending, I see there is another man there, who glances in my direction; and my eyes shy away. But not before I have seen he looks not too unmanly, and not too unattractive. And while I stand there he goes out. And I follow, and notice him standing against a wall, or under a lamp post. And then I don’t know what to do. For I lack the courage, excited though I am, to go closer, openly to offer myself or to solicit. So I walk slowly away, and excitement lessens as I am not followed; and then the whole thing seems absurd, and I don’t know whether to congratulate myself or be angry with myself or laugh at myself.

Common-sense tells me that, since I am apparently incapable of renunciation, I should make myself see at least one such encounter through to the end. The unfortunate thing is, that being as naïve and inexperienced as I am, I shall almost certainly come a cropper in one way or another.

Will Lindsay be buggered in Wakefield Market place, or will he think better of it again? Wait breathlessly for tomorrow’s thrilling instalment & find out.50

Two weeks later (in the journal entry following the above) he returns to the topic, but first remarks on his mercurial nature in the context of film editing. He had spent the whole day cutting Three Installations and failed to get it to work satisfactorily.

by a quarter to nine I was feeling suicidal. The fact had to be faced. I had no creative talent, was afraid of life, couldn’t conceive and therefore couldn’t shoot a sequence. Then somehow, during the next ¾ hour, six shots seemed to go together rather well. I left the works in a glow of content [... ]51

Only now does he return to the cliff hanger: ‘No, I haven’t yet been buggered. I’ve haunted the market lavatory three or four times, but without the earlier opportunities re-presenting themselves’.52

Anderson risked prosecution again while making Thursday’s Children and O Dreamland in September 1953. He tried to contact gay men through the public lavatories in Margate and, failing to meet anyone there, pursued the no less risky tactic of going down to the town’s seafront and the Dreamland bar (sic!) to look for a lover among crew-cut
American GIs – all of whom seemed to be looking for sixteen-year-old girls.\textsuperscript{53}

The relevance of these episodes to Anderson's cinematic authorship lies in the recurring links (of which these are merely the first) between erotic tensions and the intense stress he underwent when making films. Erotic anxiety is displaced onto creative conflicts; and conversely creative tensions transfer in a projective identification, in the above instances onto fantasised lovers and in later years onto actors and other colleagues. In the production of \textit{Three Installations}, Anderson's journal links his sexual and creative anxieties. In addition to the tensions of production with \textit{O Dreamland} and \textit{Thursday's Children}, the two films stand in opposition to one another as though the grim humour of the former were a psychologically necessary counterbalance to the sweetness of the latter.

Expressions of erotic misery aroused by a number of men over the decades occupy many pages in the journals. Anderson met numerous men while directing films and plays whom he ardently desired, none more intensely than Richard Harris, star of \textit{This Sporting Life} (1963). In a passage written as a twenty-three year old, Anderson had given an account of his own sexual nature that anticipated his responses seventeen years later to what became for him an overpowering erotic encounter with his male lead.

I find myself sexually stimulated by contact with members of my own sex: my reactions are feminine: I am attracted by shapeliness, strength and manliness. There is accordingly a masochistic element in my character which is excited by thoughts of ill-treatment, brutality etc. (probably quite falsely, romanticising what is in fact sordid and ugly). But this attraction is by no means purely sensual: it is accompanied by love – that is by a feeling of great affection and tenderness – when it is felt at its full strength. This of course makes the sufferings of repression all the more acute, since apart from mere physical strain and anguish I am tormented by the thought of the waste of so much potentially good, potentially beautiful – 'there's the torment, there's the Hell.'\textsuperscript{54}

A fortnight after finishing shooting \textit{This Sporting Life} in the summer of 1962, Anderson reported the intensity of his relationship on and off set with Richard Harris.

And as I write this, and evoke that tyrannical, bullying temperament, I am conscious of the excitement, the perverse gratification it affords, as well as the anger and the sense of inferiority and loss of dignity... that there is a strange sado-masochistic element in my relationship with Richard is undeniable – on his side the obverse of the kindly, generous, sensitive self which is also there (less often lately), which welcomes,
embraces, declares its affection and thanks. It is almost as if this personality has grown with Frank Machin: the narcissistic looks in the mirror, the admiration and enjoyment of his body, the relish of power, the sudden humorous, yet very vital expressions of savagery...55

As he wrote this Anderson had bruises on his arms from Harris’s punches. He recalled the actor sitting on set between takes, ‘and suddenly calling, pointing at the ground by his feet: “Lindsay! HEEL!”56 The memory of many such incidents, Harris’s sadistic enjoyment in publicly demonstrating authority over him and his own pleasure in feeling humiliated, feature in numerous entries over the following years. Periodically he revisits memories of Harris inviting him to watch him ‘fucking the arse off [a] big blonde’57 and ‘speculating on whips and leather belts and boots’.58 Sometimes Anderson locates himself in masturbatory fantasies as the feminised object of Harris’s excitingly cruel intentions. Sometimes he sees himself and Harris as linked because,

in a strange way, our natures, our problems coincide. In both there is an immaturity, an insecurity [that] reflects a childhood rejection: in my own case the lack of a father, which results, when I meet a personality of strength, and of a certain inaccessibility, in my wanting that personality to love me and to father me... While Richard wants the same, though with the addition of a violent suspicion of betrayal, a readiness to resent, an incapacity really and truly to give himself to anyone.59

Discussion of Anderson’s sexuality requires an account of the role played by women. During the war years the fellow officers Anderson fell for were unattached soldiers. In civilian life thereafter, his objects of desire were (like Serge Reggiani – whom he met in 1950 while observing the making of Secret People – and later Harris) actors who had women in their lives – whether wives, mistresses or lovers. This became an established pattern which suggests certain predispositions on Anderson’s part, the most obvious being that it made the men he loved unattainable, a factor which would have played to his predilection for psychological masochism. At the same time, the prior existence of an established relationship could unconsciously have reassured Anderson who often recorded his aversion to physical contact. No bodily expression of his desire would have been possible with any of the men he loved without infidelity becoming an issue. Conversely (to reverse logic, albeit fallaciously, in a manner that might quieten the conscience of Anderson the moralist) no infidelity could have occurred if his love found no sexual expression. This may explain why (to judge by the absence of journal entries on the topic) Anderson seems not to have felt that he was competing for the affections of the men he loved. However,
some of the women concerned did sense unwelcome rivalry—Elizabeth Harris being one who became hostile. Finally, Anderson’s preference for married men probably expressed a lifelong yearning to be close to women, a need frustrated in the always-stultified relationship with his emotionally cold mother.

There is pathos in all this. From time to time Anderson asks himself whether Harris or others whom he has loved ever think of him. He believes it unlikely. Indeed, he occasionally wonders whether they were ever aware of his feelings for them and, with the exception of Harris who seems to have been intuitively tuned to keeping Anderson on the hook, it is not difficult to share his uncertainty.

**Self-analysis and authorship: 3/ the satirical impulse**

By his own account then, Anderson appears to have been a man whom the damage of an emotionally abused childhood and sexual inhibitions had left incapable of making comfortable emotional (let alone physical) connections with other people. The stigma attaching to homosexuality would have acted as an additional, social pressure confirming his outsider status. Standing outside the pale looking in makes an ideal vantage point for the satirist to pick out and mock society’s follies. Anderson, however, had not strategically adopted an outsider’s position for intellectual advantage, but suffered the painful isolation of one who feels himself locked out. The journal echoes through the years to laments over the absence of love in his life, the impossibility of finding it and betrayal by friends. When reassessing people dearest to him, he repeatedly found them unworthy of friendship because they were incapable of giving him what his difficult soul yearned for. For example, early in 1967 he took Jocelyn Herbert, Karel and Betsy Reisz to see *The Saragossa Manuscript*,

which Karel got very restless at and went out before the end to have a drink: this irritated me—why? Because I’d chosen the film?! Because I wasn’t so bored—or just because I wanted to be irritated by Karel? It’s very peculiar, this sense of gulfs, of basic differences in aim and value that I feel with almost everyone. Is it middle-age? Or my rejection of the rat race? Or my own brand of megalomania?\(^6^0\)

Anderson grieved so often over friends’ and associates’ want of understanding of his nature, vision and artistic objectives that he realised he had internalised feelings of isolation in rebuffing periodically the affections of those closest to him. But recognising his predisposition did not halt it; and his addictive sorrow over the absence of love did not leave
him untouched. The corrosive sense of lack inevitably ran to its opposite and built powerful resentment against his fate. That anger, it seems reasonable to speculate, fed what (like an alchemist transmuting dross into gold) he sought to transform from disgust contaminated by contumely into the satirist’s noble rage. Indeed his bitterness at the perceived failings of his collaborators and friends suggests that even when making his early films he was already bearing the satirist’s burden.

James Sutherland argues that, ‘abnormally sensitive to the gap between what might be and what is’, the satirist cannot tolerate human shortcomings. Sutherland reckons the key difference between the writer of comedy and the satirist lies in the attitude of amused tolerance, cheerful or even delighted acceptance that typifies the response of the former to human failings. The satirist, by contrast, ‘is driven to protest. For him those are not matters for pure contemplation; they must be exposed, held up to derision or made to look as hideous as he believes them to be’.

A farewell to liberal humanism and the birth of social conscience

Occasionally Anderson recorded details of his travels with the Army (as when sailing through the Mediterranean on the way to India). Yet in general the journals provide little information about his experience of the war beyond the tedium of daily routine. However, one significant event had, we believe, a bearing on his personal and artistic development. In early years he had admired E. M. Forster. For example, after conscription but prior to his posting to India in June 1944 he wrote,

Last night I read ‘The Longest Journey’ by E. M. Forster and am again under his spell; if I ever write a novel it is bound to be very strongly influenced by him – a change anyway from Hemingway.

Although Anderson perceived that Forster deployed certain writer’s tricks to excess, he regarded these as minor blemishes:

But the theme of ‘The Longest Journey’? Again the war against unimagination, against narrowness, against inhumanism. And the struggle for adjustment. Forster is the most practical writer I know.

In October 1945, he donned his best bush shirt and with some excitement cycled seven miles across Delhi to a reception for Forster at Safdar Jang’s Tomb. Contrary to his hopes, the evening was not a success. The hostess’s introduction revealed that she knew nothing about the writer; and Anderson with regret thought him an ungainly figure. Worse, the famous author limited his speech to platitudes, concluding that
people must use the heart to solve some of their problems. Afterwards Anderson introduced himself but found nothing of interest in the two or three minutes they had together and felt relief when another guest cut in.  

So ended my meeting with the writer of my Bible [...] as I have said, disillusion was almost inevitable, and I had asked for it – yet I could not help being disappointed, not only with the general flatness of EM himself, but the boring, wishy-washy humanism of the whole proceeding.  

Anderson’s journal entry for the same day, 31 October 1945, also concludes his coverage of a week devoted to prisoners from the Indian Nationalist Army (INA). He had led an escort party bringing them from Bhopal to New Delhi and on arrival was allotted guard duties. Some of the men were to stand trial, accused of fighting with the Japanese against the British, others were to be witnesses. Despite the disapproval of a fellow subaltern, Anderson accepted the prisoners’ invitation to lunch with them in the prison camp. He did so partly out of courtesy, partly because they intrigued him.  

It is not what they said which impressed me so much as what they were... and how they behaved. After all, the facts are hardly in dispute – they fought against the British, for the Japanese. That in itself is presumably enough to condemn them to death, whatever their motives. But, sympathising, as one must, with their Nationalist ideals, one must avoid the emotional blindness & prejudice which may come upon one when one remembers that they were fighting our men, and may have been responsible for British deaths. Nowadays the old fashioned view of war as a struggle between honourable opponents has been superseded by one representing our side as Defending the Right, and the other as personifying the Forces of Evil. With the case of the Indian Nationalists this is not so. They were actuated by motives as honourable as our own: it is we (had we but the imagination to see it) who are in the false, reactionary, tyrannical position. Politically too, as well as humanely, these trials seem an absurd mistake: the only result can be to increase popular hatred of our regime. The only gain we can hope for is an increase in the Authority of our Raj: such an increase is doubtful enough, but one may even question its desirability. We have proclaimed our intention of giving India self government as soon as possible: why then proceed to make martyrs of those whose object was to achieve the same end, if by mistaken ends [sic], unless our intention is insincere and our proclamations a set of propagandist lies.  

But I do not have to ascend to the level of principles and policies for my sympathies to be aroused. Trusting the heart, I find that so many of the accused waiting at Delhi to be tried are charming, lively and reasonable people that I have no hesitation about declaring that their present
treatment is wrong. Try them for individual offences certainly, but not for their part in the I.N.A.: ask them, if we are sincere, to work with us for the good of their country, and I am convinced they would respond.68

Anderson, who had no delusions about the corrosive effects on young British officers of the traditions inculcated in them by their senior colleagues, concluded that this was the time for a courageous and constructive political amnesty.69 Thus his brief acquaintance with these prisoners led him to political analysis of a kind he sorely missed in Forster’s limp address.

Although the pessimism underlying Anderson’s appreciation of the powerful current of Indian nationalism was to prove justified, what matters for our purposes is the contrast between his reactions to the famous author and the INA prisoners. At this turning point, Anderson consciously realises the folly of using the heart alone as the means to solve social and political problems, and opts to deploy both head (rational analysis) and heart (passionate engagement with his theme). He couples this with anger directed at the naked political folly of his own people. The encounter with the INA soldiers stands out as the moment when Anderson appreciates that to be effective as either a writer or director he must develop a more steely, socially aware, indeed satirical mode of address than his erstwhile literary mentor.

Anderson was the more effective as a satirist because he had known from birth the psychology, morality and behaviour of the people who became a main (though not the only) focus of his attacks. He had no doubt that the ‘masculine’ characteristics identified above in his A list derived from his family and upbringing. These dominated the upper-middle class. By the time he came in 1967 to casting If..., his first feature-length satire, he turned again to reflect on the way his personality and artistic ambitions had distanced him from former friends and colleagues in the Free Cinema Movement and Royal Court Theatre.

let me not be self-righteous: my need, as well as my gift, is an independent, unforming one, at odds with the tradition of my class and my country. The discomfort I feel is to a great extent due to the disparity between my subjective, non-conforming impulse – and my strength to battle and survive in a position of such isolation.70

Now, in a passage reminiscent of the classical literary account of the hero preparing for battle, Anderson sees that his differences not only make him a victim but endow him with a distinctive gift as a fully armed satirist.
The nature of the private writings – reprise

Speculating on whether Anderson’s journals might have been intended for publication, we took the view earlier that, although they might have provided source material, they did not in their own right constitute an autobiography. In 1985, at the age of sixty-two, Anderson did report thoughts of writing one.

1 Anderson in the officer’s uniform of the King’s Royal Rifles (1943). In 1944 he transferred to the Intelligence Corps and served in India until 1946.
I have meant, often, to keep this diary going – especially as I think, often, of my Autobiography – and realise how much I have forgotten in the course of these last 30 years...71

If the journals can be understood as an attempt during his life to shape for himself perspectives on his existence to which (however sorrowfully) he could give assent, then the autobiography would have been an attempt to write himself for history.72 In the event, the journals petered out in March 1992 two and a half years before his death. The last entries describe a visit to what he perceived as a somewhat bleak Vienna, their tone dominated by sad reflections on continuing family difficulties, mediocre health and a feeling of depression either resultant from those things or ‘a career that seems to have drawn to a close’.73

Notes

1 The principal calligraphy in press advertisements and even trailers for O Lucky Man! was lifted direct from a draft Anderson had sent to Warner Bros.’ publicists. Additional handwritten text in the publicity material imitated his script.
2 Diary, 7 June to 22 November 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6).
3 The resultant material is more polished than the typical format described by Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir, Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 26: ‘The diary is an everyday
form, often occupied with the domestic, the detail, and usually free of any hierarchical interpretation of events; the mundane and the eventful are all allocated the same space and form’. With Anderson, to the contrary, a high level of organisation characterises his private musings except where occasionally he jots down notes listing events too numerous for detailed accounting or as reminders of things he should do. In fact he had from the start ambitions for his work beyond keeping a diary in Gudmundsdóttir’s sense of the term.

4 Diary, 1 January 1942 (LA 6/1/1/1).
5 Diary, 2 January 1943 (LA 6/1/1/114).
6 Diary, 27 June 1942 (LA 6/1/1/91).
9 Diary, 4 December 1944 (LA 6/1/5/88).
10 Diary, 27 July 1972 (LA 6/1/64/197).
11 Diary, 26 July 1972 (LA 6/1/64/196).
12 Richard E. Grant, Dear Diary (BBC 4, 6 January 2010).
13 Time (23 July 1972) 43.
14 Diary, 11 June 1945 (LA 6/1/6/49–50).
15 Diary, February 1971 (LA 6/1/61/20).
16 Diary, 14 January 1971 (LA 6/1/61/13).
17 See, for example, diary, 1 January 1972 (LA 6/1/61/41).
19 Diary, 16 December 1971 (LA 6/1/61/30).
20 Diary, 4 August 1971 (LA 6/1/62/9–10).
22 Anderson’s complaint heard yet again as late as 14 January 1985 when the two men were developing a treatment for Reunion, the proposed sequel to If… (Diary, LA 6/1/77).
24 Diary, 24 April 1972 (LA 6/1/64/113).
25 Diary, 12 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/130).
26 Diary, 5 September 1972 (LA 6/1/64/236).
29 Diary, 7 August 1971 (LA 6/1/62/12).
31 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood; Lambert, Mainly About Lindsay Anderson.
33 David Storey, Lindsay Anderson. Edited extracts from the speech can be found in Lambert, Mainly About Lindsay Anderson, 4.
34 Diary, 1 February 1944 (LA 6/1/4/14). He previously touched on a similar theme on 14 January 1942 (LA 6/1/1/15–17).
35 Diary, 17 April 1947 (LA 6/1/10/2).
36 Diary, 19 April 1947 (LA 6/1/10/4).
37 Grant, Dear Diary.
38 Diary, 22 April 1946 (LA 6/i/9/31). Anderson’s mention of ‘father’ refers to his stepfather.
39 Diary, 5 October 1947 (LA 6/i/10/32–3).
40 Diary, 21 May 1967 (LA 6/i/54/40).
41 Diary, 28 May 1967 (LA 6/i/54/46).
42 Diary, 28 May 1967 (LA 6/i/54/47).
43 Diary, 20 February 1942 (LA 6/i/1/51).
44 Diary, 27 November 1943 (LA 6/i/3/7–9); 26 May 1944 (LA 6/i/4/34–5).
45 Diary, 1 and 3 January 1945 (LA 6/i/5/119–20).
46 Diary, 29 March 1945 (LA 6/i/6/1).
47 Diary, 29 March 1945 (LA 6/i/6/1–2).
49 Diary, 12 November 1951 (LA 6/i/11/17).
50 Diary, 12 November 1951 (LA 6/i/11/21–2).
51 Diary, 26 November 1951 (LA 6/i/11/23).
52 Ibid.
53 Diary, 19 September 1953 (LA 6/i/14/3–4); 28 September 1953 (LA 6/i/14/5–6); 2 October 1953 (LA 6/i/14/7–8).
54 Diary, 31 August 1945 (6/i/6/75–6).
55 Diary, 4 July 1962 (LA 6/i/32/2). Frank Machin is the lead male character played by Harris.
56 Diary, 4 July 1962 (LA 6/i/32/3).
57 Diary, 12 May 1965 (LA 6/i/48/15).
58 Diary, 18 September 1965 (LA 6/i/48/237).
60 Diary, 5 January 1967 (LA 6/i/54/5).
62 Sutherland, English Satire, 2–3.
63 Sutherland, English Satire, 4.
64 Diary, 2 June 1944 (LA 6/i/4/37).
65 Ibid.
66 Diary, 31 October 1945 (LA 6/i/7/32–5).
67 Diary, 31 October 1945 (LA 6/i/7/35). Anderson’s library at the time of his death included the following titles by Forster. Although he did not annotate any of these volumes, it is interesting to learn from the date of publication of some editions that he continued to read Forster after their uninspiring meeting.

Anderson 34 Goldsworthy Loves Dickinson... (pub. 1945)
Anderson 35 Where Angels Fear to Tread (pub. 1953)
Anderson 36 Selected Short Stories (pub. 1947)
Anderson 37 A Room with a View (pub. 1947)
Anderson 38 The Life to Come... (pub. 1972)
Anderson 39 Hill of Devi (pub. 1953)
Anderson 51 Aspects of the Novel (inscribed ‘Lindsay Anderson, Oxford, 46’)
Anderson 53 Abinger Harvest (inscribed ‘Lindsay Anderson, Dec. 1941, Oxford’)
Anderson 54 A Passage to India (pub. 1942)
Anderson 85 Development of English Prose (pub. 1945)
Anderson 1306 Howard’s End (pub. 1939)
Anderson 1473 The Longest Journey (pub. 1943)
68 Diary, 31 October 1945 (LA 6/i/7/30–1).
69 Ibid.
70 Diary, 15 November 1967 (LA 6/1/55/4).
71 Diary, 28 November 1985 (LA 6/1/87/4).
72 Although he wrote no autobiography as such, Anderson appears to have drawn on the journals as well as his letters and public writings in contributing brief, expurgated commentaries to Paul Ryan’s collection of his writings in *Never Apologise*. 
73 Diary, 20 March 1992 (LA 6/1/93/3).
The early films

In May 1942, soon after commencing his degree programme and with conscription certain, Anderson began to have thoughts about future employment. He decided ‘to take some sort of acting job – or rather to attempt one – and blast the consequences. That is, if I survive’. That resolution was shaken in October when he failed to secure the role he wanted in the Oxford Experimental Theatre Company’s production of *The Impresario from Smyrna* (although he succeeded in a small part). He had not, however, confined himself to a single line of attack. During the summer of the same year he and Gavin Lambert had written a spy film, *Pursuit*. They sent the script to Ealing Studios and Warner-First National who both rejected it. Meanwhile Anderson was also thinking of writing film criticism for the *Oxford Magazine*.

After conscription Anderson wrote stories based on his experience of the army. When ‘Return from 48 Hours Leave’ was rejected by the *New Statesman*, he noted his intention to rewrite ‘The Soldier’s Dilemma’. The latter, a piece reflecting on the difficulty of the sensitive intellectual forced to go to war, found no better success. This could be because its central focus was too obviously the angst of its young writer suffering ‘the dilemma of the spirit forced [...] to submit to a way of life which it is bound by its nature to detest’.

Immediately on his return to Wadham in February 1946, Anderson started to review films – initially in his journal. These early attempts appear to have been aimed at honing an approach appropriate for publication. Distinctive preoccupations swiftly emerged in discussion of Jean Renoir’s *The Southerner* where ‘the combination of American vigour with French wit and observation produces thrilling and successful art [...]’. Soon he was reviewing stage productions and cinema releases for *The Isis* ‘and contemplating (with trepidation) launching or attempting to launch a magazine’.

By March 1947 things had moved on impressively. Not only had he,
Gavin Lambert and Peter Ericsson set up and published their first issue of *Sequence*, but he had other achievements to record.

I have enough projects on hand to occupy myself interestingly, and to a certain degree productively – plans for a Film: a new issue of *Sequence* to be put together; the literary editorship of the *ISIS*; introductions to be written for Movie Parade; literature to be read; thinking to be done.10

**Richard Sutcliffe Ltd.**

A further year on, in May 1948, Anderson was reflecting on the progress made with his first film *Meet the Pioneers*.11

A new chapter all right; I am 25 now, and feel 40 – but at least something has been achieved. 3000 feet of advertising film in fact.12

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this project had been brought to him the preceding winter by Lois Sutcliffe (later Smith).13 Her husband Desmond had decided to publicise to the mining industry the products of the family engineering works, Richard Sutcliffe Ltd. He proposed to use a promotional film and invited a London-based company to come up with a treatment. However, the resultant proposal struck the Sutcliffes as mediocre – no more than a catch-all matrix that could just as well have been used to promote a biscuit factory. Requiring a film that demonstrated the technical excellence of Sutcliffe’s underground conveyor belts, Desmond accepted Lois’s suggestion that they should approach Anderson to direct and she approached him at the very moment he was about to return to Oxford to start postgraduate studies.14 Lois knew that he had no experience as a filmmaker but put her faith in him on the basis of personal acquaintance, their shared love for cinema and the vigorous polemic that characterised his writing for *Sequence*.15 Forty-five years later she did not demur when David Storey wryly introduced her at the director’s commemorative event as ‘the only begetter and the true convener of Lindsay’s remarkable … film career’,16 but the birth of this sometimes charming, often pugnacious film director proved a hard delivery.

Reflecting on the work of his crew, Anderson had for the most part complimentary words for his cameraman John Jones whom he found skilful, if apt to keep himself too much apart.17 What he failed to mention was that Jones had to teach through the week and could join the crew only on weekends. Lois Sutcliffe recalled that in fact Bill Brendon, who had some experience making short documentaries, was permanent cameraman with the group.18 Anderson was less complimentary about Lois, remarking that, although acute and perspicacious,
she appeared to have lost interest and done a lot less than he expected as the shoot proceeded. For her part, looking back almost fifty years, Lois remembered that often she could not hear Anderson’s instructions above the racket of machinery so he thought her stupid and incapable. A deputation of workers, offended by the ferocity of Anderson’s invective against her, called on Desmond to get the young director to tone down his language – though it appears that, as both Lois’s husband and the company’s Managing Director, he did not think it necessary to act.

Lois supplies a revealing gloss in describing Anderson’s relations with the workers, which she says were harmonious. His initial tour of the plant had left him exhausted but impressed by the dedication with which the men and women on the floor worked. He did not condescend to them but strove to understand what they were doing before setting up his shots. ‘Lindsay liked them and got on well with the Yorkshire temperament. He found them blunt, taciturn, outspoken when questioned. He appreciated their dry turn of humour’. Plainly his behaviour with the men was at odds with his attitude towards his peers (which suggests he targeted his anger at those whom he considered able to defend themselves). Furthermore, his opinion of the taciturn manner of Yorkshiremen was to change after the premiere of Meet the Pioneers.

Tensions between Anderson and Lois Sutcliffe continued during the editing phase. Already the perfectionist, Anderson studied every cut with what seems to have been a critic’s attention. Eventually Desmond Sutcliffe found it necessary to stand over him during the last week of editing, stop-watch in hand, insisting Anderson make a cut every three minutes to ensure they met the 1 July 1948 deadline for screening to the Earls Court Industrial Exhibition. Picture editing done, Desmond wrote the narrator’s script to cover the shots. Anderson then dubbed the music efficiently from commercially available discs and voiced the commentary himself.

Unhappily, the first public screening to the workforce and their families did not deliver the satisfaction the director had hoped for. Minutes before they reached the Savoy Cinema in Lupset, Anderson was railing at Lois, releasing, she believed, pent-up anger at the gulf between what he had expected and what she had been able to deliver. He was further upset by the want of a reception at the event or any notice of his achievement in making the film.

After it was all finished it was no better. No spontaneous round of applause came as the lights went up and it was all over. No one, not a single person, congratulated us. Not a word was said and Lindsay rightly never forgot this. He felt that it showed the worst side of all the people present. Yorkshire reticence taken to its graceless conclusion.
Not only was the lacerating temper which his future collaborators would encounter already a formidable instrument (as Lois Sutcliffe’s and Anderson’s notes reveal), but his sensitivity to perceived slights was also apparent. With hindsight, Anderson’s anger before the Lupset screening and the mental scars left by that audience’s lack of response fall into a configuration (as the diaries bear witness) that recurred when his later films were released. The pattern suggests that a chronic fear of rejection lay at the roots of his unhappy reaction, its likely source childhood’s irreparable emotional abandonment by his mother.

Anderson had no illusion that this, the first of four films that he would make for Richard Sutcliffe Ltd., was anything other than an apprentice text, and that as yet little trace of a personal cinematic signature would show.\(^{26}\) While work on Meet the Pioneers was still ongoing, he noted,

> I don’t know whether Meet the Pioneers is any good; by intuition I feel that it is quite interesting, rather scrappy and also rather too conventional in approach. Certain sequences – the Drawing Office for instance – are right out of the stock book; and generally the treatment is on the obvious side…\(^{27}\)

His journal entry looking back over 1948 raised questions about whether he should be ‘satisfied to muddle along as I do now’ as a film director, whether he should stay with Sutcliffe’s or try to get a job in the film industry.

> If I carry on this year as I did last, I shall make progress, but not spectacularly. Looking back over 1948, there is no doubt that I now know more, feel more about the cinema than I did then. I am about ripe in fact for another attempt at making – having perhaps digested Meet the Pioneers by this time, seen some errors and got some rather clearer ideas.\(^{28}\)

This modest confidence was not entirely stable. Two weeks later, at the start of the New Year, he reconsidered his competence in a journal passage that displays his characteristic switching from one attitude (uncertainty) to its converse (acceptance that he knows how to get by).

> My last observations raise an ironical smile, in view of experience so far on The Assembly and Disassembly of the Goliath Gearhead [sic]; perhaps it only goes to prove what I already know – that I am not good at work ‘off the cuff’, that I need to observe and to study what I have to film before I can with any confidence envisage a completed film. And I am not experienced enough to just shoot away, and rely on editing and commentary to pull me through. At a stage such as this I feel my inexperience keenly; I haven’t really the slightest idea for instance how to set about filming the assembly of the machine tomorrow. Not that I am too seriously worried: something will come out of it all.\(^{29}\)
Almost three years later Anderson was once again in the company’s film hut, cutting *Three Installations*, the third Sutcliffe film. Once again he reported fluctuations in confidence severe enough that the troughs almost erased the self-belief induced by a successful private screening of the second film, *Idlers that Work*.

At the works I have started, slowly and without enthusiasm, to assemble the film. It is a depressing as well as a laborious business, for the whole thing seems to me stale, timid, an indication that filmwrighting is not my vocation. Strengthened by a viewing on Thursday of *Idlers that Work* – shown at the Savoy to the proprietor of the ‘Wakefield Gazette’ [sic] who is considering the celebration of his paper’s centenary with the production of a film. Naturally I did not see the film through, but observed bits of it from the projection box (with that awful ‘pî’ voice dinning round the walls); it seemed slow, pedestrian and – yes – afraid. To this extent, the films are truly personal. I refuse to indulge in the flashy-for-its-own-sake, and try to avoid the more notorious clichés; but in their place can be found only an utterly conventional conception, proceeding in a number of unadventurous, if tastefully arranged, set-ups. I suppose its still possible that *3 Installations* will constitute an advance; but I feel that any progression in it is comparative – no liberation.31

A month later he replaces fear with the thought of audience applause – perhaps a fantasy masking the searing memory of silence greeting *Meet the Pioneers*.

Mercurial, that’s me. I’ve spent all day trying to put MacAlpine’s together in some sort of order; and by a quarter to nine I was feeling suicidal. The fact had to be faced. I had no creative talent, was afraid of life, couldn’t conceive and therefore couldn’t shoot a sequence. Then somehow, during the next ¾ hour, six shots seemed to go together rather well. I left the works in a glow of content: ‘all may be well’; immense applause at the *3 Installations* premiere: audience born enthusiastically forward on the surging tide of images...32

The four films that he made for the company are not authored texts except insofar as Richard Sutcliffe Ltd. had control over the output.33 However, looking back at *Meet the Pioneers* forty-five years later, Anderson did think ‘that you can see in it some of my concerns with rhythm and editing, with people, with the importance of putting a human quality across, which have perhaps figured in my later work. But it was in no way self-conscious at the time’.34 Viewing the film today, we find the more evident elements than those he claimed to find late in life are the very features he regretted in his earlier accounts. *Meet the Pioneers* has substantive characteristics borrowed from the better films made in the 1930s by John Grierson’s British Documentary Movement. This is
unsurprising for two reasons. First, the novice director needed a model to guide him in his first film; and second, like his predecessors twenty years earlier, he had access only to rudimentary equipment.

Borrowings show in several aspects of *Meet the Pioneers*. They include Anderson’s thematic approach in which promotion runs alongside social commentary. That commentary is implicit in the intimate framing of workers while the narrator explains how their labour contributes to the completed product. The device recalls Robert Flaherty and John Grierson’s *Industrial Britain* (1931). The visual style has similarities with both the Documentary Movement’s mining films and the classic night shoot on Harry Watt and Basil Wright’s *Night Mail* (1936). As if modelling their shots on these sources, Brendon and Jones gave Anderson deep contrast that enhances visual drama, and (as a consequence of having few lamps) lighting that isolates machine parts and operators while the surrounding dark adds dynamically to the frame’s perceived depth. These devices complement a structure and pace that intensifies interest in an aspect of production before releasing tension with, for example, shots of workers eating and apprentices playing during the lunch break. The dynamic effect is not dissimilar to the break mid-shift in Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Coal Face* (1935).

As in the films of these predecessors, Anderson’s interest in people is distributed across the efficient team rather than focused on individuals. For *Meet the Pioneers*, then, he did not manage to give effect to the critique of British cinema that he wrote for *Sequence* while making the film. His article ‘A Possible Solution’ took issue with Grierson’s ‘formidably sociological’ ideology and argued that the concerns of the individual, far from being of no significance, were of the highest importance in the social arena since they affected society as much as society affected them.35

In the absence of synch recording, the soundtrack combines music with narration to set the mood. That device also springs direct from Anderson’s 1930s forebears. So too does the enduring vice of the genre – the narrator’s educated upper-middle-class spiel (his own ‘pi’ voice) subsuming ‘us’ in a shared set of unchallenged values while commenting on ‘them’ – the workers. As for structure, *Meet the Pioneers* first sketches the historical background to the manufacture of the conveyor system. Then it focuses on dedicated operatives, building confidence in the reliability, efficiency and quality of the product. That pattern too could have come from several Empire Marketing Board and General Post Office films. Finally, a variant of the conclusion of *Drifters* (1929) occurs in the valedictory sequence (here delivered twice) as product leaves the factory and a ship laden with mined stone leaves the shore.
**Trunk Conveyor** (1954) was Anderson’s final production for Richard Sutcliffe Ltd. and his seventh short film. As demonstrated by his other films of the early 1950s, he had now acquired the skills and confidence to produce distinctive work.

Anderson started on **Trunk Conveyor** with ambitions to go for intense realism and a chiaroscuro effect; but since he was making an instructional film he soon realised there was no point in sacrificing straightforward communication for atmosphere and ‘artying it up’. All the same he would have liked the human side to come out stronger. It was finished after a fairly prolonged period of editing but he actually welcomed what he described as the slowness of editor Bill Megarry. It left him free to go to France in June for the stage production of **Hamlet** to which he was contributing creatively in Angers. It starred Serge Reggiani who, as mentioned earlier, was the tantalising predecessor to Richard Harris, one day affectionate, the next offensively indifferent to Anderson.

Anderson rightly recorded his pride in **Trunk Conveyor**. It remains to this day a robust and engaging treatment of its subject: a step-by-step description of the long process of planning for and installing a Super Goliath. The system was capable of hauling coal long distances underground by conveyor belt and we watch it being installed in a mine to replace rail trucks. For this production Anderson must have had more money to spend than on **Meet the Pioneers** since lighting in the underground sequences is higher key than the first film, essential to allow illustration of the system’s intricate assembly process. The action is dramatised by the size and impressive geometry of the Super Goliath, by the camera angles, which emphasise its bulk and by the intermittent passage of the obsolescent trains which trundle by the installation crew with inches to spare. Anderson’s admiration for the meticulous craftsmanship of Sutcliffe’s men comes across aurally in the intimate tone of the factual commentary, and visually in the way their work is carefully framed and held in takes edited without undue haste.

Anderson’s competence in fulfilling a remit was thus well established by the mid-1950s. In addition to episodes of **Robin Hood** for television, he wrote and directed a twenty-minute film **Foot and Mouth** made for the Ministry of Agriculture during the 1955 epidemic. It revealed the way the disease was transmitted, touched on the devastating slaughter of infected herds and specified precautions that farmers should take to save their animals from infection. It was regarded as an effective public information film. During the same year, he directed a number of other short sponsored films including some for other government agencies and four to help fundraising for the National Society for the Prevention
LINDSAY ANDERSON

of Cruelty to Children. Erik Hedling, who discusses them all, finds a few early signs of the emerging author but concludes that the documentaries established as the classic ones are aesthetically superior and there is not much reason to rewrite the canon.42

Critic and filmmaker

During 1950 and 1951 Anderson had studied the making of Secret People, a spy feature that Thorold Dickinson was directing at Ealing Studios. Dickinson had invited him to write up the film’s production history, and Making a Film (which also incorporated Dickinson’s script) was published in 1952 to coincide with the film’s release.43 Preliminary chapters on the development of the project, acquisition of rights and initial discussions lead into an extended day-by-day account of pre-production and the shoot. Anderson had no time to write an account of post-production because of the publisher’s pressing deadline. Nonetheless his record, besides being acutely observant, also declares his feeling of involvement with the crew when he shifts the register from the third person observer to adopt ‘we’ as his form of address. This occurs, for example, when he observes a ballet troupe required for one sequence. Bored by having to wait before they can perform, they are outsiders who cannot know all that ‘we’ do about the cause of delays in shooting.44

In one respect, the book adds to the impression of an individual learning the craft through careful, fascinated observation. Recognising another aspect, Frank Hauser identified its wider theme.

What emerges from the book is not the Front Office, not the Hollywood of Hortense Powdermaker, with its illiterate bosses and slave-driven artists, but absorption in a task long meditated and now being carried out by craftsmen who know and love their work. In an odd way, this diary is an apologia for the British film industry.45

Hauser’s comment can be modified with the qualification that Anderson’s book amounted in particular to an apologia for the small-scale, independent-spirited British film. That such films were the best way of freeing the British film industry from stagnation had already been his theme in his 1948 article ‘A Possible Solution’.46

Anderson’s values as a cinephile had indeed been emerging since 1947 under the constant pressure of filling the pages of Sequence. In relation to authorship, he wrote (as we saw in Chapter 1) of his belief in personal expression. In Sequence 2 he argued that Rossellini’s Roma, Città Aperta (1945) and Paisà (1946) would have been improved had they displayed less of a documentary approach and revealed more of the
director’s own ideas. In *Sequence 4* he voiced his admiration for ‘the impulse of generous and uncompromising emotion’ in these films and De Sica’s *Sciuscia* (1946). As filmmaker he was able for the first time to fully introduce personal and emotional elements in 1953 with *Thursday’s Children* and *O Dreamland*. (He titled the latter ‘A Sequence Film’.) Through necessity rather than principle, the link between his articles and these two films was the more complete in that, mainly financed from their makers’ pockets, they were both small independent productions.

Before he made them, however, Anderson directed another commissioned film in which these ideas and Humphrey Jennings’s influence begin to emerge.

**Wakefield Express (1952)**

As mentioned earlier, Anderson directed this production in response to the newspaper’s decision to make a short film to celebrate its centenary. Albeit still governed largely by Griersonian parameters, it introduces changes to emphasise the personal if not for himself as director, certainly for its audiences. He acted on his revulsion against the sound of his own ‘pi’ voice in the Sutcliffe films and used the northern and relatively intimate voice of George Potts, one of the newspaper’s reporters, to reduce the ‘us looking at them’ effect. Furthermore, the script helps enhance the sense of closeness to Yorkshire life with down-to-earth narration covering in detail readily observable facts. It starts with a long sequence following one local reporter through a typical round of weekly contacts with shop owners, local office holders and interesting characters that any member of the public in the paper’s area might know. Identifiable elements are introduced as the journalist reacts to his contacts with engaged interest and ready notebook. In this section, as Allison Graham comments, the emphasis is on the people of the West Riding and how they create the stories that appear in the paper. That sets the baseline for a more conventional look at a range of activities which the paper regularly covers for the local community. After touching on the *Express’s* history, ownership and organisation, the film moves towards its close with a fascinating sequence on the paper’s production processes. By no means incidental to the film’s goals, this would have increased the sense of engagement for an important sector of the target audience – those of the paper’s readers who wanted to know more about how it was made. Achieving all this in his fourth film, Anderson revealed confident signs of mastering his craft.
He showed a debt to Jennings’s documentaries in making the film more intimately recognisable to the audience and also through his new ability to vary the mood. For example, he shifts from giving happy children and their proud parents pride of place at a street carnival to the unveiling of a war memorial in a nearby village. There mid-shots communicate the occasion’s significance by holding the sorrowing faces of women recalling their dead. *Wakefield Express* thus provided him the first opportunity to show tenderness – a quality often ignored in his screen productions. The next film to do so, *Thursday’s Children*, was made the following year, 1953.

**Thursday’s Children and O Dreamland (both 1953)**

The two films were shot back-to-back in the Kentish seaside town Margate. Although the former was filmed on 35mm and the latter on short ends of 16mm stock left over from *Wakefield Express*, they resemble a diptych: Anderson later described *Thursday’s Children* (co-directed and written with Guy Brenton, a friend from his Oxford days) as a song of innocence and *O Dreamland* as a song of experience. (The terms are William Blake’s but may have reached Anderson through Humphrey Jennings.) In each film the filmmakers’ personal engagement can be sensed, though in strikingly different ways. It invites the question whether an authorial persona is also materialising.

Recognising that *Thursday’s Children* had personal qualities which pleased him, Anderson lamented in his journal the ‘slightly disturbing thought that the only valid film I have been concerned with had to be made in collaboration’. Yet Brenton had an interest in anthropology which would have been valuable in outlining the project. Anderson somewhat reluctantly credited his co-director’s input because he found the other man difficult – ironically, Brenton too had a reputation for irascibility.

Working with Guy is not exactly a holiday: no doubt I plague him as he plagues me [...] Also fatal is his terrible conviction of moral superiority, past which nothing can get. Humourless too [...] The film is his creation of course, as a project completely his. After that – I suppose pretty well 50–50 his & mine. On his own he’d almost certainly have made a mess of it – buggered it up with his ‘theoretical’ ideas, as they seem to me. And on my own, I’d never even have begun.

As if this were not sufficient evidence for the surfacing of creative tensions of the type described in Chapter 2, the relationship ended
badly. Anderson (by his own account) connived against Brenton with World Wide Pictures, the company that had funded the film’s completion in return for distribution rights. They excluded Brenton from the vital sales screening to Republic Films. Republic (a small American Poverty Row studio struggling to survive the death of the market that it had supplied with B pictures) did buy the rights to Britain and the USA. However, they found it hard, notwithstanding the Oscar, to place the film with cinema chains either side of the Atlantic. Meanwhile Brenton was outraged by his mistreatment: he and Anderson are said never to have spoken again. That may be why Anderson did not possess the Oscar that Thursday’s Children won for best short subject in the 1955 Academy Awards. However, in 1958 Brenton did send a courteous note forwarding Anderson’s share of the film’s rentals.

Thursday’s Children was shot in the Royal School for the Deaf where, from four years of age, youngsters learned to speak with the support of devoted teachers. Anderson noted that ‘There is something special about deaf children – something wonderfully expressive, something wonderfully alive.’ And he attributed the film’s emotional power to their desire to make contact with the world from which the deaf are cut off. His claim was just, but it would be a mistake not to recognise the way structure and aesthetics contribute to the film’s impact.

In the opening sequences the youngest children start the day with their own game, playing at being adults. There is much laughter and fun. Little appears out of the ordinary until the teacher starts to speak and her voice fades to complete silence although her lips continue moving with marked emphasis. For some minutes, no further sound or speech is heard from the classroom itself. Framing continues tight on the one-to-one teaching with big close ups of the teacher’s mouth intercut with close ups on the children’s faces as they try to mimic what they can only see. These intense passages are book-ended with wider shots of the children’s reactions, revealing the characteristics of some individuals and showing them all as a close-knit group. Richard Burton’s sensitive narration reminds us of the high significance of what the children are trying to achieve – that without words no thoughts, but only feelings exist. When the infants hold a balloon to feel the vibrations caused by speech, sound returns to the room with the percussive syllables that they are imitating. Speech is coming.

The second half of the film shows the wonderful potential in these hesitant first steps when we focus on the six and seven year olds. The joy of rudimentary communication through speech encourages those who reach this stage of development to seize the opportunity for more meaningful interplay with their classmates. The personalities of those
children who can manage this difficult skill develop strikingly, allowing them to form increasingly individual characteristics.

Anderson’s reputation as a satirist has saturated the collective memory of his screen productions. In popular memory his filmed output seems to have been limited to feature films of coruscating anger and a few documentaries made early on. This is mistaken and (despite the friction and betrayal that was to sunder its writer-directors) *Thursday’s Children* is one of a number of tender films in Anderson’s filmography. It amplifies threads already identified in *Wakefield Express* and anticipates *Every Day Except Christmas*, *The Singing Lesson* and *The Whales of August*.

By his own account, *O Dreamland* is quite other – a satirical, almost a hate film. It presents the obverse face of humanity to that displayed in *Thursday’s Children*. As Gavin Lambert wrote in his 1956 review, ‘The first time [one sees it] it is like a blow in the face; the second, one approaches it with a kind of eager dread’.

At first glance, the film’s opening has nothing to do with the main focus – the entertainments on offer in the Amusement Park and the people who pay to see them. These shots show a chauffeur endlessly buffing the lustrous bonnet of a Bentley and we notice that the driver’s cap sports the name Dreamland. John Fletcher’s camera pans off the car onto an alley where tides of people make their way towards the attractions. It becomes apparent that the chauffeur’s pointless task, following instructions from the arcade’s owners, is a microcosm for the labour of all these visitors, released (the syllogism implies) from equally meaningless functions into so-called recreation. But the amusement arcade seen through Anderson’s lens could not lead to the true ‘re-creation’ (in the word’s older meaning) of any holidaymaker seeking relief from the daily grind. Consider the first attraction: mechanised dummies modelling the execution by electric chair of a famous spy while a mechanical policeman cackles vengefully. The offensive racket generated by many of the arcade’s automata punctuates a showman’s invitation to come and see ‘Torture through the Ages’.

‘You must see torture by immersion in boiling oil, the burning of Joan of Arc at the stake and many other attractions... Your children will love it!’

Tawdry demonstrations of the torturer’s depraved skills are intercut with gawking customers. Only one woman’s face among the adults and children admits a moment’s horror. All the while, the monstrous laughter grinds on and on, contrasting the papier-mâché models’ agonised faces and the viewers’ torpor.

As we move to sequences at the stalls and funfair, Anderson continues the pattern of cutting between holidaymakers and the sources of their
supposed entertainment. The people mostly look ugly, bored and resigned. It goes on and on – relentless mechanical laughter fighting against tedium; the flaccid enticements of bored barkers contesting the visitors’ indifference. A jukebox scratches out Frankie Lane: a pop song of dripping sentimentality that underlies accumulating images of banal and vulgar attractions: ‘I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows. / I believe that somewhere in the darkest night, a candle glows...’ Belief, dreams or the sparking of imagination could not be further from the minds of these showmen or their customers. In 1951 the Festival of Britain had been designed to demonstrate the nation’s creative potential and revive the spirits of a population exhausted by war. In Anderson’s eyes, no such revival had by 1953 penetrated the few miles from London’s South Bank to Margate. These holidaymakers are no less caged in suspicion and fear than the stricken animals they stare at in one of the stalls.

In the recollections he provided for Paul Ryan, Anderson said that *O Dreamland* could not be shown widely because he had not cleared rights to the music and copyright payments would have been too costly. In addition he had recorded without permission the Managing Director of Dreamland (the showman calling customers to view ‘Torture through the Ages’. This profoundly offended that individual, who wrote to the British Film Institute (responsible for the Free Cinema programme at which it was first screened) and refused to allow it to be shown further.65 Although *O Dreamland* has only recently become generally available, it has always garnered great interest from all those who study Anderson’s work. And while he was right to assert that in his lifetime very few people saw it, it would be incorrect to assume that it had no audiences at all. In 1956 he signed a seven-year contract with Amos Vogel of Cinema 16 in New York City selling him worldwide rights for the sale or rental of 16mm prints for 50 per cent of net income. The contract was renewed to run to September 1973. Grove Press took it over in the early 1970s (and bought a further six prints) later extending the arrangement into the early 1990s.66 Anderson’s files hold a number of statements of account in which the rights holders accounted for their rental debts to him. And although these sums were small – no more than $200 for a six-month period and often much less – they reveal that for more than thirty years the film had sporadic screenings (probably mainly in connection with educational programmes) in North America.67 Meanwhile in 1979 Anderson contracted with the British Film Institute to distribute the film in the UK on a non-theatrical basis (which would imply screenings in film societies, universities and schools). From this source he also received small rental cheques during the 1980s.68
Mentored by Humphrey Jennings

Both *Thursday's Children* and *O Dreamland* are documentaries. Both relay images from actual worlds that exist in front of the lens. Yet a moment’s reflection on the vivid contrast between them illustrates clearly how Anderson’s (and Brenton’s) editorial decisions contributed to the creation of two constructed worlds which have their foundation in an actuality interpreted to express their ideas. It seems unlikely, for example, that in the course of shooting *Thursday’s Children* none of the infants would have thrown a tantrum or wept. Conversely, the young women filmed singing tentatively in *O Dreamland* might (to speculate again) have asked the fellows standing behind them to abandon inhibition and jive. Neither of these imaginary events, if it had been shot, could have survived the cutting bench without radically altering our perception of each film. Each, then, presents a world that partakes both of observable actuality and the profoundly felt fantasies of the filmmakers’ imagination.

However, neither film sprang from minds untouched by cinematic culture. Where previously we made the connection with the Griersonian documentary at large, here we need to narrow that field to the work of Humphrey Jennings, the one member of that group for whom throughout his working life Anderson expressed admiration. What endows this link with particular significance is that, in the April–June issue of the very year *Thursday’s Children* and *O Dreamland* were made, *Sight & Sound* published Anderson’s article in which he famously described Jennings as ‘the only real poet that the British cinema has yet produced’.69

In its focus on the objects of Anderson’s satiric rage, the surface texture of *O Dreamland* does not resemble Jennings’s films, but its structure has affinities with *Listen to Britain* (1942). Both films dispense with spoken narration; both deploy music and effects for their immediate impact on carefully selected and ordered images and thereafter for their combined cumulative bearing on viewers’ feelings. To say this is almost to paraphrase Anderson’s comments on Jennings’s film, except of course that Anderson reverses the other man’s wonderful evocation of warmth between people at a time of crisis. In its place he creates a deliberate chill that shrouds these sad beneficiaries of a hard-won peace in apathy’s suffocating pallor.

The sensitive observation of deaf youngsters in *Thursday’s Children* meaningfully echoes Anderson’s observation concerning Jennings’s *Spring Offensive* (1940) and *The Heart of Britain* (1941).

A style... is being hammered out in these films; a style based on a peculiar intimacy of observation, a fascination with the commonplace thing
or person that is significant precisely because it is commonplace, and
with the whole pattern that can emerge when such commonplace, signif-
icient things and people are fitted together in the right order.\
Although he deployed music to shape meanings the audience might
take, Anderson’s two films lack what he refers to as the ‘contrasting,
conjunctive images’ of Jennings’s films witnessed when he and his editor
Stewart McAllister cut between choral singers in concert and factory
workers making bombers, or cross-faded from war artists’ paintings
and Mozart to the din of another huge workshop where tank tracks are
made and fitted. Jennings opts for the grandeur of Mozart, Beethoven
and Handel, but purposefully contrasts the classics with (to take the
case of Listen to Britain) the immensely popular Flanagan and Allen
performing in a works café where all the folk at their lunch break join
in the chorus. They sing ‘Underneath the Arches’, the chthonic song
that every adult Briton of the war years knew, blending it, one suspects,
into a silent prayer for safety from aerial bombardment. For Jennings
and his audiences through the decades, both kinds of music represent
the unity in confident spirit of Britain’s diverse people. Anderson could
not imitate this in O Dreamland where he meant satirically to emphasise
human ugliness rather than commonality. So he reversed his mentor’s
practice and dubbed in a recording of Frankie Lane’s ‘I Believe’. His
saccharine crooning rubs horribly against the images of gawping people
and flags up the nation’s spiritual emptiness.
In one further respect O Dreamland can be read as Anderson’s
homage to his predecessor. It resembles a nightmarish realisation of the
fears Jennings expressed in A Diary for Timothy (1945). Its commentary
anticipated that the moral dangers facing the British at the war’s end
might include a growth of apathy in the rebound into freedom from the
long years of resolute purpose essential to a people fighting for survival.

Every Day Except Christmas (1957)

This is the last of Anderson’s early films. Indulging in a moment of
unguarded self-aggrandisement late in life, Anderson reflected, ‘Every
Day was very much a portrait of people who, until then, had not appeared
in British films except as comic relief’. Harry Watt used these very
words more accurately fifteen years earlier to claim the credit for the
British Documentary Movement of which he had been a member in
the 1930s. Nevertheless, Every Day is a fine film, made special by its
portraits of and tribute to working men and women. ‘We all depend’,
Alun Owen’s commentary concludes, ‘on each other’s work, as well as
our own – on Alice and George and Bill and Alan and Sid, and all the others who keep us going’.

Sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, and forming part of the Free Cinema programme, the film’s heritage actually does look back prior to Jennings to documentaries of Watt’s generation such as *Drifters* and *Night Mail* (1936). They had featured working lives and fascinated audiences by revealing the intricate industrial processes which, hidden from most people’s eyes, underpin social cohesion. As such, *Every Day*, despite being made to a different format, also preceded televised reality programmes such as the BBC’s *Airport* (1996–2005).

Anderson’s film features the work of people who made a living buying and selling vegetables, fruit and flowers in the old Covent Garden market. Walter Lassally (once again Anderson’s cameraman after shooting *Three Installations*, *Wakefield Express* and *Thursday’s Children*) recalled endlessly following workers around the market trying to anticipate their movements, adding that he spent much time shooting down from the topmost shelves where they stacked the produce. The distinctive, intimate angles that resulted combine in the high-contrast night scenes with pools of light glowing against the surrounding dark and give the first half of the film its sumptuous look. A characteristic of the coverage is the time devoted to people going about their work, some on screen long enough for recognisable personality traits to emerge. No one is satirised. Rather, from the opening shots where market gardeners prepare their produce for the city, Anderson approaches his subjects affectionately. Interviewed twenty years later, he insisted that the film was very subjective, that its poetry arose from the way he, Lassally and John Fletcher had seen the market and its workers.

Anderson’s admiration for Jennings shows nowhere more than in the sound recording and editing. He paid tribute to Fletcher, believing that ‘the rhythm and the sound of the film are remarkable’. Fletcher for his part appears to have looked closely at the work of Stewart McAllister (who cut Jennings’s major films). Kenneth J. Robson has observed that by the early 1940s Jennings knew ‘a great deal about the potential impact of carefully selected juxtapositions, whose power derived from the nearly instantaneous grasp of the emotional and intellectual content of the image’. *Every Day Except Christmas* owes a more sophisticated debt than *O Dreamland* to the Jennings/McAllister documentaries. It is apparent in the structure at large and particularly in the mix of music, sound effects and voices (the latter mostly played asynchronously against picture). Like Jennings in *Listen to Britain*, Anderson and Fletcher developed for their film ‘a highly complex pattern of editing which brought the full resources of the soundtrack to bear upon [the] visual image’.
As in Jennings’s work, the soundtrack of Every Day takes the audience directly into the night’s events. It begins on a Sussex farm where market gardeners load their lorry with lettuces and mushrooms. When at midnight they start the drive to London, the BBC Light Programme goes off the air. The announcer, wishing listeners a tranquil sleep, prepares the quiet arenas of night for vital but unsung labour. The device mimics Jennings’s use of BBC radio (in, for example, Listen to Britain) as a unifying force in the war years. Anderson and Fletcher, however, were working in circumstances very different from the wartime milieu that Jennings and McAllister had interpreted in their moving celebrations of the British at bay. The surrealism of a city turned upside down by bombs had caught the eye of those who saw Listen to Britain. It was almost impossible for Anderson’s team to touch on the surreal in a peacetime documentary. Nor in 1957 could they plausibly create the image of a unified society. Instead they celebrated the harmony and unity of purpose of the micro-society that worked the market.

Notwithstanding the inevitable differences from Listen to Britain, Fletcher introduces music that, as the night hours pass, shifts unpredictably but sweetly after the manner of Jennings and McAllister. It begins with workers whistling and singing popular ditties as they unload the trucks. Then (after a third of the film has elapsed), Daniele Paris’s pastiches of various musical forms are introduced. Mixed with noise of work and voices of the workers, the result owes much to the earlier film. The musical texture is wonderful – one melody commences as a Mozartian trio and segues into a lively evocation of a Continental café dance. Then at 4.30 a.m. porters and stall owners take a break in Albert’s café where the radio provides Anglicised Latin dance music. Men and women relax over their tea before buyers arrive with the dawn and a solitary cat stands guard over the complete displays of flowers and fruits. Now a gentle melody on muted trumpet, guitar and squeezebox fills the soundtrack: it could have graced a reflective moment in a John Ford Western.

Soon we crash into the busy noise and bright light of day as selling begins. One late treat: by mid-morning the market is winding down when, à propos nothing in the narrative, a truly surreal sequence occurs as, through the relics of produce and rubbish, a jazz band picks its way while porters toss boxes containing the final sales past the musicians’ heads. In the strangeness, wit and intimacy of these juxtapositions, this ending sets the seal on Every Day’s celebration of the Covent Garden market and all the men and women ‘who keep us going’. Let John Berger have the last word: ‘Anderson demonstrates his commitment, not to a preconceived generalisation, but to the complicated reality of
his subject matter. He produces images that are so vibrant that they persuade us to remember and create explanations for ourselves...\(^{52}\)

**First signs of authorship – the director at work**

After a decade of filmmaking, Anderson had evolved into a consummate craftsman able to fulfil a brief for a commercial client and establish a style to suit the material. But to what extent had indications emerged of authorial investment in the medium – markers that the spectator might identify as his? The signs are mixed. There was a quite close resemblance between his work and the Documentary Movement’s 1930s output. To recapitulate: the films Grierson produced provided Anderson with a model of short films made to fit a sponsor’s requirements. Commissioned out of the blue by the Sutcliffes, he urgently needed that reference point. Furthermore, tight budgets (until Ford sponsored *Every Day Except Christmas*) placed limits on the equipment available to him not dissimilar to those of the British documentarists twenty years earlier. These in turn restricted the stylistic range of possibilities open to him, in particular making synch sound recording impossible.

Whenever the terms of a project allowed, Anderson attempted to develop a sense of investment in his human subjects, learning during the decade how to intensify his films’ effect by arousing emotion. Although he sometimes puffed this as his own innovation, he actually knew of his predecessors’ achievements in bringing a similar humanity to their subjects, particularly their experimental films.\(^{53}\) He thought, however, that films produced by the Documentary Movement had become dull after the war ended and strove to restore that lost human quality.\(^{54}\)

In ideological terms too, he was to some degree repeating the early history of the Documentary Movement: yet another upper-middle-class Oxbridge graduate was discovering the working class and creating a somewhat romantic picture of them. Where Anderson differed radically was in his appetite for expressing also the converse to romanticism – a distaste that he appears at the time to have felt equally deeply. Although not yet working with Brechtian principles, the satirist cannot be missed in *O Dreamland*. This potent little film echoes a sense of class alienation he first wrote about in the war years. In preparation for conscription he had attended an army medical and recorded how inferior he felt, a drone compared with many of the working boys around him who already had a useful trade.

And yet I am – this is not conceit – many times the intellectual superior of any of them. Why then the feeling of inferiority? Instinct perhaps,
and then I suppose the intellectual must always feel at a tremendous
disadvantage amongst the purely physical.  

The people of Rotherham (where he was billeted for a time during the
war) also evoked feelings that revealed his sense of alienation.

that people can live in such squalor and yet be (apparently) happy is an
encouraging witness to the strength of men’s minds and souls, but a
brake on social progress. If only they themselves could realise the unnec-
essary, almost blasphemous ugliness of their lives and surroundings.

This was not a young man’s fleeting discomfort, to be denied in later
years. Although it still represented only one facet of his complex perspec-
tive on British society, Anderson again recorded his distaste for the
people, culture and homes of working people – this time in the Leeds,
which he visited, invited by Willis Hall and Albert Finney, in 1960.

As it quickly turned out, we weren’t three, but two-and-one. Two North-
erners, no-nonsense and colloquially rough spoken; and one upper-class
Southerner, intellectual type.

They went to Willis’s father’s home, off the Dewsbury Road.

A typical, dreary, grimy, advertisement-hordinged West Riding main
road. And off it these mean streets, little red-bricked, back-to-back
houses, small and grimy. The front door opened straight into the living
room – tiny enough – with just room for a settee, a table by the window,
and a pram – and a TV set. Off, to the right, a scullery...

After a visit to ‘a small, ugly’ pub followed by fish and chips, his compan-
ions settle down to a game of cards leaving Anderson to the erudite book
he had brought with him and bitter (perhaps envious) reflection.

Of course fate would plan exactly the kind of situation for me that I am
least able to cope with. A situation of exclusion. Stranded in a world I
had no relationship with: rather aggressively male – rather consciously
‘Northern’, which means with no time to spare for the sentimentalisms
of relationships, for the arts of speculation or conversation, or for polite-
ness, hospitality or charm. A world of utter boredom into the bargain.

And yet, in a typical volte face, Anderson also had high regard for the
resilience he observed in the North of England, noting it while making
The White Bus. The same inescapable contrast between romantic tender-
ness and disdain also marks the early films taken as a body of work and
give indications of a repeating pattern, the first signs of a perceptible
authorial persona.
Breaking into the industry

Three of these films formed part of the Free Cinema programme, but only *Every Day Except Christmas* was produced for it. *O Dreamland* and *Wakefield Express* were included three and four years after completion to complement the filmmakers’ claim to be establishing a movement. The organisers were led by Anderson and included Lorenza Mazzetti (whose film *Together* (1961) Anderson had edited), Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson. They published a manifesto – a call to their generation.

> No film can be too personal.  
> The image speaks. Sound amplifies and comments.  
> Size is irrelevant. Perfection is not an aim.  
> An attitude means a style. A style means an attitude.  

Plainly the ideas behind Free Cinema – the manifesto resounds to the ring of Anderson’s voice – married with his own about the best way forward for British cinema. As we have seen, he had been working these out in print and film for a decade. Now he had found his opportunity to promote them and the work of other young, like-minded filmmakers in a series of screenings which, in retrospect, have come to be seen as having a degree of influence in changing British film culture – not that Anderson was altogether sanguine about that. Interviewed by an Italian journalist during a 1982 retrospective season, he put a rather different cast on the movement.

> As for Free Cinema, I think of it as an experience rather than an aesthetic movement, because right from the start it was an empirical rather than a theoretical thing [...] The first thing to understand is that Free Cinema existed out of the desire to do something; we wished to have our films shown to the public, films that we had already made, but which were not in circulation; and it was with that motive, principally, that we had to institute ourselves as a movement in order to give it a name and a programme. The critics would otherwise not have bothered with us: the critics did not like to write about 16mm film. So we gathered together our works: myself, Richardson, Reisz, Mazzetti, a director with whom I have worked. And we presented them at the National Film Theatre. Certainly, all the films had a spirit in common: they were not intended to be propaganda, popularising ideas, but rather to produce some kind of poetry. The spirit of the films was humanist [...]  

In notes accompanying the sixth and last Free Cinema screening, the group claimed some success. They had attracted widespread attention and believed they had marked out a possible future for the British screen. They singled out as exemplar the Granada TV Unit Five Seven with its young technicians eager for change. The group also welcomed the advent of what they hoped would be a new wave of ‘working-class
realism’ in British features films commencing with *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger.* Nevertheless, a quarter of a century later, Anderson reversed tack and described the movement as having failed. The cycle of films to which Free Cinema indirectly led neither won acceptance nor endured; and British filmmakers moved on to make swinging comedies and service Hollywood. We shall say more about what happened in the context of *This Sporting Life.*

**First signs of authorship – a critical perspective**

As we argued earlier, insofar as the films Anderson made for Richard Sutcliffe Ltd. reveal authorial traces, they are dominated by purposes and stylistic elements deriving from the British Documentary Movement under Grierson. In the post-Sutcliffe films we find first signs of a new authorial persona emerging. Jennings's work has exerted deep influence in its modelling, yet these four films taken together reveal that Anderson's cinematic persona differs from that of his mentor.

It might be thought that weighing the twelve-minute film *O Dreamland* for its satire against the three others skews the balance of evidence unreasonably. But when we look ahead to the thirty-five remaining years of Anderson's filmmaking career, the significance is apparent. The satire in *O Dreamland* and its early attempt at poetic realism (the composition of images and plotlines that invite reading as metaphors) will dominate four of his feature films. Here, then, we find one side of a dialectic. The other will evolve from what in *Every Day Except Christmas* and some of its predecessors features as a romanticised portrayal of working lives. No romantic portrayal is found thereafter, let alone in his first feature *This Sporting Life*, but associations linger with the sweet humour that audiences experience in *Thursday's Children* and later films including *The Whales of August*.

Although not yet firmly defined, we shall discover that tensions inscribed in the later films’ representations characterise the authorial persona which they make available for audiences to read – the implied director ‘Lindsay Anderson’. We shall also find that those tensions exhibit a dynamic which maps onto his personal disposition as rendered by the director’s own accounts of himself.

In 1957 the major themes of Anderson's later films had yet to emerge. They would require not only the greater freedom for the imagination that could be found in fiction, but also the organisation and deepening of control that came with scripting. Hence the importance of his working relationships with scriptwriters for the rest of his filmmaking career.

4 Anderson shooting *O Dreamland* in Margate in 1953. The film went on to form part of the first Free Cinema programme at the National Film Theatre in 1956.
Notes

1 Diary, 30 May 1942 (LA 6/1/1/79).
2 Diary, 13 October 1942 (LA 6/1/1/105–6), 18 October 1942 (LA 6/1/1/106), 22 November 1942 (LA 6/1/1/107).
3 Diary, 24 August 1942 (LA 6/1/1/98).
4 Diary, 29 September 1942 (LA 6/1/1/104).
5 Ibid.
6 Diary, 28 March 1944 (LA 6/1/4/23).
7 Diary, LA 6/1/4/78 (Enclosures).
8 Diary, 27 February 1946 (LA 6/1/9/13).
9 Diary, 10 March 1946 (LA 6/1/9/23).
10 Diary, 20 March 1947 (LA 6/1/9/76).
11 Meet the Pioneers (1948), on This Sporting Life, DVD supplement disc (The Criterion Collection, Region 1, 2007).
12 Diary, 21 May 1948 (LA 6/1/10/37).
13 Gavin Lambert corresponded with Anderson about the opportunity, 27 January 1948 (LA 4/1/1).
15 Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’; Anderson, Never Apologise, 50–2.
16 Sutcliffe Smith, Lindsay Anderson – A Celebration.
17 Diary, 21 May 1948 (LA 6/1/10/37–8).
18 Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’, 5.
19 Diary, 21 May 1948 (LA 6/1/10/18).
21 Lois Sutcliffe Smith, Interview, This Sporting Life, DVD supplement disc (The Criterion Collection, Region 1, 2007) 6.15 to 6.55.
22 Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’, 7.
24 Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’, 10–12.
26 The four films were Meet the Pioneers (1948), Idlers that Work (1949), Three Installations (1952) and Trunk Conveyor (1954).
27 Diary, 21 May 1948 (LA 6/1/10/37).
28 Diary, 19 December 1948 (LA 6/1/10/48).
29 Diary, 2 January 1949 (LA 6/1/10/49). Evidently The Assembly and Disassembly of the Goliath Gearhead was Anderson’s working title for Idlers that Work.
30 This had been erected for editing Meet the Pioneers. It was built at a distance from the works to protect them from conflagration of the nitrate stock (Sutcliffe Smith, ‘Discovering Lindsay’, 9).
31 Diary, 20 October 1951 (LA 6/1/11/12). Anderson learned this neologism ‘filmwrighting’ from Thorold Dickinson whose working practices he observed while the latter was directing Secret People and who had written an article ‘The Filmwright and the Audience’ which Anderson had read (see Lindsay Anderson, ‘The Director’s Cinema?’ Sequence 12 (Autumn 1950) in Never Apologise, 204.
32 Diary, 26 November 1951 (LA 6/1/11/23).
33 Neither Desmond Sutcliffe, who died in March 1950 aged thirty-five, nor Lois, who then left Wakefield, had input into the last two films.
34 Anderson, Never Apologise, 52.
36 Trunk Conveyor (1954) (Anderson Collection, director’s personal VHS copy). Not otherwise available.
37 Diary, 25 December 1954 (LA 6/1/18/5).
38 Ibid.
40 Diary, 6 June 1954 (LA 6/1/16/1).
44 Anderson, Making a Film, 61–4.
48 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Sciuscia’, Sequence 4 (Summer 1948) in Never Apologise, 548.
49 Wakefield Express (1952) on This Sporting Life, DVD supplement disc (The Criterion Collection, Region 1, 2007).
51 Anderson, Never Apologise, 53.
52 Thursday’s Children (1953) (written and directed with Guy Brenton) on If... (The Criterion Collection 391, Regions 1 and 2, 2007); O Dreamland (1953) on Free Cinema, DVD Disc 1 (BFI BFIVD717, Region 2, 2006).
54 Diary, 22 July 1954 (LA 6/1/16/4).
56 Diary, 4 November 1953 (LA 6/1/14/15–16).
57 Diary, 22 July 1954 (LA 6/1/16/4).
59 Correspondence, Guy Brenton to Anderson, 19 February 1958 (LA 1/2/3/10/1).
60 Anderson, Never Apologise, 56.
61 Anderson, Never Apologise, 55.
64 O Dreamland (1953) on Free Cinema, DVD Disc 1 (BFI BFIVD717, Region 2, 2006).
65 Lindsay Anderson, Never Apologise, 60.
66 In 1993 Grove/Atlantic wrote to say it was disbanding its film division, and offered to return remaining prints if the director would meet the shipping cost of $10 (correspondence, 7 September 1993 (LA 1/2/3/2/59)).
67 Correspondence and accounts relating to screening of O Dreamland, 20 September 1956 to 7 September 1959 (LA 1/2/3/2/1 to LA 1/2/3/2/59).
68 Correspondence between Lindsay Anderson and the British Film Institute, 2 March 1979 to 30 June 1993 (LA 1/2/3/6/12 to LA 1/2/3/6/37).
71 Ibid.
72 Every Day Except Christmas (1957) on Free Cinema, DVD Disc 1 (BFI BFIVD717, Region 2, 2006), 39 minutes.
73 Anderson, Never Apologise, 72.
74 In George Stoney (director), How the Myth Was Made: A Study of Robert Flaherty’s Man of Aran (1978); see also Erik Barnouw, Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) 90.
76 Lindsay Anderson interviewed in Eva Orbanz, Journey to a Legend and Back: The British Realistic Film (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1977) 42–5.
77 Anderson, Never Apologise, 72.
79 Ibid.
80 We owe this observation to Hoggart, ‘Free Cinema’.
83 Anderson, ‘A Possible Solution’, 337.
84 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Free Cinema’, Universities Left Review (Summer 1957) in Never Apologise, 73.
85 Diary, 7 January 1942 (LA 6/1/1/9).
86 Diary, 2 November 1944 (LA 6/1/5/6).
87 Diary, 24 July 1960 (LA 6/1/25/1).
88 Diary, 24 July 1960 (LA 6/1/25/2).
89 Diary, 24 July 1960 (LA 6/1/25/4).
90 Free Cinema 1, Programme, February 1956 (LA 1/2/5/4).
91 Claver Salizzato, ‘Tanto libero che non si sa cosa sia’, Rinascita (20 January 1982) n.p. (LA 1/2/6/4), our translation. See also Lindsay Anderson interviewed in Orbanz, Journey to a Legend and Back, 47.
Some people sky-rocket to fame and accomplishment, but I know I am not one of these. I am not the sort of person to achieve celebrity much before forty [...]  

**Introduction**

Roberto Gerhard’s spare, atonal score runs behind the angular title cards and chills the atmosphere from the outset. Mixed with distant sounds of a crowd cheering, the almost metallic sounds ready the audience to expect a narrative that will not encourage them to settle comfortably within the familiar conventions of mainstream narrative cinema.

The action opens with a savage attack on the rugby field that injures the central figure, Frank Machin (Richard Harris). Flashbacks draw us into the shards of his life which we watch as he frustrates his ambitions no sooner than they are within reach and becomes maniacally self-destructive. The vicious foul on the pitch is the culmination of a trajectory on which this deluded hero had launched himself months earlier.

Throughout the film, razor-edged imagery printed on unforgiving high-contrast stock complements the harshness of dealings between the characters – whether physical or mental. Right from the start, tightly framed, low-angle shots emphasise Frank’s looming physicality. Early flashbacks intercut several scenes from the past with others in the present as he undergoes emergency dental treatment sedated by gas. The apparently random intercutting reflects not only Frank’s present concussion but the confusion in his desires. Some sequences take us back to his life in the digs where he rents a room from widowed Margaret Hammond (Rachel Roberts) whom he tries to persuade to become his lover. Other scenes revisit his attempts to escape from the coalminer’s drudgery by persuading the owner of his local rugby league club to sign him as a professional player.
Gifted with a powerful body but neither imagination nor a good brain, Frank is by nature a battler. He has no idea how to handle situations either on or off the playing field that cannot be dealt with by physical strength, threats or foul play. These qualities repel some older members of the club’s board, in particular Joe Slomer (Arthur Lowe); but they attract the dominant and ruthless chairman Gerald Weaver (Alan Badel) who signs him for a fee far greater than any of his teammates. Once contracted to the club, Frank boasts of his new status and, spending his money on a large car and new clothes, attempts to elbow his way into his landlady’s affections. Although he handles the car well enough when sober, the money does not give him social skills to match. He acts boorishly even by the players’ rough and ready standards and arouses the distrust of some. Among the wealthy, where his venality overcomes his unease over their hypocritical mores, he throws his weight around like a buffoon – or the big ape that Mrs Hammond calls him. He allows himself half-heartedly to be seduced by Mrs Weaver (Vanda Godsell); but she is not a woman to be content with anything less than full commitment, especially when her rival is the poor widow. When her well-informed husband turns on Frank with calculating derision the latter realises he is no longer his own man and the bosses own him.

The gathering force of Frank’s destructive propensities is all too evident in the brute behaviour that alienates Mrs Hammond. The two of them are, as Allison Graham observes, the most ill-matched pair. Mrs Hammond is repressed, miserable and consumed with guilt over her unhappy marriage to her late husband and his premature death (which, in despair, he appears to have brought upon himself). Frank, by way of contrast, shifts about restlessly, unable to remain still for more than a moment lest the void suck him in. Matching the ultimate failure of either individual to illuminate the other, most of the scenes between them are set at night or in her cramped, dark house and shot in appropriately low-key, high contrast imagery. As Robert Vas says of Frank, ‘His real purpose is a frantic search for his own identity’. The visible gloom leaves us pessimistic that he can find it.

Frank’s vigour and his new money do engage Margaret’s attention despite her attempts to rebuff him. It shows in her hint of jealousy towards the elderly Johnson (William Hartnell). She fears that this man, who has never done as day’s work but pretends to scout for the club, may leech on Frank’s money and sexual charisma. For her part, Margaret horrifies Frank when, grieving over her late husband, she says that Eric used to worry, ‘Why was I ever made alive?’ And she feels deeply that she failed to make him feel he belonged. Although she adds that Frank...
in his brash cockiness is nothing like Eric, she does register Frank’s aghast face – for these are his fears too – and softens towards him. Nevertheless Frank’s ceaseless attempts to force her into discussing her feelings, his insistence that she fill the void in his soul, smothers any sparks of emotion.

Although Anderson was too canny an editor to dub Gerhard’s music over this scene, he used it later when Frank takes Margaret and her two children for a day in the country. The music’s edgy metallic atonalism draws out the feeling that both adults lack a secure sense of belonging. It undermines the tranquillity of the wild games that Frank plays with the children. That fragile peacefulness signifies because children (the only company in which he feels truly at ease) let him live out the big kid in himself.

One morning, while Margaret’s children are home on their school holidays, Frank imposes himself on her. His untutored hunger for sex is made irresistible by his need for her to lend him a sense of belonging. It blinds him from seeing that a subtler and slower approach might ease her fears and win her round. Thus even after she has reluctantly shared his bed, he cannot forbear trying to impose his will on her and gain her total submission. But she cannot let her feelings go and have them cut off again as they had been by Eric.

Eventually, although they establish a physical relationship, rage destroys the tenuous connections between them. The uneasy calm breaks when they attend the wedding of one of Frank’s teammates. As the guests follow the bride and groom out of the church, Margaret moves away from the crowd, out of the sunlight, ashamed of being a kept woman, of feeling dirty. From this moment, their bitter rows become savagely ferocious. In the house, their furious voices pour out through the thin walls and into the narrow street. To his stifling attempts to buy her love with expensive gifts she now must add the oppression of sanctimonious neighbours calling her a slut and mocking his pretensions. She wants him out.

Frank (the ‘great ape on a football field’ she has called him) does not understand what she wants from him, but he is deeply hurt: ‘She makes me feel clumsy, awkward and big and stupid. She makes me feel like I crush everything’ The pathos lies in his recognition that he will not be a football player forever and for him she – and nobody else – is the one thing that makes him feel wanted. But he only knows how to deal with opposition through anger. When his despairing attempts to reverse her decision fail, Frank insults her memories of Eric and then trashes the family photographs. Margaret tears up the press cuttings celebrating Frank’s career on the field.
Frank’s life loses its meaning. He finds a bed in a rooming house for dropouts, drunks and petty thieves – the very dump where Johnson used to sleep. Outside the local kids alleviate boredom by damaging his car. Rugby has now turned into a tormenting slog, like trench-warfare in which, like the other men, Frank battles to lift himself out of the mud and gain a few feet of meaningless territory. Even now things can and do get worse. He returns to the house to learn that Margaret, sick and exhausted, has succumbed to a brain haemorrhage. At her hospital bedside Frank whispers again and again that she is going to be all right and that she can’t leave him. When she dies, he ignores the children (a bereaved infant himself) and returns to Margaret’s house to face her absence in total abjection. A coda shows him once more back on the field, listless, battered, devoid of talent, instinct and passion for the game and for life.

Independent filmmaking

Anderson wrote the introspective lines cited as this chapter’s epigraph fifteen years before he made his first feature film. It was not an exact forecast: by the time he reached forty he had to his credit extensive critical writing, eight short films and several televised episodes of The Adventures of Robin Hood (1955–56). He had also developed a substantial career in theatre, directing no fewer than ten plays at the Royal Court between 1957 and 1961. That sequence began when, out of the blue, Tony Richardson (his Free Cinema co-worker who was also one of the Royal Court’s management committee) sent him The Waiting of Lester Abbs by Kathleen Sully, a writer whom Anderson admired. Anderson directed it in June 1957 without sets or costumes as a Sunday night production. It went sufficiently well that he was invited to direct Willis Hall’s The Long and the Short and the Tall (1959). This, also a success, gave him credibility and he was installed as an assistant to the Royal Court’s artistic directors.4

Nevertheless, over five years elapsed after Every Day Except Christmas before the release of Anderson’s next film in February 1963, two months before his fortieth birthday. It was not simply commitment to the theatre which caused the long interval before his first feature film. Systemic barriers stood in the way of ambitious young British filmmakers. Interviewed years later, Anderson recalled how the established industry had excluded young directors from feature film work in the 1950s. The Free Cinema filmmakers had always been more interested in fiction and drama than documentary; but they were not able to make feature-
length films because the British industry at the time was profoundly conservative. Martin Broz, reviewing *This Sporting Life* in a Polish film magazine, had been specific.

Young people find it hard to break into the British film industry. Their main obstacles are the trade unions and financial, distributors’ and producers’ circles with their hard-and-fast regulations, and their constant suspicion of a lack of talent, a lack of experience.

As opposed to the French industry, which encouraged young filmmakers in this period, the British excluded them through a toxic combination of the attitudes Broz identified and the kind of complacency that Anderson had been attacking for some fifteen years by the time he directed *This Sporting Life*. In his judgement, an industry engulfed in middle-aged torpor had been making features to appeal for the most part to middle-brow audiences and critics. We saw in Chapter 3 how he returned during a 1982 retrospective of the Free Cinema programmes to his condemnation of British critics for having failed to complete the feedback loop and create a cinema united in a perfect circle of production and evaluation. To his mind, critics had been no less culpable of the stagnation that stultified British filmmaking in the 1950s and 60s than producers, financiers and distributors.

From Anderson’s perspective, the cinematic establishment excluded newcomers through more than just the suspicion that the arrivistes might lack talent and craft, whatever industry spokespeople might allege. It also appeared to fear that young filmmakers might innovate by addressing fresh subjects, disturbing tried and tested aesthetic formulae and production routines, or generally shaking things up – which, of course, is what the Free Cinema group had intended. Nor was he the only young filmmaker to think this. In 1959 Richardson (then directing the film version of *Look Back in Anger*) wrote an article for *Sight & Sound* in similar vein. The old ‘Father knows best’ syndrome that governed so many aspects of culture and society in post-war Britain was still dominant in the cinema industry.

The historical context makes it poignant that *This Sporting Life* came to Anderson via Richardson himself and Karel Reisz. Both were veterans of Free Cinema and leading members of the artistic coterie at the Royal Court. In Anderson’s eyes, both later betrayed the ideals on which Free Cinema was founded by devoting themselves to commercially attractive productions. However, when it came, albeit by a devious route, the offer of *This Sporting Life* as his first feature film was of life-changing import to Anderson, giving him the chance to put into practice ideas that he had long espoused passionately. During pre-production he wrote
to Penelope Houston declining her invitation to contribute to Sight & Sound’s annual round up of film critics’ ten best films. He said he no longer wished to be thought of as a film critic, having ceased to be capable of critical detachment.9

Discourse about the condition of Britain had become pervasive in the arts by the late 1950s. In drama it was associated with the ‘kitchen sink’ movement of playwrights such as John Osborne and Arnold Wesker, many of the plays in the cycle being staged at the Royal Court (with Wesker, for one, being a member of Anderson’s circle). These so-called Angry Young Men sought to jolt British theatre out of its cozy middle-class mediocrity by introducing raw social realism. They achieved more, as Erik Hedling notes, in that the Royal Court became an important source of inspiration for the new wave in British film.10 Meanwhile, when David Storey’s novel This Sporting Life was published in 1960 it contributed to the airing in literature of similar issues relating both to social class and tension between the metropolitan centre and the provincial periphery.11

One of the production companies bidding for the novel’s screen rights was Woodfall Films. Osborne and Richardson had with Harry Saltzman’s backing set up a small independent production company to enable some of the new generation associated with the Free Cinema and the Angry Young Men to make the feature films that interested them.12 By 1960 Richardson had already become the company’s stock director, having directed Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer; and Reisz had made Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. Reisz remembered that Anderson had been impressed by Storey’s novel and brought the book to Richardson, wanting to direct This Sporting Life himself; but Richardson turned Anderson down and decided that he, Richardson, would make it. On that basis, Woodfall tried to buy the rights but was outbid by Independent Artists. Independent asked Reisz to direct, but he thought of it as Anderson’s project and anyway wanted to learn to produce. When that was agreed, he invited Anderson to direct.13

This Sporting Life turned out to be the last in the kitchen sink or social realist cycle of ten films released over five years. It is not necessary to account for the end of the cycle by subscribing to the opinion of Movie’s editors that the films lacked ‘style, imagination, personality and ... meaning’.14 The ideas mooted in a small-circulation film journal would not have come to the attention of many in the cinema-going audience; and in general Anderson’s film received good reviews. More relevantly, Jeffrey Hill believes that the pessimistic outlook of This Sporting Life (both as novel and film) offered nothing to admire in working-class macho culture and therefore failed to attract the public.15 Adrian Turner
noted that despite admiring reviews, the film was a commercial flop – and that is the key point.\textsuperscript{16} Turner and Alexander Walker agree that in 1963 the British cinema was already deep into escapism with the James Bond films and Swinging London about to wash away the last vestiges of working-class realism and the sort of sexual repression that Anderson was dealing with.\textsuperscript{17} Walker identified the key role of the film’s distributor, Rank (one of the two companies that then dominated the release of British films in their home market), in bringing the cycle to a close.

The Rank Organisation’s late and unlucky investment in the New Wave and this £220,000 film may explain why chairman John Davis publicly washed his hands of the kitchen sink a few weeks ago.\textsuperscript{18}

In fact the film’s final cost, certified in October 1963, was £237,322 and its executive producer Julian Wintle did not expect it to get into profit.\textsuperscript{19} As late as September 1978 Rank Film Distributors’ statements indicated that the film was in deficit. At that date, 15 years after its release, net film hire (including rentals to BBC TV and the Irish channel RTE) totalled £189,964.\textsuperscript{20} Anderson, nevertheless, remained hopeful and, writing to Reisz in 1979, inquired what the film had returned to date, adding that it should now be earning from the home video market and therefore go into profit in due time.\textsuperscript{21}

Authorship and production

When considering claims to authorship of \textit{This Sporting Life} in terms of engagement in its making, it looks at first sight as though Anderson and Storey might have contested the credit. Storey adapted his own deeply personal novel (its direct autobiographical element being his professional experience of rugby league), and the resultant film script was the first fruit of collaboration between the two men who thereafter worked together on many plays. Although over the years tensions surfaced between them (and Anderson sometimes confided to his journal that he thought Storey lacked a sense of dramatic character and dynamic structure suited to the stage), these differences, though sometimes painful, proved manageable.\textsuperscript{22} Their letters provide an insight into the relationship – primarily a working partnership (with the occasional invitation to dinner).\textsuperscript{23} Anderson’s journals, despite occasional passages of irritation, for the most part, like his public tributes, reveal his respect for this passionate writer with his ‘ambition of concept that carries him beyond neatness, completeness, civilised equilibrium’.\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps it helped that Storey, though usually affable, kept what Anderson saw as a certain
distance. On one rare occasion when Anderson called on the writer at his house, he noted the pleasure with which Storey showed him round his family’s new home. They then spent hours talking together, but Anderson remained conscious that Storey kept himself withdrawn from intimate relationship, friendly though his welcome was.²⁵

The contrast is marked between this and the recurrent anguish of Anderson’s professional and personal relationship with his other long-term collaborator, David Sherwin, the writer of *If.....* Whereas Storey and Anderson, over and beyond their collaborative efforts, always had projects that they worked on independently, Sherwin was in many ways dependent on Anderson. He found it difficult to write alone without Anderson’s direction and also relied on the director when the latter took on the role of unpaid agent (a function that would never have arisen with Storey) to promote Sherwin’s books and scripts to publishers.²⁶ Although they were good friends, Anderson was (too frequently for his own comfort) intimately involved with desperate tangles in Sherwin’s personal life, often being dragged in to help with the latest crisis – more of this in later chapters.

Working on the screenplay for *This Sporting Life*, Storey at first experienced the doubts of a novelist seeking for the first time to prove himself in an unfamiliar medium. For a while he appears to have found it almost impossible to progress the adaptation beyond its first draft. Eventually he sent an undated ‘little note of exuberance’ to Anderson tagged with a drawing of a chameleon and the words ‘An Enigma’. It marks a turning point probably reached after he digested comments prepared by Anderson and Richard Harris (who had agreed to play the male lead). They advocated ways of rewriting the first draft script of May 1961 by returning to the novel. Storey writes frankly that at last he has found it possible to throw off his former self-denial. Having previously been unable to recognise the quality of what he had achieved, he can now accept that the novel and the film script are his. More, he finds that the script is poetic.²⁷ The sense of liberation is infectious.

After this turning point Storey developed confident intuitions about what was essential to the film. Another undated note reveals his firm grasp of what he had come to regard as essential to depicting Frank Machin, the character around whom the entire plot circulates. The vigour of the writer’s perception makes it worth quoting in full.

Obviously the script has to be very subjective. Expressionist, for a word. All the ‘objective’ parts which had crept in at every level have been removed i.e. a. Dialogue about FRANK when he is not there.

b. Other characters operating independently of F[RANK] in scene of intensity. i.e. views of MRS. H[AMMOND] in ABBEY which F[RANK]
could not see (i.e. feel).

[views of] WEAVERS in RESTAURANT.

Poetically the subject ‘is’ FRANK and his obsessive, highly personal view of life and people. How, in fact, he creates life by his peculiar and violent energy. Anything other than the CAMERA operating as his companion in this I find impossible to do. i.e. 3 previous scripts. The subject is not one for lyrical detachment. For all the qualities of determinism in this subject (i.e. social issues, physical action) are driven solely by FRANK’s huge energy & not by external forces. This is F’s hugeness & his personality. Any other view of his character (i.e. moments of detachment or awareness) only drain this power, and their attempt to accommodate it within a detached viewpoint end up by sentimentalising. No romance, no sentiment. No vista of the character. This is a huge man seen from inside visually. The CAMERA is essentially within this externalising mechanism.

It would not be surprising if a novelist adapting his own work with such a powerful understanding of its dynamic core were to claim authorship. Far from doing that, however, in another note evidently written in 1962 when production was well advanced, Storey saluted Anderson, his actors and crew, congratulating the director on progress. He refers to the agony of making the film, but affirms that it is turning out to be the project they had been talking about. ‘The bits that don’t work are completely overwhelmed and annihilated by everything that does. Of the weight & the violence of feeling I could never have asked for anything more. Well done!’ He concludes by saying that he feels like someone who has set the army marching but has not joined in the battle, though he hears reports from a distance. It is, he writes, a familiar guilt since the real sacrifices have been made by others.

Given Storey’s certainty that he was not the film’s author, it is intriguing to read Anderson’s initial thoughts on the matter. Two years before the release of This Sporting Life and more than a year before production began, he reflected in his journal on his desire to make, what the Cahiers people call ‘Film d’auteur’, a first-hand work, not a dramatic construction well directed by somebody – which is what Sporting Life could be, unless I can get really inside it and make it a personal allegory. But the other kind of film of course can only be written – or at least conceived by its director.

On the surface, Anderson’s doubts whether he could make a personal, authored film look well founded – and were confirmed by many who wrote about the film at the time of its release. As we shall see, though praised by many reviewers and critics, This Sporting Life appears in most evaluations as brilliantly performed, well written and directed, but not as reflecting the personality of its director.
In addition to considering the production roles of Anderson and Storey, it is important in judging authorial input not to ignore the intervention of Richard Harris. He can be regarded as the third person with a claim to authorship that dates from pre-production. In summer 1961 Anderson flew to Tahiti (where Harris was on location) to meet the man he had invited to play his male lead. No sooner had he landed than Harris led him with great energy and enthusiasm into a radical reconstruction of the first draft shooting script. Such was the actor’s ‘passionate intransigence’\textsuperscript{32} that Anderson credited him with giving the film its brilliance and structure by his insistence on returning to the novel. Harris’s letters reveal plainly that (as he sometimes admitted) he was not a writer. So it seems fair to assume that he brought an actor’s instincts to bear on the plot via the character that he envisaged playing. When Anderson brought the notes generated by their brainstorming back to Storey, the latter readily agreed with the proposed reorientation, so that, as the director recalled, ‘in the end we managed between us to produce a script that gave us at least a chance of putting onto film the peculiarly intense, complex, and poetic quality of the original’\textsuperscript{33}

Harris’s dual performances both on and off camera were so powerful that they augment his claim to a share in authorship of \textit{This Sporting Life}. As Storey’s note had indicated, the character of Frank Machin required that the narrative be organised around him; and Harris embodied this angry, trapped and yearning man with unswerving conviction. Thus, given the shaping significance of Harris, Storey and Anderson’s input, it is no surprise that the director should have said that, ‘From the start, the film was essentially a collaborative affair’\textsuperscript{34}

Further to this, however, the relationship between director and his male lead can with hindsight be seen to have imprinted the film with a private authorial signature – Lindsay Anderson’s. Three early letters from Harris to Anderson, written after their meeting and while the former was still on location with \textit{Mutiny on the Bounty}, leave no doubt that the actor badly wanted the part and sought to impress the director by persuading him of his high regard and affection. The letters employ a confused stream-of-consciousness mode (vaguely Whitmanesque) in expressing flattering affection for the director. But whether consciously or not, they carry a troubling overtone that anticipates the way the relationship would evolve. Notice how this salutation mixes Harris’s homage to his mentor with a sense that the older man is dependent on him.

… and the key
is thrown
out into the night gliding tides. Where I wait
Prior to shooting, Anderson decided to rehearse with his lead actors Rachel Roberts and Harris. They did this for ten days, principally in the confined kitchen set. This and the shoot that followed appear to have been a stressful experience for all three, which helped them build the intense on-screen relationship between Margaret Hammond and Frank. Neil Sinyard suggests that it may have imprinted them so deeply that the performance roles overlapped into the participants' own feelings – that Anderson perhaps empathised with the repressed Margaret Hammond.\textsuperscript{36} Or as Storey told Gavin Lambert, ‘in effect he was Mrs Hammond in the film’.\textsuperscript{37} The director’s journal bears this out and confirms that \textit{This Sporting Life} matched his prescription for authorship in being intensely personal to him.

On his return from Tahiti, Anderson wrote about his immediate attraction to Harris's warmth and ardour, remarking that it caused him some concern to be still so vulnerable to the actors he directed.\textsuperscript{18} These feelings were soon to develop into barely fettered passion and reached a new pitch on the set. On Easter Monday 1962, during a break from shooting, Anderson wrote,

Five weeks (only five?) into \textit{This Sporting Life} – and I should of course have been keeping a record of it, the most alarming experience of my life, in so many different ways.\textsuperscript{39}

Lambert observes that the director in love with his leading player connects with the beloved at a subconscious level.

The shades of emotion that a director guides his actor to play, from fascination to confrontation, longing to despair, tenderness to cruelty, become extensions of his own, the camera mirrors everything in the beloved that attracts and obsesses him, and in movies for other directors the actor never reaches quite the same intensity.\textsuperscript{40}

The company had already fallen two weeks behind schedule and, although he was being told that the work was good, the Rank Organisation (which had contracted to distribute) had signalled alarm. According to Anne Francis this was in part because ‘Lindsay knew very little, then, about the skills of technical effects, or the purpose of having so many crew members around’.\textsuperscript{41} The Easter recess gave Anderson time,

...
Francis confirms that Harris’s unprofessional tantrums, to which Anderson alludes here, had been a factor in the delay. The impact of the actor – no longer playing the apprentice gratefully offering simple loyalty to his mentor – remained with Anderson for life. A fortnight after shooting ended, he elaborated on ‘that tyrannical, bullying temperament’ in the journal entry cited at greater length in Chapter 2.

It is almost as if this personality has grown with Frank Machin: the narcissistic looks in the mirror, the admiration and enjoyment of his body, the relish of power, the sudden humorous, yet very vital expressions of savagery – as he turns to me, and with clenched first threateningly jerks out ‘Cunt!’ or ‘Stop smiling!’

**Selected reviews**

Reviewers of *This Sporting Life* deployed a limited range of approaches in their accounts although, thanks in part to its screening at Cannes in May 1963, coverage was extensive, particularly in Francophone Europe. Louis Marcorelles industriously devoted close, well-informed attention to it. He had first met Anderson in 1956 in connection with Free Cinema, after which the two men developed respect for each other’s opinion and kept up a long friendship. In three articles, Marcorelles assessed Anderson’s achievement in the context of British film history. Among other things, this approach allowed him to consider the director’s authorship by examining the nature of his input to the production. Recalling Anderson’s untiring work to hold *Sequence* to a line on the clear middle ground between the two best known film periodicals of the day (avoiding what Marcorelles called the garbled language of *Movie* and the sententiousness of *Sight & Sound*), he saw Anderson as a figure who, in calling for the birth of a new cinema, resembled Truffaut and Godard (albeit the Briton thought about the topic more).

Furthermore, Marcorelles linked the end of vapidity in British cinema to the activities of the people behind Free Cinema; to the staging of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court; and to the work of John Arden and Arnold Wesker. He argued that key Free Cinema productions were *Every Day Except Christmas* and Reisz’s *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1958). For him, the lyric inspiration of these two films (in which social reality is merely the starting point for a much deeper discovery, from the inside, of the particular world of the people portrayed) made them bear witness more effectively than any others to the essential warmth in the quality of English human relations. Suddenly characters emerged who came from a precise context and spoke a language in touch with the
problems of the present time. Plainly judging This Sporting Life, which he described as a watershed, to stand in direct line of descent from its predecessors, Marcorelles concluded that the film demonstrated Anderson’s essential authorial characteristics – respect for others and a sense of the concrete.47

A second line of criticism moves towards a reading of the film text, evaluating the script and work of not only the actors but also principal crew members including the director. The last of Marcorelles’s observations above shows him drifting between production history (how else could he know that Anderson respected others?) and textual analysis (to which he moves in praising the director’s skill with actors). He thought Anderson possessed that directorial skill to a far greater degree than the Nouvelle Vague filmmakers, witness the work of both lead players – how they render through the body the interior drama of the characters whom they incarnate.

Everything in Richard Harris’s playing breathes with intelligence, the deep comprehension of the complex being whom he incarnates. His intonations, his gestures, concretise for us at every second a character so much more difficult to analyse that he seems in sum limited only to the grunts of a beast at bay.48

Reviewers at large remarked on Rachel Roberts and Richard Harris’s performances (the latter – who won the Cannes award for best male actor – being compared by a number of journalists to Marlon Brando, a thought that may have been stimulated by the two actors having recently worked together on Mutiny on the Bounty).49 These writers for the most part celebrated Anderson’s input for his skill in working with the actors to bring the characters and their story to the screen.

Lindsay Anderson, is, on all the evidence, a great, a remarkable metteur-en-scène … [His] art is to have given a reality and a human dimension to these apparently uninteresting beings.50

Among British reviewers, Penelope Gilliatt reacted with opinions and passion comparable to Marcorelles.

This Sporting Life is a stupendous film. It has a blow like a fist. I’ve never seen an English picture that gave such expression to the violence and the capacity for pain that there is in the English character. It is there in Shakespeare, in Marlowe, in Lawrence and Orwell and Hogarth, but not in our cinema like this before … Part of the quality of David Storey’s script, from his own novel, is that the characters never offer explanations. Often what they say is not what they mean at all, which is one of the things that give the film its agonising tension between a rich instinctive life and a poverty-stricken expressive life … The tension between the two of them is suffocating … 51
Like Marcorelles, Gilliatt had no doubt that Anderson and Storey had produced a tragedy: ‘Like the classical tragic hero, Frank has no power to change his life because he has no insight into it; all he has is a final stab of knowledge about how he looks to other people...’. Philip Oakes of the *Sunday Telegraph* voiced a similar thought, albeit rather more floridly.

Forty years after the film’s release, discussion about Anderson’s success in opening out the interior of his characters resumed when David Huckvale reviewed a CD with a recording of eight sections from Roberto Gerhard’s score. Huckvale remarks that Gerhard’s music in its abstraction was not what Anderson expected and notes that his ‘highly unsettling atonal score is not what you might associate with a story about a Yorkshire coal miner’s career as a rugby league player’. The implication is that Anderson used very little of the score because he wanted the music to mickey-mouse the action. However, Anderson expressed to a young admirer the contrary idea, that ‘a warm film needs cool music’; he also wrote that in mixing the sound he rejected certain passages where the music duplicated the violent action. In fact he knew full well that Gerhard would score ‘forms of concrete music, and other non-melodic styles’ because he had helped the composer test various abstract sounds. According to Anderson their dispute arose over the title sequence which he regarded as ‘abstract to an eccentric degree’ and likely, coming at the opening of the movie, to alienate or mislead the audience. Therefore, to accompany the titles, he built a sequence of fragments from the score mixed with the noise of cheering crowds. For the rest, Anderson found the music at its best ‘powerful and of exactly the tone I needed to support and reflect a deeply emotional subject’. He used Gerhard’s music sparingly where, as Huckvale says, its atonality and strangeness helped it succeed wonderfully in exploring the interior world of the characters rather than providing mere local colour. The combination of Gerhard’s music and Anderson’s sense of how and where to use it powerfully complements the actors’ performances and the film’s themes.

Many newspaper reviewers ingratiate themselves with their readers by mixing their own opinions and stylistic tricks into their account. Some do this with tact and respect for the film, others are concerned with striking a pose. Among those who recorded their own responses but showed more interest in the film than themselves was Steve Passeur, who expressed his enthusiasm in *L’Aurore*. He found *This Sporting Life* stupefying in its truth and subtleties, the film appearing to him the best at Cannes that year. Michel Aubriant in *Paris-Presse* thought it ‘a powerful, often moving film whose very roughness is captivating.
A cold, solid film, unencumbered with flourishes, but sufficiently nuanced to express the most prosaic truth in its contradictions and complexity. Henri Chapier for *Combat* regretted that Anderson did not appear able to quit his heroes with the authority he had summoned in introducing them, but otherwise found much to praise. Mario Brun in *Nice-Matin* was less pleased, finding ‘it is not the chef-d’œuvre foretold. The start goes better than the end; it is altogether overworked in the melodrama, too charged. And the recurrent violence becomes tedious in the end’.

The psychological accuracy of the characters was remarked on by Passeur, and Denis Marion developed this theme.

A veritable battle to the death is fought between the two protagonists whose love is doubled with hatred such that they know they are indispensable to each other to the extent that they make themselves suffer. This rapport, relatively frequent in life, has often inspired writers but I know of no other example in the cinema other than Von Stroheim’s *Greed*. It is studied here with an unflinching psychological rigour.

Considerations of national identity also surfaced in evaluations by some reviewers who noted the distinctive qualities of *This Sporting Life* as an unusual English production. Some, like Gilliatt, lauded it; others found it less praiseworthy. Marcorelles, having offered warm tribute to Rachel Roberts, wrote that no English actor had ever before been seen like Harris to ‘literally sculpt his character to give him life. We had never seen actors play in this fashion in an English film! We had never seen such an English film that is so little English, so savage!’ Chapier remarked that ‘one does not often see an English film that exceeds the ordinary’.

Taking these review responses all-in-all, what we have found relating to Anderson’s work on *This Sporting Life* are various conceptions of him as a superbly skilled and insightful director of actors. He is acknowledged as contributing to the structure of the film – a task he fulfilled successfully according to some reviewers but in a fragmentary way (the flashback structure disconcerted some) or inadequately according to others. He was recognised as a craftsman expertly effective in bringing together the work of the principal technicians under his control. Three of the strongest reviewers (Marcorelles, Gilliatt and Oakes) identified his having worked triumphantly with Storey, Harris and Roberts to create a tragedy for the Britain of the early 1960s.
Selected criticism

We earlier alluded to critical (as opposed to review) responses carried in Movie. B. F. Taylor argues that This Sporting Life became caught up in a debate about the nature and worth, first, of British New Wave Cinema and second, of British critical practice. When in February 1963 Anderson remarked in an interview on This Sporting Life that the films of the new British school had ‘loosened up in style in a very healthy way’, he was stepping into an ongoing argument. He said of the New Wave that,

Here the first achievement has been the opening up of new territories, both of subjects and of the social backgrounds in which they are set. This has been a great development – in fact an indispensable one. But it could also be restrictive. It certainly will be restrictive if we make films for too long about ‘working-class people’, looked at objectively, almost with a documentarist’s vision. (Or a sociologist’s, which is worse.)

Prior to the publication of this interview, V. F. Perkins had expressed on behalf of Movie’s editors a contrary view in a damning account of the British New Wave. He wrote that it amounted only to a change in attitudes that disguised the fact that British cinema remained as dead as ever. It lacked, he alleged, most of the qualities for which his journal was seeking: style, imagination, personality and meaning. Richardson (Look Back in Anger, 1959, The Entertainer, 1960, A Taste of Honey, 1961, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, 1962), Reisz (Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, 1960), John Schlesinger (A Kind of Loving, 1962) and Jack Clayton (Room at the Top, 1959) were weakest where their ambitions demanded most strength in the integration of character with background.

Taylor takes the view that a succession of articles on the films in Movie were mostly so hostile that writers such as Perkins and Ian Cameron succeeded in stifling critical consideration of what otherwise might have been seen as a movement. Taylor charges Movie’s editors with being fixated on a pair of inflexible preoccupations. One of these was the belief that there was only one true cinema. Since by their definition that cinema could not be British, any divergence from their belief amounted to heresy.

The other obsession was hostility to Sight & Sound for publishing intellectually lazy articles. Sight & Sound had come out favouring – albeit with some concerns – the work of the new directors. Indeed, at what proved to be the end of the cycle, Robert Vas wrote vigorously (with an agenda comparable to Marcrorelles’s) praising Anderson’s talent for rendering the interior of the characters by drawing from the exterior.
appearance of the setting, the characters and ‘the complicated texture, interaction and social background of human feelings, and [sorting] them out in such an exciting process of artistic discovery’. Hedling believed that Vas’s piece set the trend for critical reflections on This Sporting Life and Movie’s writers moderated their tone. Taylor makes the point, nevertheless, that the terms of conflict between the magazines had the consequence that praise in the pages of Sight & Sound generally pushed Movie to publish antagonistic articles that diminished British New Wave films and dominated discussion of them for a long time.

**Identifying the perceived author**

When Marcorelles claims to describe Anderson’s personality (the only writer to do so), he actually does nothing of the sort but gives an account of the history of the director’s professional engagement with the British cinema from Sequence onwards through Free Cinema. With the exception of Lambert and Sinyard (whose observations we began to develop earlier and will now extend) no other reviewer or critic whom we have read examines the expression of authorial personality in the film.

Ascribing an element of implied personal authorship to any director depends largely upon an attribution made by a spectator reading elements in the finished film text. This idea draws on Peter Wollen’s recognition in Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (1972) that spectators (including critics) read the presence of an author into films where they can make out certain traces – be they consciously or unconsciously inscribed – which allow them to deduce that those signs are sourced in an individual’s input. Instead of looking for the then living director Lindsay Anderson as author, the spectator constructs his or her own reading of ‘Lindsay Anderson’ – a structure that can conveniently be termed the perceived author. The latter is a figure substantially imagined whose existence arises from and may be tested against certain marked and distinct characteristics (leitmotifs, character types, themes) in the film. We shall turn to theoretical issues underpinning the attribution of authorship in our final chapter and revisit Wollen then. For the present it is sufficient to note that it is unusual for a perceived author to be constructed on the basis of a textual reading plus the detailed knowledge of personal documents such as we are able to deploy here.

As Anderson recounted, Harris took sadistic pleasure from demonstrating authority over his director – and doing so in full view of cast and crew. The intensity of Anderson’s emotions addressed in the many pages devoted to Harris was the greater for his sense that to some
degree the actor had developed into an arrogant star, and equally that
the man had turned into a monster partly through the experience of
personating Frank. Hidden behind Anderson’s words was the dawning
realisation that he had connived in his own humiliation. The figure he
loved was in part his own creation.

But this is a severe and terrible test of my own nature. For to be able to
accept the black as well as the white – instead of always striving to make
the black white – goes profoundly against my instincts [...] It seems to
imply a kind of objectivity that is fearfully hard in relation to someone
one loves.83

Returning to the topic months later after directing Harris in *Diary of
a Madman* at the Royal Court, Anderson again considered his reactions
to the other man. He realised that his sexual arousal did not start in the
moment when Harris physically dominated him, but in fantasy.

When on the stage of the Royal Court Richard puts his booted foot on my
foot and grasps me by the throat – I am conscious only of the will to stand
firm, to survive. It is in fantasies afterwards that I relive the experience
with masochistic enjoyment.84

From these perceptions it is but a small step to realise that Anderson
had painfully (if only intermittently) discerned in his image of Harris
a reflection of some aspect of himself. This would be his shadow, a
term which refers in psychoanalysis to those parts of the personality
that every individual fears or detests and tries to ignore or repress.
Anderson understood that opening himself to his own scrutiny through
the journal could force him ‘to objectify, to pursue one’s thoughts, to
marshal them and use them’.85 It was indeed a hard thing to do in rela-
tion to someone he loved.

The better to make his point, Anderson attached to this entry a
copy of Henry Fuseli’s drawing ‘Satan Summoning Up His Legions’,86
writing that it struck an emotional note for him because that side of
Harris had an insidious appeal – ‘the dark, powerful and sadistic side’.87
But Anderson knew that he also responded to Harris’s gentleness.

... it is precisely this duality of nature, this comprehension of evil and of
goodness, that gives Richard a quality of genius as an actor.87

Fuseli’s pencil complements this apperception, conveying an unmis-
takeable duality clearly associated with Anderson’s thoughts. Resplen-
dently human, the naked Satan reaches upwards to summon his legions,
but his commanding figure stands framed in the sheltering arms of a
vagina-shaped cavern. The emphatic male–female duality that results
gives to the representation of Satan both strength and pathos.
Richard Harris and Lindsay Anderson during the shooting of *This Sporting Life* in 1962.

Lindsay Anderson, Richard Harris and Rachel Roberts on the set of *This Sporting Life* in 1962.
As we saw, for Margaret Hammond to accept Frank Machin would destroy the life of repressed gentility she so desperately tries to secure after the death of her husband. Yet the part of her that desires Frank perhaps also yearns for the extinction of the survivor guilt she carries for her husband’s death. Conversely, for Frank, Margaret represents the gentleness he almost totally lacks: he has no idea how to approach her other than through brute strength or browbeating – these are the injuries he inflicts in his need for love and nurturing. Thus the doomed pairing of Margaret and Frank (insofar as she encounters in him the looming shadow that threatens her with everything she most fears – notwithstanding part of her desires it) does map onto the Anderson/Harris fantasy pairing. In Chapter 2 we developed the idea that, in the construction of a perceived author, the films display a link between erotic tensions and creative anxieties characteristic of ‘Lindsay Anderson’s’ authorship. *This Sporting Life* is a fine illustration of that thesis. This, at a deeper level than he might have anticipated, is the ‘film d’auteur’, the ‘personal allegory’ that Anderson wrote he wanted to make, two years before it was done.88 It was Storey (prompted by Harris and Anderson’s return to the source novel) who decided that the camera must be Frank’s constant companion leaving no space for detachment from his obsessive, ‘peculiar and violent energy’.89 But it was Anderson who transmuted that visionary, aesthetic aperçu into deeply cut traces that inscribed our ‘Lindsay Anderson’ into this film, secretly lamenting a savage, unconsummated love.

Our analysis of Anderson’s cathexis (that is, investment of emotional energy) in *This Sporting Life* depends heavily on information which would not have been available to the audience when the film was released. It could only have been garnered by those who knew the man at the time or who, since his death, have had access to his private papers. Therefore the ‘Anderson’ whom we have inscribed here cannot be the identical perceived author that audiences and reviewers (constrained by tighter conventions governing privacy than today’s journalists) could have constructed in 1963 even had they attempted to do so. Nor, as we shall begin to discover in the next chapter, is this the identical implied author that emerges from experiencing the satires – either for us or for the director’s contemporaries.
Notes

1 Lindsay Anderson, Diary, 31 August 1948 (LA 6/1/10/40).
5 Lindsay Anderson, Interview in Eva Orbanz, Journey to a Legend and Back: The British Realistic Film (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1977) 41.
6 Martin Broz, ‘Lindsay Anderson and his This Sporting Life’, Young Film, 3 (1963) 10.
9 Correspondence, Anderson to Penelope Houston, editor Sight & Sound, 6 October 1961 (accession to the Lindsay Anderson Archive, courtesy BFI, to be catalogued).
10 Erik Hedling, Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker (London: Cassell, 1958) 50.
13 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Sport, Life and Art’ (February, 1963) in Never Apologise, 90;
16 Hill, ‘Sport Stripped Bare’, 420.
19 Walker, ‘The Year the Kitchen Sink Went Down the Drain’.
20 Correspondence, Christopher Mann to producer Karel Reisz, 28 October 1963 (LA 1/3/6/3/2).
21 Rank Film Distributors, correspondence and statements, 30 March 1963–30 September 1978 (LA 1/3/3/7/1–14).
22 Correspondence, Anderson to Reisz, 21 September 1979 (LA 1/3/3/8/1).
23 See diary, 4 August 1973 (LA 6/1/68/1–8);
25 Diary, 4 August 1973 (LA 6/1/68/5–8).
26 See Lindsay Anderson and David Sherwin, O Lucky Man! (London: Plexus, 1973) 7–9; Lindsay Anderson and David Sherwin, If.... (London: Plexus, 1976) 8–12; and correspondence relating to these publications and Sherwin’s Going Mad in Hollywood (LA 5/1/2/Sherwin).
27 Correspondence, David Storey to Anderson, n.d. (LA 5/1/2/56/2).
28 David Storey, note, n.d. (LA 1/3/1/2).
29 Correspondence, David Storey to Anderson, n.d. (LA 5/1/2/56/3).
30 Ibid.
31 Diary, 1 January 1961 (LA 6/1/26/2).
32 Anderson, ‘Sport, Life and Art’, 92.
Ibid.
34 Anderson, ‘Sport, Life and Art’, 90.
35 Correspondence, Richard Harris to Anderson, n.d. (LA 5/1/2/Harris, Richard).
37 David Storey cited by Lambert, Mainly About Lindsay Anderson, 97.
38 Diary, 21 August 1961 (LA 6/1/28/1).
39 In fact six weeks had passed since shooting commenced. Diary, 23 April 1962 (LA 6/1/33/1).
40 Lambert, Mainly About Lindsay Anderson, 99.
42 Diary, 23 April 1962 (LA 6/1/33/1).
43 Francis, Julian Wintle, 65–6.
44 Diary, 4 July 1962 (LA 6/1/32/2).
45 Ibid.
46 Correspondence between Anderson and Marcorelles, 1956 to 1991 (LA 5/1/2/33 Marcorelles).
49 See for example France Observateur (23 May 1963) 22 (LA 1/3/6/2/14); Raymond Gimel in Le Provençal excerpted in ‘Agence France Presse, Le Festival à Travers la Presse Française et Etrangère’ (19 May 1963) 2 (LA 1/3/5/4).
52 Ibid.
55 E-mail, Christopher Wintle (son of the film’s executive producer Julian Wintle) to members of the Lindsay Anderson Memorial Foundation, 9 August 2010. Mr Wintle recalled discussing the film with Anderson at the Leicester Square premiere.
56 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Roberto Gerhard and the Music for This Sporting Life’, Tempo (December 1981) in Never Apologize, 100.
64 Michel Aubriant in Paris-Presse excerpted in ‘Agence France Presse, Le Festival à Travers la Presse Française et Etrangère’ (19 May 1963) 1 (LA 1/3/5/4), our translation.
67 Passeur in *L'Aurore*.
68 Denis Marion in *Le Soir de Bruxelles* excerpted in ‘Agence France Presse, Le Festival à Travers la Presse Française et Etrangère’ (18 May 1963) 2 (LA 1/3/5/4), our translation.
69 Marcorelles, ‘Le Cadeau du cinéma anglais’, 18, our translation.
70 Chapier in *Combat*, our translation; for a similar opinion see Samuel Lachize in *L'Humanité* excerpted in ‘Agence France Presse, Le Festival à Travers la Presse Française et Etrangère’ (18 May 1963) 1 (LA 1/3/5/4).
71 The less persuaded included Henri Rabine in *La Croix* excerpted in ‘Agence France Presse, Le Festival à Travers la Presse Française et Etrangère’ (19 May 1963) 1 (LA 1/3/5/4).
73 Anderson, ‘Sport, Life and Art’, 94.
76 Ibid.
77 Vas, ‘Arrival and Departure’, 56.
78 Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson*, 51.
82 Diary, 4 July 1962 (LA 6/1/32/3).
84 Diary, 19 June 1963 (LA 6/1/40/2).
85 Ibid.
86 See diary, 19 June 1963 (LA 6/1/40/1).
87 Diary, 19 June 1963 (LA 6/1/40/3).
88 Diary, 1 January 1963 (LA 6/1/26/2).
89 David Storey, note, n.d. (LA 1/3/1/2).
The White Bus (1966) and Raz Dwa Trzy or The Singing Lesson (1967)

The British and European New Waves

These two short films throw into relief the difference between critical terms whose names imply an equivalence which, however, does not exist. Peter Wollen has argued succinctly that for three reasons it is misleading to call the Angry Young Men films of 1959–63 a New Wave cinema. First, the dominant idea of the French New Wave was linked to the concept of director as author. Excepting only Anderson, no case has been made for Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, John Schlesinger or any directors of the British New Wave being an author. Second, the French New Wave put film first and did not subordinate it to literature or theatre. The Angry Young Men put film second because theirs derived from and were marketed exploiting the success of pre-existing novels or plays. Third, critics and directors alike justified the Angry Young Men films in terms of their ‘realism’. There is abundant evidence of this tendency in relation to Anderson’s films, not least This Sporting Life.

Wollen finds the provenance of French New Wave conventions is linked to a vigorous history of avant-garde modernism and the breaking away from naturalist conventions. The fact that, even in the cinema, modernism was not new in the 1950s and 1960s was, however, unknown to the majority of the English language audience who had little chance to see the work of filmmakers such as Eisenstein, Vertov and Pudovkin. So French and Italian New Wave releases excited those of the generation that followed Anderson, the one to which David Sherwin belongs. Most had been brought up on and internalised the conventions of mainstream Anglo-American feature films – admiring Hollywood productions for their vigour and turned off British films by their staidness. Their expectations were dominated by storytelling conventions which guided spectators through well-defined narrative arcs elaborating the development of rounded principal characters. Encountering Continental European New Wave films, the young Sherwin and his generation had to learn to
shift their focus from the primacy of those functions and seek meaning in new ways. These included having to weigh the metaphoric value of images and extrapolate from unfamiliar elisions without narrative motivation and across unexpected temporal textual divides. Some spectators and reviewers refused or failed to recognise the challenge, while others found it both demanding and exhilarating. When Sherwin eventually met Anderson in 1966 and the older man screened The White Bus, his future co-writer found, ‘This was surreal, expressionist theatre, this was poetry, this was absolutely revolutionary …’. It was, in short, comparable to the French New Wave, a perfect overture to the two men’s shared work on the satirical trilogy.

We have already referred to the tendency of many reviewers to assess Anderson’s work in relation to its perceived fidelity or otherwise to realism, a mode of filmmaking which in this context they relate to the British documentary tradition. At its most lazy such writing becomes (as in Andrew Sarris’s scathing review of This Sporting Life) an insistence so unrelenting that it fails to engage with the film. By contrast Louis Marcorelles’s openness to the ambivalence inherent in The White Bus enabled him to write that the film was not inscribed in any precise line, except poetic, and permitted the spectator total freedom of expression. As with This Sporting Life, Marcorelles (albeit heavily prompted by the director himself) was one of the few who understood what Anderson had attempted in his new short feature – the straddling of the two conventions.

The White Bus

This short film is based on a story by Shelagh Delaney. At its core is the idea of a Girl returning from London to visit her hometown in the North of England. Since access is on-line only and commercially limited (see Filmography), a detailed account of the narrative is woven into the following analysis.

A slow beginning

The idea for this project had roots in an agreement reached at Woodfall Films that Oscar Lewenstein should produce a portmanteau film based on short stories by Delaney. Three directors would be responsible for one part each, the others being Tony Richardson (Woodfall’s stock director who had already made Delaney’s A Taste of Honey on stage and as a film) and Peter Brook (director of the highly regarded film Lord of the Flies in 1963). The White Bus was produced first because Anderson
was able to make time available before the others.⁷ And even he was not swift to act.

The first we learn about the project from Anderson’s journal comes in June 1964. He mentions seeing Lewenstein about an idea for his part of the trilogy – but this entry amounts to no more than two lines in forty-three pages dominated by anguished reflections on his relationship with Richard Harris.⁸ This is typical of his written recollections of the months prior to pre-production: the project lay for some time at the periphery, beyond his immediate concerns. In private, adrift on violent tides of emotion aroused by the inconstant Harris, Anderson pondered (while the actor toyed with) projects on which they might work together. Meanwhile, serious family problems proved painfully intractable, draining Anderson’s energies. He was doing what he could to calm matters during the break-up of his brother Murray’s marriage – this despite feeling at odds with the couple and his strident mother.⁹

Professionally he was occupied by numerous ventures. They included directing *Julius Caesar* for the Royal Court; travelling to Moscow and Leningrad; then flying to India where he took on the duties of juror in the first Delhi film festival before travelling more widely in the sub-continent. Meanwhile, he worked on television commercials and continued his attempts to set up other film projects (among them *Wuthering Heights*, which was to be scripted by David Storey and star, of course, Harris). After expending much time and effort, Anderson eventually called that project off blaming the endless difficulties raised by Harris and lack of commitment from most parties except Storey to the proposed deal.¹⁰

Lewenstein having in February 1965 urged him again to proceed with the Delaney story, Anderson noted tersely ‘Why not?’,¹¹ but thereafter silence closes in again until April when we find him in Prague for the Karlovy film festival. During that visit, in a busy schedule of screenings and informal meetings, he met the cameraman Miroslav Ondricek (‘Mirek’) on location. Anderson liked the man immediately, admired his working methods and, seeing a cut of the film (Milos Forman’s *A Blonde in Love*, 1965), was taken by the quality of his imagery. It added to Anderson’s enthusiasm that he was struck by the film’s ‘reminiscence’ of Free Cinema, and he decided to invite Ondricek to London.¹² It cost him much time and effort negotiating with the Czech authorities, the cameraman’s Prague studio and the British Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians (the relevant trade union). All had to grant permission before a Czech citizen could be employed in the UK. Mirek was finally cleared in time to join the last week of pre-production in October 1965.¹³
Writing the script

Well before this, in the first week of May 1965, Anderson and Delaney had at last got together and the film version of her story began to take shape. Nearly fifteen years later Anderson gave an account of the film’s provenance in a programme note written to accompany one of its rare screenings.

Shelagh and I worked closely together to produce a script which derived closely from the original story, but which went a good way beyond it. Shelagh’s story had been essentially personal and subjective. When her play, *A Taste of Honey*, had been produced in London, she found herself reviled and attacked in her home town, the North Country city of Salford. Puritanical tradition was still strong in the North, and Shelagh’s frankness with speech and emotion shocked the local dignitaries, who also felt that she had presented an unworthy picture of the city to the world. Outraged statements were made in speeches and in newspapers, and the local Council even went so far as to sponsor tours of Salford in special buses, to show off the beauties and advantages of the locality.

Shelagh’s original story of *The White Bus* was drawn from this idea – a girl returns to her native city, and finds herself involved in just such a tour. The story is not exactly ‘naturalistic’: it is somewhere between a dream and a fantasy.

Anderson thought that their conversation in early May was creative. It is apparent that the film’s register was already emerging in their minds, different from Delaney’s original story: ‘we chatted about the style – the beginning – the end – the crucial mid-point where the bus arrives and a sort of realism (however personal) changes into a sort of fantasy (however concrete)’. Looking back from 1979, Anderson distinguished in greater detail between the print and screen versions.

[The] fantastic elements [of the published story] were preserved in our treatment, but I think that the objective or satirical side of the story was probably strengthened. In its eventual form in fact, *The White Bus* is more of a mini-Epic than a fantasy, and looking back on it in this way I can see clearly how it lay at the beginning of an artistic journey which was to lead me forward to *If...* and to *O Lucky Man!*.

Over the weeks prior to 30 July 1965, when Anderson next recorded progress, he noted briefly some indecisive contacts with Lewenstein when the latter nudged him to move forward with the script. However, Anderson was preoccupied by yet more professional commitments. He made a long journey, first to Paris and Madrid and thence to the festivals at Cannes and Pesaro where he had to write a commissioned piece for *The Times*. Then he flew to New York to prepare an Athol Fugard play;
and later to Warsaw. During this period of nearly three months he seems to have done little work on The White Bus. When he does mention the Delaney script, it is with guilt, as in June: ‘Most alarming: I have lost Shelagh’s draft of The White Bus. Jesus!’ And in early July he utters a regret that recurs over the years – his need for and lack of stimulus from co-writers: ‘I just don’t seem to have the self-contained dynamic to devote myself to, say, the Shelagh idea and get it done on my own.’

At last, at the end of July, he and Delaney spent four hours discussing the script.

Before she came I typed out dialogue from a series of interviews in The Queen with young titled Englishmen, which fitted marvellously into the character invented (app[arently] by her brother!) for the station scene...

Anderson judged that their discussion went well, though he observed that the structure remained vague and they had not resolved the problem of how to introduce the bus. ‘We seem to get bogged down in TIME & attendant REALISM’. And still wanting stimulus, he laments (in what became a ritual groan preceding the start of film production), ‘I just am so impatient and depressed by script discussions’.

At this stage, the contributions of Anderson and Delaney gave them equal claim to authorship, but that was about to change as per his retrospective comment in 1979.

The non-naturalism of The White Bus is to me one of its most attractive qualities: the freedom to experiment in terms of sound and of image. I think it was while we were working on the script that the idea came of injecting short bursts of colour into an otherwise black-and-white narrative – the obverse of If..., where a colour film was interspersed with sequences in monochrome. I have always felt that the degrees to which people reacted to such devices, or professed themselves mystified by them, shows how much we have become prisoners of naturalism. Clearly what I was groping towards was a style that would be poetically expressive rather than naturalistically faithful to ‘real life’. At the same time, I did not want any element of style that would seem wilfully eccentric or expressionist. The whole intention was to achieve a style that would be subtle rather than in any way sensational or attention-grabbing.

Pre-production

Pre-production on The White Bus began after Anderson’s return from New York in early August where he and the impresario Irving Schneider had tried futilely to cast Bette Davis in Athol Fugard’s People Are Living There – his first encounter with the star’s monumental ego. At about this time, Anderson, intuiting changes both in his circumstances and
outlook, noted feelings of ‘increasing separation from all that have been my associations of the past’, a dissociation that affected his interest in the film project. He confessed at one point feeling ready to abandon it. These changes centred in large measure on George Devine, whom he admired and liked immensely. Devine, a principal figure in establishing and maintaining the Royal Court’s programme, had suffered heart attacks and a severe stroke. Anderson’s personal sorrow was compounded by his belief that no other director of the Royal Court had the skills or commitment to radical programming to make a worthy successor.

His interest in The White Bus seems to have been rekindled by the August 1965 visit to London of the Berliner Ensemble. Fascinated and inspired by their season of Brecht’s plays, he spent much time seeing the productions and talking with the company, whom he found very sympathetic. Afterwards his ideas for the film took a significant turn towards Brechtian satire. He began to think of it as a ‘mini-epic’, something developed beyond the ideas that he and Delaney had scripted. Their typescript had fantasy, realism and the pompous character of the mayor, but nothing of an epic nature (large, small or Brechtian) underpinning its structure. Fantasy alone was no longer sufficient to satisfy Anderson.

This can be sensed even in his record of location searches. Together with Delaney and producer Michael Deeley he began touring Salford and Manchester a week after the theatre company had departed. They reconnoitred (and eventually used) so many locations as to suggest he was already preparing to extend the characters’ tour of industrial sites well beyond the script. His journal reveals excitement at the potential as ‘we sally out: usual stimulating awful marvellous Northern urban landscape. Feel The White Bus in these surroundings can be funny & poetic’.

A Good Day – in the morning two excellent industrial visits – to Proctor & Gamble, where tangled machinery produces soap, Tide, Fairy Snow, etc: and those two/three girls sit packing 3 tablets into a carton with lightning, automatic movements of the hands... some good vistas... then Turners, who make train wheels... with marvellous scrap steel yards, and furnaces, and men shovelling in the sand like fiery circles of the damned...

After more visits he wrote that they found it necessary to dupe people whose properties they wanted to film, concealing their true intent behind the pretence that they were shooting a documentary. For example, having investigated the Town Hall, ‘the most superb neo-Gothic building you can imagine’, they sought permission for shooting, ‘sitting there with
the butter melting in our mouths, lying like dogs, and feeling like assassins with knives under our cloaks’. This melodramatic evocation of scheming resounds with his satirical intent.

At this point, according to Anderson, Delaney approved his suggestions for changes but did not wish to introduce further alterations herself. Commenting to Paul Ryan, he added that, ‘A lot of The White Bus was not scripted, and I don’t think it could have been really’. As an example, he remembered that he had decided on the spur of the moment to improvise the scene where stuffed animals were filmed as if confronting the human visitors; Delaney had no involvement because she preferred not to enter the museum.

Production

The Anderson Archive holds a transcript of an interview given by Ondricek to a Czech journalist. His observations provided for his home audience an outsider’s view of what, in terms of its operational control, was a standard British production. Contrasting it with Czech practice, Ondricek on one hand remarked on the creative latitude granted the director. On the other, he emphasised the highly codified production schedules that required long hours, demanding work and accurate, accountable output from the British crew. The amount of preparation ahead of each day’s shooting and the professionalism backing every shot augmented his perception of how an industry based upon the capitalist system works – in particular the financial constraints that meant ‘time is money’. He admitted that schedules arranged for cost-effectiveness (as opposed to shooting scenes in sequence) had presented him with artistic challenges.

First you do part of a scene with the actors. Then on the same location, you do shots of them from other scenes. Maybe after a fortnight or so you will complete the first scene on another location. It is rather difficult. I remember us shooting one scene at two different railway stations with one group of actors in Manchester and with another in London – not to waste time by transporting the actors.

By implication (though Ondricek was too canny to spell it out in a Czech journal), matters were arranged differently in his Soviet-dominated home. He found the British director’s freedom of expression striking; but Czech crews were less well paid. On the other hand, they were not bound by the pressures required for efficient use of capital.

It is tempting to compare Ondricek’s feeling of estrangement from filming routines on The White Bus to Anderson’s frustration with the slow progress in shooting his next film, The Singing Lesson. Although
the latter was shot in Warsaw with a Polish crew, the comparison suggests how in the mid-1960s British capitalist and Central European communist systems of film production became routine professional and cultural practices in their respective territories. Ondricek was not alone in finding change awkward: though still working within a capital-funded screen industry, Anderson vigorously resisted change when in 1978 he made *The Old Crowd*, a television drama that he preferred to think of as a film.

**The text and Anderson’s input**

At the time of writing, *The White Bus* is only available in a 16mm print as part of the trilogy *Red, White and Zero*. For that reason, there follows a fuller description of the text (with an account of Anderson’s input) than for films that can be readily accessed.

Evidence for Anderson’s adoption of Brechtian principles is more than merely circumstantial. Constant, disorienting changes of register (not all scripted) distance the audience from the predictable comforts of mainstream, naturalistic storytelling. Anderson once again acknowledges his debt to Humphrey Jennings via surrealism. Early in the film, the Girl (Patricia Healey) works at her desk in a London clerical office long after everyone but the cleaners have gone. Cut to her body dangling, hanged, above the desks. The cleaners continue their labours, observing nothing. Cut to the Girl who takes her coat and leaves. Three shots. Lacking narrative motivation, the film leaves us to deduce that she has fantasised herself as dead. Lewenstein for one did not understand.39 Given the register alters as soon as she leaves her desk, that is not surprising: it is not night but Saturday afternoon. Delaney’s short story only starts now, which indicates the tenor of changes made for the screen.40

On the street the Girl’s attention is drawn to a young man (Victor Henry) listening to live football commentary on a transistor set. The ebb and flow of the game blows him to and fro across the pavement until calamity strikes his team when he hurls the radio down and stamps it to pieces. The Girl walks away, but his crazed fury draws a smile. The register shifts again when she waits for a delayed train and sits between a middle-aged couple who, without speaking, pass the pages of their newspapers across her face as if she did not exist.

As she moves along the platform to her train, the character dreamt up by Delaney’s brother, a young city gent (Stephen Moore), accosts her. In place of conventional chat-up lines, this scion of the upper class spouts a torrent of prejudices – his words culled by Anderson from
the magazine for such elevated personages, *The Queen*. Far from giving offence, his ridiculous sermon brings a broad smile to the Girl’s face: she is visible again, if only to a titled dolt. We are already far from naturalist conventions when she leans from the departing train to promise this unknown stranger, ‘I’ll write’.

On the train she settles among football supporters returning home after the lost game. Ordinary Northerners finding consolation in beer, song and good companionship, they quickly make her feel at ease. The sequence (a single long take) furnishes *The White Bus* with a rare moment of warmth, a sort of emotional high water mark from which everything else falls away.

The train deposits her after dawn in the almost empty streets of her hometown. Whereas in the short story she arrives drunk and remains so for the duration of the plot, in the film she is sober. Therefore the surreal moments that follow do not follow a drunk’s point of view. The city looks grim both in black and white and when the shot switches to colour. Ondricek’s angles pick out cliff-like walls of brick, rubbish on the streets and ruined buildings. Suddenly a racket introduces a brutal scene – three men pursue a woman who tries but fails to escape them. They bundle her into their car like a kidnap victim and drive off fast. The Girl watches and then resumes walking. Was it a fantasy and, if so, like the ‘suicide’, hers?

She wanders around before spotting a white bus passing through urban wasteland. Boarding unsuspectingly, she finds herself recruited into a day-long tour of the city’s industrial, housing and cultural developments. Her half-hearted attempt to slide out of this oppressively marshalled event is efficiently frustrated by the bus conductress-cum-tour guide (Julie Perry). This woman organises the tourists and, refuting the naked evidence before their eyes, proselytises them about the city’s attractions with the determination of a regimental sergeant major. Delaney’s story has a playback system on the bus. Its public-relations speak is given to the film’s bus conductress, which enhances the comic and surreal effect as when, for example, she intones mechanically ‘We are now travelling at twenty-five miles an hour in an easterly direction...’

The group of middle-aged visitors this woman shepherds comprises a bizarre combination of foreigners (a Ghanaian, an Indian and a Japanese all in national dress) together with British guests (some of them also in national dress, like the bowler-hatted civil servants, the toff in top hat and several women sporting tawdry flowered bonnets for a respectable day out). They are, as Allison Graham noticed, every bit as docile and vacuous as the people in *O Dreamland*, allowing themselves to be
herded round the town by the mayor (Arthur Lowe). This complacent grandee wears his full regalia and is accompanied by the town’s mace-bearer (John Sharp) to confirm his dignity in office. Perhaps he believes his dignity licenses him to feel the Girl’s leg. She rebuffs him decisively, but with this rare exception is a passive and mute observer of the world around her.

The group’s endless visits to factories and civic amenities are absurd. The conductress issues walkie-talkies with long antennae to everybody, but bellows so loudly that the equipment is redundant (although almost everyone uses it anyway). Immaculately dressed, the visitors traipse round installations whose functions they don’t understand, peering as they go at operatives dwarfed by machines that alternately roar and gobble unearthly sounds. Meanwhile the embodiment of an overstuffed corporation, the fat mace-bearer, advises the Girl with worldly cynicism and syrupy tongue: ‘Money is the source of all progress’. All this, along with occasional random shifts from black and white to colour and back again, renders the grim city tour as fantasy, distancing it from naturalism in a Brechtian manner.

We mentioned in Chapter 2 James Sutherland’s distinction between the writer of comedy and the satirist. Both are alive to people’s follies and faults, but the writer of comedy accepts them and shows no interest in advancing moral standards: ‘his attitude to those who fall short of them appears to vary from an amused tolerance to a cheerful or even delighted acceptance’.

It is, on the contrary, the mark of the satirist that he cannot accept and refuses to tolerate. Confronted with the same human shortcomings as the writer of comedy ... he is driven to protest. For him those are not matters for pure contemplation; they must be exposed, held up to derision or made to look as hideous as he believes them to be. ... The satirist is nearly always a man who is abnormally sensitive to the gap between what might be and what is. [He] feels driven to draw attention to any departure from what he believes to be the truth, or honesty, or justice.

As we know, these words describe one of Anderson’s driving impulses. He revealed the conscious sharpening of his satirical focus in a scene that pays homage to the Berliner Ensemble’s influence. After viewing industrial processes and boring catering facilities, the tourists are shepherded into the Council’s Community Centre. The mayor delivers his PR puff and describes the amenity as essential for ‘corporate relaxation and refreshment’ – while showing no understanding of what a community might be. Then a young man (Anthony Hopkins) commands the stage. A rifle slung under his arm, he sings one of Brecht’s songs in German which Erik Hedling identifies as ‘Resolution’ from *Days of*
Neither the character, actor nor film makes a connection for the English-speaking audience with anything that precedes or follows. The tourists remain stoically dumfounded. The scene is Anderson’s homage to Brecht and the Ensemble. He had seen this play twice during the Ensemble’s London season and took Hopkins with him on the second occasion, delighted that the actor ‘responded with the understanding and sensitive appreciation of that art, that I’d expected’.48

Anderson also heard ‘Resolution’ one last time during an emotional farewell party for the company.49

The first verse gives the tenor of the fragment that is sung directly to the mayor.

Realising that it is our weakness
That enables you to pass your laws
We resolve in future to abandon meekness
And the law hereon will justify our cause.50

Here, although he had already directed plays using Brecht’s dramatic methods, Anderson adapts those methods to the screen for the first time. He shared the German’s purpose of casting fresh light on contemporary society; but he did not subscribe to the dramatist’s Marxist principles.

This last point makes Anderson’s disagreements with his editor Kevin Brownlow particularly interesting, revealing a fundamental underlying difference in the way they viewed the material. Anderson’s first journal entry on the topic, in late November, sets this up.

Get on with the job assembling: it is definitely a push with Kevin, all of whose instincts are in quite a different, mechanistic direction... he has no fantasy at all: and is not old enough for ambiguity...51

Two weeks later, Anderson noted that ‘Kevin displays what he has done to the Civil Defence sequence – “the Fascist Montage” – which is a meaningless wreck, depressing chiefly in that it reveals how totally he misunderstands the material’.52 Anderson used the phrase again in a January 1966 entry where he recorded John Fletcher’s success in eradicating Brownlow’s ‘Fascist montage’ from this sequence during the latter’s absence in the USA.53 Years later Anderson told Paul Ryan that Brownlow had wanted to cut the film like Eisenstein and had to be discouraged.54 Nothing could be further from a fascist aesthetic. Eisenstein, celebrated for cutting in a dialectical pattern that Anderson probably thought of as mechanistic, theorised his ‘intellectual montage’ as a cinematic tool essential to the expression of Marxist ideology. So Anderson’s rejection of Brownlow’s ‘mechanistic direction’ suggests, more than merely distaste for the other man’s aesthetics, the wish to distance his film from Brecht’s politics.
Despite this, Anderson’s purpose with *The White Bus* ran deeper than interrupting the storyline to keep the audience aware that they were watching an artefact – though he did that too. Hopkins’s brief performance perfectly illustrates Brecht’s concept of the ‘epic’ performance in which characters no less than plot are constructed in defiance of conventions guiding the creation of naturalistic, invisibly constructed and rounded personalities. As Robert Gordon notes, Brecht sought to break from nineteenth- and twentieth-century naturalist and expressionist theatre in order to violate the identification of spectator with performer.

Epic theatre had to use every device of dramaturgy, acting and production to prevent the flow of empathy between spectator and performer. To achieve this, the actor had to avoid becoming identified with the character she was representing, but had to use her own personality as the basis for a dramatic role that involved her as both storyteller and character.55

Hopkins’s song is not the only Brechtian moment in *The White Bus*. Having run past the abodes of the rich, the bus takes a turn through the neighbouring Queen’s Oak Park. No sooner have our eyes registered a vast and blank expanse of grass patrolled by police and swept by gardeners than the image cuts to colour, a farmer raises his shotgun to the skies and fires. Scarcely has this surreal moment registered, vaguely reminiscent of a genre painting, when, still in colour, we see four young women cheerfully bouncing a mannequin in a blanket. Hedling recognises this scene as a pastiche of Goya’s *The Mannequin*,56 and the women are certainly having more fun than anyone on the bus tour. Retrospectively we may want to construct the scene as the Girl’s fantasy of sharing the vitality of Goya’s young women: she is surrounded by straw people on whom her unconscious may be imposing an imaginary revenge. However, the disconnected, unmotivated shock of this intrusion of a tableau vivant seizes spectators’ attention but leaves no time to absorb its possible implications because the scene swiftly cuts to a reconstruction of Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. As in its source, two reclining male artists converse with each other, paying no attention to the naked model sitting with them or the other woman washing herself in the middle-ground. The woman in the foreground moves her head to look out of frame, as if returning to a pose. Her languorous passivity contrasts with the Girl who, though also passive, is the observer rather than the observed. The next cut brings a pastiche of Fragonard’s *Les Hasards heureux de l’escarpolette* (*The Swing*). The licentiousness of the original is preserved: the girl on the swing relishes the frisson of being pushed by one man so that his fellow in the foreground can gain a
knowing glimpse under her skirts. In Anderson’s version the two men might be friends, but the original picture was commissioned by the libidinous rake enjoying a glimpse of his lover’s secret beauties. As the artist’s patron he requested that the other man should be a bishop. Needless to add, the energy and sexual anarchy depicted in these paintings contrasts vividly with the repressive pleasures provided by the civic amenities in Queen’s Oak Park.

Because they are dissociated from narrative, these *tableaux vivants* may be accounted for in many ways, including (Hedling notes) as another homage to Jennings. Other possibilities include viewing them as surreal intrusions into the bus’s tedious journey; as the Girl’s wishful fantasies; or as satirical hints that the rich can do just as they wish in what is supposedly a place of communal recreation. This last interpretation is encouraged by the episode’s conclusion. In full colour and like a landscape painting celebrating the power of the Borough Council (with the mayor’s crimson gown enriching the screen), the party of visitors advance across the sward. Off-screen the shotgun fires again and, cut to black and white, a pheasant hits the ground by the tourists’ feet whence the farmer’s dog retrieves it. Fantasy and the plot’s ‘reality’ penetrate each other’s boundaries in a productively intriguing Brechtian manner.

In English, the term ‘alienation’ is usually deployed to summarise the intention behind Brecht’s techniques to divest the world of its illusory appearance of being something natural, normal and self-evident. As Slater reminds us, by making it unfamiliar and even unrecognisable, the alienation effect should require audiences to ask questions about the nature of the world so that ultimately it becomes more comprehensible in its underlying rather than its superficial reality. And, although Anderson did not adopt Brecht’s Marxism, on the surface at least *The White Bus* seems compatible with this model.

In *The White Bus*, as in the later satires and his journals, a recurring target of Anderson’s disparagement included decaying, malfunctioning, bad-mannered, bureaucratic, complacent, obsessional, unhelpful and ugly Britain – as well as everyone who did not resist the nation’s decline into torpor. The public library, where the tour next processes, might be expected to contain a collection which the mayor should celebrate, but a secret fixation wrecks this piece of public relations. The circular reading room is empty of readers but echoes fill the great void with whoops and whispers. They sound less like the tourists’ voices than the ghosts of books, and something in the racket releases an obsession of the mayor. He pompously declaims the cupola’s inscription from Proverbs 4:7, ‘Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding’. However, he does not take
the words’ meaning: leading the group aimlessly round the shelves, he rants that each time he chooses a book it turns out to be by an advocate of homosexual practices. He wonders how many ‘dirty books’ the library holds. The librarian quenches this tirade by merely saying that it’s time for tea.

The mini-epic tour concludes back in the wasteland where the Girl boarded the bus. In a parodic allusion to Jennings’s *Fires Were Started* (1943), civil defence volunteers put on a demonstration with sirens, smoke, flames, machine gun fire and other sound effects of warfare while they mount implausible rescues of ‘victims’. Towards the end of the fatuous display, an explosion releases a mushroom cloud, the symbol of nuclear war underscoring the futility of the entire show. Yet this phoney drama of death and destruction animates the other tourists for the first time. All the party except the Girl immediately transmogrify into the dummies they are. With dusters covering the void under their headgear, it is impossible to forget Goya’s mannequin or Magritte’s faceless men in bowler hats. The Girl rises impatiently, quits the viewing stand and moves into the authentic, unregimented life of the town’s narrow backstreets.

Kids play freely in a school playground. A frustrated lover whose young woman will not have sex with him storms out from a side alley. He rages at the Girl, who has observed the scene, ‘She wouldn’t! You all want it. You’re all getting it. But not from me!’ When he runs off, the Girl walks further down the street and, drawn by the sweet sound of a piano, looks into a living room where a woman plays Bach with passionate absorption. As evening falls, the Girl wanders on and watches an elderly woman tenderly shaving her demented husband. Finally she becomes the last customer in a fish and chips shop – a scene straight from Delaney’s original story. As the owners close up, the husband kindly suggests to his wife that they leave the cleaning till the next day. But his wife recites an adage.

If we don’t do Saturday’s work till Sunday, we won’t do Sunday’s work till Monday, we won’t do Monday’s work till Tuesday, we won’t do Tuesday’s work till Wednesday, we won’t do Wednesday’s work till Thursday, we won’t do Thursday’s work till Friday, we won’t do Friday’s work till Saturday and we’ll never catch Saturday’s work again.

‘Intoxicated with the rhythm’, as Delaney puts it, the couple begin to clear as the Girl finishes her chips. Their quiet resignation to an existence built round work hardly offers the élan that a young woman in her twenties might hope to take from life; but the evening scenes have an authenticity that the mayoral tour lacks.
Post-production

Brownlow visited the USA late in 1965 and Fletcher took over editing, eradicating the Eisensteinian aesthetics that Anderson condemned. On his return early in 1966, Brownlow tidied details that Fletcher had found difficult. Over the six weeks to mid-February, Anderson noted progress and reversals in the dubbing and mixing of voices and effects, the recording of Misha Donat’s music and the transfer and rebalancing of sound from magnetic to optical, together with some re-editing of the picture. His diary reports doubts and anxieties, often projected onto associates in a pattern already established as his norm during post-production. Depression intensified in tandem with exhaustion as the film was approaching completion, while budget limitations and deadlines ever more tightly closed off opportunities for improving the work. Thus, only a month after praising Fletcher’s loyal and effective work, he seemed to Anderson to lack efficiency, control and creative imagination. The director also doubted the input of a conductor he refers to disparagingly as ‘an efficient hack’.

Music O.K. but honestly I don’t really know. Would it be better without? Sneakingly I think so, but no time or leeway to try. Actually Mischa [sic] is good, intelligent & v. capable: though he could be better on timing and fitting to cuts.

Anderson plumbed the nadir early in February. After running the sound tracks at Elstree, he found it ‘intensely depressing – the picture seems meaningless, the sound un inventive, lacking in spark and finesse...’

What happened next

Some promotional work had commenced in January 1966. Tony Snowdon photographed him with Delaney. ‘We played the game – crouching low and absurdly close to the Moviola’. Then an ‘affable ignoramus’ interviewed them for Life, Anderson allowing himself to be pushed into being controversial and ‘outrageous’, before feeling ashamed.

In February 1966 Anderson received his fee of £2,000 from Woodfall. The completed film was screened privately in April (Prague), June (London) and September (Venice) – and the history all but grinds to a halt. The other directors had already abandoned their plans to shoot stories by Delaney, and in October Anderson saw Peter Brook’s contribution, then titled Ride of the Valkyries. He noted its ‘utterly disastrous amateurism’ with withering scorn and told Lewenstein ‘that the only hope for it is to give it to a good professional editor: and devise a consistent, blanket music-track. But God knows really what the ultimate fate of the Trilogy will be.’
In the first week of January 1967, Anderson attended the long awaited screening of the TRILOGY... my view of the recut of Peter Brook’s *Ride of the Valkyries* and first glimpse of Tony’s *Red & Blue*. The first remains amateurish and confused; the second has Tony’s usual virtuosity, combined with a very flashy, commercial-style colour, and a phoney, masturbatory sensuality, exploiting to an uncomfortable degree the monstrous narcissism of Vanessa...74

There followed ‘a preposterous meeting’ at Woodfall where Brook seemed ‘totally complacent about his botch’, all Anderson’s suggestions were shot down and he came under renewed pressure to cut his film’s first ten minutes.75 He was no readier to sacrifice the opening than when Lewenstein had asked him sixteen months earlier.76

In the spring of 1967, he worked, with Brook’s approval, on redubbing *Ride of the Valkyries*.77 It was later retitled *Zero*, a homage to silent cinema starring Zero Mostel. Anderson appears not to have appreciated that *Red* had been influenced by Jacques Demy and thus was a British take on the French director’s affectionate parodies of Hollywood musicals. Whatever their individual merits, the three films make an undeniably bizarre ensemble, as any distributor could not fail to see. In effect the trilogy was dead.

Over the next fifteen years, whenever he saw an opening Anderson explored the possibility of independent release for *The White Bus*. Writing in 1980 to John Tilley of United Artists in New York he recalled how he had tried to ‘detach [it] from Peter Brook’s abortive Keaton-style comedy (and may Buster forgive him!), and from Tony Richardson’s limp attempt at a musical’. He ‘deplored the way they changed the original conception of that trilogy-film, and [...] produce[d] a film which made no composite sense and which I could not blame United Artists for shelving’.78 As the correspondence continued, he suggested linking it in a double bill with Kubrick’s *Killer’s Kiss* (to which UA possessed the rights) or alternatively with his own *Every Day Except Christmas* and *Thursday’s Children*.79 This, like all his previous efforts, came to nothing and, apart from a brief release at London’s Paris Pullman in July 1968, a late night transmission by BBC Television in 1981 and occasional film society screenings, it remains unseen.80

**Epic performance and Anderson**

The Girl adopts Brecht’s epic performance style, which we described in relation to Hopkins’s small role. Patricia Healey plays both the Girl and a version of herself as actor. With rare exceptions, Anderson deployed the Girl/Healey as an observer of almost everything she is exposed to,
a performer who conceals most of her reactions.\textsuperscript{81} This role of observant onlooker implies that she also stands in for Delaney. (Anderson had originally suggested to the writer that she might play the part, but she suggested her friend Healey who, pertinently, looked like her.)\textsuperscript{82} By extension, the Girl/Healey/Delaney also functions as Anderson’s proxy, a factor he noted after an early screening of the yet unfinished film.

I realise that the film really is deeply ‘alienated’... too deep for tears I’m afraid... it’s strange that it has come out like this: not rationally chosen: but a true reflection of my attitude – and Patsy’s character.\textsuperscript{83}

In April 1966, with work on The White Bus at last complete, the exhausted director found time to reflect further on his affinity with the Girl as one who reacts, and also on his sense of authorship.\textsuperscript{84}

This total collapse of many days: dating I suppose from the reaction after intense work on The White Bus [...] the growing sense of alienation, awareness of conflict with all around – without quite the compensating sense of real or lasting adequacy in myself. How intensely autobiographical The White Bus has turned out to be! In fact when I think about it, I wish vaguely I had been able to make it personally expressive in a more complete way [...]

My chief creative problem undoubtedly remains this one of remaining, or perhaps being essentially a reactor: unable to function fully alone, or at script stage, therefore dependent on collaboration to a huge degree... unable to read scripts even with that detailed and creative concentration they need: woefully dependent on stimulus of collaborators and material – and of course finding it only rarely.\textsuperscript{85}

Anderson’s sense of relationship with the character has significant implications relating to the film’s themes. The Girl’s impassivity provides one indication that Anderson’s satire had yet to develop into the Swiftian \textit{saeva indignatio} of the trilogy. Compare her with Mick Travis and his pals in If.... The Girl, an employment exile, is experiencing an official public relations introduction to her own depressed hometown. Her response is far from rebellious: she distances herself from most of what she sees and, as the day goes on, witnesses fantastic erotic images which may be her creation. Her successors, the schoolboys of 1968, end up in outright rebellion against the targets of their anger whom, in the realist-fantasy world of that film, they murder. The mayor is a pompous fool, an atrophied and complacent figurehead who adds to the dead weight of the local government machine. But, for all that, save semi-secretly in the song of Resolution, he is not, unlike Mick’s Headmaster, configured as the enemy – although a nod to the future is there in the rifle Hopkins carries. Sorrow and ridicule are the governing tenors in The White Bus rather than the ridicule and rage of If....
Satire, liberal humanism, theory and doctrine

The register of *The White Bus* presents a significant change of voice from Anderson’s early films including those screened in the Free Cinema programmes. Previously only *O Dreamland* had attempted satire and none had adopted Brechtian principles of construction. However, Anderson had already worked successfully in this mode with productions for the stage – where, however, we need to remember that playwrights rather than director usually have the greater claim to authorship. Doris Lessing had commented on his production of John Arden’s *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* at the Royal Court in 1959.

Gripping, exuberant, moving! Sometimes exasperating, it is alive from start to finish. I have not been more excited by direction and acting for years. It has scenes of Brechtian grandeur. What more do you want?86

Milton Shulman wrote about Anderson’s next directorial venture, *The Lily White Boys*.

Reveling in Brechtian stage tricks, stark lighting and suspended symbolic props, Lindsay Anderson’s production, aided by Eleanor Kazan’s austere staging of the musical numbers, keeps the action pounding…87

Penelope Gilliatt developed a longer analysis of this play’s Brechtian provenance and characteristics in *Vogue*;88 and the following year several writers observed Brechtian techniques developed in another Anderson production, *The Fire Raisers*.89

What strategic explanation can be found for Anderson’s introduction of Brechtian aesthetics to his feature films? Writing about *Sequence*, Alan Lovell argues that a dilemma of which both Anderson and Gavin Lambert were aware typified liberal criticism, the philosophical base on which the magazine’s writing stood.

If the critic is to trust his own responses and be flexible and tolerant in his outlook, alert for quality in any kind of film, isn’t there an inevitable drift towards relative values where everybody’s critical views are given the same weight? ... The obvious answer to the dilemma is the development of fixed principles, which both Lambert and Anderson suggest. But such a development leads in the direction of theory and doctrine, which Anderson and Lambert as good liberals are suspicious of. ‘It is a matter of fact not of opinion that the cinema is an art. This does not call for theoretical discussion – unless, of course, you enjoy that kind of intellectual exercise.’90

Lovell wrote that the two men tried to resolve the dilemma by reaffirming the value of personal response and a belief in humanism – in short they failed to resolve it. In Lovell’s opinion, the same ideology
underlay Free Cinema. It failed, despite seeking to affirm and adapt liberal principles, because that loose grouping of films was struggling in a climate unsympathetic to small-scale independent cinema.91

In his modification of Brechtian satire Anderson now found a way, without abandoning liberal values, to escape the liberal dilemma caused by the lack of theoretical principles. His deployment of Brechtian devices in this and later films also had the effect of asserting the dominance of his authorial voice over their narrative flow. We introduce this argument with reviews of If as well as of the film in question, taking the liberty because little showing insight was written about The White Bus at the time of its completion. Anderson’s authorial voice had evolved so distinctly in the two films that reviews of the 1968 release support our reflection on both.

Anderson’s opposition to commercial cinema and his reluctance to recognise his films as typically British ran in tandem with the evolution of his directorial style. As a director whose film work began with extended experience of documentaries, he consciously imported into the production of features the techniques of factual filmmaking. His decision to make fictional films that in some aspects evoked factual modes of address resonated therefore with what critics had previously learnt to expect of him. It also harmonised with his preference for a simple shooting style, as he explained to David Robinson.

*The White Bus* was quite consciously made in a simple shooting style; and in fact I like more and more a style that is as simple and quintessential as possible. I think to some extent that it is a reaction against the over-application of technique which seems to me to be more and more a kind of mannerism as opposed to a genuine style. The result of using an extremely direct and simple shooting technique is in fact a deliberate contravention of fashion, and the result is a film that from the commercial point of view was regarded as outlandish and utterly uncommercial [...] I think what one tries to do is to get at essences rather than brilliant surfaces.92

David Wilson, for one, reviewed *The White Bus* in terms revealing that he recognised the documentary element but not the film’s ambivalence.

[It] never indicates which way it wants itself to be interpreted, which is the last thing one expects from a professedly committed artist. And the central inconsistency is only reinforced by Anderson’s conscious juxtaposition of surrealism ... and a documentary realism ...93

This was characteristic of several reviews of *If...,* written by continental European critics after its Cannes screening. They focused on Ander-
son’s perceived success or failure in holding true to documentary values when rendering the details of life at an English public school. Most of these writers challenged his claim to convey images and sounds of a more fantastic or symbolic nature (in large measure because that ran counter to their expectations of how a British director would mediate the ‘real’ world). Variously they found these elements of the film exaggerated or insignificant or to have caused flaws in its structure.

Two reviews of If... stand out from the others, one written for *Nice-Matin* and the other published by *Le Canard Enchaîné*. Both accounts identify as Anderson’s distinctive approach to and treatment of his subject a tendency simultaneously to document and lampoon, blending a flawless realism with unfettered imagination. Their analysis sits comfortably with the only substantial critique of *The White Bus* which Louis Marcorelles wrote shortly after the film’s completion. He had attended a private screening in Venice which Anderson (in the city as a juror for the Film Festival) had introduced. Marcorelles begins by linking the film to Free Cinema, but takes his cue from the director in extending his argument.

Truth to tell *The White Bus*, ... is not inscribed in any precise line, except poetic. Before the screening, Lindsay Anderson explained that if one coupled the vein of Alice in Wonderland and the traditional social tendency in English cinema, one would perhaps have an explanation...

Remarking that Patricia Healey has very little to say, but functions through the mobility of her gaze reflecting on the strange events around her, Marcorelles adds,

One might perhaps think of Alice in Wonderland, but also of the mute woman on her roof in *Mother Courage*, powerless witness of a barbarism that she would like to ward off ... [It gives the strong sense] of a film that wants to be a Swiftian fable, a Voltaire-like story, but without literature.

This seems right except that *The White Bus* lacks Swift’s savage indignation. Thus (to formalise the arguments of Marcorelles and the reviewers of If... at *Nice-Matin* and *Le Canard Enchaîné*), Anderson’s style in the satires once again finds its distinctiveness in its constitutive tension. However, his authorship is not characterised in these films by a link between erotic tensions and creative anxieties; rather it lies in the treatment of his subject in the opposition between document and lampoon, realism and imagination. Paradoxically this endows the director’s signature with its authorial unity. In both *The White Bus* and Anderson’s subsequent satirical trilogy, the connection with documentary and the adoption of aesthetic devices from the New Waves in Poland, Czechoslovakia and (to a lesser degree) France are equally active.
Anderson found in satire the means of escaping what Lovell called the dilemma of liberal criticism. Satire has to be intensely focused. It targets and excoriates those things that its makers find ridiculous, inequitable or just plain wrong. Satire thus avoids the weakness of liberal criticism alleged by Lovell, namely a philosophical obligation to allow all voices equal value. However, it does not require its makers to show how to rectify the iniquities it focuses on. Satire thereby allowed Anderson to sidestep Lovell’s issue and express his personal values through irony in *The White Bus* and rising anger in the loose trilogy. Yet, finally, satire allowed him to do that without engaging with doctrinaire policies or theories of society, culture and films that he so despised.

Since wit and anger were two powerfully energised outlets for Anderson’s emotionally charged intelligence, it seems probable that the adaptation of satire, an established literary form, into a vivid (and at least superficially anti-British) screen cycle may have been psychologically satisfying to him, perhaps allowing him to find in satirical fantasy a home for deeply frustrated yearnings as they metamorphosed into disillusion.

**The Singing Lesson**

In 1966 Anderson went to Warsaw to direct a theatrical production of John Osborne’s *Inadmissible Evidence*. While there, he was invited by the director of Warsaw’s documentary studio to make a short film on any topic he liked. After accepting an invitation to watch a class of students being tutored in song and dance by a revered performer in musical theatre, he realised he had found his theme, which he returned to film in the spring of 1967.

In order to secure funding from the studio, Anderson was required to submit a written outline. The succinct two-page ‘Proposal’ in the Anderson Archive gives an account of the film in English and Polish which is so exact in detail that it must have been written after production had got underway. Studio officials paid him the first instalment towards costs in mid-May, at least two weeks after shooting had begun. The ‘Proposal’ is almost certainly the document they required.

In it, the film bore the working title: ‘The third-year students take a lesson with Professor Sempolinski’. Its subtitle ‘One, two, three!’ became the Polish title in translation, *Raz Dwa Trzy*. It ingeniously captures the students’ chant as they waltz under the guidance of their professor; it hints too that they are at the start of the race into their adult and professional lives. The Proposal itself opens as follows –
Idea  The idea of this film came from an afternoon spent watching Professor Sempolinski working with third-year students on the presentation of songs and musical numbers. The selection of students was by chance, but I was struck by their enthusiasm, their ability and the freshness of their work. Even their mistakes had charm. And this atmosphere was reinforced by the enthusiasm and vitality of Professor Sempolinski. The intention is not to make a documentary account of the professor’s methods. In fact, since those are prepared songs – his part in the proceedings is limited – until the final scene where he instructs the students in the movements of the waltz; nor is it to show necessarily the most accomplished students. It is rather to capture the vitality and positive ‘attack’ of these young actors, and to use this atmosphere to accompany shots and scenes from life in Warsaw, the life which soon they will leave school to face.\textsuperscript{104}

Anderson appended a note to the outline indicating the nature of exterior city street scenes (several of them already in the can).

N.B.  Into this sequence of songs will be cut images from ‘real life’ – evoking the past and life today: a street memorial, with flowers dedicated to a fallen soldier of yesterday – relics of wartime agony – faces in the crowded streets of today – a woman toiling feverishly in a theatre cloakroom – shoppers buying food – workers crowding on to transport on their way home. The purpose of these shots is not to show an exotic, picturesque or ‘tourist’ view of Warsaw. But rather to contrast the fantasy of the songs with the reality of everyday existence – the unromantic facts of life with the freshness of youth that has still to come to terms with it.\textsuperscript{105}

Conditions of production

During the making of the film, Anderson wrote journal entries only intermittently, but their general thrust is confirmed in a summary account written the following year describing it as ‘a very pleasant, maddening and illuminating experience’.\textsuperscript{106} Despite this mixed verdict, his admiration for the students’ vitality and enthusiasm remained constant.

The students are really charming, excellent, good-mannered; hard working. They are, like the young Czechs, the best possible advertisement for socialism. What will become of them?\textsuperscript{107}

Among the difficulties faced, he battled, not for the only time in his career, to overcome inefficient translation. This problem was often resolved by the pianist rather than the official translators. Anderson referred to her as ‘the charming and intelligent Pani Irena [Klukowna]’ and his cinematographer captured these qualities as she accompanied the singers.\textsuperscript{108}
Anderson found that, in comparison with Britain, technical resources and skills were primitive, but he also said that the work and working relationships had a good personal quality.\textsuperscript{109} He greatly appreciated the cinematographer Zygmunt Samosiuk, ‘a marvellous person’, for his willingness and grace, but added that he was ‘oddly erratic’ and needed to work in a ‘different tradition to discover care’.\textsuperscript{110} The context makes it clear that Anderson thought that Samosiuk would benefit from experience like Ondricek’s, working in a film industry where more tightly organised professional regimes prevailed.

In fact, Anderson found the lack of organisation in the unit a constant handicap. It was impossible to get a schedule arranged, or held to (if one should be drawn up) so that the crew could plan and execute work intelligently. Again and again he complained about the loss of hours and even days in a tangle of inefficiency.\textsuperscript{111} On one occasion he grumbled at the indiscipline of the entire unit when they disappeared after filming the first song.\textsuperscript{112} He appears to have forgotten his shocked discovery of the previous October while directing \textit{Inadmissible Evidence}. Then too most of the actors disappeared ‘like whippets’ at the end of each rehearsal. They did this because everyone was paid so little that they all seemed to juggle three jobs.\textsuperscript{113} When receiving the funds for \textit{The Singing Lesson}, Anderson had noted that in Warsaw as elsewhere work in cinema was paid better than in the theatre.\textsuperscript{114} Nonetheless it seems likely that this crew needed to augment their income with other employment not least because this film was a short-term project.

\textbf{Authorship: input and perception}

As it happens, Anderson’s account of his film and those of the few who commented on it are closely entwined. He asserted that the theme of innocence and experience underlay the film. He intended the charm of students engaged in their music and dance to contrast with the drab, harsh life visible on the streets of Poland at the time.\textsuperscript{115} He had no illusions about the impact of Soviet power on the two Eastern European countries he knew best, only a decade after the occupation of Hungary in the mid-1950s. Indeed, Anderson left Warsaw on 14 June 1967 before editing of \textit{The Singing Lesson} was completed and the next day met Vladimir Pucholt in London. The young Czech actor, perceiving the threat that the Soviet Union posed to Dubcek’s liberalising government, had fled Prague leaving family, friends and the theatre.\textsuperscript{116} Anderson helped the frightened man apply for permission to stay in the UK and, having got involved, noted that he himself was imagining being under surveillance and scenes of violence.
It is like a death, or some intense personal or public event that for a moment breaks through the comfortable norms of routine, the safe cocoons in which we spend most of our lives; and like the Israeli war, there is even some kind of melodramatic tonic in it [...] inevitably, the third eye operates, and one thinks of it all in a film [...]17

Gavin Lambert knew Anderson’s opinions and endorsed them. He summarised the impact of *The Singing Lesson* as lighter in tone than *The White Bus*, but deceptively so, there being another, darker subtext. Lambert took the view that *The Singing Lesson* showed that the appeal of Poland (which Anderson had formerly felt vividly) had waned ‘with Soviet-style communism making life in Warsaw a mirror-image of everyday life in the drab, anonymous city of *The White Bus*’.118

Anderson denied having instructed people in Warsaw streets to avoid smiling when the camera was on them, describing their glumness as evidence of social alienation in Poland.119 Nevertheless, at the time, he had noted in his journal that he and Samosiuk had selected shots on location carefully, making a point, for example, of shooting ‘alienation close-ups of shop assistants... (Back to *O Dreamland*)’.120 If anything, the film is more sardonic than this suggests: a fuller reading discloses that not everybody on the streets appears glum. The shop assistants do look bored or weary, but a few well-to-do women buying hats and clothes are enjoying the rare chance to partake of the consumer economy. Given the depressed milieu in the majority of city scenes, the cushioned delight that insulates them from their fellow citizens is loaded with irony.

Lambert noted that the opening titles describe the film as ‘a sketchbook or poem’, adding, again prompted by Anderson, that the songs’ words are not important, ‘only their themes, the images and memories they evoke’.121 This may be true enough for an expatriate audience, but misses the political dimension for Poles. A congratulatory letter from Mr T. Korolewicz, a London-based émigré who saw *The Singing Lesson* at the Academy Cinema, makes the point that Anderson was lucky to have been invited to Poland when he was: ‘Now, unfortunately it would very probably be impossible because of the worsening, and worse, political climate’. Korolewicz hopes that none of those who participated in the film have been reprimanded or punished.122 A reminder, if more were needed, that the darkness documented in the faces of the ‘experienced’ men and women on the city’s streets was an ever-present, if barely visible burden in the nation’s socio-political structures that the ‘innocent’ young performers would have to face.

In *The Singing Lesson* Anderson’s authorial embrace of tensions served his subject well, as F. E. Siegel also perceived in reviewing a 1987 screening where he notes the tension as well as its exuberant resolution.

The Girl (Patricia Healey) ends her tour of her town with supper in a chip shop in a scene from *The White Bus* (1966).
One man sings ‘I cry for help! Help! And no one comes.’ He sings, but what we see are images of Warsaw society: cold, bleak, compressed. Only the students show animated faces of laughter. The triumph of art.

The acting teacher, whose eyes are carefully hidden behind dark sunglasses, is inscrutable. His thoughts only expressed by the slight movement of his lips. Then spontaneously, he gets up to dance. Suddenly everyone is dancing! The room is filled with movement, with life, with an irresistible urge to shout. It is a magnificent and joyous rendering in Anderson’s hands.123

After that same screening Diane Jacobs registered a similar insight but without the emphasis on exuberance.

Anderson the aggressive stylist can be found … [in] The Singing Lesson. Wildly elliptical, it counterpoints Polish performers rehearsing song-and-dance numbers with a foreigner’s free-associating impressions of Warsaw (looping train tracks, women trying on hats). Here is the testier Anderson of O Lucky Man! and Hotel Britannia – brutally seeking cacophonies, juxtaposing lilting folk tunes with scenes of harried commuters shuffling off to work.124

We noted when discussing The White Bus that Anderson’s authorial mark could be found in the tension between its documentary and fantasy elements. The Singing Lesson is structured across a not wholly dissimilar tension – balancing lyricism against harsh documentary realism.
THE WHITE BUS AND RAZ DWI TRZY OR THE SINGING LESSON

Fletcher, Anderson’s faithful colleague who not only made his own documentary *About the White Bus* but also played a major part in finishing Anderson’s film by taking over cutting in Kevin Brownlow’s absence and laying sound tracks (several diary entries in January and February 1966, LA 6/1/50).


15 Lindsay Anderson, Programme Notes for Gary Sweet’s showing of *The White Bus*, 3 December 1979 (LA 1/4/5/1).

16 Diary, 6 May 1965 (LA 6/1/48/109).

17 Anderson, Programme Notes for Gary Sweet.

18 Diary, 16 May to 1 June 1965 (LA 6/1/48/119–33).


20 Diary, 6 June 1965 (LA 6/1/48/140).

21 Diary, 2 July 1965 (LA 6/1/48/166).

22 Diary, 30 July 1965 (LA 6/1/48/193).

23 Ibid.

24 Anderson, Programme Notes for Gary Sweet.

25 This project too was not realised, in large measure thanks to the star’s intransigent demand that numerous changes be made to the play (diary, 3–9 August 1965, LA 6/1/48/197–203).

26 Diary, 29 August 1965 (LA 6/1/48/211).

27 Diary, 14 August 1965 (LA 6/1/48/208).

28 Devine died in January 1966.

29 Diary, 29 August 1965 (LA 6/1/48/211–19).


31 Diary, 6 September 1965 (LA 6/1/48/231).


33 Diary, 9 September 1965 (LA 6/1/48/234).


36 Ibid.


46 Sutherland, *English Satire*, 4.


48 Diary, 29 August 1965 (LA 6/1/48/216).

49 Diary, 29 August 1965 (LA 6/1/48/219).


51 Diary, 26 November 1965 (LA 6/1/48/281).

52 Diary, 10 December 1965 (LA 6/1/48/290).
Anderson, Never Apologise, 107. This man of legendary and ungovernable temper never had a problem ‘discouraging’ people who annoyed him. Mamoun Hassan recalls with some amusement working in the adjacent room of a shared facility when Anderson and Brownlow were experiencing difficulty cutting The White Bus. Hassan became so familiar with the director’s despairing shrieks of ‘Kevin!’ that he learnt to imitate them. On one occasion he did so to tease Brownlow, believing the director was not in the editing suite. But he was mistaken and Anderson hurled a 400’ can of film like a discus at Hassan’s head, narrowly missing him (Mamoun Hassan in conversation, 26 February 2009).


Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 70.


Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 70.


Anderson used these words again as an epigraph in If....

Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 70; see also Penelope Houston, ‘The Heavy Brigade’, Spectator (19 July 1968) 97.


Diary, 10–13 January 1966 (LA 6/1/50/7–10).

Diary, 2 and 5 February 1966 (LA 6/1/50/30 and 33).

Diary, 28 January 1966 (LA 6/1/50/24).

Ibid.

Diary, 2 February 1966 (LA 6/1/50/30).

Diary, 12 January 1966 (LA 6/1/50/9).


Diary, 20–21 June 1966 (LA 6/1/50/64–5).

Diary, 2 September 1966 (LA 6/1/50/92).

Diary, 7 October 1966 (LA 6/1/50/101).

Diary, 7 January 1967 (LA 6/1/54/7).

Diary, 9 January 1967 (LA 6/1/54/9).

Diary, 28 September 1965 (LA 6/1/48/247).

Diary, 18–20 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/37–9).


Years later Malcolm McDowell mentioned (with O Lucky Man! in mind) the difficulty of playing a role which requires the character to react rather than initiate action. Healey preceded him in having to play in that mode for most of The White Bus.

Anderson, Never Apologise, 106.


While post-production was continuing, he had been casting two plays, including The Cherry Orchard for the Chichester Theatre.

Diary, 10 April 1966 (LA 6/1/50/59).
86 Doris Lessing, in promotional leaflet for *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959) (LA 3/5/5).
92 David Robinson, ‘Anderson Shooting *If*...’, *Sight & Sound*, 37, 3 (Summer 1968) 131.
95 Michel Duran, ‘*If*...: Le Collège Détone’, *Le Canard Enchaîné* (28 May 1969) 7 (LA 1/6/6/2/4).
96 Diary, 2 September 1966 (LA 6/1/50/92).
97 Louis Marcourelles, ‘Dans la tradition du “free cinema”’, 40.
100 *Ibid.*
101 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Proposed Short Film’, n.d. (LA 1/5/2/1).
102 Diary, 13 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/32).
103 Diary, 29 April 1967 (LA 6/1/54/21).
104 Anderson, ‘Proposed Short Film’.
107 Diary, 7 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/28).
108 Diary, 5 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/26).
109 Anderson, publicity ‘interview’.
110 Diary, 13 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/32).
111 See diary, 3–6 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/24–7).
112 Diary, 4 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/25).
114 Diary, 13 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/32).
117 Diary, 19 June 1967 (LA 6/1/54/71).
120 Diary, 2 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/23).
121 Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, 137.
122 Correspondence, T. Korolewicz to Anderson, n.d. (LA 1/5/3/1/10).
Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting get understanding. (Proverbs 4:7)

Introduction

The central characters of If... are three senior boys. Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell) is the charismatic leader with Johnny (David Wood) and Wallace (Richard Warwick) his willing accomplices.

The three friends, on the verge of adulthood, resist the bullying discipline imposed by the prefects – smoking, drinking, ignoring pettifogging orders and, worst of all, addressing those martinet with calculated arrogance. For their rebellious attitude they are beaten savagely; but rather than feel humiliated they rebel. Mick and Johnny break out of school and taste forbidden delights of the world beyond its walls, stealing a motorcycle and meeting a Girl (Christine Noonan) in a roadside café.

On manoeuvre as cadet soldiers, the three mutiny and kill their commanding officer (Geoffrey Chater). This individual is not only the school chaplain, but a sadistic teacher who abuses junior boys. The headmaster (Peter Jeffrey) summons the murdering trio to his study and lectures them on their misconduct before producing the chaplain from a drawer and instructing the boys to apologise. Their punishment is to clear a musty storeroom, and as they burn the rubbish they uncover not only a stuffed crocodile and an embalmed foetus but forgotten arms and ammunition. Rejoined by the Girl, they take to the roof on Founders’ Day and slaughter the headmaster and his staff, distinguished guests, parents and pupils.

A commercial and to a large degree critical success, this film constitutes a significant point of reference in Anderson’s career. Arguably it epitomises his legacy as a film director, the title that members of the
general public are most likely to recognise and associate with his work and personality. In that connection, after making *The White Bus*, he was asked with reference to statements by European New Wave filmmakers, whether the director was emerging in a new capacity. He replied:

Well, this is hardly a new development in the cinema; it simply has developed on a scale that has previously been impossible. For instance, Fellini's *8½* is in the tradition of the French avant-garde film of the early thirties. What is new is a large, educated, international audience which makes such a film economically feasible. The most important stylistic development is the escape from the straightforward narrative film, previously the basis of the cinema (certainly of the American cinema). We have reached a point where the material of the film can be presented in more interesting, more subjective ways.

Anderson's response anticipates the bases exploited by *If*.... in finding success as both a critically interesting art film and reasonably profitable production.

**Only connect: *If*.... as text and palimpsest**

The epigraph to the film (and this chapter) shows Anderson returning to a theme he opened in *The White Bus*. The satirical element cannot be missed since few characters in either film possess wisdom or understanding. Erik Hedling notes that in *If*.... the irony cuts deeper when in chapel the arrogant and brutal head boy, Rowntree (Robert Swann), reads the lesson citing Moses on God's commandments: ‘for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ The school does not teach the getting of wisdom but dullness, obedience and conformity: for Anderson the nation is far from great.

Hedling shows that *If*.... has a place within a distinctive British literary and film cycle. The concept of public schools as breeding grounds for the old values of Empire (duty, discipline, physical courage deployed by the upper classes in the service of State, Church and the Military) has a history originating with Dr Thomas Arnold of Rugby. It soon found a home in fiction: Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) is merely the best known of a genre of school novels of the mid-Victorian era. Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky & Co.* (1899) started a sub-genre in which the public school was shown as both a living nest of bullying, sadism and brutality for the pupils, yet essential for training the Empire's ruling caste. The genre found an outlet in cinema in a cycle – *The Housemaster*
LINDSAY ANDERSON

(1938) and Goodbye Mr Chips (1939) among them – which continued after Anderson’s film.\(^5\)

the fact that Anderson and Sherwin chose to name their film after Kipling’s poem ‘If–’... can in part be read metaphorically, as an ironic commentary to Kipling’s enthusiasm for English education ritual and his celebration of the British Empire, and in part literally, as a positively charged allusion to the heroism praised in ‘If–’.\(^6\)

If..., the film, showed both sides of the paradox that Hedling identified, the positive aspect arising not from the training of the Empire’s rulers (too late for that) but the fact that the boys (despite their naivety in believing that armed rebellion will change the old order) act as heroes and become men in standing up for their convictions.\(^7\)

Anderson’s autobiographical contributions

David Sherwin and John Howlett started things off with an autobiographical script based on their time in public school. When it failed to win approval from British producers, the project was brought to Anderson because he had had similar schooling.

During the time he worked on If..., Anderson’s inner conflicts continued to plague him, as he recorded while on holiday from pre-production. Reflecting on the causes of exhaustion, he recurred to a lament familiar in his journals of recent years. Despite the welter of activities – script rewrites, location searches and ‘increasingly nerve-wracking visits’ to his mother – he could not ignore a growing sense of personal and professional isolation.\(^8\)

Alliances of the past ten years (Free Cinema; the Royal Court) have come to an end; friends and contemporaries (the ever-recurring name of Karel [Reisz] in the forefront) have passed on to working out their life-patterns, more or less ruthlessly, in terms of compromise, or adjustment to the established order. And let me not be self-righteous: my need, as well as my gift, is an independent, unconforming one, at odds with the tradition of my class and my country. The discomfort I feel is to a great extent due to the disparity between my subjective, non-conforming impulse – and my strength to battle and survive in a position of such isolation.\(^9\)

Add to these pressures his predisposition to displace loneliness and personal despair into razor-tongued, intellectually brilliant anger, and the result is a not implausible outline of the enduring mindset that fostered his impulse to satirise.

The roots of If... not only, as in The White Bus, reached deep into the director’s psyche but also into his personal history, even though
the script’s first draft (entitled Crusaders) was not his and pulled equally embedded threads from Sherwin’s past. In Cheltenham, Anderson had attended a public school with a strong military tradition. As the school prospectus noted, ‘all boys in the Senior School are instructed in military drill and the use of the rifle ... with a view to the special preparation of Boys for the Army’.10 Discipline was strong, reflected in the College Rule book, twelve pages of regulations governing conduct with a fold out map showing areas of Cheltenham out-of-bounds to students.11

Anderson kept souvenirs of his schooldays including prospectuses, postcards of the College, his school crest and cap, exam certificates, programmes for theatre productions in which he appeared and school notebooks.12 Reports in his run of The Cheltonian (the school journal) suggest that he had a conventional time at school, while excelling in the artistic and literary fields. As a senior pupil, he took on responsibilities: Editor of The Cheltonian from October 1940; Secretary of the Debating Society from March 1941;13 and College Prefect from October 1941.14

In his first editorial for The Cheltonian, he wrote a review of conditions at college following a year of the war (annotated in his own copy with the words ‘all my own work’).15 His literary talents were seen in a number of short stories and the occasional film review. He was an active member of the school’s dramatic societies (along with Gavin Lambert); reviews of their productions show that he excelled in playing the clown and the Shakespearian fool.

At one meeting of the Debating Society, Anderson proposed the motion that ‘This House considers that the Public School System has no future’. He ‘prophesied the introduction of co-education and argued that the upper classes had shown themselves unworthy of their privileges by their unwillingness to shoulder their responsibilities’. His arguments failed to sway the House and the proposal was defeated after a debate which he described in The Cheltonian as ‘marred by an excess of snobbery and class consciousness’.16

His memorabilia contain pertinent curiosities: every year the pupils produced an end-of-term humorous publication for Speech Day, The Colleger. Its June 1935 edition (Anderson was twelve at the time) included ‘Sickle and Hammer’, a skit about a ‘Soviet’ revolution at the school. The rebels, led by one of the pupils, ‘purloined the contents of the armories’ and took up position in the College field before being defeated by the school, ‘uttering fierce cries of Col-LEGE, Col-LEGE’.17

When nineteen, Anderson drafted a two-page ‘Untitled Screenplay’ in which one of two brothers lately out of public school joins the commandos and is killed in a raid. The other has started studying at Oxford; deeply stirred he resolves to join the army immediately.18 The
story has autobiographical links which date it to Anderson’s first undergraduate year, shortly before his conscription. Paul Sutton thinks the outline is an element on which he might have drawn when redrafting *Crusaders*. However, it can be read as bearing a more pressing sub-text. Lindsay’s 1942 journals express alternating admiration for and irritation with his elder brother. He disliked Murray’s insouciant selfishness, his ‘restless, rolling-stone quality’ on flying visits from the war; yet he felt guilty that Murray was facing dangers from which he was still sheltered. Lindsay had witnessed the unusual sight of his cold mother’s tearful anxiety over Murray’s safety, which probably increased his jealousy. His screenplay vents his embarrassment in symbolic fratricide.

Self-evidently, when it came to scripting *If...* his souvenirs would have provided Lindsay with useful prompts; but he also did some up-to-date research, reading a copy of J. D. R. McConnell’s *Eton: How It Works* (1967). Years later he noted how useful this book had been. In one scene three older boys are called to the office of the headmaster after shooting the chaplain: ‘it is interesting that a lot of the headmaster’s dialogue in that scene was taken from a book written by an ex-house-master at Eton, so some of the more idiotic things spoken by the headmaster are real.’

One of the film’s themes was pre-echoed two decades before he read *Crusaders*. Recently demobilised from wartime service to resume academic studies in Oxford, Anderson noted in his journal for 5 March 1946 a piece of gossip that excited his curiosity.

Tea with Peter Currie and the Cheltonian Society Committee [...] Afterwards get onto subject of Coll[ege] and stumble on the track of a rather exciting anti-headmaster conspiracy, but unfortunately not operating from the humane, but the reactionary standpoint. Must go over and find out more about this. Curtis [sic] was very secretive, but let quite enough out of the bag to be going on with.

The diaries carry no further reference to this rumour, and twenty years later Anderson was introduced to Sherwin and Howlett while they were trying to place the script of *Crusaders*. It was only after he began work on the project that Anderson thought of making his old school the site of a fictional anti-headmaster conspiracy. Yet that 1946 journal entry reveals more than intimate gossip among old boys from the same school. Its tone as much as content reveals the conflict between his sense of belonging among these members of the upper class and his fascination with rebellion against the old order represented by the school and its alumni.
Writing the script: creative tensions

Sherwin and Howlett had set out to fictionalise their days at the Tonbridge Public School in Kent. By the time Lindsay Anderson met them, their hopes of seeing *Crusaders* produced were running low. Their story was a chronicle of the struggle for power and the resulting revolt against the daily abuses taking place within the confines of an imagined English public school. It had incurred moral outrage from two of the industry’s purse-holders; and where it had attracted favourable attention, no commitment followed. Nicholas Ray expressed interest in the story but felt that he was not suited to direct it. Similarly, Seth Holt responded enthusiastically but thought his background disqualified him. Instead, he introduced the writers to Anderson, rightly believing the latter’s experience of public school constituted an essential prerequisite for developing the script.

After some weeks Howlett dropped out to concentrate on another script for Holt, leaving *Crusaders* to Anderson and Sherwin. Sherwin was later to describe the circumstances which led to his working with Anderson as a personal and artistic epiphany. But as we said in Chapter 4, it was not always comfortable for either man. Both kept notes about the writing process. Charles Drazin – editor of Sherwin’s diaries and his friend – offers the observations of an informed outsider on the dynamic operating between the two men. It quickly moved to a teacher/student basis when Anderson expressed dissatisfaction with Sherwin and Howlett’s draft. In a detailed commentary to Sherwin early in November 1966 Anderson expressed approval of a number of changes that Sherwin had offered in a recent set of notes, but added, ‘plainly the time has come to consider form a bit; i.e. who are the characters in this story; how do they relate; what is happening at the beginning, middle and end; what are the main incidents?’

You have (excuse me writing like a school report) a fecundity of imagination, but it seems to operate rather without organic sense, like a series of prose poems: or jottings for a script. Sometimes a whole idea is valuable, sometimes a couple of lines, sometimes nothing.

Sherwin’s diary for Christmas Eve 1966 summarises his emotional strain.

Lindsay tells me the script is awful. I have failed. ‘Go away and write simply. Remember Georg Büchner,’ he says.

In citing the nineteenth-century dramatist as an exemplar, Anderson was perhaps thinking of his precept that a new plot or idea cannot be forced into an existing, well-tried form. Form must follow content.
As Mueller notes, each scene in Büchner’s plays was virtually autonomous, but when juxtaposed and assembled, they formed a seemingly indissoluble whole. Thus Brecht’s Epic Theatre owes him a great debt.\(^3\)

Although references to Brecht abound in Anderson’s records, this is not true of Büchner, although he did possess two editions of Büchner’s plays, both published in 1963. Directly or indirectly, *If....* is indebted to his example.

Sherwin was not alone in feeling stressed. After a script meeting on the first day of 1967 Anderson noted that the ‘outline, characters, relationships [...] remain appallingly fluid’.\(^3\)

Concerning the script-writing process, he described himself as ‘too subjective to be a writer’; however, he recognised that Sherwin had a different problem, namely ‘opposing me with enough confidence’.\(^4\) Within a week he saw that the work was progressing, but reflected further on his own limitations as a writer. As when co-scripting *The White Bus*, he felt the need for:

that *authoritative* writing element[,] that authority to whom I can make appeal – which seems an inescapable element of my ambiguous, ambivalent nature... I feel the story, the style even is shaping, but I find myself very confused, between epic, fantasist, liberal protest (an initial danger) etc... I need to throw myself against reality, out of which I can create something – but to create that reality is very hard for me. I only seem able to work through some kind of dialectic.\(^4\)

When he came to work on *O Lucky Man!* Anderson would revert to similar thoughts, once again reflecting that he floundered when it came to initiating scenes. Wanting someone to construct a firm outline that he could challenge, but finding Sherwin unable to do that, Anderson tried with each film to take on both roles at the cost of great stress to himself and the working relationship with Sherwin.

Charles Drazin puts it this way:

David had a genius for poetic dialogue and a sense of the absurd or the fantastic in the real, but he lacked judgement and the ability to stand outside himself successfully to sift what worked from what did not work. Anderson, on the other hand, possessed a formidable sense of structure and the analytical ability to push a dramatic situation to its logical conclusion ... Anderson was a containing influence for a highly inventive mind that was prone to lose itself in excesses of imagination.\(^4\)

As already noted, the writers’ autobiographical experience found its way into *If....* Another major influence in shaping the structure and texture of the film, as Drazin explains, was their shared interest in Jean Vigo’s work, especially *Zéro de Conduite*. 
The affinity of approach that Vigo, Sherwin and Anderson share lies in suppressing conventional suspense so that we think more deeply about the relationship between the people and the objects in the frame. They shift the emphasis from a series of steps in a sequence, where the primary drive is the unfolding narrative, to the texture of the sequence itself. Plausibility of story ceases to be so much in issue, allowing a poetic freedom. It is why If.... is able to move so seamlessly between realism and fantasy: the school chaplain is shot dead in one scene, to be pulled out of a drawer in a subsequent scene to receive the apologies of his killers. It is surreal, but not absurd.43

As Anderson commented on this incident, ‘There is a perfectly clear symbolic interpretation for the act, which is: This is where the establishment keeps religion, isn’t it?’44 This scene and Anderson’s gloss on it provide further evidence linking this film to The White Bus and also aesthetic modes deployed in inscribing themes employed by directors such as Fellini, Antonioni, Godard, Resnais and Varda.

**Authorial input**

**Script credits/film credits**

Drazin concludes his account of the writers’ authorial input to the project by stating that ‘the film was an example of the key creators in effect pooling their authorship through shared values. If.... was neither Anderson’s film nor Sherwin’s film; it was their film’.45 This needs further scrutiny.

In an article for The Observer in December 1968 about the decision once again to go for an epic style, Anderson did indeed attribute all writing decisions relating to If.... to both Sherwin and himself.

From the start, the epic style was what David Sherwin and I aimed at... The school as paradigm of an obstinately hierarchic Britain; of the Western world; of authority and anarchism [...]. Crusaders had also ended in violence, but on a personal level. We were after something bigger, something that went beyond naturalism, yet with realism, an inner logic, that would enable us to progress from an apparently naturalistic start to a violently epic conclusion.46

He expanded this in ‘Notes for a Preface’ to the published script of If....

We specially saw Zéro de Conduite again, before writing started, to give us courage. And we constantly thought of Brecht, and his definition of the ‘epic’ style. David referred to Kleist from time to time, John Ford (‘old father, old artificer’) and Humphrey Jennings (romantic-ironic conservative) were in the bloodstream.47
Anderson’s subsequent two feature films and several unrealised projects were also to be jointly scripted with Sherwin. So the picture emerges of a productive and mutually beneficial, if stressful partnership. However, the conclusion that they were equal partners in the making of *If...* fails to recognise certain factors. First, Anderson had without assistance from Sherwin recently directed a satirical epic (albeit not of feature length) in *The White Bus*. Second, typical of Anderson’s working relationships, the Anderson–Sherwin collaboration was not evenly balanced in psychological terms.

The disparity between Sherwin’s exuberant but insufficiently governed fantasies and Anderson’s need to apply formal discipline generated creative tension. That made progress in developing the script both painful and slow; yet it also caused the process to thrive, deepening the film’s epic dimensions. In the outturn interpersonal tension between the director and his scriptwriter on *If...* mirrors the tensions analysed in scripting *The White Bus* (Chapter 5). Looking beyond *If...* we find evidence that when directing feature films Anderson usually worked in tension with others. On the writing front, where Sherwin now replaced Delaney, David Berry would succeed Sherwin on *The Whales of August*. Although it is fair to attribute co-authorship of the script of *If...* to Sherwin, like that of *The White Bus* to Delaney, Anderson was dominant in each partnership. And an equal partnership in writing a script is not the same as equal co-authorship of a finished film.

**Working with crew members**

From the editor’s perspective, David Gladwell corroborated Anderson’s insistence on the simple editorial style signalled in the script. Gladwell had discovered little written guidance there, and his first attempt at putting a scene together was the Cadet force queuing for refreshments when the rebels fire into the tea urn. It had displeased the director on the grounds that he had made it look like an Ealing comedy with far too many cuts. Anderson told him to ‘try putting it together to follow the script’.48

In four short statements the script described what happens. It was this simplicity which I had mistaken for vagueness, and it was this simplicity which the director required in his film ... In everything else we did in the course of editing the film, this style remained consistent. The answers to problems were not always to be found by following the written script but success was nearly always achieved by making the minimum number of cuts.49
Gladwell added that he had learned a basic rule from Anderson, ‘that all the action which occurs between any two cuts should be quite self-sufficient in character’. He had no doubts concerning authorial control. At their first meeting Anderson had made it clear ‘that it would be he and not I who would be editing the picture and that my job would be to organize the cutting-room...’. In due time Anderson supervised all the looping, dubbing and mixing: ‘No stage was allowed to escape his control just as, during editing, no cut satisfied him until all the possible alternative arrangements of shots or alternative frames on which to cut had been fully considered’.

It was much the same with other senior members of Anderson’s crews on this and other features. A letter by his Production Designer, Jocelyn Herbert, congratulates him on the finished film but also touches both on the torments of working with him and her admiration.

I just wanted to say how glad I am about ‘If’, not because of the critics but because it really is good – ‘a Masterpiece’ as you say yourself. Somehow the whole operation – in spite of the agonies, has been a great experience and somewhat revived my flagging faith. You just are different to work with than anyone else – far more demanding – and far more rewarding – the difference I suppose between being a creative artist or not? Anyhow the example of your unflagging and detailed concentration is as stimulating as it is unique and I am immensely proud to have been (even in a somewhat haphazard way) connected with the film.

This pattern of his working relationships, which repeats film after film, suggests that Anderson, always striving for control, projected his own inner tensions as well as his warmth and humour on both his colleagues and the outcome of their often difficult labours. That tension seems to complement the tension in the film text between documentary realism and insurrectionary fantasy.

Authorial input – stylistic devices

Anderson did not maintain his journal while shooting If..., but he did offer David Robinson, for a location report, reflections on style that complement Gladwell’s words.

As far as style is concerned, this film is really a development from The White Bus. The White Bus was quite consciously made in a simple shooting style; and in fact I like more and more a style that is as simple and quintessential as possible. I think to some extent that it is a reaction against the over-application of technique which seems to me to be more and more a kind of mannerism as opposed to a genuine style. The result of using an extremely direct and simple shooting technique is in fact a
deliberate contravention of fashion, and the result is a film that from the commercial point of view was regarded as outlandish and utterly uncommercial [...] And in this picture also the actual shooting technique is extremely simple [...] I think what one tries to do is to get at essences rather than brilliant surfaces.54

In If..., Anderson was beginning, according to Hedling, to adopt self-referencing practices that European art film directors had developed as a means of enhancing their authorial signature. One pupil is named Machin – a tag on This Sporting Life.55 In chapel, the boys sing a traditional hymn ‘Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus’. Anderson and Sherwin rewrote it as ‘Stand Up! Stand Up! For College!’ name-checking the director’s passionate argument in Sight & Sound for a revitalised British cinema.56 Most obviously with Arthur Lowe as Housemaster, Anderson began casting actors whom he had previously directed on stage or in films. Particularly with O Lucky Man! and Britannia Hospital, it adds to the sense of authorial continuity between the films.

In a mock interview written to support the promotion of If..., Anderson noted the film’s various distancing devices. He emphasised how his film departs from the classical emphasis upon narrative traditionally associated with the Hollywood Studio Era format. And he recurred to the Brechtian ideas voiced in support of The White Bus, elaborating the idea of the ‘Epic’ to indicate what this film aimed to achieve in both style and theme.

the concern of the film is much more to show what people are, what things actually are, than to tie everything together in a specific cause and effect.57

He argued that the film’s chapter divisions foreground the theme being introduced to the audience in a manner that contributes to the epic effect. He stressed, for example, the symbolic dimension of the ‘Discipline’ section referring to a crucial moment when the three rebellious friends, Mick Travis, Wallace and Johnny, are caned. They are being beaten, the head boy tells them, not to punish a specific mischief, but as an indictment, a rejection of what they are.58 Anderson claimed the episode thus transcends the immediate value of the beating by building the narrative towards its end. It also invites the audience to focus upon what is happening to the characters and the thematic significance of the act – further evidence of the film’s conscious associations with European New Wave practice.

Anne Billson develops this idea in a different way, contending that ‘Chapter headings are a sign of directors who want to be taken seriously as auteurs’. They are for Anglophone directors a substitute for the
subtitles that they seldom have cause to use but which by convention have become widely recognized as a signifier of the art movie. They remain to this day ‘a smart way for film-makers to align themselves with revered artists such as Jean-Luc Godard, whose Vivre Sa Vie is a “film en douze tableaux”’. Anderson, however, refuted the suggestion as ‘fashionable rubbish’ when mooted by commentators forty years earlier, referring to Brecht as his model.

Making and selling the film

Finding a distributor

The next draft of Crusaders was ready by mid-May 1967 when Anderson declared it finished (although twenty-four hours later Sherwin panicked, ‘The script is rubbish’). Anderson and producer Michael Medwin (of Memorial Enterprises) discussed the project with Universal’s Cecil Tennant and Jay Kantor. Anderson found them respectful but ‘not convinced or optimistic of Crusaders’ capacity to attract exhibitors’. In June, after a further bout of rewriting embarked upon by Anderson with reluctance, they pitched it at Columbia’s London office. John van Eyssen accepted the project ‘smoothly, with a few tepid criticisms’; but Anderson noted that the executive was ‘concerned obviously to cut an influential figure, and I am raising no premature cheers’. His judgement was shrewd: Columbia did not pursue the project. Medwin’s partner in Memorial was the actor Albert Finney and he began energetically pitching the script to Hollywood studios. All the majors had turned the project down when CBS Films undertook to fund it; but at the last moment they pulled out leaving Memorial only forty-eight hours to find a backer. Medwin and Finney finally interested Charles Bluhdorn. On the basis of a personal hunch rather than market analysis, he signed them to Paramount Pictures. Gladwell recalled the budget was set at around £250,000; Joseph Morella’s statement that the negative cost amounted to $660,000 is compatible with that at the exchange rate then extant.

Promoting If....: art-house film or commercial movie?

Years after the event, Alan Lovell furnished a socialist’s account of the locus of If.... in the motion picture industry. He believed that Anderson’s success in getting If.... and O Lucky Man! produced within the British cinema of their era was a great achievement. Brecht had never worked within a similar economic and social situation and had never conceived
of the pleasure that audiences could take from the popular theatre as other than a drug. So he had left no legacy of clear thinking on the problems faced by an artist such as Anderson. The latter had no choice but to innovate in seeking to use Brechtian methods within popular forms and in a capitalist industry – the British cinema – committed to entertaining very large numbers of people.

The tension arising from the conflict between commercial and artistic objectives revealed itself throughout the promotion of If..... Following a pre-release screening in September 1968, Paramount’s London office pressed Anderson to conform to Anglo-American taste. Bolstered by the reactions of that audience, the studio’s Terence Feely reiterated the need (as he saw it) to nurse spectators through the movie step-by-step: ‘The fantasies and the lack of any help in recognising them have again been repeatedly mentioned’. He advocated for the café scene placing a shot of Johnny before the Girl and Mick are seen naked, ‘so that at least we could assume that this is his fantasy’. Feely missed that on the jukebox Mick selects the African Sanctus from the Congolese Missa Luba. This track blends traditional Christian Mass with (Europeanised) pagan influences and is the music cue that periodically signals Mick’s sense of burgeoning power that will allow him, rather than actual freedom, the illusion of breaking out of ‘a world ruled by the principle of logos’ – the straightjacket the school imposes on its pupils. Feely added to his misapprehension by recommending Anderson drop a scene where the dead padre returns from a drawer in the headmaster’s room and show that killing him had been Mick’s fantasy. Happily, a week after this letter, Paramount’s Hollywood chiefs Charles Bluhdorn and Martin S. Davies expressed their delight with Anderson’s attitude to the entire project. There is no record in the director’s files of further pressure from the London office on this matter.

Paramount put together a doughty sixty-page pack to support the film they had financed and appeal through the press to the widest possible spectrum of moviegoers. In one respect the pack adopted the usual format and furnished career histories for all the principal talent behind and in front of the camera. However (doubtless bearing in mind the needs of press reviewers based outside Britain), it also presented journalists with easily digested information about the nature of public schools. This was accompanied by an account of problems the crew had faced in creating the on-screen ‘College House’ from location shoots in no fewer than four schools and a studio. Meanwhile Anderson had taken a complementary tack and, as mentioned previously, written a mock interview to help promote the film. In it he emphasised qualities that he hoped would appeal to an audience demographic willing
to think about the film’s aesthetics and themes. Quoted as if an actual interview, it provided the core of an article by Elizabeth Sussex in *The Times* in November 1968.\(^7\)

The British Press screening took place at Paramount, Piccadilly Circus on 17 December 1968, two days before the London run commenced.\(^7\) Thereafter, pre-release screenings for the rest of Britain were arranged for various dates in February 1969.\(^7\) Well before then, on New Year’s Day 1969, Anderson, reflecting once again in the backwash from the film’s completion on ‘reawakening to an emotionally empty life...’, was aware that in London ‘in the freezing evenings the queues straggle down Lower Regent Street for *If...*’.\(^7\) He was so completely drained of energy that he could ‘hardly feel pleasure about the astonishing success (so far) of the film – certainly no exhilaration...’.\(^7\)

Soon the American publicist Marion Billings was organising a ten-day schedule for Anderson and Medwin to promote *If...* in New York City through interviews with newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Anderson was slated also to give an informal talk to the Film Class at the School of Visual Arts.\(^8\) The effort paid off when the National Society of Film Critics (comprising celebrated reviewers for *Newsweek, New Yorker, Time, Life, Vogue* and other magazines) selected the film for special recommendation.\(^8\)

Anderson’s relations with Paramount Pictures (UK) did not remain undisturbed. In March 1969 he wrote protesting furiously about the total lack of purpose and organisation behind a party for ABC cinema managers. It was intended to publicise the film’s UK-wide circuit release to the very people who would be on the sales front line. Memorial had its three producers and eight leading players including the stars in attendance – all eager to persuade the cinema managers of their film’s quality. Paramount, Anderson alleged, had only two people present: they knew none of the filmmakers and appeared overawed by the occasion. ABC had no senior manager whatsoever to hand.\(^8\)

Anderson’s promotional efforts did not end with the film’s release. Always ready to rise to a challenge, when the first British reviews of *If...* stirred up controversy, he drafted an advertising poster under the strap-line, ‘Which Side Will You Be On?’ Divided down the middle, it comprised extracts from British papers – damning reviews on one side, glowing ones on the other.\(^8\) This wasn't the first time he had adopted a confrontational approach to critics, staring criticism in the face and challenging audiences to make up their own minds. In 1959 he had directed a production of John Arden’s anti-war parable *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* at the Royal Court Theatre. After ten days of its scheduled run Anderson produced a leaflet to counter poor reception and empty seats.
In bold type on coloured paper he asked theatregoers, ‘What Kind of a Theatre Do You Want?’ accompanied by extracts from a damning review by Harold Hobson in the *Sunday Times* and a more favourable report by Philip Hope-Wallace in the *Manchester Guardian*. The reverse of the leaflet featured praise from high-profile figures including Peggy Ashcroft, Doris Lessing, John Osborne and Karel Reisz.84

None of this evaded personal moral cost: in an article of December 1968 Anderson lamented the compromises forced on the director who tried to beat the system, even when he had cut the trailer and fought over the advertising to seek a match with his own ideas. He felt the ‘wretched loss of dignity’ in conniving at stories and interviews (including those he had solicited) that betrayed the seriousness of his work in the interests of entertaining readers and getting the film seen.

The system which permitted (probably by accident) its creation, has no real idea how to use it. How Quixotic it suddenly seems, how doomed to failure, this attempt to straddle a divided culture, to find an audience that is neither *Carry On* nor *New Statesman*, neither ad-mass nor mandarin.85

Then as now, *Variety* was the dominant trade paper for the American motion picture industry. One of its main functions was to guide cinema operators on the suitability of new releases for the specific markets they served. Gene Moskowitz summarised his advice on *If....* in the characteristically overwrought argot of the paper.

Dynamic and provocative film on student revolt in a British public school. Fine returns indicated in specialized and general situations, though careful placement needed... Timely and timeless, this is a punchy, poetic pic that delves into the epic theme of youthful revolt. Entertaining and provocative, it should show art legs and playoff possibilities if well placed, ballyhooed and labeled. It reveals Lindsay Anderson as one of the more individual and dynamic filmmakers on the British scene.86

Moskowitz was Anderson’s friend. This may account for his characterising as ‘epic’ a film which had very few of the qualities Hollywood usually attached to that term. Then as now, the studios released what they labelled as epics to every kind of cinema, not ‘in specialized ... situations’. Moskowitz was hoping young American audiences would follow their British peers and pick up on *If....* to produce ‘epic’ box-office results. In effect his review doubled as promotion. Indeed the prospects looked good (though not epic) when Morella reported (also in *Variety*) that the film had done well in the UK, recouping its negative cost of $660,000.87

When *If....* won the 1969 Palme d’Or, it sprung both director and principal talent into international prominence. One cannot but note
the irony that Anderson’s international reputation was established on the back of a cultural heritage towards which he felt so ambivalent throughout his life. His feelings surfaced again in a 1991 interview when he admitted not knowing how to make a film which the British wanted to see.

I’ve never felt part of the film industry here, and I don’t think I am. Read the film books – I’m rarely there. [...] I don’t exist anymore as a British filmmaker. I have never had a nomination, not that I give a damn, from the British Film Academy. That is perfectly OK because I know what I do is not to the English taste – Fuck ‘em.88

Box office

Whatever the merits and demerits of the promotional system, the public soon found out about If.... (built in the UK by excited word of mouth among the young)89 and this showed up in box-office returns.

To their frustration, Medwin and Anderson had difficulty establishing via the Byzantine contractual and financial systems operated by Paramount in New York what the takings and properly incurred expenditure of the distributors had been. They disputed the charging of more than $500,000 of expenses and resorted in 1972 to having Paramount’s accounting statements audited. The resulting reports showed that by the end of 1971 the film had returned to Paramount worldwide gross receipts in excess of $4 million.90 The film continued to earn and the last set of reports held in Anderson’s files shows total receipts from 35mm, 16mm and televised distribution amounting by January 1985 to $5.7 million.91

Anderson’s earnings as director amounted by that date to $243,725.92 He would have been entitled also to a share of the producers’ income from Memorial, Paramount having by the same date remitted to that company just under $300,000.

Reviewers and critics: attributions of authorship

After its Cannes screening in May 1969 and the award of the Palme d’Or, If.... was widely reviewed. A tendency emerged in some accounts to read the film as starting in the documentary mode with a realistic depiction of the everyday life and rituals at a public school, then evolving into a fictionalised, even romanticised account of youth rebellion. In the Financial Times David Robinson found it poetic in juxtaposing elements to produce impressions greater than the sum of those elements and
thereby offering ‘a vivid metaphor for conflicts in contemporary society which are acute but barely articulated’.93

The close integration and determined development of the film is concealed by its method: a series of brief impressionistic scenes, subdivided into eight chapters. The anarchic and revolutionary elements that underlie the film, the horror inspired by the sadism and frustrated sexuality that are by-products of the system do not exclude a vigorous comedy. For although the film expands to fantasy and symbol and surrealism (two scenes in particular, consciously or not, echo Bunuel) its substance derives not a little from Lindsay Anderson’s first vocation as a realist director.94

John Russell Taylor wrote in The Times: ‘Little by little it edges over into fantasy, or rather fantasy penetrates more and more deeply into the film’s reality’.95 Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times voiced the same opinion.96 Others saw the permeation of fantasy into documentary realism or even, as for Richard Roud in The Guardian, the fusion of these two modes of address.97 The Observer’s Penelope Mortimer thought that ‘The transfusion of fantasy and fact is so expertly done that there is, for the greater part of the film, no dividing line’.98 Vincent Canby in the New York Times took a wider view: ‘Every movie is a fantasy of one sort or another, with its own built-in reality that need not correspond to anything observable or probable as long as it is consistent...’.99

A different emphasis appears in accounts by a number of Continental European film reviewers. It was widely known – Paramount’s press pack made its significance plain – that like Sherwin, Anderson had attended public school and at one of the key locations. The perceived autobiographical dimension greatly impacted on the film’s appraisal, prompting many critics to comment upon its documentary value. Francophone reviews abounded with the terms ‘chronique’, ‘document’, ‘réalisme’, ‘précision’, ‘choix du détail’. Michel Capdenac in Lettres Françaises, establishes a direct correlation between ‘the vitriolic depiction characterising the everyday life of this “closed world” and the director’s “rich personal experience” which lends the story “an autobiographical undertone”.101 Similarly, Der Tagesspiegel regards If... as a subversive, autobiographical account of the English public schools system.102 The near consensus with which the documentary value of the film was celebrated is the more remarkable when contrasted with reviewers’ reservations concerning its perceived revolutionary message. Louis Chauvet in Le Figaro, for instance, juxtaposes the first half of the film, which he regards as ‘sober and restrained’ reportage, to the exaggerated tragedy with which the film concludes.103

The documentary value of If... thus functions as a point of reference to which almost all these reviews return: they use it whether to account
for what they regard as the disappointing conclusion of an otherwise promising film or to open up the debate on the stylistic choices of the director. Aggeo Savioli in L’Unità, although stressing the extraordinary quality of the film and enthusiastic about the documentary part, nevertheless expresses doubts as to the validity of its ‘revolutionary hypothesis’. Conversely, François Maurin praises its stylistic features but, writing for the Communist newspaper L’Humanité, dismisses Anderson’s revolutionary message and highlights instead the admirable quality of the cinematography. Most of these reviews worked towards establishing as Anderson’s forte his ability to give his subject matter an accent of realism; but they denied that the film had successfully conveyed a more symbolic message, whether through form or content.

Some overseas commentators took the converse position, finding the film’s aesthetics obstructed the expression of its themes. Miriam Alencar in the Jornal Do Brasil attributed to an archaic and flawed stylistic structure the film’s failure to carry its moral message. In La Croix, Jean Vigneron expressed his dismay at what he believed to be Anderson’s systematic assault on British traditions. He contended that the reportage section of the film, which he had initially found of value, ultimately fell victim to Anderson’s ‘questionable aesthetic choices’. Vigneron argued that If... could not be saved from mediocrity in spite of the emotional power of the actors’ performances and some themes.

In this context there stand out the two French reviews of If...we mentioned when discussing The White Bus: Mario Brun wrote in Nice-Matin, and Michel Duran in Le Canard Enchaîné. Nice-Matin is a regional newspaper of liberal bent, whereas Le Canard Enchaîné is famous in France for its satirical treatment of topical news and politicians alike, to the extent that it is regarded as an anarchist newspaper. The fact that newspapers espousing opposing values should offer a similar account of If... and the director’s distinctive style provides a balance and completeness missing in the two-tier assessments from Cannes in the other Continental papers mentioned. To reiterate: both Brun and Duran see Anderson’s distinctive method as simultaneously creating documentary and lampoon. It’s an approach which they judge as blending flawless realism with unfettered imagination, effectively structuring the resultant film not unlike a novel. The resurrection of the chaplain would be an example: the words and ‘liberal’ attitude of the headmaster, though absurdly pompous, document him; while lampoon arises with the padre emerging from his coffin-drawer, offering his hand to accept the boys’ apology before, having served his purpose, being closed back into confinement.

For Brun and Duran, Anderson’s style lies in its constitutive tensions
which paradoxically endow the director’s signature with its unity. Their idea harmonises with our evolving idea of the perceived author ‘Lindsay Anderson’.

Ritual and romance

Tension and aesthetics

Tensions find formal expression in a number of elements – one being the oscillation between colour and monochrome that extends the device in The White Bus. Contrary to the assertion of some reviewers that it separates realist from fantastic sequences, switching occurs randomly. Sometimes Anderson claimed that necessity had governed Ondricek and his invention. In The Observer in December 1968 he noted that ‘we shot some sequences in monochrome because they would have been too expensive, in equipment or in time, to shoot in colour’. In the preface to the published script, however, he argued for the impact of the device.

Doesn’t colour become more expressive, more remarked if drawn attention to in this way? The important thing to realise is that there is no symbolism involved in the choice of sequences filmed in black and white, nothing expressionistic or schematic. Only such factors as intuition, pattern and convenience.

As in The White Bus, it enhances the film’s Brechtian qualities by disrupting its surface, keeping spectators aware that they are watching a constructed narrative ‘on a level of imagination beyond naturalism’. Its success was reflected in the distorting mirror of those who looked in vain for the certainties of a more conventional division between these elements.

Ondricek’s camerawork contributes to the tension. In some sequences he gives us, as Michael Dempsey remarks, images of ordered beauty – the establishing shots of the school grounds, the shots of well-kept lawns, stained glass windows and the pictorial symmetry of the choir in chapel, the beautiful Phillips (Rupert Webster) gazing at Wallace in the gym and the joyous escapade with the Girl on the motorbike. Contrasting these moments, certain scenes with the boys have a tawdry quality that complements their teenage behaviour, as when Mick shoots darts at the posters in his room, or the three friends clasp bloodied palms and swear brotherhood.

Hedling observes another narrative device that distances the spectator. The first sequences of the film paraphrase classical narrative only in
order to deconstruct it. In the first chapter a new boy, Jute, enters the school. Ignorant of the traditions, favouritism and bullying with which the prefects rule the pupils, he is the vehicle who leads viewers on an uncomfortable journey of discovery through the minefield that awaits him. But then, as Allison Graham notes, rather than developing into a principal character, Jute soon fades away into the undifferentiated mass of boys.

We have already referred to Sherwin and Anderson’s decision to divide If... into eight chapters, each corresponding to a key topic in the narrative. The chapter divisions marry with Brechtian fragmentation of the whole since they shift the register. Early chapter headings reinforce the quasi-documentary format which so many critics ascribed to the film. They recall the intertitles which shaped films of the silent era through their descriptive value: ‘College House’, ‘College’ and ‘Term-Time’. Half way through the film, however, these headings overflow their descriptive function and add another layer of meaning: ‘Ritual and Romance’, ‘Discipline’ and ‘Resistance’. Here a new dynamic operates whereby a layer of symbolism begins to supplement the narrative value of these headings. The last two chapters are ‘Forth to War’ and ‘Crusaders’. Any attempt at connecting them to a specific aspect underpinning the reality of an English public school becomes impossible. Thus the titles point to the underlying binary conception of If....

**Tension and themes**

The deepest appreciation in correspondence received by Anderson after the film’s release came from the poet and playwright Christopher Logue. ‘It breathes the most extraordinary contraries. It is gentle and extremely subversive; it is sexy and objective; it is moral and very diabolic. I am sure Blake would have loved it’. Logue’s praise must have delighted the director, given his love for the eighteenth-century English visionary. Stressing duality in the text, it complements our assessment of the authorial function in If....

Anderson himself, interviewed about If... for *Jeune Cinéma*, said that he always wanted his films to engage with the poetic – starting with the concrete while aspiring to universality. Buoyed by recognition of the timeliness of If... in the context of the Paris disturbances of May 1968, he referred to the film as prophetic in as much as the screenplay (though not filming) preceded those events. Perhaps echoing Canby, he emphasised to Joseph Gelmis the imaginative freedom he had aimed for.
I wouldn’t like to say, ‘Now it’s fantasy. Now it’s real.’ Because the whole point of fantasy is that it is real. And that there aren’t in life any rigid distinctions between what is real and what is fantasy. Our fantasies are part of our reality. He also mentioned that the film represented the working out of a personal myth. He does not say so, but this would certainly encompass (on the negative side) challenges to deadening authority and (on the positive) the fantasised love between Wallace and Phillips.

In the *Jeune Cinéma* interview Anderson remarked that it was appropriate to speak of myth in relation to the sub-text of *If*. He added that he had been a bit piqued to find that the critics did not disinter this element in the film, which reveals that he had in mind not only personal but also communal myth. Although he had not previously touched on this topic, his remark is not an afterthought. ‘Ritual and Romance’ is the chapter in which Mick encounters the Girl in the Packhorse Café. Its title echoes Jessie Weston’s classic study of the quest for the Holy Grail *From Ritual to Romance*. As Paul Cornelius noted, the three friends, Mick, Johnny and Wallace take on through their actions the characteristics of mythic heroes or Grail Knights. Their story can be seen as a heroic (if at first unfocused) quest to discover what is real in life. Having left the comfort zone of dull mediocrity (Cornelius calls the College a metaphorical Waste Land), they refuse obedience, suffer injury for their audacity and finally mount a bold rebellion intended to destroy the old order.

Mortimer inadvertently opens a deeper view of the topic when she complains about the Girl, ‘I found that whenever she came on the screen, the dividing line between fantasy and reality became visible. Busty, potent, articulate Girls have no place in this society’. This prescriptive reading ignores the fact that the Girl’s intervention is not the only shift away from documentary style. When, in the same chapter, young Phillips watches Wallace working out on parallel bars in the gym, their eyes lock and point-of-view shots show mutual fascination sparking between them. Wallace rotates on the bars with Ondricek filming his graceful performance in seductive slow motion. It sets the tone for a tender relationship far removed from the prefects’ coarse lust for the attractive Phillips.

Mortimer fails to recognise that emotionally powered fantasy is an essential element of living myth – whether personal or communal, and whatever form it takes. In contrast to the tender love between Wallace and Phillips, the Girl’s vitality is gloriously shocking. She introduces the female side absent from the young men’s existence, bringing the heady promise that their appetite for everything which the school tries to crush (more than sex or love, all of life) can be fulfilled. Her very presence (like
a much-needed fantasy arising from Mick’s unconscious) kick-starts
their exhilarating sense of the potential fullness of being – exactly what
the school bans. Ondricek’s camera responds by only in this chapter
adopting a lyric style. For instance, following the dreamy scene in the
gym it tracks and pans – in effect flows – with the movement of the
exuberant young people on their purloined bike.

After Mick, Wallace and Johnny have killed the chaplain on army
manoeuvres, the headmaster makes them clear out a junk-filled storage
space as punishment. Here in a locked cupboard the boys find a jar
containing a dead foetus. No symbolic moment could better signify the
school’s morbidity than the discovery of this tiny, long-forgotten corpse.
Anderson was once again paying tribute to Vigo’s Zéro de Conduite; but
critic Albert Johnson linked this tiny shrivelled corpse with its symbolic
opposite, Stanley Kubrick’s effulgent star child in the previous year’s
2001: A Space Odyssey. The ambivalence is perfect. The Girl appears
from nowhere, defying the conventions of naturalism. She holds the jar
for a moment and tenderly inters it once more in the cupboard. Then
with the three young men she leaves the dead and discovers armaments
buried in the junk. With guns and grenades they will launch their rebel-
ion, intending to bring new life from death.

On prize-giving day Mick, Johnny, Wallace, Phillips and the Girl
take to the rooftops and smoke out from the great assembly hall
the staff, visiting dignitaries and students. As the rebels turn their weapons
indiscriminately on those below them, the Girl sets aside her machine
gun and with coolly levelled pistol puts a single bullet between the
headmaster’s eyes. A figure of their imaginations and (since she brings
pleasure and a measure of fulfilment to our desires for the boys) of
ours too, the Girl introduces one aspect of what becomes at the very last
moment a renewal of thematic tension. She continues to incarnate wild
Blakean Innocence; but in the film’s final seconds the camera holds
tight on Mick as he wreaks slaughter on the crowd below. His grim
and anguished face signals his sudden dreadful immolation in Experi-
ce as his automatic weapon drills on and on at the crowd moiling
below. Not that the latter remain defenceless victims, for they have now
grabbed rifles from the armoury and are returning fire. As Anderson
wrote in 1990, reflecting on the conscious differences between his film
and Zéro de Conduite,

our climax in the quad was not just a transposition of Vigo’s barrage of
books, shoes and stones from the rooftop. Our Mick Travis is left firing
desperately, trapped by the massed firepower of the establishment.
Vigo’s schoolchildren escape joyfully along the skyline, singing their
Jaubert song of liberty.128
Lindsay Anderson and Malcolm McDowell in discussion during the making of *If...* (1968).

Lindsay Anderson and the Chaplain (Geoffrey Chater) on the set of *If...* (1968).
For their part, the rebels find targets indiscriminately: in their rage, they have not considered who should be classified as their oppressors. The dead and dying include the rebels’ schoolmates and their parents as well as staff, dignitaries and prefects. Among the visiting dignitaries, the ludicrous knights representing 500 years of the school’s history and the pompous General Denson embody the ossified order. Most of, but not all the teaching staff are equally implicated. The prefects, made vicious by naked ambition to inherit their elders’ power, also seem wedded to the old order. Among the pupils, however, many would side with the rebels.

We said when considering Brun and Duran’s reviews that Anderson’s style in *If*... is distinguished by its constitutive tensions and that these paradoxically endow the director’s signature with its unity. Anderson himself thought that the ending of the film was profoundly ambiguous, ending with Mick’s despair after the exaltation of destruction. The broad dramatic tensions inscribe the core Blakean theme; but paradoxically they also etch in ‘Lindsay Anderson’s’ perceived authorial position by revealing its root tensions temporarily unified in an unstable dualism.

‘Anderson’ is not Blake. If he were, the film might persuade us that only from the conflict between contraries does progress come. In *If*..., however, when the archetypal and inspiring purity of Blake’s abstraction becomes entangled in human endeavours, it swiftly becomes corrupted. So the ‘Anderson’ we find in *If*... closely resembles the perceived author of *The White Bus*. Now, however, his satirical voice is emboldened by rage against the system: Swiftian *saeva indignatio*. Yet it conveys also tenderness for these young people that is shown more openly than any authorial feelings for the passive Girl on the white bus. ‘Anderson’ (both lampoon artist and documentarist) empathises with them and recognises the self-defeating limits to their rebellion.

In the final seconds of the film, then, Mick Travis emerges as a suitable candidate for the sterner satire with which Anderson will belabour his no less naive successor, the Mick Travis of *O Lucky Man!* In that film ‘Anderson’ too will lose some of the innocence with which, albeit in evanescent fantasy, he had here endowed his tainted schoolboy hero.
Notes

1 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Class Theatre, Class Film’, *Tulane Drama Review*, 11, 1 (Fall 1966) 127.
3 Deuteronomy, 4, 6.
4 Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson*, 89.
6 Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson*, 91.
7 Ibid.
8 Diary, 15 November 1967 (LA 6/1/55/1).
9 Diary, 15 November 1967 (LA 6/1/55/3–4). Anderson had previously recorded bitterly (diary, LA 6/1/54/52, 3 June 67) that Reisz had read *Crusaders* and returned it without comment. At the time, Anderson felt their friendship had ended.
10 School prospectus for Cheltenham College (LA 6/3/2/3).
11 Cheltenham College Rule book, September 1932 (LA 6/3/2/4). The Crusaders in *If...* certainly broke the following prohibitions:
   3 (b) To use or have in their possession any explosive substance, firearms, slings, or catapults ...
   3 (e) To keep in Cheltenham or hire or use motor-cycles ...
   3 (h) To lounge in any street; to walk arm-in-arm during College hours ...
   4 All shops where eatables and drinkables are sold ... are out of bounds.
12 Cheltenham College memorabilia (LA 6/3/2).
13 *The Cheltonian* (March and April 1941) 50 (LA 6/3/2/35).
14 *The Cheltonian* (October and November 1941) 182 (LA 6/3/2/39).
15 *The Cheltonian* (October and November 1940) 162 (LA 6/3/2/32).
16 *The Cheltonian* (October and November 1940) 184 (LA 6/3/2/32). In his copy of this issue Anderson marked passages that he had written, including this report.
18 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Untitled Screenplay’ (presumed 1942) (LA 6/1/7/60).
20 Diary, 8 February 1942 (LA 6/1/1/43).
21 Diary, 31 January 1942 (LA 6/1/1/39); 6 March 1942 (LA 6/1/1/61); 27 June 1942 (LA 6/1/1/91).
22 Diary, 14 January 1942 (LA 6/1/1/13).
25 Diary, 5 March 1946 (LA 6/1/9/18–19).
26 Lindsay Anderson, ‘How If... Came About’, unpublished article in *Never Apologise*, 108.
28 See David Sherwin, *Going Mad in Hollywood and Life with Lindsay Anderson* (London: Penguin, 1997) 2, entry for 5 May 1960: ‘the only experience we’ve got is that Nazi camp – Tonbridge – our schooldays!’; Sherwin, *Going Mad in Hollywood*, 4, entry for 21 May 1960: ‘[Lord Brabourne] is straightforward. *Crusaders* is the most evil and perverted script he’s ever read’. Anderson, ‘How If... Came About’, 108, wrote that the British producer Ian Dalrymple had told Sherwin and Howlett they both deserved to be beaten.
29 Anderson, ‘How If... Came About’, 108.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 11.
33 Drazin, ‘If…. Before If….’, 318–34.
35 Correspondence, Anderson to Sherwin, 6 November 1966, cited in The Diaries, 171.
36 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 15.
38 Mueller, Georg Büchner, xxiv.
39 Diary, 1 January 1967 (LA 6/1/54/1).
40 Ibid.
41 Diary, 5 January 1967 (LA 6/1/54/5).
42 Drazin, ‘If…. Before If….’, 311.
43 Drazin, ‘If…. Before If….’, 329.
45 Drazin, ‘If…. Before If….’, 333.
49 Gladwell, ‘Editing Anderson’s If….’, 30.
50 Correspondence, David Gladwell to Anderson, 2 April 1969 (LA 1/6/3/2/73).
51 Gladwell, ‘Editing Anderson’s If….’, 24.
52 Gladwell, ‘Editing Anderson’s If….’, 33.
53 Correspondence, Jocelyn Herbert to Anderson, 19 December 1968 (LA 1/6/3/2/20).
54 Lindsay Anderson cited by David Robinson, ‘Anderson Shooting If….’, Sight & Sound, 37, 3 (Summer 1968) 130–1, 131.
55 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 98.
56 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 97–8.
57 Lindsay Anderson, Draft publicity interview about If…. in The Diaries, 196.
58 Ibid.
61 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 17.
62 Diary, 16 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/35).
63 Diary, 19–20 May 1967 (LA 6/1/54/38–9).
64 Diary, 19 June 1967 (LA 6/1/54/70).
66 Gladwell, ‘Editing Anderson’s If….’, 25.
69 Correspondence, Terence Feely to Anderson, 6 September 1968 (LA 1/6/3/4/1).
70 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 84.
71 See also Mark Sinker, If…. (London: BFI, 2004) 41.
72 Feely to Anderson, 6 September 1968.
73 Correspondence, Martin S. Davies to Anderson, 13 September 1968 (LA 1/6/3/4/2).
74 Paramount Pictures Press Pack (1968/69) u (LA 1/6/5/8).
76 Admission pass to press screening (LA 1/6/5/1/1).
77 A.B.C. Pre-release schedule (LA 1/6/5/4).
78 Diary, 1 January 1969 (LA 6/1/57/1).
79 Ibid.
80 Billings Associates, Publicity Schedule for New York City, 4–12 February 1969 (LA 1/6/5/2).
81 Memo, Marion Billings to Hi Hollinger, n.d. (LA 1/6/5/2).
82 Correspondence, Lindsay Anderson to Paramount Pictures UK, 1 March 1969 (LA 1/6/3/4/4).
83 Unsigned text for advertisement (LA 1/6/5/7).
85 Anderson, ‘School to Screen’, 115.
86 Gene Moskowitz [Mosk], Review of If..., Variety (10 December 1968) 30, 32 (LA 1/6/6/45).
87 Morella, ‘When Big Pics Go Over Budget’.
90 Audit report by Solomon and Finger, 30 August 1972 (LA 1/6/3/7/1).
91 Paramount Pictures Corporation distribution statement for the period ending 26 January 1985 (LA 1/6/3/7/15).
92 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
96 Roger Ebert, ‘Students vs. the System in Bloody Vision’, Chicago Sun-Times (1 June 1969) 8 (LA 1/6/6/5/40).
100 Promotional booklet (1969) LA 1/6/5/3.


Michel Duran, ‘*If...*: Le Collège Détone’, *Le Canard Enchaîné* (28 May 1969) 7 (LA 1/6/6/2/4).

Lindsay Anderson, ‘School to Screen’, 114.

Lindsay Anderson, Preface to the published script... in *Never Apologise*, 121.

Lindsay Anderson, ‘*If... The Colour of Monochrome*’, 117.

See, for instance, John Coleman, ‘Mr Anderson’s Anarchy’, *New Statesman* (20 December 1968) (LA/1/6/6/1/21).

Michael Dempsey, ‘*If...*’ *Film Heritage*, 5, 1 (Fall 1969) 16–17.

Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson*, 83.


Correspondence, Christopher Logue to Anderson, 11 October 1968 (LA 1/6/3/2/8).

Anderson’s library contained several editions of Blake’s work.


Lindsay Anderson cited by Joseph Gelms, ‘Director Aims for Moral Impact’, *Newsday*, n.d., 72A (LA 1/6/6/5/11); reprinted in *The Film Director as Superstar*, 106. Curiously, as Sinker remarks in *If...* 7, when the film was re-released in 2002, the enthusiastic response did not extend to reflection on the mass killings by two pupils at Columbine High School of their classmates – possibly because ‘Those who see themselves as outsiders may be emboldened by the fantasies they identify with, the crusades they imagine themselves undertaking...’ (Sinker, *If...*, 8).

Anderson in Gelms, ‘Director Aims for Moral Impact’, 72A; reprinted in *The Film Director as Superstar*, 106.

*Ibid*.

Anderson, ‘*En 69 comme en 57*, 1.


Mortimer, ‘Anderson’s Masterwork’.


When Anderson visited the Lodz Film School in the late 1960s, the students, to his delight and lasting recollection, ‘staged the last scene of *If...* when we arrived “firing” from the rooftops, and I flung myself into the snow... I can’t remember what I said to the students, but I remember speaking in a very inflammatory and Bolshie-idealistic style’. Lindsay Anderson, *Glory! Glory!* Production Diary, 24 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/40).

Anderson, ‘*En 69 comme en 57*, 5.

See also Sinker, *If...*, 16.
What I like about the film is that it has that irony.
It hasn’t got the simplicity of being nasty about rich people.
It’s nasty about poor people as well.
It’s nasty about people.¹

Introduction

Let’s begin at the end where, in the final scene, Lindsay Anderson as director steps out from behind the camera and places himself in the centre of the action. The film’s young hero, coffee salesman Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell) has been on a long picaresque journey reminiscent of Voltaire’s *Candide*, Fielding’s *Tom Jones* or even Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (another character falsely seduced by society’s obsession with materialist success).² Mick has been corrupted, given illusory hope by the rich and had it snatched away. He has been caught in an industrial explosion and narrowly escaped being experimented on surgically. His attempts at reform while in prison have given him glimmerings of wisdom that prove delusory. All these long travails in pursuit of wealth and success end with him destitute and wandering the streets of London.

A billboard catches his eye inviting passers-by to audition for a starring role. He drifts none too hopefully into the casting session where Anderson plucks him from a large group of young men and photographs him in various poses. Instructed by the director to smile, however, Travis protests repeatedly, ‘I can’t smile without a reason. What’s there to smile about?’ Anderson hits him across the face with the script and (after a long pause during which a great deal of what he has lived through may well be going through his mind) Mick smiles. He has made the traverse (reflecting his surname) from one state of being to another.³ Alan Price and his band kick off what turn out to be the film’s final celebrations
with a reprise of its title tune bringing things full circle with a raw energy that accentuates Mick's release into self-discovery. He joins with the other characters, the actors now released from their roles, and with the filmmakers released too from the constraints of art.  

What is Anderson saying about the director's role with his provocative assault on Mick Travis at the end of the film? Is it a challenge to the traditional boundaries of film, a cinematic joke or a piece of self-mockery, the brute on the screen reflecting Anderson's bullish public persona? It is not wholly implausible to argue that Anderson was mocking his notoriously volatile temperament to amuse his associates. However, an insider joke says nothing to a film's audiences. So something else has to be in play here (though that does not mean it cannot also reveal the director's personal foibles). Anderson had no doubt that as the film's director he functioned as its key talent. He always referred to *O Lucky Man!* as his – as an *auteur* production. Intervention in the action would be one way of making the point. However, a dramatic intrusion such as that contrived for the final scene could fatally have ruptured the film's narrative structure had it not in some way been prepared for.

Anderson's diaries and correspondence reveal that he invested the project with deeply held personal values and beliefs. The slapping of Mick has been described by, among others, Anderson's old friend Gavin Lambert as the character experiencing a Zen-like revelation. Lambert's reading of the final scene picked up the association with Zen that Anderson had noted in his private journals in the hours after shooting it. Not that Lambert would have needed access to Anderson's private writings to know of his interest in this worldview. In a 1957 review of *Tokyo Story* published in *Sight & Sound* (the journal Lambert had edited until 1955), Anderson wrote of the wisdom and acceptance of life that comes with practising the Zen philosophy. Years later, when promoting *O Lucky Man!* he expounded this idea to journalists, reflecting on the way the final smile echoed the grin with which Mick had ingratiated himself as a salesman at the start of his epic journey: 'I thought of it more as Zen master and pupil than as director and actor. It's where the film comes full circle, where the smile at the end echoes the smile at the beginning [...]'. Anderson added, 'it's not the facile smile of compromise' with which Mick Travis had tried to work his way into the favour of those who had in their gift the money, power and esteem he so greedily desired. Rather, this is 'the hardened smile of acceptance'.

These references provide useful pointers towards one of the film's principal themes; however, they are all exterior to the text itself. Happily, *O Lucky Man!* has its own built-in reference system which buttresses Anderson's and Lambert's claims for Mick's undergoing a Zen-like
experience. That back-up resides, as we shall see, in the music of Alan Price and his band.

Anderson’s authorial input

During the making of *O Lucky Man!* Anderson suffered recurrent despondency, even despair. This, as we have seen, was not an unprecedented experience, but it does seem to have been more intense than in his previous film work. His journal reflected on the difficulties that the Anglo-American cinema system of the 1970s posed *auteurs* such as Kubrick and Peckinpah. He thought it turned them into ‘monsters of paranoia’ because only thus could they survive professionally. Noting the severe disturbance of his own emotions, he recorded feeling the enormous strain imposed by the attempt to straddle the worlds of personal (*auteur*) cinema on the one hand, and popular, commercial entertainment on the other.

Authorship was an issue that continued to concern him greatly; and from 1948 he adopted a consistent concept of the director’s authorship in the cinema (as opposed to the theatre). As before, he credited his colleagues but asserted ultimate artistic ownership of ‘his’ films, referring to *O Lucky Man!* both in public and private as if he had controlled both its scripting and direction. This was not without a measure of truth since by their mutual admission he had to bludgeon writing on this project from David Sherwin – not least because the latter was going through severe personal crises. His relationship with Malcolm McDowell was different, both enjoying its intimate father–son quality. So here too he led even though the idea for the film started with ‘Coffee Man’, a rough script based on McDowell’s experiences selling coffee in the north of England. Anderson had challenged his actor to develop the script and work with Sherwin before he himself introduced the ‘epic’ dimension.

In general Anderson’s journal records comments about his collaborators more negative than on earlier films. To take just one example, his production designer was once again Jocelyn Herbert, his trusted colleague in both stage and studio work. Furthermore as his close friend she had helped by taking care of Sherwin at a time during the scripting of *O Lucky Man!* when alcohol and severe depression seemed likely to overwhelm the writer. Yet diary entries in the first two weeks of shooting record furious rows over details in her work that have displeased him – she has the wrong fabric for Mick’s gold suit; or the set is not designed to accommodate changes in camera angles. More widely, does she –
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does anyone – understand this film?

With Miroslav Ondricek, however, matters were different. It proved impossible for Anderson to dominate the cameraman in the way he ruthlessly coerced Sherwin, Herbert and others such as his editors. A series of entries in the diaries from March to August 1972 reads like a one-sided history of the two men’s contest for authorial control. Anderson saw the nub of the problem as Mirek’s insistence on prioritising composition and lighting. As director, Anderson tenaciously held the drama to have prime importance and reckoned that Mirek either did not read or failed to understand the script (not implausible since the Czech still had limited command of English). Having again negotiated with bureaucrats for permits to employ the Czech in Britain, Anderson commenced the shoot with the warmest of feelings towards a man whose work he admired. But by degrees he convinced himself that he was partnered with an obstructive prima donna. The unhappy sequence ends with the director enraged after viewing poor rushes. He decides Mirek is a spoiled baby who has lost his respect because ‘he has not DELIVERED THE GOODS. FINITO’.

Evaluating Anderson’s journal shows his verdict was to say the least one-sided, even morally questionable. If excusable, then only on account of the severe pressures on the director. Mirek had returned from Prague for pick-up shooting only three weeks before this outburst. Anderson then recognised that the other man was seriously disturbed by the political upheavals in Prague which Vladimir Pucholt had foreseen when he fled (see Chapter 5). Fearing imprisonment on his return Ondricek had burnt all his letters, posters and records relating to the Dubcek era before flying to London. In this context, Anderson’s outburst in the final week on location shows him becoming something of a ‘monster of paranoia’ finding it necessary to confirm to himself his authorial control.

Alan Price’s contribution was distinctive and is well documented in Anderson’s papers. Despite the age difference between the two men, they achieved (not without minor difficulties at first) a relationship based on mutual respect and the awareness that each had semi-autonomous command of his respective medium. Prior to directing O Lucky Man! Anderson had actually been planning to shoot an on-the-road documentary about Price and his band. Sherwin had kept a diary of production on O Lucky Man! and when he asked Anderson to edit it, the director inserted this paragraph.

Lindsay had been planning a film about Alan Price after Alan had written the music for Home. It was to be a documentary featuring gigs, travel, digs and one-night stands. Like the old actor-managers with their travelling
fitups. But when Alan teamed up with Georgie Fame the project ran into difficulties chiefly on copyright for the material they were using (£1,000 a minute for a Ray Charles number).\textsuperscript{23}

When the documentary project fell through Anderson decided instead to use Price in the feature – a choice welcomed by the film’s distributors, as we shall see.

Even prior to the period of research for the documentary and pre-production for \textit{O Lucky Man!}, observations of Price’s personality and \textit{modus operandi} dominate the entries relating to him in Anderson’s private journals. They had already worked together when Price wrote music for Anderson’s Royal Court production of David Storey’s \textit{Home}. He had attended rehearsals on two occasions in May 1970 recorded by the director.

He is less insistently aggressive than when we met [previously] … Alan is funny: there is a sort of \textit{intellectual} rigidity, I don’t know how much he takes in, some of his responses don’t seem exactly bright… but there is such brightness and emotional commitment in his response: his laughter and sudden bursts of attention.\textsuperscript{24}

Ten days later, Anderson writes, ‘Alan has an urgent animation that I find immensely attractive…’.\textsuperscript{25}

In February 1971 Anderson observes that the younger man swings wildly between exaltation and depression; and although he admits that he cannot recall the medical term for the condition, Anderson plainly has manic depression or bipolarity in mind.\textsuperscript{26} By July he is actually musing about casting Price rather than McDowell as lead in the new feature film: ‘It is an interesting phenomenon – the tough, sexy, sensitive rebel – can I do this for Malcolm in \textit{O Lucky Man}? But really Alan is the character’.\textsuperscript{27} In the outturn both men were to have key, thematically related roles.

Six months later, Anderson confesses his personal fascination with Price, writing that notwithstanding the latter’s ruthless dedication to his personal objectives, the singer has acquired, at the level of fantasy, a sudden, unexpected potency in his imagination.\textsuperscript{28} We believe, judging by the recurring pattern of Anderson’s feelings towards tough men with whom he worked, that what he perceived as Price’s ruthlessness and remoteness augmented the attraction.\textsuperscript{29} Erotic fantasies of Richard Harris sexually brutalising him still overwhelmed Anderson almost a decade after \textit{This Sporting Life}.\textsuperscript{30} With Price, however, Anderson’s feelings modulated away from the hopeless passion he had felt for Harris, Reggiani and others, towards increasing professional respect and friendship.\textsuperscript{31} We guess that, in working with and getting to know Price,
Anderson himself may have come to enjoy as close to a Zen-like relationship as he was to achieve with any of his collaborators.

Initially, when researching material for his documentary, the filmmaker had accompanied the band to a number of gigs where the disorganised pattern of work of both the musicians and their roadies drew his disapproving attention. Doubtless this was in part because it differed so greatly from the firm control that he liked to exert when working with a film crew. Observing the want of a rigorous plan of action for the gigs, he more than once reflected on the weakness inherent in this informality. The same concerns returned when he described Price’s nerves, tension and inability to provide leadership for his musicians as they recorded the tracks for O Lucky Man! in the studio. For his part, Price admitted his nervousness, recalling why he had asked to write and record the songs before the film was shot. Having worked with Anderson previously, he valued the affinity in their thinking. His respect for the older man was such that he wanted to make his contribution and not be overawed by the standard set by Anderson and his co-writers, Sherwin and McDowell.

After that first recording session Anderson wrote a detailed account in his journal of four tough days. He thought that progress had been made, but not before he had intervened asking for changes in the lyrics. Price had first resisted but eventually came round under pressure and with these sessions finished, Anderson thought the music good. Relations between the two men improved during the forthcoming months of work on the film, Anderson noting, after another studio session in May 1972, that Price had been unusually open to suggestions.

Factors other than the different ways they organised concerts and recording sessions would have added to Anderson’s sense of alienation from the band’s working methods. He was to some degree distanced from the culture of young people through his class background. While Anderson was a scion of the upper-middle class, rooted (despite his Scottish ancestry) in the Home Counties, British pop music of the 1960s and early 1970s found it useful to let its Northern, working-class roots show, both being authentic ingredients of Price’s life. That Northern aura amplified the ethos of youthful rebellion from the culture of the establishment, which remained centred on London and the South-East.

Anderson also belonged to a different generation, and the crew marked his forty-ninth birthday during the shoot. Although he may not have known that two days later Alan Price turned thirty, he could not have been unaware of the age gap between them. In fact, at a time of life when most people consider themselves middle-aged, Anderson consistently wrote of himself as being old. All these factors may help
explain his choice of Price who (to judge by music press reviews) was not seen as being cool as some of his contemporaries. His work with Georgie Fame was described as ‘a smooth and polished cabaret act’ by *NME*, but Eric Burdon, fellow founding member of The Animals, is given more respect. Consonant with this, the preface to the script’s first draft, describes Price as ‘a singer with a group – who are neither trendy or aggressively “pop”’. When in 1971 Anderson had travelled with the band to research the proposed documentary, he recognised that Price’s music raised fascinating questions about its sources; but he appears not to have explored them, noting instead that he intended to focus on the singer’s work at its most pure, personal and passionately lyrical. With these words Anderson echoed his own trumpet call twenty years earlier in *Sequence* for British films to prioritise the personal and passionate in rebellion against the nation’s ossified cinematic culture. As we have seen, it became a cohesive value behind the Free Cinema programmes and also identified Anderson as ‘a charter member of the [European] New Wave’. However, when preparing *O Lucky Man!* his approach altered. Discussions with the bandleader concentrated on the philosophy of the film’s songs. For his part, Price remembered that the script interested him because of both its philosophy and the idea of a young man coming down from the North trying to make money and be successful, just as he had tried to do. So the personal was reinstated. Whereas in the film Price is like the street singer in Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*, in the drawn-out process of production he was to Anderson what Kurt Weill was to Brecht, an essential musical partner, fully conscious of his function as his comment to James Delson showed. He said the epic proportions of the film demanded that spectators absorb a lot of information fast, so to put in a song, something melodic, gave them time to catch their breath.

Interviewed by David Robinson for *The Times* shortly before the film’s release, Anderson described the method behind his collaboration with Price. Early drafts of the script simply note the themes (‘song of luck’, ‘song of opportunity’, ‘song of money’, etc.) on which Price was to write. Later, for each point at which music was to be inserted the director wrote a paragraph stating what he thought the song should be about. Price took that and reinterpreted it in terms of his feelings and attitudes – which Anderson found sufficiently different from his own to provide creative tension, but also sufficiently the same for that tension to be productive.

After a production meeting in the month before shooting commenced, Anderson mused in his journal: ‘In a sense the final zen-existential
feeling of the film corresponds to [Alan's] own feeling about life: be what you are: you are what you are: decisions won't change anything. But of course this is mixed with an instinctive, romantic individualism...'.

Saying this, Anderson was voicing his belief that words only mattered to Price when they came to him in a flash. Anderson believed (and in our view the film justifies his assertion) that this mix of the political and the deeply personal characterised the songs. He thought that, considered as the Chorus, they 'express the ironic attitude of the film quite directly, [and] the persona that Alan presents takes on an air of knowledgeable-ness'.

As Price himself said, ‘In some ways the presence of me and my music is to be sort of an opposite to Malcolm. You know, I’m the guy who’s been there and can now adjust and reflect on it all’. For Anderson, Price remains slightly enigmatic as a character in the film, as if apart from the action. He has attained the attitude to life that it takes Mick the whole story to get to. In short, Price’s character is a portrayal of someone who knows what life is about.

Through the weeks of post-production Anderson’s exhaustion and depression intensified. This was a film on a far bigger scale than anything he had attempted before, and he got to the point of dreading entering the cutting room to face the ‘dolts’ working with him. During that long saga (which spanned a period in which his mother was hospitalised for major surgery) he came to recognise his ‘“whipping boy” tendencies’. It seems likely that such scathing remarks about his editors (who, like many principals in the team, had collaborated with him before) projected onto them his secret fear of suffering a creative block. In one journal entry he diagnosed his own ‘critical sureness – after the event – but creative uncertainty: which is what makes editing such agony’. Paranoia aside, he had doubts over the quality of what he was seeing in the cutting room, thinking that some of it was adequate ‘in terms of just getting scenes to function’, but no more. His mood improved when Tom Priestley (assistant editor on This Sporting Life) agreed to act as supervising editor. He brought a fresh pair of eyes to previously intractable narrative problems and under his guidance the movie began to take its eventual shape.

To summarise, the work of Price and McDowell was crucial. They have co-authorship claims relating to their contributions. However, when Anderson steps into frame at both the beginning and end of the film, he does so as the dominant creative figure co-ordinating and harmonising the input of all his collaborators.
On publicity and release

It is necessary to rewind at this point and note that *O Lucky Man!* was financed from Hollywood, like its predecessor *If.....* Anderson flew to New York in December 1971 with his producer Michael Medwin of Memorial Pictures and Michael Simkins, Memorial’s entertainment lawyer. They had already explored possible contractual arrangements with Warner Bros. in London but no agreement had been concluded. *En route* over the Atlantic, Anderson wrote a journal entry about the other two, voicing mistrust of their attitudes to the forthcoming negotiations, seeing both as ‘situated so firmly in “that” world’.58

God! We descend… What an ordeal lies before me – what an orgy of posturing and play-acting. It really does make the whole business of film-making repugnant [...] But I still have no doubt that there’s no valid alternative.59

In the next two days they had talks with several studios including Warner Bros., Fox, Palomar and Paramount. Sure enough they encountered (as Anderson perceived it), just such a preposterous *danse macabre* as he had anticipated.60 In the end they contracted with Warner Bros. Notwithstanding Anderson’s continuing execrations against the studio system, his team had done exceptionally well, as Erik Hedling remarks, to secure a $1.5 million agreement at a time when American studios had generally ceased investing in British cinema after the many financial failures of the 1960s.61

When the time came to promote the film, Anderson’s paranoid doubts evaporated and (as usual) gave way to enthusiastic commitment. In late April, early May 1973, prior to its release in Britain, he submitted to numerous interviews with press journalists and recorded others for radio and television.62 Later he, McDowell and Price flew to New York to repeat the exercise with the North American press. The most thorough and insightful of these interviews (such as Robinson’s for *The Times*63 and Rex Reed’s piece widely syndicated in the USA)64 set the agenda for the majority of newspaper reviewers who, with columns to fill urgently, no doubt found detailed accounts of the work convenient sources. For his part, Anderson seized the opportunity interviews afforded both to promote the movie and offer guidance towards what he thought was its proper interpretation. His friend Gene Moskowitz sent him an early draft of his review. This Anderson energetically subbed (many of his phrases adopted in *Variety*, 18 April 1973)65 so as to enhance Mosk’s appreciation of the film.66

Warner Bros.’ senior executives and their publicity agents had, from the start, recognised the potency for marketing *O Lucky Man!* of
three names among the principal talent attached to the film. Lindsay Anderson could be expected to draw audiences on both sides of the Atlantic for *If*...; Malcolm McDowell likewise for his striking performances in the same film and more recently Stanley Kubrick’s 1971 *A Clockwork Orange*; and Alan Price for his hit singles and albums, his work with The Animals and with Georgie Fame. Price had the additional attraction for Warners that his music for the film could be sold in two markets.

In letters and telexes written while preparations for the North American release of *O Lucky Man!* were under way, the music features heavily, with the main emphasis on publicity and promotion. Warner Bros. had not only financed the film, but (in the decade when cross-media deals were becoming common) had also contracted to purchase rights to the songs that Price was to write and perform. As part of the deal, the company was to release music from the soundtrack on their own record label. That Anderson attached great importance to the music is clear from his characteristically fierce communications with the studio. Heated disputes arose over, first, the want of timely confirmation of arrangements for the band’s tour in the USA and, second, delays in the schedule for bringing the album to market, both events intended to anticipate the film’s North American release and awaken interest in it.\(^6^8\)

As this correspondence shows, the studio’s executives no less than Anderson expected the band’s music to provide valuable publicity for the film; and as it turned out, both parties were correct. The tour did go ahead. And the album, whose release had been held back by manufacturing problems rather than the studio indifference that Anderson seemed to suspect, enjoyed favourable reviews and strong sales. This was particularly the case after June 1973 when it came out in the USA. Jon Landau wrote that Price ‘infuses clichéd topics with fresh spirit and discordant asides that generate a peculiar form of rock ambiguity ... Swinging, pounding and thoroughly professional, intelligent and blatant rock and roll – that is the secret to the title cut and this very unexpected and very much appreciated surprise album of the year’.\(^6^9\) Ultimately the music for *O Lucky Man!* was to earn Price a BAFTA award, an Oscar nomination and his first US chart album.\(^7^0\)

Plans for Warner Brother’s promotional campaign went beyond the album to include trailers, teasers, extracts for television and a radio contest tied into Price’s music. The North American campaign played up parallels with Watergate that some reviewers had already discerned. In addition to plans to screen the film to journalists, political commentators and editors, a syndicated fifty-five minute radio programme on ‘the making of ...’ was to go out to 250 college and FM radio stations
across the states. Although plans to show *O Lucky Man!* to college reviewers as a way of reaching the student market were complicated by a dispute over screening policy with the American Film Institute, eventually college journalists from all over the country were flown to Connecticut to review it.

As ever, Anderson remained keenly interested in every aspect of the film’s release. He reluctantly accepted the advice of Warner Bros. that the scenes of the Salvation Army, of Mrs Richards’ suicide and Price’s song ‘My Home Town’ should be cut, explaining to a correspondent the pressures exerted on distributors and directors by reviews that focused unfavourably on the film’s length (as several had done after its Cannes screening with a running time of 186 minutes). Anderson added that, comparing audience reactions to the shorter and the uncut versions, they had found people more alert to the picture’s end. So this 166 minute version was the one released. Nevertheless the director retained the hope of seeing the excised sequences restored in re-releases – a point he had already made to Ted Ashley at Warner Bros. Although two sequences had been lost forever, Anderson did in 1977 restore at Warner Bros.’ expense the three sequences named above. Hedling (who compiled the detailed account of the film’s four versions to which we are indebted) describes the resultant 177 minute version now in circulation as the one that follows the original most closely.

Anderson and his producer Michael Medwin disagreed with Warner Bros. over the release pattern for the London opening. To gain prestige and higher revenue, the studio imposed two shows a day ‘hard ticketed’ (that is, with pre-booked, higher-priced seats). Medwin and Anderson argued for three shows and no booking on the grounds that the combination of queuing, rapid turnover of the house and lower prices would create more of a buzz for young audiences. They got nowhere, but the director won a more accommodating reaction when he telexed Warner Bros.’ boss Ashley protesting against the questionnaire being handed to London audiences.

here it is absolutely unheard of that a major motion picture, accepted everywhere as an unquestioned prestige hit and running every night to full houses, should be treated as though on tryout. Moreover the questions are clumsily and provokingly worded and actually invite people to make ‘criticisms’ ... the chief result of this action is to sow doubt in minds of the public as to the confidence of the distributors in their product.

When it came to planning the New York previews, an emollient Richard Lederer of Warner Bros. suggested using the company’s standard questionnaire without the leading questions in the London version.
Box office

Midway through the shoot, Anderson had made a terse, red entry in his diary: ‘FATAL BOX OFFICE QUALITIES: Fantasy. Philosophy. Satire.’ Although the film’s takings were not disastrous, those thoughts possessed some truth. Box office returns between release and the end of January 1974 were from ‘below average to very poor’ in territories outside the USA; and ‘not good’ after 504 engagements in the USA and Canada.

About two years later, Warner Bros. accounted for receipts from cinemas worldwide in the period to December 1975 amounting to $2.16 million. Against this the distributor charged $1.13 million for advertising and other expenses to produce a figure of $1.03 million on which they paid a royalty of 10 per cent. The first 5 per cent of this figure was equally shared by Alan Price, Jocelyn Herbert and Miroslav Ondricek. The remainder was divided between Memorial (25 per cent) and SAM Productions, which was the company set up by Sherwin, Anderson and McDowell to make O Lucky Man! (75 per cent). SAM’s portion was in turn divided 50 per cent to Anderson, 35 per cent to McDowell and 15 per cent to Sherwin.

On satire

The diaries leave no room to doubt Anderson’s motives: ‘Only by making [O Lucky Man!] an authentically wry and bitter statement can I live by my convictions.’

As we saw first with The White Bus, Brecht sought to break from naturalist aesthetics to violate the identification of spectator with characters. No less radically than If..., this film’s narrative structure fragments in line with Brechtian principles. Episodes connect only loosely in terms of character and plot development, giving priority instead to preserving purposeful thematic links. Nevertheless, Anderson told Robinson that the film’s form was traditional because picaresque narratives featuring a hero journeying through numerous adventures and meeting countless characters had stood the test of time through Pilgrim’s Progress, Gulliver’s Travels and Tom Jones, not to mention Voltaire’s Candide. Hedling assigns to the film a multitude of allusions to poetry, plays, art and other sources. He recognised (with Anderson’s assent) that O Lucky Man! resembles Sullivan’s Travels (1941) in the broad sweep of Preston Sturges’s satire on American cinema or when both films show their heroes painfully experiencing the failure of their altruism. Resemblance also lies in the detail of specific scenes: for example, when Sullivan,
pretending to be a tramp, is taken in by an old woman, she tries to seduce him, as does Mick’s landlady Mrs Ball. The people whom Mick meets along the way mostly have the two-dimensional nature of ‘humours’. This is typical of figures in the picaresque tale that represent the baseline of certain human characteristics, sometimes in a cartoon-like manner. That cartoon quality also flags up the satirical intent and complements Brechtian principles which are further emphasised by the casting of actors in two or three roles apiece – a device, as Hedling says, which draws attention to the art of acting as such and disturbs the illusion of dramatic representation. Not only does each performer play various characters, but the roles allocated to each actor differ from one another. Hedling specifies several roles which present us with two-dimensional character types like those the same actors played in earlier films by Anderson. He instances Arthur Lowe’s self-satisfied Mayor Johnson who resembles the pompous mayor of Salford in The White Bus. Mary MacLeod’s lovesick landlady Mrs Ball brings to mind her role as Mrs Kemp in If...; while Rachel Roberts’s role as the suicidal Mrs Richards alludes to her character Mrs Hammond in This Sporting Life. Nevertheless, with the exception only of McDowell and Price, none of the performers in what was by now Anderson’s stock company – some, like Ralph Richardson, Rachel Roberts, Mona Washington and Arthur Lowe, immensely popular in Britain – commands the screen long enough in any one role to draw the spectator’s empathy.

The quality and style of epic performance is, to cite Robert Gordon: succinctly captured in Brecht’s injunction to actors to perform ‘consciously, suggestively, descriptively.’ The epic actor consciously describes character and suggests salient details to evoke the situation in a style appropriate to a street-singer or stand-up comic rather than a naturalistic actor.

One of many indications that Anderson was conscious of this in directing O Lucky Man! is Malcolm McDowell’s presentation of Mick Travis’s journey. Mick has a chameleon nature and tries to adapt to fit the frequently changing milieux of his picaresque existence; but McDowell plays him with malfunctions to his camouflage. This is all the more pronounced in that Mick/McDowell have connections not only with If..., but also with the hero of Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange, Alexander de Large (whose name, Hedling notices, appears in Mick’s order book for coffee). His performance perfectly illustrates Brecht’s concept of the ‘epic actor’ – defined as a player who does not seek to project a single, unchanging character but one that changes all the time by leaps and starts. Thus characters no less than plot are constructed in defiance of conventions guiding the creation of naturalistic, invisibly
constructed and rounded personalities.

Despite his adoption and development of Brecht’s ideas for the cinema, Anderson (as he wrote in the introduction to the published script of The Old Crowd) was never happy with the term by which it was known.

‘Alienation’ is the Brechtian term – a translation of his Verfremdungseffekt – usually applied to such a style, but I have always thought this a heavy word and not a very accurate one. The real purpose of such devices, which can include songs, titles between scenes, etc., is not to alienate the audience from the drama, but rather to focus their attention on its essential – not its superficial or naturalistic – import.95

As we saw when discussing The White Bus, Anderson’s and Brecht’s goals differed radically. Brecht intended his productions ultimately to contribute to changing the world. Anderson, now becoming the Dean Swift of his age, had more limited ambitions, aspiring instead to exorcise the horrors and iniquities barely concealed in every stratum of 1970s British society. Interviewed by Louis Marcorelles, Anderson volunteered that Brecht would not have liked the conclusion of O Lucky Man! because it corresponds to the poetic aspect of Brecht’s work but not his Marxism.96 Instead, the film’s characters function as vehicles for keen satire, exposing the hypocrisies and corruption of rich and poor, powerful and powerless alike. Anderson would have agreed with Matthew Hodgart that satire should be devoted to showing how things really are and demolishing existing follies rather than advocating a new dispensation.

The satirist appears in his noblest role when he accepts the challenge of oblivion, by taking on an ephemeral and unpleasant topic... [Politics] offers the greatest risk and the greatest rewards: politics is traditionally considered a dirty business, yet the satirist is most a hero when he enters the forum and joins in the world’s debate... What is essential is that he should commit himself boldly to his ‘impure’ subject, yet retain a purity of attitude, in his aesthetic disengagement from the vulgarities and stupidities of the struggle.97

Critical reception

Except in one respect, O Lucky Man! divided its reviewers. The exception was Alan Price’s music. Janet Maslin evaluated the impact of his performance, finding that the songs were

performed with such utter charm that their essential seriousness remains remarkably unobtrusive. And while Lindsay Anderson’s film, which
Price’s appearances so delightfully punctuate, uses a series of bizarre but concrete episodes to suggest allegorical generalities. Price reverses that method – with sterling results. He may sing and write about the big issues, but his easygoing method reduces them to ironic everyday terms, making them all the more potent for their illusion of familiarity.

[This relies on] the basic contradiction of Price’s style, with its abrasive energy camouflaged by disarming pleasantries. Price’s vocals, loose but perfectly suited to his material, play upon that seeming same contradiction, as do his superb arrangements and keyboard work, and the end result is a full-blown irony that’s more than merely verbal. It’s not just the lyrics, but rather the whole production, that contrast the sinister with a mood of simulated naivete.98

When one reads the lyrics on paper (for example, those accompanying the opening titles) they do indeed seem to give too much away. Heard in the cinema, they do not. In addition to the light touch described by Maslin, other factors contribute to this effect. The first is the placing of the opening titles. They follow a prologue that mimics a grotesquely over-acted, black and white silent film in the style of the century’s first decade. After the card ‘Once Upon a Time’, we are in a colonial coffee plantation: an impoverished labourer (McDowell) steals a handful of the beans he has harvested. A brutal, white police officer observes the crime and arraigns the unfortunate man before a slavering white judge who, with no evidence, pronounces him guilty. The police officer carries out the sentence with relish, chopping off the unlucky man’s hands. Cut hard to Alan Price, titles, music and song:

If you have a friend on whom you think you can rely –
You are a lucky man!
If you’ve found a reason to live on and not to die –
You are a lucky man!

[…]
If you’ve found the meaning of the truth in this old world –
You are a lucky man!
If knowledge hangs around your neck like pearls instead of chains –
You are a lucky man!
Takers and fakers and talkers won’t tell you,
Teachers and preachers will just buy and sell you,
When no one can tempt you with heaven or hell –
You’ll be a lucky man!
You’ll be better by far
To be just what you are –
You can be what you want
If you are what you are –
And that’s a lucky man!
The silent prologue amounts to a deliberately crude lampoon that produces shock. Then suddenly eyes, ears and mind are busied by the hard cut to the present which comes out of nowhere at the very moment we expect the story proper to start. In addition to Price performing with his band, the director himself (in his trademark leather jacket) wanders among the musicians to leave a sheet on Price’s music stand. Meanwhile the main titles are superimposed on this scene.

Jim Knippenberg noticed a specific example of this method of juxtaposition of dramatic action and music referring to a moment when Mick has reached the summit of his ambitions as personal assistant to a rich city businessman but Price suddenly appears and forewarns of disaster: ‘... look over your shoulder, / ’cos there’s always someone coming after you’. However, Price is grinning and playful, gently making sport of everything in sight. As a consequence, profound and weighty topics don’t seem ponderous.

However, as we have said, in other respects, critics were divided. Not least because satire is a powerful weapon designed to arouse emotion in the receiver, projective identification shows clearly in some responses to O Lucky Man! A few professional reviewers appear to have felt Anderson had attacked them no less than his lead player with a cinematic slap to the face. The intense, personalised energy of their reactions demonstrates these cathexes in play, as in John Coleman’s, ‘It is very open to the sort of exegesis that ambitious snails were built to undertake. It is an arrogant, anarchistic, Anderson film’. In no review was anger clearer than Stanley Kauffmann’s. He responded to O Lucky Man! viciously, describing it as a three-hour effort at self-canonisation exuding conceit and pig-headedness and steeped in self-display and self-reference. He found it ‘twisted by rancor’ and pickled in the director’s bile because he had not been called a genius for his previous movies. Believing that the whole thing had been made for the sake of Anderson’s on-screen strike at Mick, he characterised it as a ‘sickening, self-indulgent, egodrooling moment’. A curious footnote can be attached to this rant: six years earlier Anderson had returned from an overseas trip, opened his mail and noted: ‘dull post – Stanley Kauffmann offering me tutorial job in Yale or Harvard’. Did Anderson’s indifference to this offer create personal animosity?

Assertions that O Lucky Man! was too long and insufficiently tight in narrative focus recurred among negative comments on either side of the Atlantic. Coleman in the New Statesman thought it an ‘unnecessarily prolonged film’ for the material; and believed that ‘Mr Anderson ... rides off in all directions, trampling where he might have trumped...’ Stanley Eichelbaum of the San Francisco Examiner found it embarrass-
ingly heavy-handed, referring to ‘David Sherwin’s erratic, ultimately pointless screenplay’. Vincent Canby also thought it ponderous, with wit ‘too small, too perfunctory, for the grand plan of the film’. However, others, such as Nigel Andrews in the Financial Times, understood length as essential to showing a ‘society so large that the only frame capable of containing it is screenwriter David Sherwin’s brilliant cinematic pastiche of the 18th century picaresque novel’. And the reviewer for What’s On observed that, ‘The different categories of commercial film – thriller, social drama, horror, silent picture – are skilfully used to underline the points to be made’. Al Goldstein in Cavalier had no problem with the baggy quality of O Lucky Man! arguing that:

the film leaves us to ponder many loose threads, which is really what high art is all about ... [This] really above average creative effort makes us probe our own thoughts and limitations.

Derek Malcolm for The Guardian is worth quoting at length because he obliquely reflected aspects of the film’s problem in entering the market that are implicit in these reviews. Unconsciously he echoed Anderson’s reflection on the enormous strain imposed by the attempt to straddle the worlds of auteur cinema on the one hand, and popular, commercial entertainment on the other (see above).

What makes me uneasy about this frequently brilliant progress is that its attempt to have it both ways, to be both a popular entertainment and something altogether more knowing, is by no means always a success. In some areas its simplicity and directness are almost too much, so that one feels beaten over the head by the obvious. In others, the ideas are buried so deep or stated so elliptically that to define them at all is risky. It would be unfair to call the film indulgent but this assuming too much or too little does take away from its startling effect. Even so, I think Mr Anderson has done the trick again. He has engaged us fully, and in a way that is as rumbustiously alive as most British films are palely loitering.

Some reviewers found Anderson to have been self-righteous. In Sight & Sound David Wilson found ‘an unappealing sanctimonious edge to this comprehensive spite...’. Wilson’s review was no rant, but a balanced analysis to which we shall return. Variants on this idea were not uncommon. Gavin Millar wrote:

If everyone is out of step except you, you have to be sure-footed, and there are too many places where Anderson’s and his writer David Sherwin’s step falters. No one denies that Anderson has the saeva indignatio, but there’s a queasy uncertainty about where it’s directed ...

Whereas the writers cited above took Anderson to be the unquestioned sole auteur in an unproblematic way, they did so tacitly. Others
did not. Gerald Jones announced that *O Lucky Man!* was ‘on the deepest level of Anderson’s own autobiographical statement about the need to face the harsher truths of the day’.115 Charles Champlin in the *Los Angeles Times* came straight to authorship head-on, as if naively, yet with some sense of what Brechtian construction requires of an audience. Cutting through theoretical niceties, he asserted:

films are the man and Anderson – cool, guarded, rigorously unsentimental – finally preserves a certain detachment from his material and consequently from his audience. If we are engrossed by his events and impressed by his characters we are denied some ultimate, easy empathy and moved to thought and admiration rather more than to deep feeling."116

Colin MacCabe also took Anderson as sole author. Writing for *Screen*, whose target readership in the 1970s comprised academics interested in Marxist film theory, his purpose was not to celebrate the director but charge him for derogating Marx by the ‘vulgarisation and de-politicisation of Brecht’. MacCabe objected that, far from revealing ‘the different articulations of reality’ as a true Brechtian must, Anderson merely expressed ‘a stereotyped reality of England which the spectator is invited to enjoy from his superior position’. His truths ‘turn out to be that endless message of the reactionary petit-bourgeois intellectual – that we can do nothing against the relentless and evil progress of society (run as it is by a bunch of omnipotent capitalists with the morality of gangsters) except note our superiority to it’.’117

Hedling noted that the attack on Anderson (which other contributors to *Screen* were to join) flowed from that journal’s advocacy of a Brechtian cinema based on Marxian concepts of alienation. ‘Since Anderson so explicitly turned to Brecht and thus at least nominally was a practitioner of *Screen*’s preferred aesthetic he could not be so simply disposed of’. 118

Alan Lovell was one who joined the debate at an event sponsored by the journal in 1975 to consider British engagement with Brecht. As we saw when considering *The White Bus*, he had previously criticised Anderson for his inability to break with liberal humanist values and make the case more effectively for a socialist principles. But at the *Screen* event, he noted – as we mentioned when analysing *If...* – that Anderson had in effect to innovate by trying to work using Brechtian methods within popular forms while doing so in a capitalist industry. He went on to say that Anderson was among a number of artists, including Joan Littlewood, John Arden and Margareta D’Arcy, who had tried to introduce Brecht to British culture – and he regretted the negative attitude of British intellectuals towards British culture ‘which leads to positive things in that culture being completely lost, and has an effect on the artists themselves, isolating them and preventing them from devel-
Lindsay Anderson was a lone voice on this occasion, but others writing in the popular press were more sympathetic to Anderson’s endeavours.

Robinson followed his earlier interview in *The Times* with a review describing Anderson as the author of a modern morality play. He saw Mick’s acceptance at the very end as:

perhaps the only and inevitable resolution of that exact mixture of exasperation and passionate affection that has characterized Anderson’s view of mankind from *O Dreamland* and his early films though *The White Bus* and *If....* And it is Anderson’s distinction that he is, since Humphrey Jennings, the only British film-maker ... whose work expresses a consistent critical attitude towards the time and the world in which he lives.

George Melly’s piece for *The Observer* complements Robinson’s. While the Brechtian mode seldom works in cinema, he argued, it did so triumphantly in this case. He thought that due in part to a strong screenplay by David Sherwin, excellent multiple performances from the actors at large and particularly Malcolm McDowell’s performance as the hero. One of the principal factors supporting the Brechtian mode was Anderson’s coherent view of how society works, which had given the narrative its robust scaffolding.

It should be added that more than one critic was to deride the film because, like John Weightman, they returned to the documentary realism versus fantasy debate that had shaped many reviews of *If....* ‘In presenting us with corrupt policemen, power-crazy tycoons, sadomasochistic judges, murderous meths drinkers or suicidal Cockney housewives’, Weightman wrote, ‘Mr Anderson doesn’t seem to be in England at all’. For Melly, on the contrary, the Brechtian mode meant that all the incidents (police looting a crash site, the sale of arms to an African despot, scientific experimentation on human beings, etc.) could be paired with reality: ‘in the week of the Watergate disclosures, the film’s relevance needs no underlining’. And he thought, more confidently than Derek Malcolm, that though *O Lucky Man!* was not flawless, ‘It achieves that most difficult balance between popular appeal and serious content’.

Alexander Walker turned in the *Evening Standard* to the topic with which we began – Mick’s hesitant smile – as a measure of the distance between *If....* and *O Lucky Man!* ‘Not the sten-gun, but the Zen lesson of *satori*: instead of the clenched teeth, the dawning smile of transcendental acceptance of things as they are...’. This, on the surface, seems diametrically opposite to Robert Benayoun who thought the allegorical epic should be compared to Swift rather than Voltaire, noting approvingly the film’s mordant qualities and verve, its tonic malignity. ‘Si
o lucky man!

vous aimez Swift’, wrote Hugues Vehenne, ‘allez voir O Lucky Man!’. They harmonise with Raymond Durgnat’s opinion:

If Lindsay Anderson now accepts the pessimism for which he once flagellated Elia Kazan (re On the Waterfront) before he recognized it in himself, the result is artistic growth, into a black tragicomedy like Swift’s – a venerable, versatile, and formidable position.

So, does O Lucky Man! offer acceptance or rage? Anderson himself was clear that he intended both.

People act from the worst of motives and you’ve got to anticipate that... If you are sentimental, then you are taking an unreal view of life. The whole essence of the film is to suggest we do have to understand the conditions of life, of being human beings. Stupidity must be mocked and laughed at. Wickedness must be mocked and laughed at. We have to accept we are human beings and our lot is not entirely a happy one.

Two critics examined the division between rage and acceptance. David Wilson, despite his regret at finding a sanctimonious edge to the film, drew attention to Anderson’s ‘fondness for the episodic structure, where the effect derives from the accumulation of loaded detail rather than any linear narrative progression...’. Wilson traced this back via Anderson’s documentary films to Jennings’s method of assembling from fragments. However, a significant change has occurred.

The impressionist tendencies of the early documentaries are now modulated into Expressionist oppositions. Mick gives his prison pay packet to a Salvation Army meeting, and the idealist gesture is immediately countered by cynicism as two bystanders pick his pockets.

Wilson adds that ‘Blake’s contraries, the innocent dream and the experience of reality, have often found echoes in Anderson’s films’. But even Blake’s words are corrupted by Mick’s mentors, the line ‘A sincere belief that anything is so will make it so’ having been absorbed into coffee salesmen’s training programme.

Elissa Durwood argued that ‘Mick’s smile is a recognition and surrender to the duality, a moment of insight we’ve been waiting for the entire film’. As jumbled and chaotic as the final party may seem, she observes, it is as deliberate as the rest of the film – with the players shedding their pretence to be nothing but characters and showing us how to live the moment. Their doing so does not break the tension of the story but boosts it towards a rush of understanding: ‘The contradictions that skulk below the surface of O Lucky Man! blossom, and the film and its director reveal their deeply Zen nature.’
Letters from friends and fans

Files in the archive hold a considerable number of letters from individuals who had seen *O Lucky Man!* Many came from professional colleagues and personal friends, most offering enthusiastic congratulations. Some, such as Elizabeth Sussex, came up with fulsome praise but also measured thoughts – in her case on tightening some scenes prior to release.135 Gavin Lambert, whose reactions Anderson had sought, was frank about his admiration for his friend’s artistic courage and his belief that it contained some of his best work while expressing doubts about the last third of the film in which, ‘I felt myself being lectured rather than enthralled’.136

Anderson received adulatory letters from fans who showed some insight but tended to project their own needs and passions via the film onto him. As far as possible he responded with quiet gratitude, taking their observations seriously. However, if invited to develop the contact, he maintained a courteous detachment.137 Occasionally he was touched more deeply, as when contacted from Boulder, Colorado by a young actress, Kether Dawson (Nina Axelrod, daughter of the Hollywood scriptwriter and novelist George whom Anderson knew). He dealt sympathetically and judiciously with her vivid, New Age enthusiasm for life, his movie, and contact with ‘dear Lindsy’ [sic] with whom she wanted to work no matter how humble the job.138 Her second letter described throwing the I-Ching after seeing *O Lucky Man!* again. She analysed the resultant hexagram which signified ‘After Completion’.

The hexagram changes to Waiting/ Nourishment, which refers to a man who waits for the forces of life to nourish him. The I-Ching has never misguided me, and once again I found its words remarkably perceptive.

I just wanted to give you this view of your work.139

Thanking her for a ‘magically perceptive letter’, Anderson (who used the I-Ching quite often) developed her analysis saying that he had ‘always believed instinctively in the necessity of waiting for the forces of life to nourish one before it is possible to undertake any new work of any ambition’. One must wait until ‘time has brought one inescapably round to the point where there is no alternative but to undertake a new enterprise’. Nevertheless, while thanking her for the pleasure of such an appreciative human contact, he let her invitation to draw up his astrological chart go by.140

The roles of master and disciple reversed when Patrick White, the Australian novelist, thanked him for the film.

In spite of all the nightmares you took us through I ended up feeling rejuvenated and glad to be alive. And what cunning performances your
actors give: there are still none who can compare with the best English actors. I should add that I also felt particularly in tune with If... after being forced to spend four years at Cheltenham.\textsuperscript{141}

These words from the author of Voss so overwhelmed Anderson that for once he played the neophyte, launching à propos nothing into an unprovoked complaint about the way his film had been compared with Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange. Finally recovering himself, he found what really needed to be said.

I had supper with Ralph Richardson last night and he showed me your letter to him and we both purred with pleasure. Thank you again. I would offer you my congratulations if I didn’t feel that that would be a bit imper- tinent.\textsuperscript{142}

There were of course correspondents who blended criticism with praise; sometimes Anderson replied at length describing his intentions and analysing sections of the film in terms that revisited ideas that he had been expounding to the press since the start of promotional work. An example is his reply to a long letter from a British expatriate in Zambia who was ‘taking my Master to task’ for his misunderstanding of the specific circumstances of post-liberation African states.\textsuperscript{143} Anderson wrote back not without sympathy but did say that the accusation made him feel ‘a little bit (making all allowance for different levels of achievement) like Shakespeare attacked by Tolstoi for his “immorality” or for his uselessness to the Russian peasant’.\textsuperscript{144} He then argued that the intentional jumble of characteristics given to the fictitious state of Zingawara were designed to make the audience see the sequence in far more general terms than his correspondent did.\textsuperscript{145}

Conclusion

A brief comparison of the achievements of François Truffaut and Lindsay Anderson gives us something to smile at (albeit ironically) in reflecting on their different goals and successes. There are many striking similarities: their absent fathers and distant mothers; their passionate championing of the cinema; and their belief in the centrality of the author. Truffaut’s Cahiers article, ‘Une Certaine Tendance du Cinéma Français’ is commonly regarded as the manifesto that launched both the politique des auteurs and the French New Wave. For his part, Anderson had financed and co-edited Sequence and become a leading member of the British New Wave. It is an instructive coincidence that Truffaut’s love poem about the near-impossible process of directing a feature film, La
Nuit Américaine (also 1973), won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1974, whereas O Lucky Man!, despite being heavily tipped, had not won the 1973 Cannes Palme d’Or.

In a key sequence from La Nuit Américaine (Day for Night in English-speaking territories), Truffaut, playing the director of the film within his film, steals a vase from the hotel where he and the film crew are staying, intending to use it as a prop. Emmanuel Burdeau’s reading of this episode touches our interpretation of Anderson slapping Mick’s face insofar as both directors question the nature of cinematic reality.

The cinema ceaselessly outgrows its own limits. It takes advantage of documentary sources to feed off them: in the manner of a robber, it draws upon reality. More precisely, the cinema enables a meeting between life and the films themselves, just as the vase and the bouquet sequence exemplifies. The cinema both partakes in and of the very act of sharing as demonstrated by the film La Nuit Américaine which celebrates in its own right this ritual by allowing two experiences of the film to meet and merge: the film for the audience and the film within the film. A two-way lesson in short: the cinema has arguably been ripped off from life itself, and as a consequence it retains the trace of this very act of robbery within itself.146

Seeing the film both as overflowing into the real and as a robbery from life, also sheds light on Anderson’s intervention in O Lucky Man!. Mick’s difficulty in smiling during the audition sequence effectively breaks down the fragile equilibrium that underpins the relation between cinema and reality. McDowell had found the smile hard to perform, needing to repeat the take twenty times over five days to discover the ‘wordless insight, a chemical reaction… that transfigures [Mick] from within’.147 Mick/McDowell’s initial reluctance to give away part of his real self – his grin – to the fictional world which the mock audition foregrounds, mirrors Truffaut’s theft in La Nuit Américaine. Anderson makes his actor/protagonist aware of the exchange with reality that needs to operate within the cinema. For his part, Truffaut gives the flowers from the vase to the script-girl in recompense for stealing. Burdeau reads the flowerless vase as a metaphor for Truffaut’s view of the way cinema moulds reality.148 Truffaut maintains the very equilibrium between life and art that Lindsay Anderson sought to challenge, a key difference between them.

The conscious choice on the part of both Anderson and Truffaut to step into the screen as fictional versions of themselves suggests parallels with Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt. If Brecht was intent on making the audience aware of the artifice underpinning any artistic representation, Truffaut and Anderson supplement his technique with
their own variants. As previously noted, Anderson was less interested in alienating his audience than in focusing their attention on the drama’s essential import. Their respective definitions of this ‘essential import’ bear on the different fortunes of Truffaut’s and Anderson’s films – the popularity of La Nuit Américaine compared with the divergent reactions to O Lucky Man!

Truffaut chose to show the audience how mainstream cinematic reality is constructed, whereas in O Lucky Man! Anderson engaged in visual and thematic deconstruction of cinematic realism. ‘Showing things how they really are’ implies total commitment to both the message and the medium – which Anderson’s film exemplifies better than Truffaut’s. Since nothing is ‘natural, normal, or self-evident’, reflecting upon what is presented on screen requires the degree of acceptance and commitment that Zen philosophy calls for. Revealingly, Truffaut’s alter ego in La Nuit Américaine never lets the audience know what function the stolen vase will serve in his film. As Burdeau remarks, Truffaut the ‘cineaste’ withholds as much information as he releases. Anderson avoids any such ambiguity by stepping into the filmic space and challenging the dynamics operating between life and art.

When discussing The White Bus we noted James Sutherland’s distinction between the writer of comedy (who accepts and is amused by human folly) and the satirist who, unable to accept and rejecting bêtises, is driven to protest. Arthur Pollard portrays the latter in words tailor-made for Anderson.

The satirist is not an easy man to live with. He is more than usually conscious of the follies and vices of his fellows and he cannot stop himself from showing that he is. He is in a difficult position, for he can so easily lay himself open to the charge of moral superiority or even of hypocrisy if people think that they see in him the faults he condemns in others. If he escape these charges, he may still have to counter that of mere personal animosity against his victims ...

It is no wonder that Anderson’s film roused some to anger, for when all is said and done, O Lucky Man! has epic qualities not merely from observing the Brechtian paradigm, but also through its deliberate inversion of the traditional epic framework. Whereas classical epic poetry surveys the glorious history of an entire nation and celebrates its prospects, Anderson’s vision of Britain presents a nation whose glory is a false memory deployed – but failing – to conceal meaner motives: greed, lust and the corrupting appetite for power.

Looking back near the end of his life, the director reiterated his original idea: ‘The end is a sort of ironic evocation, I suppose, of the Zen attitude to living, which is to live life and accept it and to smile the right
kind of smile but not to ask why’. As the party that ends the film gets underway, Anderson embraces Mick warmly, recognising that his Zen pupil has broken free from false pre-conceptions about the nature of happiness. That rounds the film off nicely, but leaves open the question whether Anderson himself could have reaped as much from the experience as his lead character.

The answer depends on which ‘Anderson’ we have in mind. Concerning the personal experience of the man himself, his journals show that this moment was not only hard won, but also ephemeral: there remained another four weeks of principal camerawork and four more shooting pick-ups before the arduous business of post-production and readying the film for release. He felt the long-drawn labour threatening to overwhelm him and complained of lassitude and fatigue. His personal doubts, loneliness, sexual yearnings and anguish went unrelieved; and the heavy burden of his colleagues’ expectations weighed him down. Of his editors he wrote:

I am absolutely sick of having this paralysing effect on people... They like treating one as a genius – which I am NOT – because of course it relieves them of the responsibility of doing anything.

Having exercised authority, ‘Anderson’ the on-screen character does indeed appear to have found a moment of tranquillity, perhaps even joy, which helps resolve Mick’s picaresque odyssey. This ‘Anderson’ functions as the master or, to use a term derived by C. G. Jung and developed by his successors, the archetypal figure of the wise old man.

The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea – in other words, a spiritual function or an endopsychic automatism of some kind – can extricate him.

As such he radiates mana, a vital energy which Samuels et al. describe as not unlike the charisma of a priest, doctor, magician or holy fool that ‘can attract or repel, wreak destruction or heal, confronting the ego with a supraordinate force’.

The ‘Anderson’ that we are principally focusing on, however, is the cinematic author, here found in the guise of satirist. As such he resembles the ‘Anderson’ we discerned through If..... Acceptance has no part in his value system not just because his indignation is ever more intense, but because the satirist who learned to accept would by definition need to find another profession. Instead of the hesitant new smile of his pupil, this ‘Anderson’ wears the fixed mask of saeva indignatio, which, whatever his public make of it and however they react, he cannot change to pacify them. Nevertheless, there is paradoxically in
his perceived authorship something of the wise old man, an archetypal figure that ‘has an ambiguous elfin character ... seeming, in certain of his forms, to be good incarnate and in others an aspect of evil’.159 ‘Anderson’ in his satirical function as healing destroyer exhibits this ambivalent quality.

What might lie behind Anderson’s role as a satirist? Here again Jungian theory helps. Jungians call the mask which an individual dons to face the world the *persona*. It has the social function of presenting individuals to the world in the way they want to be seen (as opposed to the way they actually are). It follows that aspects of the individual’s personality are concealed, some of them (often forming complexes) being hidden from others and from the individuals themselves. The unconscious ‘is the Achilles heel of even the most heroic consciousness: somewhere the strong man is weak, the clever man foolish, the good man bad, and the reverse is also true’.160 These unwanted elements constitute the shadow. Since the satirist’s persona is so rigidly defined, the shadow it conceals is likely to be deep.

It might be alleged, since satirists focus on what they condemn, that they reject love. That seems a slapdash verdict because, rather than being motivated by contempt for the entire species, they may rage at their fellow beings’ failure to fulfil their potential. This is true of Anderson’s *If....* and *O Lucky Man!* where among the biting satire are found glimpses of tenderness towards both heroes. It is more to the point

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11 Alan Price, Lindsay Anderson and Miroslav Ondricek prepare to shoot a scene during the making of *O Lucky Man!* in 1972.
to recognise that the satirist aims to be armour-plated and fearful to his enemies, which suggests that the shadow at his back might be his own fear. Here we find a link between ‘Anderson’ the satirist and ‘Anderson’ the man whose journals reveal a fear of failure so gripping that he tended, almost certainly without knowing it, to divert his shadow into an attack first on his colleagues, and later on reviewers. To make this projection more effective, he occasionally donned the mantle of the film’s most able critic.

The satirist ‘Anderson’ seems secretly to fear the root phenomenon that he rages against, which might be summarised as the triumph of the world’s existing orders of self-interested power and the oppression of authentic human vitality. As we have found ample evidence to demonstrate, this position matches closely with his public and personal writings on the topics of British cinema and culture as well as the nation’s public life.
Notes

1 Lindsay Anderson interviewed by David Robinson, ‘Stripping the Veils Away’, The Times (21 April 1973) Review, 7 (LA/1/7/6/2/3).
2 Frank R. Cunningham, ‘Lindsay Anderson’s O Lucky Man! and the Romantic Tradition’, Film Quarterly, 20 (Summer 1974) 258 (LA/1/7/6/9/19).
4 See Cunningham, ‘Lindsay Anderson’s O Lucky Man!’, 261.
6 Diary, 16 June 1972 (LA 6/1/64/160).
8 Mary Blume, ‘A Smile, an Echo, a Director’, International Herald Tribune (27–28 October 1973) 16 (LA 1/7/6/3/72).
9 Ibid.
10 Diary, 3 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/7–8).
11 Ibid.
12 This is clear from Anderson, Never Apologise, 149 and David Sherwin, ‘Diary of a Script’ the typescript of which Anderson amended at the writer’s invitation (LA 1/7/1/8). It was later incorporated into Sherwin’s Going Mad in Hollywood and Life with Lindsay Anderson (London: Penguin, 1997).
13 See transcript of conversation between McDowell and Peggy Rowe about her experiences of working in the coffee industry (LA 1/7/1/10).
14 See transcripts of conversations between McDowell and Sherwin (LA 1/7/1/9, 1/7/1/11) and typescript of the opening scenes of ‘Coffee Man’ (LA 1/7/1/12).
15 Diary, 6–7 February 1972 (LA 6/1/64/39–40).
16 Diary, 24 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/82).
17 Diary, 29 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/88).
18 Diary, 25 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/84).
19 Diary, 11–12 January 1972 (LA 6/1/64/13–14).
21 Diary, 25 August 1972 (LA 6/1/64/226).
22 Diary, 3 August 1972 (LA 6/1/64/204–5).
23 Anderson for David Sherwin, ‘Diary of a Script’ (LA 1/7/1/8).
26 Diary, February 1971 (LA 6/1/61/20).
27 Diary, 12 July 1971 (LA 6/1/61/29).
28 Diary, 22 January 1972 (LA 6/1/64/24).
29 See, for example, diary, 17 February 1972 (LA 6/1/64/50).
30 Diary, 19 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/294).
31 See, for example, diary, 15 April 1972 (LA 6/1/64/104–5).
32 Diary, 1–9 October 1970 (LA 6/1/59/1–7).
33 See, for example, diary October 1970 (LA 6/1/59/19).
34 Diary, 5 to 8 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/65–8).
36 Diary, 5 to 8 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/65–8).
37 Diary, 6 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/125).
See, for example, diary 12 March 1972 (LA 6/1/64/72); 23 April 1972 (LA 6/1/64/122); 19 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/295–6); 27 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/144). In 1994, he and Price had a joint birthday party. Anderson’s last: Alan Price, ‘This Sparring Life’, Daily Telegraph (1 September 1994) 16 (LA 7/1/1).


Keith Altham, interview with Eric Burdon, NME (2 June 1973) 9.

David Sherwin, O Lucky Man!, first draft screenplay, October 1971 (LA 1/7/1/5) Preface.


Elissa Durwood, ‘O Lucky Man!’ Crimmer’s: Journal of the Narrative Arts (Spring 1976) 11 (LA 1/7/6/7/1).


Diary, 8 February 1972 (LA 6/1/64/41).

Ibid.


Robinson, ‘Stripping the veils away’, 7.

Diary, 5 September 1972 (LA 6/1/64/236).

Diary, 22 October 1972 (LA 6/1/64/282).

Diary, 31 July 72 (LA 6/1/64/201).

Diary, 30 September 1972 (LA 6/1/64/262).

Diary, 3 October 1972 (LA 6/1/64/265).

Diary, 23 October 1972 (LA 6/1/64/283).

Diary, 16 December 1971 (LA 6/1/61/33).

Ibid.

Diary, 17–19 December 1971 (LA 6/1/61/34–7). Anderson was undoubtedly piqued by Charles Bluhdorn, the CEO of Gulf + Western, owners of Paramount, who had so enthusiastically bought If...., but now ‘never returned my call. The script he passed to [Frank] Yablans’. Diary, 18 December 1971 (LA 6/1/61/37).

Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 15.

Draft UK press schedule (LA 1/7/5/3).


In one of its many imprints held in the archive: Rex Reed, ‘The British Burn Over “O Lucky Man!”’, Sunday News (1 July 1973) 61 (LA 1/7/6/3/40).


Correspondence, Anderson to Gene Moskowitz, 8 March 1973 (LA 1/7/3/7/1).

See details of Warner Bros.’ promotion campaign at LA 1/7/3/5/34; and Fred Hift Associates proposals for the UK campaign, April 1973 (LA 1/7/3/8/1–10).


Warner Bros., Inter-Office Memo: O Lucky Man – Promotion Campaign (LA 1/7/3/5/34).
72 Correspondence and memos, 19 January to 15 March 1973 (LA 1/7/3/5/1–4); correspondence from George Stevens, Jr to Anderson, 3 May 1973 (LA 1/7/3/5/10).
73 Pat Mott, ‘“O Lucky Man” Is Entertaining – But Long’, Daily Trojan (17 May 1973) 10 (LA 1/7/6/4/7).
74 Correspondence, Anderson to Mary-Ann Tyrrell, 11 July 1973 (LA 1/7/3/12/3).
75 Correspondence, Anderson to Ted Ashley, 28 June 1973 (LA 1/7/3/12/8).
76 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 16–18.
77 Telex, Michael Medwin to Anderson, 12 April 1973 (LA 1/7/3/5/5); Anderson to Myron Karlin at Warner Bros. and Medwin, 13 April 1973 (LA 1/7/3/5/6).
78 Telex, Anderson to Ted Ashley and Bob Solo, 11 May 1973 (LA 1/7/3/5/13).
80 Diary, 12 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/129).
81 Correspondence, Myron D Karlin, Warner Bros., Burbank to Michael Medwin, 6 February 1974 (LA 1/7/3/5/29).
82 Correspondence Leo Greenfield, Warner Bros., Burbank to Michael Medwin, 11 February 1974 (LA 1/7/3/5/30).
83 Warner Bros. Inc. distribution report to 31 December 1975 (LA 1/7/3/16/6).
84 Correspondence from The Simkins Partnership (solicitors to Memorial Enterprises) and Michael Medwin, 22 July 1974 (LA 1/7/3/16/1). These figures relate to royalties on the film, not Price’s album.
85 Correspondence and accounts relating to SAM Productions, 3 April 1974 to 9 July 1985 (LA 1/7/3/13/1–11).
86 Diary, 16 December 1971 (LA 6/1/61/33).
87 When released in France, the film was titled Le Meilleur des Mondes possibles, a direct lift from Candide.
88 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 140–2.
89 Anderson in Robinson, ‘Stripping the Veils Away’, 7; Anderson in Delson, ‘O Lucky Man!’ 30. An undated draft scene, handwritten by David Sherwin, reveals the scriptwriters’ impulse to Brechtian satire and lampoon running strongly even when well into the shoot. The proposed scene features ‘Richard H Slogul’ Vice President of the film studio. Slogul speaks as a Brechtian chorus. He is obliged to describe Mick Travis’s time in prison because the huge riot demanded by the script was too expensive to film (LA 1/7/1/3). However, Sherwin had first written, then crossed out the name of the Warner Bros. executive Robert H. Solo. Solo sent a telegram to Anderson on 21 April 1972 expressing serious concerns at Warner Bros. about O Lucky Man! running over budget (LA 1/7/3/2/1). Presumably the script insert, which was not filmed, gives Sherwin’s and Anderson’s private reaction. In his diary for the same day Anderson referred to the telegram as ‘total idiocy’ (LA 6/1/64/110).
90 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 131.
91 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 132–3.
93 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 135.
94 Gordon, The Purpose of Playing, 231.
95 Lindsay Anderson, Introduction to The Old Crowd (1985), in Never Apologise, 140.
Knippenberg, 'This Price Is All Right', 16H.
Diary, 14 June 1967 (LA 6/1/54/9d).
Joseph Gelmis, 'O Unlucky Film!' Newsday (14 June 1973) n.p. (LA 1/7/6/4/17) is typical: 'It is audacious and amusing and exciting in individual scenes. But it runs so long and there is, for me, a feeling of over familiarity with the theme and the treatment...'.
What’s On in London (4 May 1973) 13 (LA 1/7/6/2/21).
Al Goldstein, 'Movies, Then and Now’, Cavalier (September 1973) 9 (LA 1/7/6/4/45).
Diary, 3 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/7–8).
David Wilson, 'O Lucky Man', Sight & Sound, 42, 3 (Summer 1973) 128–9 (LA 1/7/6/2/29).
Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 146–7.
Alan Lovell, 'Breath in Britain – Lindsay Anderson', Screen, 16, 4 (Winter 1975/76) 69.
George Melly, 'Mick Grins and Bears It', The Observer (6 May 1973) 34 (LA 1/7/6/2/22).
Melly, 'Mick Grins and Bears It', 34.
Raymond Durgnat, 'O Lucky Man! or: The Adventures of a Clockwork Cheese', Film Comment, 10 (January/February 1974) 40. Durgnat asks, en passant, 'Is O Lucky Man the best Polish film about the British since Repulsion, Cul de Sac and Deep End?' A decade later Andrzej Wajda was to congratulate Anderson on
making in Britannia Hospital ‘the most Polish film produced anywhere in the world in recent years’ (LA 1/7/3/16/62).


130 Wilson, ‘O Lucky Man’., 128.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Elissa Durwood, ‘O Lucky Man!’., 15.

134 Ibid.

135 Correspondence, Elizabeth Sussex to Anderson, 9 January 1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/1).

136 Correspondence, Gavin Lambert to Anderson, 4 June 1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/11).

137 See, for example, Inez Hoffman Newton correspondence with Anderson, Summer 1973 to 17 January 1974 (LA 1/7/3/10/21–6).

138 Correspondence, Kether Dawson (Nina Axelrod) to Anderson [November 1973] (LA 1/7/3/10/41); Anderson to Kether Dawson, 7 December 1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/42).

139 Correspondence, Kether Dawson to Anderson [February 1974] (LA 1/7/3/10/49).

140 Correspondence, Anderson to Kether Dawson, 8 March 1974 (LA 1/7/3/10/50).

141 Correspondence, Patrick White to Anderson, 5 December 1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/43).

142 Correspondence, Anderson to Patrick White, 14 December 1973 (LA 1/7/3/10/44).

143 Correspondence, David Wallace to Anderson, 22 May 1975 (LA 1/7/3/10/67).

144 Correspondence, Anderson to David Wallace, 13 June 1975 (LA 1/7/3/10/68).

145 Ibid.


147 Malcolm McDowell in Alexander Walker, ‘Lindsay’s “Lucky Man” – His Last Picture Show?’., Los Angeles Times (1 July 1973) 19 (LA 1/7/6/2/44); Anderson’s diary, 16–18 June 1972 (LA 6/1/64/160–162); 25 June 1972 (LA 6/1/64/169); 7 August 1972 (LA 6/1/64/208).


149 Anderson, Introduction to The Old Crowd (1985), 140.


153 Anderson, Never Apologise, 128.

154 Diary, 25 June 1972 (LA 6/1/64/169).

155 Diary, 17 July 72 (LA 6/1/64/188).

156 Diary, 21 July 72 (LA 6/1/64/192).


Introduction

The next film Anderson made was a claustrophobic family drama that hardly strayed from the sitting room where most of the action took place – a total contrast to the sprawling adventures of *O Lucky Man!* As William Gaskill said previewing the original stage production, ‘It is a subterranean play in which only a little appears above the surface ...’.

In a terraced northern house a miner, Harry Shaw (Bill Owen), and his wife (Constance Chapman) welcome back their sons to celebrate their fortieth wedding anniversary; but the reunion brings to the surface long-repressed tensions and conflicts which threaten to wreck the event. The father, last in a family of coal miners, has given everything to ensure that his sons escape the pit. However, their educational achievements have pushed the young men into worlds remote from their parents, severing them from their roots. Andrew (Alan Bates), the ungovernable eldest, is a lawyer who has abandoned his profession to paint. Colin, the second (James Bolam), has risen to join middle management in a car factory. Meanwhile the youngest, Stephen (Brian Cox), is an introverted writer who, riven by unresolved family tensions, has suppressed his account of their youth.

Production

Anderson had directed David Storey’s play *In Celebration* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1969 where the production had been received with widespread critical acclaim. In 1973, Ely Landau and Otto Plaschkes invited him to direct a film version. It was to complement Landau’s American Film Theatre (AFT) series as one of a number of British productions. Two others were produced by Plaschkes, namely Simon Gray’s *Butley* (1974, directed on film by Harold Pinter) and Pinter’s *The
Homecoming (1973, directed for the AFT by Peter Hall).

The draft agreement with the Ely Landau Organization (which owned the AFT) specified that Anderson should direct In Celebration on film, starting in July 1974. His fee would be the sterling equivalent of $30,000 and he would be entitled to profit participation of 2 per cent of the distributor's gross receipts (which was to amount to just over $19,000 in the period to March 1981). The agreement also specified that when the director had completed his cut, time should be built into the schedule for Anderson to make such alterations as the company might require. The schedule was tight, requiring delivery of the final answer print to the distributor by 30 November 1974. Rehearsals were slated for the week 5 to 9 August, principal photography for the six weeks 19 August to 23 September with editing commencing immediately and running through to 2 November. Discussion of alterations was allowed for during the following working week. Thereafter Anderson would make the alterations and dub the film in sufficient time for the laboratory to produce a satisfactory unified print and despatch it to New York.

In practice, the American Film Theatre gave Anderson a free hand and the issue of alterations did not arise. He had in fact begun preparations with Plaschkes some weeks before the draft agreement was drawn up. In March the two men exchanged ideas about individuals who might become key members of the crew and Plaschkes set about recruiting people whom they expected would suit the kind of production they had in mind. Anderson had made it a condition of taking on the film that he should use the actors who had staged the production five years earlier. The cast was reunited for the film (except for one character dropped in the adaptation). Looking back, the director realised that this had been a good decision that eased the remake. He found that the actors' performances had matured and there was a sense of a real family between them. He told a journalist, 'It became more mature. I felt it was a deeply personal commitment on my part and that of the actors'. For his part, Storey had allowed the AFT to produce the film because they were prepared to take it at its full length. He had rejected an earlier approach from David Susskind who had proposed making a television version, but to do so introducing severe cuts.

Anderson, Storey and the transfer to film

The film is an exceptionally accomplished transfer of a stage production, powerfully performed and beautifully directed. On first sight, it appears to have been (and was) expertly served by Anderson, but not authored by
him. It manifests few of his characteristic cinematic themes and motifs, whereas it derives much from Storey’s family history.

Interviewed in 2003 for the film’s DVD release, Storey recalled that his father had objected to his becoming a writer, which his parent thought a dead end, refusing to finance him any further as an Art School student. So he signed on as a professional rugby league player with Leeds and earned enough money to continue his studies at Art School. He used this as a means of both painting and writing – eventually being expelled for doing too much of the latter. Out of these experiences grew the ethos for both *This Sporting Life* and *In Celebration*, namely the feeling that he had escaped while in reality being still fastened to his origins. Storey realised that to a large extent he had been trying to make sense of his home background: his father having been a coal miner for forty years with a family of four sons, one of whom died; his mother the only woman in the house. Storey had also drawn on his own experience of going away to be educated. All in all, the pressure to write this play seems to have been intense: he recalled that *In Celebration* was written in about three days.\(^1\)

The weighting between the respective inputs of writer and director in the film of *In Celebration* alters the balance struck when they made *This Sporting Life*. Although both films have distinctive elements based on Storey’s life, in the earlier one we found Anderson’s personal and psychological investment to be palpable. With *In Celebration*, we perceive Storey to have been the principal, but not the sole author. We saw in Chapter 1 that Anderson had argued in 1950 that movie scriptwriters who claim their contribution dominates the finished product prefer those films ‘in which the director’s function approximates closely enough to that of a stage director’.\(^2\) For Anderson this view had put the film director ‘severely in his place, demanding of him technical capacity, sensibility to the ideas and characters provided for him by his author, but no independent response to his material, no desire to present it in the light of his own imagination, illuminated by it, or transformed’.\(^3\) However, this did not hold true of Anderson’s contribution to *In Celebration* where a combination of, first, the intimate knowledge gained from directing the play onstage; second, rethinking its requirements in the process of adaptation; and third, his personal history opened opportunities for his directorial, imaginative input (as he himself realised).

Anderson had a long and fruitful partnership with Storey which eventually led, aside from the two films, to his directing no fewer than nine of Storey’s plays. Their working relationship had a tenor different from that with David Sherwin (see Chapter 4), which found an outlet in the anger and energy of the Mick Travis trilogy. If the Travis films
are a powerful cinematic manifestation of Anderson’s widely recognized public persona, much of his work with Storey hints at his private side. Storey’s writing often deals with the minutiae of family relationships, addressing themes such as love and loss, longing and loneliness. Directing this material gave Anderson the opportunity to examine feelings he experienced in his own life. Like the characters in many of Storey’s dramas, Anderson came from a dysfunctional family in which the public façade of politeness and normality hid the stresses and strains of family life. Thus In Celebration, as his friend Gavin Lambert noted, presented ‘a situation that struck a personal chord for Lindsay, bound to his own family by ties of ambivalence’.14

Storey and Anderson’s working relationship also drew the director’s imaginative input to the film in ways that bonded technique with emotion. Interviewed by Archer Winsten for the New York Post, Anderson remarked that Storey was as inaccessible as Stephen, the youngest of the Shaw family: ‘He can’t or won’t talk about anything’.15 But this was not the negative observation it at first seems: the two men had other means of sharing the essentials. He told Dennis Barker of The Guardian that his collaboration with Storey was based on an almost total lack of discussion, even though the writer would be present until everything was established: ‘but we don’t talk theoretically. The only discussions that take place are on absolutely specific points. But even specific points – does he remain standing or does he sit down in this scene – when conducted in the right way are profoundly significant’.16 Storey confirmed this, saying that when in 1969 he had at the director’s invitation analysed the play for the actors by adopting a theoretical approach, he left them with glazed eyes. Anderson decided that they had better not discuss it any more, so their conversations thereafter were all about the technicalities and mechanics of performance. The emotional impetus gradually acquired itself from the repetition of these kinds of actions.17

When it came to post-production of the film, however, Anderson controlled the editing as he always did. He put it on record that he would have been horrified not to do so since no editor can get into the director’s head.18 Writing in mid-November 1974 to Bates, he reported progress on the film and praised Russell Lloyd who, provided Anderson was there to urge him in the right direction, had proved himself ‘an excellent editor ... very scrupulous, obsessively detailed (which I like), and sensitive as well’.19 Thinking of the damage editing can do, Anderson recognised why players fear butchery by scissors: ‘It must be dreadful to be an actor and see what can happen to a performance. There are so many times when he is cut off in the middle of a reaction, or a bit of meaningful business for the sake of pace or rhythm. I try to keep that in mind [...]’.20
It was not only the technical skill but the creative quality of Lloyd’s work, together with the contribution of cameraman Dick Bush’s shot selection that Anderson valued. His correspondence with an admirer of the film explains why.

I had been apprehensive of In Celebration, for all the obvious reasons. (A single set, more or less, a restricted bunch of characters, no ‘movement.’) But I see from the result that this is to underestimate the power of the camera to create and register psychological movement, by the use of expressive grouping, and of course most strikingly through the use of close-up. This meant that a character like Steven [...] who is very hard to bring off on the stage, since he is silent for so much of the time, and one can’t be sure that the audience is going to be looking at him, or continuously aware of him, as is necessary – a character like this can be correctly ‘placed’ much more easily in a film than on the stage. I suppose that what the film does most successfully, from my point of view, is to oblige the audience to look at it as exactly as I directed it. They can’t let their attention be distracted by the irrelevant face or movement, as it might be on the stage. At each moment they have to see and attend to exactly what I, as director, wished them to. Since I am nothing if not authoritarian as an artist, this is quite a joy for me. 

Plaschkes, interviewed for the DVD, confirmed how Anderson used a good director’s trick to augment Alan Bates’s impact in the role of Andrew ensuring that he is often present in the background even when other actors are talking. He mentioned too that the inexperienced Brian Cox had difficulty in adapting from stage to screen and Anderson worked with him to tone his performance down. For his part, Anderson noticed that highlighting individual characters’ emotions cinematically meant that it drew less laughter than the play had done in the theatre.

We know that the film pleased Storey, despite reservations about his own contribution. He wrote to Anderson nine years after the AFT version was first released, having just watched it on Channel 4. He thought that the director’s and actors’ imaginative – perhaps instinctive – working out of the drama’s resolution repaired what he thought of as his script’s inadequacy.

I was very touched – and frightened by In Celebration, seeing it after so many years, and in the context of a television screen. Distance at least makes one thing clear – what a remarkable partnership those theatrical years were, and what a great deal you brought to them – in artistry as well as love and care. What a great pity the opportunity to film The Changing Room and The Contractor never arose ...

I was startled by how naked the film was, and the fidelity with which the characters and their feelings are followed – and dismayed that I’d never found a more ‘logical’ ending: Andrew should have come out with
what he was feeling and plainly some inhibition in me prevented it. Not to be laid at the feet of the actors or director for, in an equally instinctive way, they obviate the deficiency and the film, for me, found its own poetic ending – the wheels spin on.\textsuperscript{24}

Storey plainly believed that Anderson and the team’s imaginative input had revitalised and re-envisioned his play.

**Release**

The film’s release in North America swiftly followed its completion, but British screenings did not. Impatient to let the work be shown to domestic audiences and doubting that Landau’s company would organise a season, Anderson wrote to Plaschkes in May 1975 proposing that they organise a ‘Pirate Press Show’ to remedy the situation.\textsuperscript{25} He wanted to run a one-day programme of the three British theatre films (\textit{Butley}, \textit{The Homecoming} and \textit{In Celebration}) with a view to engaging the interest of critics and journalists alike. It mattered to Anderson that these films should be seen in Britain because they reflected the richness, relevance and tradition of the British theatre. And he was conscious that millions of people could see them and might find the dramas more absorbing when screened than in the theatre.\textsuperscript{26} He had already drafted an invitation in the names of Plaschkes and the three films’ directors, when the producer told him that Landau in association with Sir Bernard Delfont intended to make a big launch in Britain of the first and second AFT series.\textsuperscript{27} Doubtless for this reason Anderson did not push his proposal forward, but in fact the Landau-Delfont idea did not materialise. A year passed before Seven Keyes (an Australian distributor seeking to break into the British market) released \textit{In Celebration}. It ran in London at the Curzon in a British Film Theatre season selected, as Anderson had envisaged, from the full AFT list.\textsuperscript{28}

**Critical readings**

As mentioned, Storey regretted he had never found a more ‘logical’ ending for the play and admired the filmmakers for finding their own intuitive and poetic resolution to the drama. His 1983 comment harmonises with a discussion thread that had run through some of the more insightful critiques on the film after its British release in 1976. Prior to that, of course, North Americans had seen it, and one critic gave Anderson the opportunity to engage with this topic as early as March
1975. Jay Cocks wrote a generally positive piece in *Time* but commented that Storey had not shown any wounds suffered by the Shaw family. Anderson responded to Cocks privately, challenging his observation. He pointed out that Mrs Shaw is socially superior to her husband and never lets him forget it. With her intensely puritanical spirit, she has always felt resentful and guilty at having allowed herself to be seduced and forced into what Anderson describes as a fundamentally loveless marriage. For despite all Harry Shaw’s protestations of fondness and admiration for his wife, she is a cold woman. Thus the miner, who has laboured underground for fifty years to educate his sons so that they may escape his life of drudgery, is doubly alienated. Colin accepts the middle-class values which his father despises, while Andrew and Stephen reject them but have nothing to replace them with.

Anderson’s observation that divisions between British social classes lie at the core of the family’s internal strife explains why some North American reviewers had difficulty in understanding the film, much though they might admire the performances or direction. To take an extreme example, the *Miami News* completely missed the point in describing the film as showing that those who work with their hands do more satisfying or at least less psychologically destructive work than educated paper shufflers.

British reviewers by contrast had not only been nurtured on socially conscious British theatre and cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, they were imbued from birth with class-based values. They could not fail to recognise class divisions as an inescapable theme. For example, celebrating in *The Listener* the film’s honest and deft translation of the play to the screen, Gavin Millar remarked that ‘Harry has felt guilty all his life for being a mere digging animal, and for making the fine creature marry him. She, for her part, has been as unwilling to make him suffer for it as she is incapable of making him forget it’. They are both victims of social, sexual, even political roles and incapable of extricating themselves from them. Meanwhile, the sons’ generation is equally incapable of escaping the roles their upbringing has moulded them for.

The suffocating oppressiveness of the house has its effect on all the family. On BBC Radio 4, Michael Billington responded to the sterility of Mrs Shaw’s ‘iron gentility’. ‘You notice the way she’s always stroking cushions needlessly and gratuitously as if she’s, you know, wanting total perfection in her house ...’ *Variety* noted that the production designer Alan Withy had made a claustrophobic set that builds the intensity of family relationships. And *The Times*’s reviewer analysed in some detail the dynamic role of the setting, comparable in that respect to other plays by Storey, noting that, ‘For the sons it is their history and more: for
Stephen perhaps the womb he has never escaped; for Colin a sacred myth.  

The tiny back-to-back (which seems less to look out of its netted windows than to be looked in on by its neighbours in row upon row of identical boxes) with its shoddy furniture and gaudy ornaments, is the chain that shackles the family. As The Home it is the witness of Shaw’s 50 years down the pit. For Mrs Shaw it is a waxed and dusted self-made shrine ...

Anderson evokes the cramping physical reality of the place, the way that from the moment they enter by the yard door the characters are embraced by the walls, the wallpaper, the fireplace with its rituals of stoking, the three-piece suite, the kitchen sink, the comfortless bedrooms up the narrow stairs ... [he] uses all the means the cinema offers for heightening the claustrophobic concentration of the play.

Although this describes the impact of the house well, the whole play is set in the present day, by which time (with their adult sons away from home) the Shaws are no longer dirt poor. Even now, however, there are not enough easy chairs for all the family unless three of them squash together on the sofa. But this is a small inconvenience compared with the sons’ memories of their childhood, with decrepit furniture, one piece of lino shuffled around to hide holes in the floor and newspaper on the table instead of a cloth. The cost of their good schooling had made paupers of the family. Colin cannot forget the careers teacher who visited to advise their parents that Andrew should go to university. After witnessing the poverty in the house, he never spoke to the boys in school again, but looked exactly six inches above their heads. Colin still dreams about the pain that look caused and wakes up struggling to convince himself they are no longer that poor. It is not solely because he is the only one who can afford it that he has paid for the refurbishment and foots the bill for the celebratory dinner.

The entire family lives in the shadow of the eldest brother Jamie’s death in childhood. Andrew can remember his crying in his room and believes that Jamie was beaten and left alone, the living evidence of Mrs Shaw’s guilt for which he could never atone. For his part as the second born, Andrew was put out to a neighbour for six weeks and forbidden by his mother from crossing the threshold while she coped with the birth of a younger brother. As Millar writes, Andrew has never forgotten or forgiven the breach that grew up between them then, and nor has she.

Having received the education his father intended, he found employment as a solicitor but, unable or unwilling to govern his rebellious temperament, quit the profession to become an apathetic artist. Meanwhile Colin works in middle management at a car factory and negotiates with the trades unions. As Millar says, he ‘believes that the welfare of
the country depends on him'. His attitude seems like a projection of feelings generated by the experiences of poverty.

Stephen, the youngest, is a family man, married with four children, and a teacher – from all of which he appears emotionally dissociated, suffering instead the torments which the camera picks up so clearly – Millar calls them ‘that mixture of impotent rage and mute grief which is the play’s most powerful note’. Although unable to resolve the internalised conflicts that stupefy his own creativity (he has abandoned his own autobiographical novel), Stephen perceives his brothers’ natures clearly. He says they resemble each other in being evangelists: Colin believes in ‘the morality of vested interests’, Andrew in ‘the morality of destruction’. ‘Attitudes like yours’, he tells Andrew, ‘are easily adopted. All you have to do is destroy what’s already there’. Stephen’s insight does not deter Andrew, however, from his desire to take revenge on their parents – a revenge that he has long wanted Stephen to exact on his behalf by publishing his autobiographical novel. Andrew had read it as a draft and admired its power in revealing ‘all the abominations that I ... had suffered’. But Stephen, aware that the book would inflict appalling pain on his parents, has suppressed it and taken on himself the pain of holding split feelings. Since his father confided that his mother had tried to kill herself after Jamie’s death when six months pregnant with himself, Stephen’s feelings have been almost unbearable, ripping through his sleep with wracking sobs. The knowledge alone would be enough to threaten his mental stability; but to make matters worse, Stephen has told Andrew, honing the latter’s craving for vengeance.

Millar picks up this theme, echoing Stephen: ‘Colin wants to preserve at all costs. Andrew wants to tear down – almost at all costs; and it is this “almost” that gives the play its excruciating tension ...’. Indeed it endows the film with a thematic logic that beautifully substitutes the different outturn (in which Andrew would have vented his fury on his parents) that Storey regretted not having imposed on the stage production.

The morning after the wedding anniversary celebration, Andrew, undeterred by Stephen’s attempts to restrain him, announces that he will have his revenge. He attacks his mother for locking him out of the house for weeks when Colin was born. Even she cannot conceal his bitter rage from herself, despite a predisposition to turn away from whatever pains her; and she watches him nervously as he comes to her. Only when within touching range does he discover that he cannot drive home his assault. Asking half in jest for a dance, he takes her in his arms. Thus, as Paul Vaughan noted in a BBC review, ‘this terrible mother in the end has the truth concealed from her’. Billington agreed
In this context, Anderson offered a vivid insight into the autobiographical basis of the play. Storey’s parents came to see it on stage at the Royal Court in 1969, and before the performance Anderson went to Connie Chapman, playing Mrs Shaw, asking her to soften the role a little. He didn’t want it to hurt or start the whole thing again. ‘As it went, the father was very moved. The mother accepted the play but seemed to close her eyes to what it said. It was the way she really was’.45

So too in the film (as Tim Radford recognised), family members were spared from the worst.

the collier father is allowed to retain the stubborn dignity that is all that remains of him after 49 years in the pit; the mother is allowed the self-deceptions of the farewell kisses and smiles.46

Indeed it is right to note, as Bryan Robertson did, the way in which from time to time extreme tension is dissipated by little flurries of family humour.47 Very occasionally they share memories that still bond them. For example, when they return home after the celebratory dinner the talk turns to recollections of the war – the dugout bunker in the back yard that filled with water and Mr Shaw carrying Stephen outdoors to see German bombers flying overhead. Recollecting that time, they start spontaneously to sing a hymn. Perhaps only the strife-torn Stephen feels that the lyrics mean as much now as they did in the war years – and the sweetness that the audience cannot miss.

While the tempest still is high,
Hide me, Oh my Saviour hide
Till the storm of life is past
Safe into thy haven guide
Oh, receive my soul at last.48

Authorship

For all Lambert’s perceptive invocation of Anderson’s personal experience of a dysfunctional home life, Storey must be perceived as principal author no less of the AFT’s version than the stage play. Nevertheless, Anderson’s role in adapting In Celebration for the screen and focusing the drama more sharply on the suffering of individual characters marks his input as that of a significant contributing author.

In discussing films in which Anderson has a major claim to authorship, we have found tension to be a recurring personal signature. In that
respect, *In Celebration* has a familiar dynamic in the dreadful tensions between the characters. However, for whatever reason, whether because Anderson had in the past worked successfully with most of the principal talent, or because Storey, the characters (and the actors behind them) had of necessity to deal with most of those tensions thereby lifting the burden from him, the director seems during the entire production process to have escaped the personal agony with which he was so familiar. And this too suggests that in terms of his personal emotional
engagement Anderson may best be characterised as a secondary author working on the periphery. Indeed, insofar as he was perceived as an author by most of the commentators to whom we have referred above, his name was (ironically in view of his prior reservations about the limitations on the function of the metteur-en-scène) mainly invoked in tribute to his technical skills in realising the adaptation. Which is not to demean either his or Storey’s authorship. As Robertson said in his BBC review, he had seen the play in 1969 and thought it one of the great plays of his lifetime. He added, ‘I think the film is a great, great triumph for Lindsay Anderson – it must be one of his finest hours. It’s a superb film, beautifully made, intelligently made...’

Notes
4 Production Schedule (27 June 1974) (LA 1/8/2/1).
7 Anderson told Carole Brandt, an academic writing about In Celebration, that the character Reardon was eliminated from the film because his entry with long speeches in the second half would have been too distracting in the film and cost it momentum. Correspondence, Anderson to Carole Brandt, 25 June 1975 (LA 1/8/3/6/2).
8 Ibid.
10 Correspondence, Anderson to Brandt, 25 June 1975.
13 Ibid.
15 Anderson interviewed by Wisten, ‘Rages and Outrages’.
17 Storey, Interview (2003).
18 Galloway, ‘Imparting Directives’.
19 Correspondence, Anderson to Alan Bates, 14 November 1974 (LA 1/8/3/10/1).
20 Galloway, ‘Imparting Directives’.
21 Correspondence, Anderson to Paul Leaf, 27 February 1975 (LA 1/8/3/4/6).
25. Correspondence, Anderson to Otto Plaschkes, 2 May 1975 (LA 1/8/3/1/8).
26. Correspondence, Anderson to Otto Plaschkes, 12 June 1975 (LA 1/8/3/1/9); correspond-
    ence, Anderson to Brandt, 25 June 1975.
27. Correspondence, Anderson to Plaschkes, 12 June 1975; correspondence, Otto 
28. Promotional material from Seven Keys (LA 1/8/5/2).
31. *Ibid*.
    n.p. (LA 1/8/6/1/21); see also Cocks, ‘Dead Center’; Martin Knelman, ‘In Celebra-
    1/8/6/2/16).
34. *Ibid*.
35. Michael Billington, Review of *In Celebration*, Transcript of *Kaleidoscope*, BBC 
    1/8/6/2/3).
38. *Ibid*.
40. *Ibid*.
41. *Ibid*.
42. *Ibid*.
43. Paul Vaughan (presenter), Review of *In Celebration*, Transcript of *Kaleidoscope* 
44. Billington, Review of *In Celebration*.
45. Winsten, ‘Rages and Outrages’.
46. Tim Radford, ‘Shear Enjoyment in the Outback’, British newspaper, no details 
47. Bryan Robertson, Review of *In Celebration*, *Critic’s Forum*, BBC Radio 3 (12 June 
49. Nonetheless, Anderson did complain to his friend Louis Marcorelles that ‘Elstree 
    Studios are extremely depressing – the atmosphere evokes the British cinema 
    at its eternal mediocre worst. Absolutely no excitement or creative feeling in the 
    atmosphere. It really does make me feel that it is impossible to make films of any 
    importance or cinematic worth here’. Correspondence, Anderson to Marcorelles, 
    23 August 1974 (LA 5/1/2/33/11).
50. Robertson, Review of *In Celebration*. 
**The Old Crowd (1979)**

The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he tells things to come, but in the sense that he tells the audience, at the risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts.¹

**Introduction**

Since the television play was not available at the time of writing, a relatively full account is necessary; but, because it is wildly out of kilter with the familiar world of domestic TV dramas (and yet flat), it is advisable to start with its register. The prejudices of the characters, rabid commentators on social issues, blind them to the root causes of the malaises on which they pontificate. They cannot see what lies just beneath their hypocrisy. As Erik Hedling observes, the intimate sphere of the party is protected by old newspapers pasted over the windows, ‘the modern press accordingly being reduced to a screen which blocks out real views of the outside world’.² A hint of incipient blindness dulls the décor: the action takes place in a mostly grey interior with men wearing tuxedos and almost the only colour in the women’s dresses. It makes them stand out both as symbolic bearers of their husbands’ wealth and objects of other men’s lust (their spouses being indifferent to their sexuality). The actors project their voices and presence grandiosely as if on stage. Rather than in naturalistic mode clipping each other’s lines, they often leave pauses before responding. And when the camera pans it occasionally reveals other cameras and crew in sight as part of the Brechtian distancing machinery. Indeed (repeating one of Anderson’s authorial signs) a few shots are recorded in monochrome.

Hedling notes rich connections between *The Old Crowd* and several of Bunuel’s satirical films that add to the Brechtian aesthetic. The cinematic dinner party forms a metaphor for bourgeois space and collective paranoia as in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972). The play also
has links with *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) where, in a dangerous zone, well-heeled guests exhibit ‘human folly with all its cowardice, greed, gluttony and cruelty’ although trapped in a house from which the servants have escaped.3

The camera holds a low-angle shot of a grey ceiling where a crack is opening as the play begins with a thump from the lid of a long-forgotten grand piano. Discordant notes picked out by a blind piano tuner (James Ottaway) overlay the building’s creaks; but the tuner proves to be the one character who actually improves something as he prepares the instrument for a party.

As the old crowd arrive at the party given by George and Betty Nelson (John Moffatt and Isabel Dean), a choreographed ritual plays out. The arrivals pause at the door while George Fenton’s music caricatures their self-images. For example, a chord foretells mystery and Oscar (Valentine Dyall) swirls in, poses in the doorway, tosses his stick, hat and cloak to the hired waiter Glyn (Frank Grimes) before joining the group to rapturous, exaggerated joy as everyone cries out in ecstasy and exchanges kisses. But the music stutters satirically to anticlimax and conversation dives into banality while Oscar gropes Pauline (Rachel Roberts). There is, of course, no mystery about him, just as there is no romance (only a hunger for rough sex) in Stella (Jill Bennett), despite her haughty entry to a delicious curl of celebratory music. Glyn gets Stella’s measure right away, insouciantly caressing her breast as he slips off her silver fox fur. ‘Oh’, she says, ‘thank you very much!’ then gushes nonsense with Pauline about the beauty of an empty house.

None of the guests is more rabidly patrician than Pauline’s husband, Rufus (Peter Jeffrey). George tells him that all their furniture has gone 300 miles north, whereon Rufus unleashes a bilious moan, rubbishing the state of the nation by misquoting Shakespeare and John of Gaunt’s celebration of Britain as ‘this sceptered isle’.4

But isn’t that typical. Isn’t that absolutely straight down the line what we’ve come to expect in this godforsaken country of ours, this piss-stained, ammoniacal little island, this floating urinal where you can’t wipe your bottom without filling in a form first and you can’t transport your worldly goods from Point A to Point B without getting them lost in the process ...

Pauline has not listened (such is marriage in *The Old Crowd*) and repeatedly eulogises their hosts’ sophistication in opting for Scandinavian design. The guests go upstairs to tour the bleak house. They promenade the vacant space as if choreographed: movement and style suit these people, almost concealing the void in their heads and hearts. But an extreme close up of a human eye occupies a TV screen. An Old Lady
(Cathleen Nesbitt) watches, fascinated, as an incomprehensible medic narrates a procedure vaguely reminiscent of Alex’s ‘cure’ in *A Clockwork Orange*. Consumed by the televised images, the Old Lady gazes on, unaware of the guests. Only Stella’s forgotten husband, the obsessive businessman Dickie (Peter Bennett), wanders round alone. He alone notices another crack in the ceiling but ignores it.

Downstairs in the dining room, the second waiter Harold (Philip Stone) tweaks place settings and helps Glyn put an ornate mirror above the fireplace. It reveals the camera crew. The doorbell summons Glyn. Sci-fi chords (Fenton’s irony again) announce the entry of two helmeted characters marching in step. Are they the advance guard of an alien militia, motorcycle cops or boy racers? They take off their visors, burden Glyn with their gear and, to cheerful 1930s dance music, show themselves as Peter and Sue (Martyn Jacobs and Jenny Quayle). They struggle to get their outer trousers off and the effusive greetings and music dwindle away: clumsy undressing is not part of the approved ritual. But when they uncover formal evening wear, the absurd, excessive greetings to these ‘Children’ resumes. Pauline coos to Peter, ruffling his hair: ‘Let me kiss you again!’ and ‘Aren’t they pretty!’ Whereon conversation dies again until dinner is announced.

The company sit to dine like children in chairs comically low for the table. Harold pulls a rubber glove from the soup tureen and ostentatiously tucks it into his jacket pocket. He and Betty take a pauper’s meal up to the Old Lady who, careless of them, clutches her glass while on trash TV a car crashes over a high cliff.

Downstairs, the show of harmony among old friends sharing a meal fails to conceal its falsity. Pauline’s interest in one of ‘The Children’ is, to say the least, suspect. (‘The Children’ are not related to anyone present, but accept the tag with cheerful deference because they are thirty years younger).5 ‘Aren’t they pretty?’ Pauline asks yet again, staring at Peter before turning to Sue: ‘You’re pretty too’. Meanwhile Stella’s licentious glances at Glyn cannot be missed, though Dickie turns away with practised blindness even when she deliberately drops her napkin. Glyn worms under the table to suck her toe lasciviously before emerging with the cloth.

Entertainers arrive without ostentation: pianist (David King) and soprano (Adèle Leigh). While they make ready, the diners carry their chairs to sit by the piano. Pauline drags Peter’s close to hers and the singer starts with ‘Because’, that saccharine declaration of love’s sanctity. Before it ends, Stella is enticing the scruffy waiter upstairs and into the Old Lady’s room. There Glyn offers Stella a probing finger to suck and the pressure of sexual desire fractures her usual hauteur. Gnawing
at each other’s mouths, they fall behind the TV set onto the camp bed, barely disturbing the Old Lady’s pleasure as she swiftly turns back to an African tribesman pounding grain. It’s one of many fine moments of surrealism.

Presently, Dickie falls to his knees outside the door, distracted not by his wife’s whoring but by a report in a newspaper on the floor which he scours urgently. Whether this is what he has been searching for all evening (or all his life?) we never know because piercing howls like a vixen on heat distress him. The camera scans dismayed guests before it discovers Pauline yowling rabidly at Peter, who sits frozen with embarrassment on a mantelpiece. Hedling finds the scene signals with satirical absurdity Pauline’s sexual unhappiness, sense of physical decay and yearning to recover lost youth.

Time passes. Glyn returns to the kitchen tucking in his shirt, pisses in the sink, cuts a chunk of cold meat from the joint and eats it from his hands. He ignores the doorbell which announces a last, unexpected arrival and, together with Harold, will soon slip away unnoticed until the guests need their coats. Upstairs the absurdly named Totty (Elspeth March) sweeps in accompanied by sumptuous cello. No woman could less suit her nickname. Nevertheless earlier in the day, on learning she had only three months to live, she had sent apologies and a request for advice in re-upholstering a sofa. Betty then felt used by Totty, but now participates in the familiar voluptuous greetings. Stella tries to repair herself at the top of stairs before rejoining the party: the shoulder of her dress is torn but as usual no one notices – they either are, or intend to be blind.

Trivial chatter stops when Totty announces that she has something to tell them – but she cannot remember what. To entertain his friends, George screens old slides. The guests try identifying forgotten times and hazy memories; they do not grasp that the images show their own decay. Totty, seeing a picture of herself gardening, says, ‘If only I’d known!’ Asked what, she responds vaguely, ‘I don’t know ...’. Verses learned long ago surface in some minds. Rufus quotes Tennyson’s ‘The Revenge’, ‘And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the summer sea. / But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and the fifty-three’. A swelling cello mocks this nostalgic celebration of nineteenth-century heroism so different from his bitter assessment of present-day Britain. Oscar narrates the last verse of Kipling’s If..., harking back to the stoic values of Empire that set off today’s shallowness and recalling Anderson’s film together with the world of school. Hedling sees this as cueing Totty’s reversion to childhood doggerel:
No more Latin, 
No more Greek 
No more extra work from Beak 
No more beetles in my tea 
Making googly eyes at me 
No more science, no more French, 
No more sitting on a hard school bench, 
This time tomorrow where shall I be?

She ends, and the next slide is a grotesque close up on a mouthful of bad teeth. Guests hazard different claims about who it is and ask Totty. They get no answer because Totty has died. The undertow of the childhood nonsense of her last words becomes her epitaph and the old crowd’s.

The men bring the huge mirror from the mantelpiece to check for breathing – in vain. They decide to lay her on the table. Rufus, with familiar, ghastly clumsiness orders ‘All hands to the pumps!’ As the guests lift her, the cello surges and we pull back to the control room and take in the gallery’s overview of actors and set before Frears cues us back to the studio floor. The entire party have formed a choir, singing ‘Good Night Ladies it’s time to say goodbye ...’. As Hedling notes, these words derive from Ophelia’s valediction to life. Her madness, brought on by Hamlet’s betrayal of her love, has emptied her existence of meaning. As if to underline the absurdity, the chorus moves seamlessly on to ‘Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along ...’. Proprieties observed, guests and entertainers swiftly make their excuses, lacking any emotional tie with the dead woman that might make true mourning possible. George and Betty are left alone with Totty’s corpse, but they too take refuge from death by consoling themselves with the thought that she had enjoyed the party.

Suddenly the Old Lady appears on the landing propped on her Zimmer. A blank screen (the ultimate emergency) has made her stir. George investigates and decides the set has broken, but his mother refuses to let him turn it off because it may come on again. She gazes intent as ever at the white screen, on which the principal credits for The Old Crowd soon roll.

Background and scripting

This was one of six plays written by Alan Bennett for London Weekend Television. All were commissioned by Stephen Frears (who at the start of his career had worked with Anderson at the Royal Court and as assistant director on If....). Having decided to direct three plays and produce
the remaining three himself, Frears invited Anderson to direct any one of those others. Anderson already admired Bennett’s writing, ‘its rare combination of wit and feeling, the way it so precisely catches the poignancy as well as the comedy of existence’, and the ‘strong currents of sadness and disturbance’ that lie beneath the surface of his style.” Yet he hesitated before taking up the offer. He did so mainly because he knew that television was primarily a writer’s rather than a director’s medium and, although the script he chose was incomplete (leaving room for his input), he wanted to be assured that he could approach it as though he were making a film, free to make it personal and subjective. Knowing his work, Frears and Bennett agreed to collaborate on this basis.12

Anderson wrote immediately to both men on 21 October 1977. To Frears he said, ‘I could get excited about the idea: but only if I don’t feel Alan is timid and (worse) disapproving’.13 But he had already written to Bennett and let him know what he thought the draft script needed, in effect laying out his terms for the collaboration.

I read The Old Crowd, and was very intrigued by it – then found, particularly as the script developed, that it seemed to me to fall away from its initial, disturbing and poetic quality.14

Although voicing concern lest Bennett ‘think it cheek’, he suggests ‘the play could do with a rather fundamental transformation, particularly in the last half’.15

It seems to me at the moment rather to fall between two stools. First of all a quite surreal, comic yet also vicious satire on bourgeois manners [...]. And on the other hand, an amusing, but much more trivial comedy of eccentric manners, in the end amusing rather than disturbing.16

No surprise that Anderson admires those inventions that he finds have ‘a strong, poetic and bizarre quality’ and wants to extend that quality throughout. To effect this he advocates changing the style so that the characters are less fussed and apologetic in their carrying on. He wants to develop the Bunuelian traits he already finds in the script and (a splendidly dark sentiment suited to his aim of intensifying the satire) to make the characters ‘stronger, more monumental, worthier victims of calamity’.17 With this, he fires off a first set of specific ideas to bring about this kind of change. For example, two characters, Harold and Glyn, ‘act’ as waiters, say they are actors but might be neither. Anderson proposes making them more threatening. He admits to Bennett, ‘I know I have a rather cataclysmic imagination – and maybe this puts you off […]’ but, he concludes, ‘the more I think about The Old Crowd, the more I think it does have within it the potential of a very extraordinary, alarming, timely and poetic work’.18
Anderson had previous experience in creating a monumental, worthy victim of calamity from directing Max Frisch’s *The Fire Raisers* at the Royal Court Theatre in December 1961. Irving Wardle summarised thus the absurdist Brechtian drama:

The ironically named hero, Biedermann (‘honest man’) is a well-to-do suburbanite who has made a fortune out of hair oil by filching the discovery of a poverty-stricken inventor who kills himself in despair. When a grim-visaged ex-convict strides uninvited into his home asking for bed and board, the guilt-laden Biedermann seizes on the chance of performing an act of charity that will leave his possessions intact. A wave of arson is sweeping the country, but Biedermann refuses to entertain any suspicions of his guest – he installs him in an attic where he is shortly joined by an equally unsavoury companion and a large collection of petrol drums. Quaking inwardly but unable to admit his fear, Biedermann falls back on appeasement, asks them to dinner, and finally hands them a box of matches with which they promptly burn the house down.

R. B. Marriott in *The Stage* called *The Fire Raisers* ‘a modern morality of chilling reality and macabre humour’. W. A. Darlington said, ‘The agents of doom [the fire raisers] generate an atmosphere of implacable menace’. And Peter Lewis wrote, ‘With surgical certainty [the play] inserts the skewer into your soft flesh and thrusts you over the flame’.

Some years after *The Old Crowd* had been transmitted, Bennett and Anderson wrote about it as unusual for the day not only in its themes and aesthetics (widely reviled by reviewers), but also for the way they had worked together. In his piece, Anderson described the basic scenario:

It presented the situation of a moneyed, middle-aged couple who had moved into a London house and were giving a house-warming party for a small group of their oldest and best friends. Their only problem was the loss of their furniture, misrouted on the road from Horsham and ending up in remote Carlisle. They decide to hold their party all the same, with dinner provided by caterers and served by two ambiguous waiters, who may (or may not) be out-of-work actors.

As Peter Hoskin noted, the world outside appears to be beset by riots, rampant crime, disease and (in the eyes of the privileged bourgeoisie) the collapse of public services. ‘This bleak portrait would resonate for viewers enduring the ongoing “winter of discontent” that prefigured the demise of the Callaghan government’.

Three days after his first letter to Bennett, Anderson wrote again having found *The Old Crowd* ‘reverberating strongly’ in his thoughts. He opens the four-page letter with the hope that his observations will help them ‘know all the sooner if we can be thinking along the same lines’. Some of his suggestions are detailed. He rewrites the scene in which
the waiters Harold and Glyn arrive and describe themselves as actors. Comparing this version with Bennett’s March 1977 draft, the dialogue is terser, ‘and thereby more ambiguous, more poetically concentrated’, the style which Anderson advocated for the entire play. Harold and Glyn’s dialogue was to undergo further changes before the script was completed; and indeed some of Bennett’s ideas were reinstated.

It is clear from work done on this scene alone that the two writers quickly found it possible to work together creatively and (certainly until they were on the studio floor) Anderson did not impose his ideas where Bennett resisted them. In fact the director’s revised script of March and post-production script of December 1977 both bear the two men’s jottings in the redrafting and editing processes. Nor were Anderson’s contributions limited to minutiae. For example, perhaps mindful of The Fire Raisers, he offered the idea that the characters live in a society under threat: ‘I thought perhaps there was a War going on. Or perhaps it’s only a situation of civil strife, violence, upheaval etc., so extreme it amounts to war.’ He was also brimming with ideas for staging. Minor touches intensified effects: although Bennett invented the piano tuner working in the empty house, Anderson made him blind with dark glasses and a dog which (equally blind?) knocks over the first guest to arrive. New dramatic elements racked up the surreal and satirical: it was Anderson who placed a television set in an empty room where the Old Lady sits absorbed by TV trash while the guests ignore her.

Bennett’s diary for 11 January 1978 has a wry account of writing in Anderson’s flat.

Lindsay comes to the door in a plastic apron in the middle of preparing leeks or parsnips. He makes me some coffee, then we sit at the kitchen table and work on the script. He looks at me enquiringly, then puts a straight line through half a page. ‘Boring, don’t you think? Too tentative.’ He invariably crosses out all my ‘possiblys’ and ‘perhapses’. To be epic is, if nothing else, to be positive. He agreed to do The Old Crowd in the first place because he detected ‘epic’ qualities in it … but I am still not sure what epic means … I think it means things do not have to be explained, but am not sure of the difference between this and mystification. I don’t say this.

Bennett revealed that he enjoyed the collaboration and reckoned the best lines were Anderson’s. He added, ‘Lindsay has no false pride. He will consider suggestions from anybody. “Grateful for them. I mean, come on. One has few enough ideas of one’s own”’. However, the mood darkened while Anderson watched the actors in rehearsal.

He is the schoolmaster alternately praising, sarcastic or self-revealing. The actors vie with each other to please him. He makes them children
again so they do not mind being childish and showing their uncertainty. Stood in his cap and old windcheater he listens to them with a long-suffering air, wide mouth set in a slightly mocking smile. ‘Aren’t they stupid? Don’t you just want to shoot them all? I do. I just want to machine-gun them all.’ He suddenly shouts at them.

‘Fucking actors.’

‘Oh, don’t start that,’ Jill Bennett shouts back.

‘Fucking actors!’

Alan Bennett offers no further comment, but the response from the floor reveals that the actors were used to this kind of irrational mood swing in their director.

Production

Recording took place on 21 and 22 February 1978. Following the shoot Anderson wrote to Michael Grade, then Director of Programmes at LWT, in appreciation of the crew’s input. Indeed for the most part it did go smoothly within the framework Anderson had set, although (according to The Guardian’s Tom Sutcliffe) Bennett felt sensitive about constant little changes made to the lines and at one point asked Sutcliffe to leave the control room. This was Anderson’s first experience of recording in an electronic TV studio: ‘Having been more used to the film camera, I found the challenge of video pretty intense’. He believed that things in part had gone well because the crew was buoyed up by his decision to direct from the floor, leaving producer Frears to call the shots from the gallery.

The chilling effect of reducing the director during shooting to a depersonalised voice, usually communicating with his actors only through the ear-phoned floor manager, is something I dislike intensely. And I have no doubt that the sense of communal enterprise that resulted from having the director on the floor was largely responsible for the technicians’ readiness to extend our last day’s shooting to four o’clock in the morning. And the actors too.

Sutcliffe had observed the shoot while researching an article on the play’s making that appeared in The Guardian on the day of transmission. He attributed to Anderson’s ‘passion, which gives him his extraordinary charisma’ the willingness of the crew to overrun the shooting schedule by eight hours without dissent. Sutcliffe accepted that directing from the floor had advantages, but noted that it had its downside too: because Anderson had so many other things to decide, he found it impossible to concentrate closely on the monitors. Sutcliffe glossed Anderson’s
remarks about the difficulties of editing on videotape with the case for
doing so: ‘The overriding fact of television production is that machine
time is expensive’. Anderson’s preference for shooting as if on film
cost a lot in the time overrun.

He did not want to use the standard television close-up technique which
results in most close-ups in any confrontation between characters being
filmed three-quarter face in angled shots and instantly edited by the
vision-mixer. Anderson’s full-face close-ups inevitably meant that the
videotape had to be stopped – hugely inflating the post-production cost
of editing.

Having completed the shoot, Anderson did not expect post-produc-
tion would be prolonged. He would soon have to change his mind.
On 22 March he wrote to Michael Medwin describing the process of
electronic editing, in particular the strangeness of selecting tapes on
his VCR at home and then trying to relay what he had learnt from
this off-line viewing to guide Andrew Vere who was editing on two-
inch tape without exact reference points. The difficulties were not all
technical. Production Assistants had gone on strike, campaigning to
be upgraded before operating the new equipment. This deprived the
team of the time-coding that would have made the job more manage-
able. Trade union restrictions consequent on the industrial dispute
meant that Anderson and Frears had clandestinely to recruit Vere from
outside LWT, concealing his connection with their project. Despite
these restraints, director and editor managed to achieve a first cut in the
week available to them. By the end of March, Anderson thought the
work was near completion.

By that date he and Frears had already talked about ‘the idea of devel-
op ing The Old Crowd into a film subject’. They wanted Medwin to come
in as Executive Producer and sell the idea to EMI or some other media
organisation and they needed to know whether Bennett would join
them. Anderson wrote to Bennett arguing (in the face of the other’s
scepticism about securing finance for such a project) that the idea had
the potential for development, ‘but it is going to need some new inven-
tion, and not just the expansion of existing scenes’. When Anderson
screened the play’s roughcut for Medwin the latter loved it and wanted
to explore the possibilities for a film. But he noted the difficulty that the
play had already exploited the television market. Thereupon thoughts
of a film appear to have lapsed for over a year.

Although some further work on the play was done in April, editing
remained incomplete at the end of June when (with September
transmission in mind) Anderson wrote urgently to Frears and Tony
Wharmby, Controller of Drama at LWT. He sought an agreed plan for
finalising post-production, now appreciating that work outstanding on the sound track (effects, off-camera dialogue and music) would be almost as complex as finalising the cut on two-inch tape. By this time, Anderson had more on his mind than completing this work. He had committed to a second production of William Douglas Home’s play *The Kingfisher* in the States during September and October plus two further weeks in December prior to its New York opening. Nevertheless, back in London in the second half of October, he reported to Grade that the many delays had had the fortuitous advantage that the final cut was achieved on a new editing suite which functioned splendidly; and the music track was laid and very pleasing (a tribute to George Fenton’s work). The whole picture would be completed on 5 November.

Promotion

With post-production finished, the director’s thoughts turned to publicity. Back in February Alan Bennett had noted that this was the only thing he and Anderson had disagreed about.

Lindsay believes in talking to the press at length about what he does, preparing the public for it. I’ve always thought that a recipe for disaster. Lindsay wins and there’s a good deal in the papers. Though no one has had a chance to read the play and though it hasn’t even been shot yet, he is already quite combative about it.

Anderson revisited publicity in his October letter to Grade, writing that he gets the impression that for some reason these needs are taken much less seriously than in the film industry or even the theatre.

But when as much care and importance has been given to a project as London Weekend have certainly given to *The Old Crowd* […] it seems to me an awful waste for the Company not to get as much credit and reclame as possible. That is why I am hoping to co-ordinate the effort a bit.

Unsurprisingly, given Anderson’s familiar pro-active posture when promoting his screen productions, he had already begun the process. Sutcliffe had been present at various pre-production events and during the shoot. In July Anderson had written to assist him with an account of the editing process, then in its third iteration. He also relayed discussions between Frears and Grade on the screening order of the six plays. They preferred Saturday rather than Sunday-night transmission, expecting (backed by LWT’s scheduling experience) stronger viewing
figures. Anderson provided Sutcliffe with the schedule of picture cutting and sound editing and hoped the journalist would observe the process. Finally, reversing his usual bullish promotional voice, he wrote a gloomy assessment of the play’s prospects, which Sutcliffe quoted. Not only did the prediction prove accurate, but some hostile reviewers used it against the director.

I do realise it is going to need all the help and support it can get. It really is extremely sophisticated for a television play, and I can hear the sets being switched off, or over to the other channel, all over our benighted island – with voices grumbling, ‘What’s all this about?’, ‘They slipped up on that one – they couldn’t even keep the technicians out of the picture,’ and ‘What’s it supposed to mean?’

Given Anderson’s eagerness to win the approval of an educated audience, his decision to turn down Melvyn Bragg’s invitation to appear with Frears and Bennett on the South Bank Show seems an unusual lapse. The invitation had reached him in New York from where he was to fly to Sydney, Australia to direct The Bed Before Yesterday. In declining, he pleaded the risk of delays to that production as a reason for not flying back immediately it opened; however, he also admitted that ‘the possibility of stopping off in places like Bali, Agra, Colombo etc., is too tempting to resist’. As it turned out, Anderson missed the plane from Sri Lanka to London and was not in Britain when The Old Crowd was transmitted.

Critical reaction

In describing his and Bennett’s input to the writing, Anderson said that it would be impossible to look back and separate out their respective contributions, except that ‘I must take responsibility for the disruptive elements that eventually made our work so resented’. Both men were singled out in the critical furore that followed; but for several commentators such as Nancy Banks-Smith it was Anderson who had ‘crowded out’ Bennett’s ‘absolutely unique comic talent’.

Advance notices

Was Bennett right in thinking that seeking advance publicity was the kiss of death? Evidence from the previews and pre-transmission listings is mixed. The Evening Standard considered it ‘Must viewing’. Ann Pacey in the Sunday Mirror: ‘For my money this very naughtily entertaining play... is the best thing on the box this week’.  Jonathan Meades:
‘a consistently surprising piece, a rare work of authentic surrealism, a
delight to the eye and very funny indeed’.61 Less flatteringly Anne Campbell Dixon in the Daily Telegraph wrote, ‘I’m not sure the result is as
good as it should be, in fact I’m not even sure what the result is’.62
Elizabeth Cowley of the Daily Mail found that ‘He slips up … cameras
and the gallery popping in and out of shot among the actors can be
fine in a live improvisation but not in a highly polished black comedy
of manners like this. Not much of Bennett’s sense of fun in this rather
macabre family get-together, but a stunning storm in a wine-glass for
all that’.63 The Evening News previewer found the vacuous guests did not
engage interest but the play ‘has enough style and off-beat moments to
keep tedium at bay’.64

Reviews
Anderson had no high regard for television reviewers in the press, most
of whom seemed to him to have an extraordinary disregard of the work
they commented on. Hedling, citing Mike Poole, shows that there were
good grounds for Anderson’s contempt for television criticism. Unlike
reviewers whose observations advised readers about films, plays or
exhibitions that the public could experience for themselves, they wrote
about programmes that had already been given their only screening.
Television was not taken seriously by a bourgeois culture dominated
by literature; and no archives of past productions were available from
which critics could build historical knowledge of their subject. However,
newspapers needed to include TV reviews because they attracted large
numbers of readers, so they had recourse to writers whose principal text
was their own witty personality.65

The Observer, to cite a case in point, published Clive James showing
off the no-nonsense Aussie wit that had made his name. Rather than
reflect on his ostensible topic, the play as realised, James showcased
himself, as when remarking that its production values made it ‘look like
D. W. Griffith’s version of “Duck Soup”’ or that Anderson had brought
out ‘a quality in Bennett’s writing which had hitherto lain dormant –
crass stupidity’.66 Another personality, Richard Ingrams, felt he should
reveal that he had missed the play’s beginning and then lay in the bath
while deciding that in a healthy society Bennett and Anderson should
have been pelted with bad eggs for producing such rubbish.67

Richard Gott showcased himself too. Having been excited at the
prospect, ‘Doubtless like many readers I crouched myself [sic] in front
of the small screen’. However, ‘I emerged from the experience in such a
state of towering rage … that only two days later have I simmered down

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sufficiently to put pen to paper. His main charges were that the play was twenty years late and ‘miserably slender’.

Perhaps it was about the emptiness that lies at the heart of bourgeois society – in itself an excellent though threadbare theme. But was it necessary for the play to emphasise emptiness though its own vacuity?

Not to repeat Anderson’s observation that a theme cannot, by definition, be simultaneously excellent and threadbare, we note that The Guardian’s features editor seemed to have forgotten that satire often dwells on the very deficiencies concerning which it seeks to enrage its audience.

In the Daily Express, James Murray expostulated against the ‘brutal pillory’ of a social class ‘whom the audience were invited to despise’. Curiously (far from alone in this) he assessed these bourgeois would-be patricians as middle class. Evidently British TV reviewers of that era moved in different social circles than most of the nation. Julian Barnes, having protested the expense of this ‘raucous travesty of a play’, used his review in The Spectator to echo Cowley, condemning the ‘stale old device ... of including shots of the camera and the director’s gallery’. He argued that people, having taken the trouble to be present in front of a screen, don’t need reminding that they are watching a play. By this means Barnes sidestepped Anderson’s point that intrusions into narrative flow distance people from emotional identification with characters. Meanwhile Philip Purser of the Sunday Telegraph dismissed The Old Crowd tersely as ‘just a protracted send-up of the works of Harold Pinter’. This association, made by several writers, irritated Anderson as one of many symptoms of ‘that old, unchanging philistinism which is insulted by any suggestion that an original work may deserve or require effort for appreciation, and which almost congratulates itself on its cultural ignorance’. All in all, as Hedling notes, it is ironic that Anderson should have suffered so severely from the attacks of people who basically shared his disparaging opinion of television as a medium.

Other commentators took a more balanced view, discovering aspects of the production to celebrate and others to regret. Although she regretted that Bennett’s comic touch was missing, Banks-Smith found the play ‘quite exceptional, patterned and polished’. She took a quite different view of its self-reflexivity from Barnes.

Anderson’s most striking device was the use of the visible innards of TV. The story was not only being filmed, it was being filmed being filmed. Sudden glimpses of the crew (‘You’re not overlooked?’ ‘We have neighbours but we never see them’) were so subliminal that at first you thought you were seeing things. It was both theatrical (they know they are there and aren’t letting on) and ominous (they are blind).
Praise came from Alexander Walker who described Bennett’s and Anderson’s work as
derivative – in the best sense. They gave us an English Bunuel ... It was a sharp, malicious play given that kind of production by Stephen Frears. For a well-orchestrated catalogue of the asinilities and eccentricities of a mutually uncomprehending upper-middle-class set of people, it was a treat.\textsuperscript{78}

Herbert Kretzmer was the reviewer most enthusiastically in tune with the play. He found that ‘The Old Crowd reflected, with superb skill and timing, our current mood of impotent rage and resigned despair in the face of a system that sometimes threatens never to work again’.\textsuperscript{79}

[Anderson’s] direction, and Bennett’s corner-cutting text kept going straight to the heart of the matter. The erotic yearnings of a house guest, for instance, were depicted without polite preambles, by Rachel Roberts howling at a young man like a vixen on heat ...

The British theatre has long known (Pinter, Orton, etc.) this breed of menace. That a commercial channel should have mounted such unnerving material on what is traditionally the safest night of the week is, despite the doomwatch warnings of the play, an occasion for hope.\textsuperscript{80}

Published letters

Gott’s ‘towering rage’ in The Guardian drew letters to the paper. Paul Rotha’s found ‘this experiment in TV and video a pretentious load of old cabbage’,\textsuperscript{81} and Lady Gaitskill among others protested ‘the waste of good actors, and the disgraceful expense of the production’.\textsuperscript{82} Conversely, one correspondent offered fine appreciation of the play’s visual aesthetics and atmosphere of menace,\textsuperscript{83} and Dame Peggy Ashcroft wrote a delightful parody of Edward Lear. She condemned Gott, ‘Who cannot tell good wood from rot’ and celebrated all who contributed to a play in which – in her astute aphorism – ‘the Future leaps out of the Past’.\textsuperscript{84}

Alex Cox and Martin Turner protested to Time Out that John Wyver should not have insisted that Anderson must be politically revolutionary to use Brechtian techniques.\textsuperscript{85} But Wyver, who had found it ‘the most exciting single play to have been produced by ITV for several years’, nevertheless stuck to his doctrinaire belief (like Screen’s position in 1974–76) that without Brecht’s social goal all that could be left was empty effect.\textsuperscript{86} ‘Brecht’s theory was’, he argued, ‘developed for a particular political purpose and was pointless applied to Alan Bennett’s script’.\textsuperscript{87}
Anderson’s reactions to the critics

Surely Sheridan Morley can see that *The Old Crowd* was not about ‘private people in public places’ which he claims is the theme of all Bennett’s plays ... Anderson’s direction fascinatingly showed a creative director collaborating with a brilliant writer to produce a work of rare originality: neither Bennett nor Anderson, but both.  

When the editors of the *Evening Standard* decided to print this they would have seen ‘Norman Machin’s’ signature but not the draft in Anderson’s hand held in his files; nor did they remember that Machin was Frank’s surname in *This Sporting Life*. They did cut ‘Machin’s’ assertion that ‘telly critics are little more than all-purpose journalists at best’ – a recurrent theme of Anderson’s after the battering taken by *The Old Crowd*. All the same, they printed the extract above, and his private revenge suggests that Anderson did enjoy jokes – provided they had a purpose.  

Notwithstanding Anderson had not made himself available for the recording, he wrote privately to Melvyn Bragg reviewing the *South Bank Show*’s discussion of *The Old Crowd*. (He appended to this letter R. G. Collingwood’s assessment of art as ‘the community’s medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness’ along with our epigraph to this chapter.) Anderson considered the discussion chaired by Bragg to have been generally fair. He defended his use of Brechtian techniques to ensure viewers should not get emotionally caught up in the work but rather engage their critical faculties. He also regretted that people had lost the capacity to respond to nonsense and the surreal, ‘unless, that is, it is tamed into humorous absurdity [...] the fatal (to me) tendency of English absurdism to dribble away in facetiousness’. A reviewer on Radio 4 reported correctly that Anderson believed the British use jokes to defuse any really serious concern.  

In July, Anderson wrote to Grade describing the outrage the play had caused as partly gratifying because it showed the piece had sharp satirical teeth; but he also reflected on the vituperation in some reviews: ‘I’m afraid there was an awful lot of purely personal bitching’.  

Generally, however, it was disappointing that critics who spend so much time bemoaning the lack of experiment and innovation on television should rush so enthusiastically to club to death a piece which, at the very least, showed a great deal of innovative daring. I was even more regretful on behalf of London Weekend than for myself because, as you know, I greatly appreciated the freedom and backing you had given us.  

Understandably he showed equal warmth in expressing gratitude to Kretzmer for ‘the generosity and perception’ of his review. Characteristically, nonetheless, he devoted half a page to defending his use
of Brechtian techniques and – once again – discussing ‘alienation’.93 Kretzmer replied that he appreciated Anderson’s thanks, ‘especially after the ridiculous mail I received when my notice of *The Old Crowd* appeared ... You really touched them on the raw nerve, Lindsay’.94

Interviewed by Gerald Pratley a decade later, Anderson repeated that *The Old Crowd* had been unpopular because it was satirical, surreal and in places an hommage to Buñuel. He still found it gratifying that it had been so disliked and caused a stir.95

The afterlife of the TV play

The main purpose of Anderson’s July 1979 letter to Grade was to report on screenings of *The Old Crowd* that he had arranged during a visit to Los Angeles. According to his records, screenings took place in March at International Creative Management and in May at New World. He had in mid-April also invited guests by personal handbill to a screening room in Venice to project the videotape in a small cinema. He estimated about 150 people had seen the film including various industry personnel and representatives of two pay-TV companies. They expressed interest in getting the rights, as did the LA Public Television station KCET. Response had been positive, with those present relating strongly to the subject. However, although Anderson followed up and Grade promised that LWT would too, nothing appears to have come of attempts to sell the play in the USA.96

It was screened again to UK audiences in September 1987 by Channel 4. John Fortune and Deborah Norton wrote to Anderson expressing high praise for its wit and skill in both direction and writing.97 Anderson, ‘terrifically pleased’ to have their congratulations, replied that he had been wondering whether the critics would respond with equal indignation this time, ‘But of course critics don’t watch “repeats”’.98 And indeed, Anderson’s records contain nothing else on *The Old Crowd*’s second outing.

Anderson’s authorship during production

The relationship between Bennett and Anderson is often touched on in accounts of making *The Old Crowd*. Inevitably writing with Bennett differed from Anderson’s work with Storey, Delaney and Sherwin since every co-operative partnership has its own characteristics whether one person dominates or not. Anderson’s work with Bennett was charac-
terised by the relative ease and openness between the two men. The texture of the resultant script (if not its register, which remained Andersonian) differed from his previous films in reflecting Bennett’s comic sensibility. However, the nature of Anderson’s authorial input did not greatly change in this play. Although Bennett had drafted the original screenplay, Anderson, as he had specified, took control of the project.

As far as possible, he cast players from his stock company, the group of actors he had used so often as to make the easy chemistry between them appropriate to a group of old friends.99 They included Rachel Roberts, Frank Grimes, Peter Jeffrey and Jill Bennett. Hedling notes that Anderson’s use of familiar actors enabled him to cross-reference *The Old Crowd* intertextually to his earlier productions and mark his authorship. Usually unspoken, one such link is verbalised when Rufus guesses that he has seen Harold before and the waiter says he has acted as a senior policeman (Philip Stone having also played the interrogator in *O Lucky Man!*).100

Holding to familiar patterns and preferences Anderson directed his first electronic recording as nearly as possible as if he were making a feature film. Most important of all, the play’s aesthetic devices (self-evidently its adoption of Brecht’s methods and satirical register) were first developed in previous productions as were its themes. In particular the decay of British society and the ironic nastiness about people rich and poor are familiar from *O Lucky Man!*

In sum, it would be hard to say that during the production process of *The Old Crowd* a significant change had taken place in Anderson’s authorial practices. The same cannot be said for critical perceptions of ‘Lindsay Anderson’.

‘Anderson’ the perceived auteur

Analysis of the play as transmitted often focused on the same topics. But while some reviewers did offset what they thought had been well achieved against aspects they did not like, a significant proportion of them used even favourable observations as rods for the director’s back. Among those who recognised the actors from his stock company as guarantors of quality, some said that the play was so poor that it did not deserve such performances. Commentators locked in that mindset seized on Sutcliffe’s account of Anderson using cinematic rather than TV studio techniques and made its expense another stick – wasteful extravagance. Few apart from Sutcliffe and Banks-Smith reflected on the aesthetic effects of using this technique. Then too, where accounts
by those who witnessed production in process stressed the harmony between Anderson and Bennett, most reviewers perceived things differently. ‘Anderson’ was widely seen to have erased ‘Bennett’ by relegating the latter’s characteristically witty voice in favour of a pompous and stale replication of Brechtian techniques. Reviewers in hostile frame of mind reacted unfavourably not only to Anderson’s satirical film but also (as Bennett had feared) to his hectoring interventions in the press.

What had happened to bring about the striking diminution in his standing as an auteur? We cited in Chapter 7 part of Anderson’s introduction to the published script of *The Old Crowd* which dealt with his use of Brecht’s methods. In winding up that essay Anderson added an observation key to his evolving fate as both filmmaker and perceived author.

A dissident or subversive vision demands a style that rejects the terms in which the conforming world presents itself: this is the only way it can offer a version of reality in essentially different, critical terms. The dissenting artist must hack away the props which hold up the status quo, in style as well as theme.

As Anderson knew, there is an ever-present risk that, when one tries to distance (never mind ‘alienate’) audiences from their emotions while working in a medium that before all else defines success by its capacity to entertain great numbers of people by engaging their feelings, those efforts may succeed too well. So, while we can see Anderson working in a style and with themes broadly comparable with *The White Bus* and *O Lucky Man!* three aspects of his position in 1979 counted against him. First, as Hedling argues, he rejected Brecht’s Marxism, which seriously damaged his claim to be revolutionary and alienated the new intellectual elite in university departments of Film Studies. Second, his insistence on the nastiness of all his characters probably reduced his appeal to the broad Left (Hedling speaks of his having attained the public status of a misanthrope). Third, his refusal to make films in the easily-consumed manner of mainstream features counted increasingly against him. His reputation as both an established authorial presence and a maker of difficult films helped reviewers (most of whose editors required them to honour the requirements of entertainment in their opinions as well as the way they presented them) to express their hostility in a self-justifying manner.
A footnote – the film that almost was

We have mentioned that Anderson had been struck by the suitability of *The Old Crowd* for adaptation into film well before completion of the play. After transmission, correspondence from July 1979 between him and Alex Cox (then a film school student at UCLA) discussed ways in which the story might be developed for cinema. In August Anderson began exploring the idea with Jörn Donner, a Finnish director then Head of the Swedish Film Institute. In pitching the project to him, Anderson described *The Old Crowd* as having ‘a rather Bunuelesque flavour to the whole thing, though with a distinctly British accent of comedy’. With Donner’s backing, Anderson and Bennett began working on the film adaptation in September. It was to include action outside the house and add some additional characters. The intrusive camera crews which so exasperated the TV critics were to be retained and developed – for example, one scene was to feature actors in the dressing room being called onto set, another actor would forget a prop and be handed it by a studio assistant.

Anderson was enthusiastic about this project – possibly (since he always liked to provoke) because of its controversial nature and potential to annoy. He wrote to Bennett, ‘I find myself more and more thinking that we can do something which will be execrated even more widely than our previous effort – and what more noble ambition could there be?’

In February 1980 Bennett completed the script (for which he received...
£8,000 from the Swedish Film Institute). Filming was scheduled to begin in the Institute's Stockholm studios in July or August and Anderson hoped that the original TV cast could be retained with additional parts being played by Swedish extras. Suddenly in May the project stalled 'amid a clatter of false assurances and broken promises'. The funding promised by the Institute failed to materialise and the project was abandoned. Its failure clearly frustrated and upset Anderson. He roundly blamed Donner in a circular letter to all who were to have been involved.

Notes

3 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 164.
4 See Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 161.
5 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 164.
7 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 165. Although satirised for their irregularity, Pauline's feelings are not literally incestuous because she is not Peter's aunt. He calls all three older women 'Auntie'.
8 See Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 156.
9 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 162.
10 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 162–3.
12 Anderson, Never Apologise, 139.
13 Correspondence, Anderson to Stephen Frears, 21 October 1977 (LA 2/3/3/2/1).
14 Correspondence, Anderson to Alan Bennett, 21 October 1977 (LA 2/3/3/1/1).
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
21 W. A. Darlington, 'Fine Acting in a Sombre Play', no further details (LA 3/9/6).
22 Peter Lewis, 'By Golly This One Is a Roaster', no further details (LA 3/9/6).
25 Correspondence, Anderson to Alan Bennett, 24 October 1977 (LA 2/3/3/1/2).
26 Ibid.
27 Revised script, March 1977 (LA 2/3/1/2) and post-production script, December 1977 (LA 2/3/1/3).
28 Correspondence, Anderson to Bennett, 24 October 1977.
29 Ibid.
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Anderson’s introduction to their collaboration was reprinted as ‘The Old Crowd’, in Never Apologise, 137–47.
33 Ibid.
37 Correspondence, Anderson to Margaret Scott, 27 February 1978 (LA 2/3/3/4/8).
38 Anderson, Never Apologise, 142.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Correspondence, Anderson to Michael Medwin, 22 March 1978 (LA 5/1/2/Medwin); Anderson, Never Apologise, 142.
43 Correspondence, Anderson to Alan Bennett, 31 March 1978 (LA 2/3/3/1/3).
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Correspondence, Michael Medwin to Anderson, 10 May 1978 (LA 5/1/2/Medwin).
47 Correspondence, Anderson to Stephen Frears, 24 April 1978 (LA 2/3/3/2/2).
48 Correspondence, Anderson to Stephen Frears, 30 June 1978 (LA 2/3/3/2/3); correspondence, Anderson to Tony Wharmby, 30 June 1978 (LA 2/3/3/3/6).
49 Ibid.
50 Correspondence, Anderson to Michael Grade, 27 October 1978 (LA 2/3/3/3/7).
51 Bennett, The Writer in Disguise, 16.
52 Correspondence, Anderson to Grade, 27 October 1978.
53 Correspondence, Anderson to Tom Sutcliffe, 14 July 1978 (LA 2/3/3/4/14).
56 Anderson, Never Apologise, 143.
57 Anderson, Never Apologise, 139.
61 Jonathan Meades, ‘The Week in View’, no further details, presumed to be The Times (LA 2/3/6/1/4).
69 Ibid.
70 Anderson, Never Apologise, 145.
71 James Murray, ‘This Was Almost the Living End’, Daily Express (29 January 1979) 19 (LA 2/3/6/1/20).
74 Anderson, Never Apologise, 144. The complaint did not die with the 1970s. In 2010, Mark Duguid, ‘That Was Then, This Is Now’, Sight & Sound, 20, 6 (June 2010) 51, wrote: ‘British television criticism has always been a shallow discipline by comparison with criticism of film or theatre, its columns casually assigned to those ignorant of and indifferent to the history of a medium that many seem to hold in something like contempt ... Most of today’s exponents – with one or two honourable exceptions, such as the Independent’s Tom Sutcliffe – favour humour, venom or writerly flourish over depth or insight ...’.
75 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 168.
76 Banks-Smith, ‘Black as Hell/The Old Crowd’.
77 Ibid.
79 Kretzmer, ‘Looking Forward in Anger’.
80 Ibid.
85 Alex Cox and Martin Turner, letter to Time Out (11 February 1979) 3 (LA 2/3/6/1/31).
87 John Wyver, response to Cox and Turner in Time Out (11 February 1979) 3 (LA 2/3/6/1/31).
89 Correspondence, ‘Norman Machin’ to the Editor, Evening Standard, 23 February 1979 (LA 2/3/3/5/3).
90 Correspondence, Anderson to Melvyn Bragg, 28 February 1979 (LA 2/3/3/5/9).
91 Correspondence, Anderson to Michael Grade, 18 July 1979 (LA 2/3/3/3/11). Years later Anderson recalled being reminded that he had referred to Clive James as “the thinking man’s Rolf Harris”, and as a result he had apparently sworn to “get me”, correspondence, Anderson to Jeremy Isaacs, 20 August 1987 (LA 2/3/3/7/1).
92 Correspondence, Anderson to Grade, 18 July 1979.
93 Correspondence, Anderson to Herbert Kretzmer, 19 February 1979 (LA 2/3/3/5/2).
94 Correspondence, Herbert Kretzmer to Anderson, 24 February 1979 (LA 2/3/3/5/4).
96 Correspondence, Anderson to Grade, 18 July 1979; Correspondence, Michael Grade to Anderson, 19 July 1979 (LA 2/3/3/3/12); see also diaries 25 March 1979 (LA 6/1/77/22), 23 April 1979 (LA 6/1/78/7–8), 26 April 1979 (LA 6/1/78/3) and 8 May 1979 (LA 6/1/78/9); and invitation for 17 April 1979 (LA 2/3/5/9).
98 Correspondence, Anderson to John Fortune and Deborah Norton, 2 October 1987 (LA 2/3/3/4/32).


Correspondence, Anderson to Alex Cox, 11 July 1979 (LA 5/4/6/5). Cox had sent Anderson a copy of his script *Scousers*, which started their correspondence.

Correspondence, Anderson to Jörn Donner (Swedish Film Institute), 6 August 1979 (LA 5/4/6/6).

Correspondence, Anderson to Alan Bennett, 1 October 1979 (LA 5/4/6/7).

Correspondence, Ulla Ryghe to Anderson, 5 December 1979 (LA 5/4/6/6).

See circular letter, Anderson to cast of television production of *The Old Crowd*, 7 March 1980 (LA 5/4/6/9). The Lindsay Anderson Archive holds shooting schedules, plans of sets and other production material relating to the film.

Correspondence, Anderson to Michael Grade, 30 June 1980 (LA 5/4/6/12).

Correspondence, Anderson to all involved in the proposed film project, 30 May 1980 (LA 5/4/6/13). For further details see Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson*, 169–72.
Introduction

*Britannia Hospital* was written as a naked allegory for the state of the nation. The narrative weaves multiple strands into an extended lampoon in which a large cast all play caricatures. In near total disarray, the hospital is preparing to mark its five hundredth birthday with a visit from a member of the royal family. The opening gives a taste of what will follow. Striking porters blockade the entry protesting against privileges afforded to private patients. They admit a stretcher case only because the invalid is near death. He duly expires because the casualty nurses insist on their tea break before attending the patient.

A glittering tower stands above the other rundown buildings – The Millar Centre for Advanced Surgical Science. Its staff function with military precision, under its self-styled Overlord, Professor Millar (Graham Crowden). His demonstration of cutting-edge research will provide the climax to Her Royal Highness’s visit: his team will assemble a man from assorted body parts and bring him to life. The Professor, anticipating his triumph, boasts to a BBC TV crew the wonders of his achievements. But behind the scenes, he and his secret lover Dr Macmillan (Jill Bennett) disconnect a terminally ill patient (Alan Bates) from his life support system, ensuring he dies in time for his head to be used in the demonstration.
In this film Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell) is an investigative journalist on the make. He spies on the great man’s activities using a miniature camera and the help of an insider, his lover Nurse Persil (Marsha Hunt). Mick’s videocam transmits to a truck where two equally cynical journalists are to tape and edit his material for broadcast. As Erik Hedling notes, the TV camera features throughout as a weapon turned against people to blind rather than illuminate with its images.2

A dawn wave of bombings and riots hits London. Nurses decline to admit the bloody survivors until their demands for overtime payment are met. The cooks refuse to make breakfast because the private patients are given special meals. The latter – who include a retired general and an African dictator – are outraged at being asked to breakfast on oranges. Hospital manager Vincent Potter (Leonard Rossiter) attempts to restore order and end the strikes while co-ordinating security with Police Chief Superintendent Johns (Fulton Mackay). Palace dignitaries – the midget Sir Anthony Mount (Marcus Powell) and the tall, incomprehensible Lady Felicity (John Bett) – try to enforce an antiquated protocol; but the chaos (to which they add royally) is such that they are flummoxed.

And all this is just the set up! In the ensuing action the centre, far from holding, falls apart and more than one blood-dimmed tide is loosed. Among the episodic, wild surges, Millar and his team discover Mick hidden in a spare parts freezer. They subdue the interloper and Millar orders Nurse Persil to sedate Mick with an injection (which she does, career ambitions proving stronger than lust). Unhappily for him, Mick’s team are wasted on dope. They fail to notice their colleague’s extreme plight when the Professor needs a replacement head for the demonstration and takes a cleaver to Mick’s neck.

Sir Anthony and Lady Felicity join the rehearsal for HRH’s tour. They call on one of Britain’s finest Foreign Secretaries (Arthur Lowe, shortly before his death) just as the old man croaks, ‘They wouldn’t listen to me!’ He utters fragments from John of Gaunt’s speech, ‘this sceptered isle, other Eden, demi-paradise’, and falls back on his pillow, dead. Noticing angry demonstrations outside the gates, Sir Anthony insists on cancelling the visit, but HRH is already on the way. And when ambulances arrive, they do not carry, as expected, casualties of a bombing, but the royal party led from under a shroud by HRH (Gladys Crombie – a look-alike for the Queen Mother).

Millar stitches Mick’s head onto his monster but his triumph is as short-lived as Frankenstein’s. Given life, the patchwork creature fastens its teeth on its progenitor’s hand. Struggling to release their boss, the doctors wrest off the head, spraying them all in blood. Millar shatters the skull to free his hand whereupon the headless thing advances on
Macmillan and strangles her. Millar promptly vows to honour his faithful lieutenant by revealing to HRH an even greater wonder, Genesis.

A full-blooded riot ensues when demonstrators at the gates see TV images of the Royal party inside the hospital. Realising they have been deceived, the crowd and striking staff storm the Millar Centre, battling with riot police. The royal party take their seats to witness Millar’s demonstration, whereupon the doors collapse and angry folk moil through the lecture theatre. Undeterred, Millar warms to his theme with evangelical bombast. Preaching that only a new intelligence – pure brain – can save humankind, he unveils from under a gleaming pyramid a pulsating bio-computer that resembles a vast brain – Genesis. On cue, the sponge (Frank Grimes its voice) croaks Hamlet’s despairing celebration of humanity: ‘What a piece of work is a man, / How noble in reason, / How infinite in faculty… / In apprehension, how like a god … ’. It gets stuck and repeats the last phrase brokenly as we cut to black.3

Inception

A few months after The Old Crowd had aired, Anderson’s new project Memorial Hospital was being pitched both at home and abroad by Michael Medwin’s Memorial Films.4 The initial inspiration for the film came from a Daily Mirror article which triggered a surrealistic image in the director’s mind. It concerned a strike of hospital workers protesting against admission of private patients to Charing Cross Hospital.5

I imagined a revolt with crowds breaking into the hospital… I imagined the crowd breaking into the private wards and throwing all the patients out the windows, and I saw the beds of English lords and Arab potentates coming down in slow motion, past the windows of the hospital.6

As Michiko Kakutani noted, this scene never appears in Britannia Hospital; but it represents the way Anderson’s imagination processed the absurdities of daily life into what became a resonant metaphor.7

Pitching the treatment – round one

Memorial Hospital first got the nod in spring 1979. The circumstances surrounding this deal touched Anderson’s sense of irony. Despite his usual pessimism about Hollywood in general and his career in particular, Anderson was in Los Angeles at the behest of Mike Medavoy to seek out and develop viable film projects for Orion Pictures. Late in April, having already been in Los Angeles over a month, Anderson received a
phone call from Memorial Films in London (not from Orion itself) to
tell him ‘that Orion had passed’. He agreed that Medwin should move
ahead with further pitches. Four weeks later he received another phone
call – this one from Cannes – to the effect that Barry Spikings of EMI
had given the go ahead on Memorial Hospital. Anderson noted:

I had mentioned the idea to Barry in London – and he’d turned it down...
So a British director, with an idea for a film about Britain, approaching
a British company, has to come to Beverly Hills to enlist the aid of the
American representative of the company in Rodeo Drive – in order to
sell the idea. (Of course Barry’s objection was to setting me back in my
‘English rut’.... which prompts the question – why are they interested in
me in the first place?).

Occupied with attempts to develop several projects for Orion, Anderson
resentful of the Hollywood business culture that he found nebulous
and evasive) grumbled that he did not know why he was in Los Angeles.
He laboured to persuade Medavoy and his producers to remake the 1950
Nicholas Ray film In a Lonely Place; but it proved difficult to find compe-
tent writers and the proposal evaporated. Later, Anderson’s imagination
was stimulated by a historical epic set in India during the Great Mutiny
of 1857. This project ran on till mid-1981, but his own enthusiasm waned
earlier because he found working with Ted Tally frustrating. Meanwhile
he had made his first approaches to Jörn Donner to film The Old
Crowd (see Chapter 9).

Pitching the treatment – round two

Despite Spikings’s enthusiasm, Memorial Hospital did not secure EMI
funding. So on 31 October 1979, when Anderson went to Twentieth
Century-Fox, he included it in his portfolio as one of three projects
pitched to his former agent Sandy Lieberson who was now heading
Fox’s international production. The first, Special Duties, did not interest
Lieberson; but the second, Report from the Sex Factory did. It was written
with Anderson’s backing by Ian Rakoff, assistant editor on If..... The
latter had based it on his experiences as editor of a high-budget Euro-
pean porn movie. Lieberson sought in-house advice about whether the
film would be too controversial for his studio and went with the favour-
able response from the London office (ignoring contrary advice from
his Hollywood script readers). He authorised a development deal in
December 1979. Ultimately, the project came to nothing when (Lieber-
son’s short tenure at Fox having ended) both parties recognised that the
studio didn’t share Anderson’s ideas and Fox withdrew.
During their October 1979 meeting, Anderson and Lieberson also negotiated a deal for Memorial Hospital: £12,000 for David Sherwin’s script and £5,000 for development. This deal was finalised in December whereupon Anderson wrote to Sherwin sending him two early versions of his treatment. The director noted that ‘it needs an enormous amount of work and invention, and something really ingenious at the climax. (Not only ingenious but horrifying...)’.

Writing and research

Anderson was generous in supporting his writing partner both during pre-production and the shoot. And before post-production had ended he was urging Sherwin to write his account of the filmmaking. Contacting a publisher with whom he hoped Sherwin would place the diary, Anderson described their division of labour in terms familiar from his earlier collaborations.

The script itself is, of course, absolutely a collaborative piece of work. That’s to say, the basic idea and the construction is mine: David’s contribution is essentially in dialogue and character – and he has that special quality of sympathetic understanding (even when our disagreements are violent) that inspires rather than inhibits creativity. I have given him solo credit on the script partly because he needs it – with luck it may enable him to carry on his screenwriting career at least until he’s paid off his mortgage – and partly because the auteurist fashion of recent years has meant that directors get quite enough (usually too much) credit for their films...

The notion of publishing Sherwin’s diary there and then was abandoned when Anderson reported that, although he admired some graphic and illuminating entries, his colleague had not managed ‘to produce anything that is either comprehensive or genuinely and honestly personal.’

At the time the deal was struck with Fox, Sherwin could not focus on the script since he was devoting his energies to a novel and was unsympathetic to Anderson’s outline. Anderson, clearly embarrassed, prepared to cancel the deal with the studio. Crisis was averted when late in May 1980 the two men completed a shakily typed, ten-page plot outline, newly named Britannia Hospital. Sherwin’s draft diary, like that on O Lucky Man!, describes long periods of unused research followed by rare whiskey-triggered visitations of genius in Anderson’s Rustington cottage. Early in June they submitted a full-length ‘first polished draft’ professionally typed by Monika Sherwin. This satisfied the terms of
the development deal with Fox and saved the Sherwins from having to repay money that had already gone to settle their mortgage. Soon after, however, the regime that had fired Lieberson dropped this project too.

While the project was still titled Memorial Hospital, Anderson had instructed Sherwin to do field research; but having visited the Gloucester Royal Hospital in January 1980, Sherwin decided that there was little material for the film in an institution where everyone seemed happy. This did not please his director who was seeking a metaphor for a crazed world. In the outturn, he himself brought a mix of research and sore personal experience to the project.

Life in a British hospital had almost given Anderson his first feature film subject in the late 1950s, after the completion of Every Day Except Christmas. Elizabeth Sussex mentions that when Sir Michael Balcon of Ealing Studios expressed interest in working with him, Anderson had suggested adapting a novel about a doctor’s daily life. He spent a month observing in the casualty ward of a London hospital, but the project fell through when the studio asked for a romantic sub-plot. Anderson felt he would not be able to write that himself and requested the assistance of a scriptwriter, which the studio would not agree to. According to Louis Marcorelles, Anderson wanted to focus on the doctor’s handling of ethical issues linked to his profession.

Anderson collected numerous press cuttings besides reviews of his work. He seems in the late 1970s to have clipped articles to fuel the satire in Britannia Hospital on diverse topics including: corruption among councillors; police brutality; a brutal African dictator (in this case Idi Amin) being chaired by British businessmen; and headlines including “Breaking Point” for Staff at a Hospital and ‘Hospital Patients “At Risk from Weary Doctors”’. In 1972, Anderson’s mother had been twice admitted to hospital, on the second occasion for colostomy – removal of a cancerous bowel polyp. Her hospitalisation in a private ward was prolonged and coincided with her son’s involvement in post-production on O Lucky Man! The toxic combination of worry about her condition and problems in shaping the film debilitated Anderson. Whereas in the early days after surgery he had hopes for her swift recovery, as the weeks passed he began to believe she was deteriorating and projected his anguish on the nearest targets: he thought his brother uncaring and the hospital lacking.

But this is Hospital [sic] – like any other organisation, compounded of pride & touchiness & hierarchy: the doctors not really knowing what happens when their backs are turned, everyone trying to keep the myth of service and efficiency intact – the usual cover-ups – except that here
it is pain and even life that is at risk. Everyone agrees when I speak out – but no one can do anything. What private wing [sic] – they run out of linen even!\textsuperscript{31}

Uncharacteristic grammatical slips highlight his emotional fatigue; and over the following days his distress deepened.

Still exhausted – to the Hospital: I enter this building each time with a sinking heart. How dreary, shabby and unattractive. And doctors and nurses with their false smiles and their lack of real caring.\textsuperscript{32}

Nearly eight years later, while working with Sherwin to meet the Fox deadline, Anderson was also ‘labouring desperately to complete [his] last Ford chapter’.\textsuperscript{33} Early one morning in July 1980 he finished work on \textit{About John Ford}, his memorial to the great American director. When Kathy Burke his secretary came in, she typed it out. ‘We celebrate: I have a Bourbon and she has a lager. It is finished’.\textsuperscript{34} But the moment’s triumph illuminates only briefly the sombre background of this period. In his journal he gave it four lines squeezed between pages on Rachel Roberts’s descent towards suicide. In October, he recorded ‘another devouring Rachel day’\textsuperscript{35} as he strove devotedly to save his friend from alcoholism and despair, and accompanied her on the fatiguing circuit between his flat (where she was staying), doctors’ consulting rooms, the Royal Free hospital and a nursing home. Noting delays in seeing doctors, the hospital’s inefficiency and ugliness, he wrote ‘The Royal Free is Britannia Hospital’.\textsuperscript{36} Once again the perceived lack of help (this time from some of Roberts’s significant intimates) intensified the burden on him. Once again, he projected angrily onto the medical profession the acute anxiety of a man who, as in a cliff-top nightmare, felt himself unable to hold the tormented actor back from her abject desire to let go. She brought her life to an end that November.

\textbf{Pitching the script – round three}

In the summer of 1980, Anderson had asked the independent producer Clive Parsons to try setting up \textit{Britannia Hospital} since Medwin had not succeeded.\textsuperscript{37} The following December, Parsons and Anderson discussed the latter’s commitments which included directing \textit{Hamlet} on stage. Parsons tried to persuade Anderson to commit both to \textit{Britannia Hospital} and another film, \textit{Dress Gray}. The latter was a Warner Bros. project scripted by Gore Vidal to which since October Anderson had been attached as possible director. In discussions with Warners, Anderson had stressed that \textit{Britannia Hospital} was his priority. However, he had
also told them that if Britannia Hospital remained without backers by
the end of March 1981 he would abandon it and direct Dress Gray.\textsuperscript{38}
Parsons took the entrepreneurial view that Anderson should do both,
confident that Warners would wait for him until January 1982 if funds
for Britannia Hospital did come through.\textsuperscript{39}

This discussion focused Anderson’s mind (although not in the way
Parsons hoped) and he decided to stick exclusively with the kind of film
he knew well.

Last night I made the decision – to agree to Hamlet at Stratford (Theatre
Royal) [...] and to open in the week of May 18\textsuperscript{th} ... to stick with Britannia
Hospital – or rather to gamble on Clive Parsons’ ability to set it up – tho’
inevitably postponing its shooting (if he does set it up) till, say, August...
and so (seemingly inevitably) saying goodbye to yet another Hollywood
flirtation – Dress Gray.

Wisdom or folly? Courage or cowardice? I haven’t the slightest idea.
I’ve always known that I haven’t the talent to plan or order a career – a
life for that matter. I can see all round every question far too clearly.
From one angle Dress Gray would be a revitalising, challenging, freshly
creative experience. From another it would be an evasion, a running-
away, a rash committal of myself into the hands of ruthless aliens –
however seemingly friendly... From one angle Britannia Hospital is the
logical, courageous development of my own style, my own thoughts and
feelings. From another it is a stubborn repetition of ideas which have
already proved unpopular, unwelcome, unacceptable to all except an
increasingly shrinking minority.\textsuperscript{40}

In March 1981 Parsons struck a deal which brought the film full circle
back to EMI two years after that company first offered to finance it.
It required a substantial contribution from the National Film Finance
Corporation plus Gaumont’s agreement to distribute in France to remove
the final blockage and complete the package.\textsuperscript{41} Britannia Hospital could
now go into production.\textsuperscript{42} Parsons and his co-producer Davina Belling
(for Film and General Productions) agreed with Anderson that they
should share £50,000 fees and the director should receive the same
figure minus advances from Fox.\textsuperscript{43}

**Pre-production**

Hedling traces numerous cross-references in the cast to Anderson’s
earlier films, a further example of the director inscribing his autho-
rial signature. Arthur Lowe plays another dubious authority figure in
the former Foreign Secretary. Brian Pettifer is again bullied, as in If...,,
Graham Crowden’s Professor Millar resembles his mad transplant
surgeon of *O Lucky Man!*. And McDowell’s Mick Travis is imbricated in the trilogy not only by his name but also as a former coffee salesman. Like his schoolboy predecessor he discovers an embryo in Millar’s display cabinets. Obsessed with getting a scoop, he feels neither reverence nor awe.

Anderson made two significant changes among his chief technicians. He replaced Miroslav Ondricek as cinematographer (believing he had shown indifference towards the project). Mike Fash took his place and proved to be an excellent colleague, easy to work with. Anderson so relished his positive attitude he hired him again on *The Whales of August*. Norris Spencer took the job of production designer (though Jocelyn Herbert rejoined Anderson for *The Whales of August*). Both Fash and Spencer had only worked on commercials before. Sherwin believed that suited Anderson who wanted his film to look like a commercial. Alan Price once again took charge of the music, working in a style quite different from *O Lucky Man!*

**Production**

At the end of July, with shooting to start on 10 August, Anderson wrote eloquently to actress Pauline Melville (whom he cast as Clarissa) expressing the fears that every major screen production aroused in him.

As you can imagine, I’m passing these days in agonised dread. *Britannia Hospital* [...] is the usual over-ambitious conception, satirical, ominous and absurd – designed to annoy practically everyone. And there’s no doubt that working in the theatre is bad for movie-making. One gets used to that gradual process of development, a production growing from its first days of rehearsal to its first performance – instead of this series of breakneck, snatched improvisations, every scene a violent struggle with time.

For once, he permitted an interviewer a glimpse into his state of mind on location: ‘It’s like being a lion tamer. When the lion tamer goes into the cage, he has to give an impression of absolute confidence and relaxation even if he is terrified 10 minutes before’. Occupied by the many tasks faced in realising the production, Anderson did not write his journal again until two months after principal photography ended. But fifteen years later Sherwin’s amusing observations of the production process found their way into *Going Mad in Hollywood*. They reveal Anderson’s familiar fiery temperament under stress and the tensions predictable in any large production where the crew battle to realise massive ambitions against a tightly constrained
Sherwin’s anecdotes relate, of course, to this film alone; but few reveal ruptures with routine British film production practice of the day, and none causes us to think Anderson’s methods of directing varied significantly from those of *O Lucky Man!* albeit his vision was darker.

**Publicity**

At the turn of 1981–82, Anderson took on heavy post-production commitments while involving himself intensively in publicity. In both functions the obsessive behavioural patterns of his earlier productions manifested again, this time prejudicing the campaign.

As on previous occasions, his reactions to his new film during post-production were for the most part despairing. On 4 January 1982 he viewed the first three reels in the edit suite ‘which looked to me thin, fragmentary and clumsily shot’. A few days later he gave a preliminary screening to Parsons and Belling, EMI bigwigs and other top people: ‘The film unrolled without a glimmer of response from anyone. To me it seemed scrappy, without form or grasp, unfunny, obvious, pretentious and ineffective. Awful’. Yet despite his private worry, he pushed on vigorously in public – nowhere more than in intervening over publicity.

An exception to the post-production gloom came when Anderson went to work with Alan Price. The musician had a ‘small, chock-a-block studio’ in his Farnham cottage where, using the time-coded tape of the film, he wanted ‘to conceive and execute, then and there, the entire score on his synthesiser’. Although Anderson felt he had had insufficient opportunity to put his ideas across, the results pleased him.

We did a good deal of work: ‘Rule Britannia’ over the whole Dying Man sequence was incredibly eloquent I thought. Also some good abstract sounds – drumming – and horror-sci-fi for Jill’s death.

As Anderson’s admiration for his old collaborator and for arranger Derek Wadsworth grew, he urged Spikings to release an album, adding that the music encompassed ‘the traditional royal, the spooky-scientific and the just plain dramatic’. EMI did not take this step, probably because the music did not sound like Price’s usual work and consisted mainly of well-known tunes adapted to the storyline. And fatally, Anderson had mooted the idea too close to the film’s May 1982 release date for an album to be ready – just one of a succession of poor judgements during the campaign.

The Anderson Archive holds a great deal of material, much of it correspondence initiated by a worried Anderson, relating to publicity on both sides of the Atlantic. Soon after principal photography ended
on 30 October 1981, he had written to Spikings at EMI offering thanks for support in letting him make the film he wanted. Hoping to prompt the Chief Executive’s engagement in a vibrant campaign, he challenged Spikings’s anxieties about the depiction of HRH – a barely disguised Queen Mother. Pointing out that television is far bolder and ‘Not the Nine O’clock News has absolutely no scruple in representing and parroting members of the Royal family’, he argued against the complacency endemic at every level of the British film industry which was driving young audiences towards television and more stimulating media. ‘What sells pictures today, it seems to me, is originality, zest, even outrageousness’.57

Inadequate publicity became a major theme in Anderson’s mind from December 1981 onward. He criticised work produced by a team at Lonsdale Advertising Agency and outlined his thoughts in long letters. For example, he wrote to an EMI executive, ‘It is certainly not desirable that the first or chief reaction to Britannia Hospital is that it is “anti-Establishment” [...] the film is not restricted to the English in its appeal’.58 Dreading it might get what he thought of as EMI’s routine treatment, he urged the company to involve Gerry Lewis, an outside PR agent whose vitality had impressed Anderson when they worked together on If.... and who showed enthusiasm for Britannia Hospital.59 Thereafter more ideas for publicity came from Lonsdales, but Anderson found them mediocre, noting that Parsons and Belling should have been more firm with these ‘transparent second-raters’.60 EMI did engage Lewis for the British publicity campaign, but confined him to working within Lonsdales’ ambit. Anderson still thought the campaign remained unimaginative and blamed all involved, now including Lewis who had disappointed him.61 He laid part of the responsibility at the door of an ‘obstinate, recalcitrant, closed-minded’ head of marketing.62 Next he dismissed the market research as ‘generally poppycock’, hinting at nepotism since it had been commissioned from a publicist’s girlfriend. Then he alleged that the publicist in question had made no use of it.63

In fact the research findings (responses from 420 people testing various attractions that might be offered in promoting the film) made perfect sense. They suggested the film’s drawing power would be centred on its stars (principally Leonard Rossiter for his TV presence in Rising Damp, and also Malcolm McDowell). The title and the expectation it would be a comedy would also attract, while audiences under 25 were more likely to be interested than those above that age. The director’s name was a lesser pull, mainly effective with older people. Importantly, themes about the collapse of society did not draw this sample group, nor should the film be promoted in such a way as to move beyond the
safely outrageous ‘which may put off as many as it attracts’.64 However, Anderson had already decided against singling out stars and in favour of those themes he meant to emphasise. He did not change his mind.

The preliminary marketing plan accompanying these findings suggested that the traditional method of advertising in the up-market broadsheets should be ignored. Lewis did not want to ‘rarify the picture or treat it as an intellectual piece’.65 Instead his agency promised ‘to make a major effort to break the popular dailies’ by ‘showing the film to people likely to be angered or shocked’66 such as union leaders and newspaper columnists (as opposed to critics). This incoherent approach to Britannia Hospital’s promotion seems to indicate that, right from the start, the publicists and EMI were unsure about how best to market the film. They tried to cover all bases, which produced a disjointed and uncertain campaign. As much as anything, the completion of the preliminary marketing campaign less than two months prior to the film’s release did little to benefit its reception.

Further disarray was caused by the eruption of the Falklands war and the jingoist sentiment that the Thatcher government and its press succeeded in whipping up. Early in April 1982 Anderson had thought it might benefit the film.67 But he soon had to concede that the image he had originally preferred ‘of the headless torso waving a Union Jack – a direct quotation, of course, from the film itself – was not a good idea in view of the wholly unexpected turn that public affairs have taken during the last month or so’.68

[When] any day we might see on the front page of the newspapers a picture of a tattered Union Jack floating on the waters of the South Atlantic, and news of the loss, perhaps, of thousands of British sailors – ideas like this might rebound disastrously.69

For a short while Anderson advocated as logo ‘the headless man waving an untattered [sic] Union Jack’.70 He focused on the flag rather than the corpse and missed the force of his own argument.

Just why all this should set strong executives a-tremble, and cause them to flee from the market place – leaving their considerable investment abandoned in the gutter – I couldn’t understand.71

Nevertheless, discomfort was palpable and he noted that ‘the top echelons at EMI were showing every sign of panic, and seriously considering (as far as I could make out) withdrawing the film from Cannes (it was the official British selection) and even putting it on the shelf’.72

To his dismay, EMI eventually replaced the headless motif for UK release with a
plain letter-press advert which was run up in about ten minutes (I only found out about it a day late when I couldn’t do anything but make minor adjustments), without the service of a real designer or typographer.\textsuperscript{73}

Anderson’s folders of press clippings do not contain the advertisement published in the UK press, possibly indicating how unimpressed he was with it.

His fulminations against the publicists’ efforts evidently had some justification, but such outbursts recur with the launch of all his feature films. Both in his diaries and correspondence, he characterised the publicists for Britannia Hospital as ‘second-rate bullshitters’.\textsuperscript{74} Yet he probably aggravated their uncertainties when arguing that no one image could evoke all the characteristics of the film while simultaneously insisting ‘we do need an image, not just for the poster, but which can be readily and strikingly identified with the film’.\textsuperscript{75} His twisting and turning cannot be missed: three weeks before this assertion, he had reminded Parsons:

\begin{quote}
you will remember that many months ago I spoke to you about the possibility of a Ronald Searle drawing of Britannia in traction. You dismissed the idea, but I can assure you that it would have been ten times more effective than what we are now offered. The Headless Body motif is undramatic and humourless [...].\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Granted that this was a comment on one particular version of the figure, his ill-advised persistence with the headless torso may reflect his difficulty (which the publicists also experienced) in finding an alternative.

Similar predictable responses were triggered half a year later when alterations to United Artists Classics press campaign prior to the American release exasperated him. A publicity image that he liked had been replaced by a cartoon consisting of the characters (including himself) ‘spilling out of the hospital in a zany chase’.\textsuperscript{77} Anderson complained of it ‘giving the impression that the film is a sort of farcical exercise in the Carry On tradition, with nothing striking, original or exceptional about it’.\textsuperscript{78} He addressed letters ever higher up the UA chain of authority protesting this and other perceived inadequacies in the company’s handling of his film. The publicists, however, probably knew American audiences better than he and the campaign did seem to work in the film’s favour. Actually, a Carry On type poster might have benefited the British campaign by defusing associations with the Falklands war.

Confirming this and that Anderson’s reputation did not guarantee favourable reception by American audiences, co-producer Belling described the film’s reception at a February 1983 preview.
Clive and I were amazed that as many as 60 die-hard LA fans braved the worst blizzard in years to attend the sneak last Friday. Unfortunately the response was not good, with 15 walk-outs after the operating theatre sequence. If your former fans can’t stomach Britannia Hospital, perhaps Tom Bernard has a point wanting the artwork to go in a ‘zanier’ direction in order to attract a younger crowd.79

Ultimately Anderson’s hostility to publicists seems rooted in their function as market researchers. Preparing his films for release, they inevitably revealed that his vision of the film would differ from most of the audience. In May 1982, Anderson privately recognised this violation of his authorial dream.

A further reason for tension is, of course, that it becomes clear to me – yet again – that the film is going to be badly received, sneered at, begrudged and dismissed. Once again, I realise, my idea of the ‘popular’ film that can also carry a charge of poetry and ideas, is going to be proved illusory.80

There are two things that can be said about this. First, in his anxiety, Anderson forgets that he had enjoyed considerable critical success with his previous features and remembers only hostile comments. Second, although he would refute Wollen’s terms, he senses that he is about to give way to ‘Lindsay Anderson’, one or more authorial personae perceived by filmgoers and reviewers in the film, beyond his control.

Expenditure and income

Britannia Hospital was a box-office flop. Looking back at the UK launch, David Robinson noted a host of rival distractions.

It opened on a day when the whole country was watching the Cup Final replay on television. Next day the Pope arrived in Britain. The Falklands campaign was at its most critical, and the great heat wave had come to a climax, sending cinema attendances in Britain plummeting. To crown all this the press (with a couple of exceptions) was so damning that no one was surprised when the public stayed away.81

The certified cost of production prior to striking prints and paying for publicity was recorded as £2,494,210. Of this £1,305,137 had been budgeted by Thorn EMI; £450,000 was contributed by the National Film Finance Corporation; and the balance of £738,873 was attributed to Thorn EMI as a cost overrun.82

Monthly statements of EMI’s receipts and expenditure held in Anderson’s files suggest how far Britannia Hospital fell short of making
back its costs. A caveat: the archive does not hold data for North American cinema income which was not attributable to EMI because United Artists owned theatrical rights for Canada and the USA. EMI’s statement for 31 May 1983, a year after release, indicated gross domestic income of just under £50,000; and gross overseas income (including £205,000 for USA Cable TV release) of £444,000; a total of less than £0.5 million. When the distributors’ commission was added to the cost of striking prints, publicity, freight and promotional screenings, the film cost £117,000 more than it brought in that year.83 A year later, the deficit on distribution had been reduced to £25,000 primarily thanks to television network screenings and video sales at home and abroad.84

The following year the revenue and expenditure account on distribution moved briefly into £33,000 net surplus.85 However, during the following quarter sundry expenses of £130,000 were charged, moving the account back into almost £90,000 deficit.86 This debit probably arose from payments to the producers and director for profit participation – a deal which Clive Parsons had negotiated.87

Income from cinemas in the USA and Canada additional to these figures is hard to gauge. Reports from the New York Plaza gave the house the ‘sweet smell of success with a $45,000 opening week’ (i.e. gross box office take rather than returns to the distributor).88 In June it took ‘a so-so $13,000 during first 10 days on two Los Angeles screens’.89

The final set of returns held in the Anderson Archive is dated 30 September 1988 when the cost of release still exceeded income attributable to EMI by £5,000.90 There had been almost no activity since the previous year when £75,000 had been earned from television channels in the USA.91 By this time, six years after first release, the biggest source of income to EMI (at about £320,000) had been North American sales for the small screen. Sales for all formats in the UK (theatrical, television and video) amounted to £147,000; the equivalent in France just under £100,000; and Australia £67,000.92

Responses of friends and fans

Anderson received warm support from friends and colleagues. David Storey wrote passionately after seeing an early rough-cut. He thought Britannia Hospital ‘a testament to a very unusual spirit – from the acorn of O Dreamland doth this mighty oak tree grow! Rest assured – the spirit, and the animus – the benevolence – is there – undoctinaire, life-lasting: faithful to the end’.93 Others sent congratulations on the film and condolences on its reception – among them Jocelyn Herbert,
Fans wrote enthusiastic letters not unlike those stimulated by his previous features. A number of these came from people working in the National Health Service who appreciated his take on the decline of the system. Since the volume of correspondence was manageable, Anderson (assisted by Kathy Burke) replied to most. Often he expressed the consolation the letters provided; on occasion, true to his combative nature, he would take issue with correspondents’ interpretations. Sometimes he reflected on the intellectual poverty of the British critical response and the lumpen, under-educated TV-watching English public.95

Months after it had been written, a letter came that pleased him so much he struck copies. It was from the Polish director of towering political cinema, Andrzej Wajda.

It is the most Polish film produced anywhere in the world in recent years. I don’t know if this sounds enthusiastic enough. Being Polish, I completely understand the way you are using the facts of contemporary life and putting them on the screen. They make perfect sense because you, a rebel and also a new social and political legislator, present them for the enlightenment of people everywhere. This is really Britain – the only one that truly exists. And it is also Polish through and through, amazing in its ideas ...

As in every Polish masterpiece, there is twice as much material in it as there ought to be. It’s as if you were anticipating censorship and counting on it to shape your film by cutting it. Perhaps it’s a pity you’ve no censorship in England. Though really your film would be quite uncensorable: they’d just have to write the whole thing off as a loss – as we say over here. Quite simply the film is superb, and I do wholeheartedly congratulate you for it.96

Press reviews and criticism

In Cannes for its premiere as official British selection, Britannia Hospital’s billboard was surreally framed. Alexander Walker saw:

figures of Falklands casualties ... flashing in light bulbs across the facade of the Hotel Carlton just below the skysign for the musical Annie and just above the cut-out cartoon advertising two new Pink Panther films. It was a macabre juxtaposition that Anderson himself might have devised.97

The film drew extensive coverage and divided reviewers. On only two topics was disagreement minimal. The first concerned the quality of the performances which Vincent Canby summarised thus: ‘Britannia
Hospital is virtually a Guide Michelin to the great actors available to British filmmakers’. The second concerned attribution of authorship. From the moment they committed to financing Britannia Hospital, EMI’s Spikings and Mamoun Hassan of the National Film Finance Corporation promoted it as a film authored by Lindsay Anderson, describing him as having made some of Britain’s best films. Taking this marketing cue (and adopting journalistic shorthand), almost every reviewer took Anderson to be principal, usually sole author of Britannia Hospital. Only occasionally did Sherwin receive equal blame. Price’s music – no doubt because it parodied revered English tunes and was not recognisably his – was ignored.

Reporting from the festival for The Times, Robinson accurately anticipated the furore the film would arouse in the UK domestic press. He remarked on the applause which frequently (and unusually) interrupted the Cannes screening, adding that its success startled English critics with their ‘maidenly distaste for its savage comedy’. Rightly he found American and European spectators more ready to see in the saga ‘not a parochial symbol of a foundering British society but a much larger metaphor’.

Reviewers’ tendencies: Britain

Not every journalist waited to gather reactions. Before the Cannes premiere, the Daily Star printed Alasdair Riley’s “Sick Joke” Film Angers Hospital Workers, in which a tabloid journalist wheedled the response he wanted from a trade union leader who had not seen the film and manufactured his anger – ironic, given Britannia Hospital’s jibes at ruthless journalists and soundbite-ready union leaders.

Among those British reviewers who had seen it, most gave Britannia Hospital a drubbing as ‘clumsy and hysterical ... head-on and old-fashioned’, or ‘just not funny enough’. The Daily Mail set the tone with David Lewin’s ‘Cruel Britannia: Would Any Other Country Stand for a Film that Portrays Us All as Mad?’ Lewin discovered ‘brilliant filmmaking, but an unrelenting attack on everything in our society and an unyielding cynicism about the motives of everyone trying to make it function’. John Pym in the Financial Times said that, as the last of the satiric trio, it was ‘increasingly embittered, misanthropic’ yet lacked ‘that particularity which distinguishes true satire’. In The Observer Philip French agreed that the film emerged as petty, mean minded and spoiled by threadbare writing. For Jennifer Selway of Time Out it was worse, ‘a shameful compendium of material which would disgrace a fifth-rate sitcom, and a waste of a top-flight cast’. The Sunday Times’s
Alan Brien condemned its haphazard construction, poor performances, pre-fabricated stereotypes and want of a single memorable shot. In the *Daily Express* Ian Christie described the script as poor, adding that Anderson did not have a clear-cut idea of what he was trying to say. The *Daily Telegraph*’s strapline made its endorsement of that view plain enough: ‘Frenzied Fooling with Second-rate Script’. Sight & Sound published Chris Auty in much the same tenor. Francis Wheen granted *New Statesman* readers the insight that ‘My own reaction was a big yawn and a thankfulness that this foolish movie was over ... In his contribution to *Declaration*, published in 1957, [Anderson] wrote perceptively about the failings of British cinema – “snobbish, anti-intelligent, emotionally inhibited, wilfully blind to the conditions and problems of the present”. He himself is now guilty on all counts’. Richard Combs added scathingly that ‘it lacks the intellectual rigour to pursue any idea’ and ‘has all the intensity, along with the flailing incoherence, of a soapbox Jeremiah’.

**Reviewers’ tendencies: France**

By comparison, French comments were positive. The reviewer for *Le Quotidien de Paris* celebrated two hours of intelligent, destructive laughter, the like of which Cannes had not seen since Peter Sellers’s swan song. Pierre Billard for *Le Point* found that the inventive diversity of Anderson’s attacks kept him ceaselessly engaged. In *Le Figaro* Guy Lagorce admired the way that, in its satire on all parts of society, the film summoned ancient sentiments that were also very modern, doing so as a comedy. And in the same paper, M. N. Tranchant asked Anderson what could better fit with his self-professed anarchism than artistic creation? Delighted, the director responded, ‘That’s completely true. Try to write that it was I who said it!’ In fact, Tranchant praised *Britannia Hospital* highly as an account of England and the Western world created with sceptical, satirical verve by a Voltaire from across the Channel.

Also fulsome in his praise, André Pierre found *Britannia Hospital* a gigantesque farce caught between the Commedia dell’Arte, the parodic resurrection of expressionist myths and the ravaging humour of Monty Python. It was also, thinking of the Falklands, a bloody allegory for England. Pierre was not alone in considering this coincidence: for Marcorelles it denounced the gulf between the published principles of modern states and lived reality, ‘as if a malicious destiny wanted to add to the cruelty of a fable whose meaning crosses frontiers and addresses us all, confused citizens of a mad world’.
Reviewers’ tendencies: North America

Many columnists, including the widely syndicated Rex Reed, found *Britannia Hospital* hilarious. Indeed, a summary of American reviews for June 1983 showed that *Britannia Hospital* had been rated excellent by *Box Office*, *Variety* and the *New York Times*, and as fair by the *Los Angeles Times*. Reed first saw the film at Cannes and led some of his compatriots in comparing the film’s style with the ‘wacky’ *Carry On* movies. This observation reflected the American publicity and became a mark of approval in several reviews. Anderson loathed having his film associated with the triviality of the British series, but he must have relished Reed’s enthusiasm.

> It is all quite mad, merry and mischievous, as slapstick and corrosive cynicism about the society we live in combine to form the most original and entertaining film of the entire Cannes Festival. *Britannia Hospital* is the M*A*S*H of socialized medicine, and a resounding triumph.122

Canby (who had disliked *O Lucky Man!* was another who saw the funny side of what he called Anderson’s best film.

> No secret is made of the fact that *Britannia Hospital* is a metaphor, but the reason the film works with such consistent funniness is not its satire, which is devastating, but the expertly staged and acted farcical complications that turn this day of celebration into a glimpse of the apocalypse.123

Canby endorsed Anderson’s belief that he had made a humanistic film. He said (echoing Dilys Powell’s review) that, while there were several dozen wonderfully inane characters, the image of the Queen Mother was simultaneously hilarious and very moving, an indication of how the film evoked complex feelings.124 That thematic complexity was also recognised by Reed.

> Every human vice is here – cowardice, snobbery, duplicity, arrogance, royal pomp and circumstance, and more – along with slapstick, farce and even Grand Guignol. If ever a film struck a note of requiem for what we call vanishing civilization, this is it.125

**Critical themes: style, structure and meaning**

Some critics saw that the distinctive performance style complemented the film’s visuals. In this connection, McDowell described his acting thus:
I really learned the basis of my technique from [Lindsay] and it’s very simple – clear everything, very economical in a sort of highlighting style, real but not realistic, go for the moment, take it and move on. It’s a sort of Brechtian style, Lindsay’s, and it is my natural style as an actor.\textsuperscript{126}

In harmony with this, Michiko Kakutani noted that Anderson’s films avoided fancy visual pyrotechnics where the ‘tour-de-force manipulation of light’ (Anderson’s phrase) mattered more than image content. Rather, his images emphasised the social over the psychological aspects of character.\textsuperscript{127} Richard Tombleson, Anderson’s assistant on the film, complemented this by drawing attention to his literary approach. ‘He builds his films out of dialogue … He’s anti-cinematography in a way. He cares about what’s in the frame – and he comes up with some very good compositions – but he doesn’t concern himself so much with the shots themselves’.\textsuperscript{128}

We saw in a number of British reviews that structure became a source of contention. Anderson had sought to stress the classical qualities of his work, emphasising,

form and discipline. Shape and conception, particularly in cinema, are terribly important. We are at a time when all these classical virtues are not esteemed. Sensation, handling, immediacy of effect are all much more valued.\textsuperscript{129}

Yet Newsday’s reviewer was only one of those who thought the film began well but ended in a muddle.\textsuperscript{130} Andrew Sarris agreed, despite his admiration for Anderson’s tenacity as an apostle of passionate commitment. He reckoned the savagery of Anderson’s satiric assault had destroyed the narrative: he had tried to do too much in too many styles and wound up with an in-hospital satire tied to an out-of-hospital newsreel.\textsuperscript{131}

By contrast, other writers noted that the film appeared to spin out of control to mimic society’s unravelling. Frank Roddam said, ‘Lindsay’s films start out as straight socialism or social criticism, then they get weirder and weirder. It’s no accident the director he admires most is Bunuel’.\textsuperscript{132} Mike Bygrave extended this idea, saying that while Britannia Hospital had inevitably been reviewed as one more satire by an ageing iconoclast,\textsuperscript{133} it was actually something much more dangerous.\textsuperscript{134} What Christie took to be ‘an indigestible mixture of farce, black comedy, ghoulish horror and pretentious moralising’,\textsuperscript{135} Bygrave found exhilarating: Anderson had taken the social comment lying at the root of much British writing and refracted it through a prism of surreal comedy. The result was like three different scripts, a comedy, a horror movie and a drama, torn up and shuffled.\textsuperscript{136} The surreal was, once again, one of Anderson’s preferred modes of destroying naturalism. It shows, for
example, in having Marcus Powell, a midget, play a palace courtier (in tribute to Jean Vigo’s headmaster in *Zéro de Conduite*), accompanied by the lanky John Bett in drag as the upper-class lady-in-waiting of garbled tongue.

Hedling thought the film’s structure, which differs from *If.... and O Lucky Man!*, might partly explain the difficulties experienced by audiences and reviewers. He says Mick ‘becomes a side character, being “swallowed up” by the narrative’ and then killed. He never is the central figure, so *Britannia Hospital* lacks a picaresque hero to engage the audience emotionally from start to finish. This differs from the other two films where, despite the distancing effect of Brechtian methods, Mick was the principal focus of audience interest. Hedling suspects his evacuation from that role may have dismayed spectators.

**Critical themes: the status of satire**

Anderson continued to believe that the satirist had a duty to approach his material with *saeva indignatio*. As before it set him at odds with some reviewers. Tim Pulleine in *The Guardian* argued that ‘the perceptions of national malaise that Anderson’s film presents are already the unthinking small change of TV situation comedy...’. Chris Auty agreed that television had been more anarchic and gone further. This association remained anathema to Anderson (see Chapter 9). He observed, ‘the trouble with the “satirical” work that’s been done on television over the last twenty years is that it always has to be pushed into facetiousness or farce, and therefore loses wit and irony’.

Hedling argues that *Britannia Hospital* displays carnivalesque elements in parodying the Hammer Frankenstein movies and evoking *Carry On* comedies. When they flourished, the two cycles shared an engagement with popular culture at what critics regarded as its lowest ebb – with excessive gore splattering the former and vulgar, scatological humour larding the latter. The *Carry On* series flaunted misrule and turned the familiar orders of the world upside down. Anderson denied the connection with what can be taken as patrician contempt, yet his rebuttal bears on the nature of satire. For while the carnivalesque may include satirical scenes, it seldom intends more than a temporary reversal of the familiar social order. True satirists rage to sweep the existing world order away.

Other writers recognised authentic satiric address in *Britannia Hospital*. Robinson saw its characters as more aggressive than those in Anderson’s earlier films, many being in head-on conflict with one another. *Die Zeit*’s correspondent registered the darkness and breadth
of the film in tenor, a characteristic he found at odds with the television sketch.

What might sound, in [a] brief summary, like a series of more or less successful jokey sketches, is much more than that: a panorama of ills in the manner of Swift and Defoe; a film whose black fury is surpassed only by its analytical intelligence. Maybe Britain doesn’t deserve such an extraordinarily imaginative, creative and inventive picture, but maybe Anderson’s immensely powerful film also demonstrates the distant possibility that a radical operation can still save the moribund patient.\footnote{145}

Bygrave and Walker reached a similar conclusion, seeing Anderson as a classic traditional moralist, whose ire was kindled by the chaos into which Britain had fallen.\footnote{146}

Anderson’s reactions

The director himself agreed with this. Writing to Mike Fash as the film was being released in New York, he regretted that very few people had seen,

that the point and the difficulty about Britannia Hospital is that it is essentially a moral film, whose humour and satire spring out of a serious, even a despairing concern for the human race, and that the final comment or challenge of the film goes far beyond satire on disintegrating Britain.\footnote{147}

Reflecting further, Anderson said, ‘If I didn’t care about Britain and about humanity, then I wouldn’t be making films like Britannia Hospital. Satire always comes from people who care too much to live in a world which is wasteful of its potential, without saying anything about it’.\footnote{148} To Bygrave he added, ‘In a sense to be a satirist you have to be a frustrated romantic’.\footnote{149} He believed Britannia Hospital constituted a more desperate film but ‘an absolutely logical development’ of his earlier work, sharing a lot of ideas with If... and O Lucky Man! – ideas which he hoped had matured through the ‘philosophical sequence’ they comprised.\footnote{150}

The inability of reviewers to understand the film remained for Anderson indicative of, and influential upon the way the film was viewed by the cinema-going public. In this respect, his attitude towards criticism remained unchanged. So when Britannia Hospital got good reviews Anderson sometimes responded, thanking the writers and extending the discussion. Tending to reiterate themes previously voiced in interviews and other writings, these letters do not need further scrutiny here.\footnote{151}
The tenor of his private letters was far from bullish. Prior to the New York opening, he wrote to Belling about the emotional cost of the film’s UK failure.

I am quite ashamed to find that the general English-speaking hostility towards *Britannia Hospital*, and the film’s dismissal by prejudice and resentment masquerading as criticism have disturbed me more deeply than is healthy. Not caused me to doubt the work, exactly, but made me aware of the near impossibility of getting across a point of view, values of reason and morality so alien to the spirit of our times. It is not so much the strength of the opposition that has discouraged me, as the lack of support, the indifference of the ‘uncommitted’ majority, and their willingness to be led by the enemy behind the typewriter…

 Truly, and to a much greater degree than I realised when we were making it, *Britannia Hospital* is a dissident film. Morally as much as politically dissident. Pessimistic in its conclusion – ‘optimistic’ only in its vitality as a work of art.152

Anderson’s sense of defeat resounded in his journal two years later when he was despairing both of his professional future and the mental health of three intimates. He had good reason to remain fearful for the stability of his nephew and Patricia Healey (both living in his flat) and now also Jill Bennett, depressed after divorce from John Osborne. In his New Year entry for 1985, Anderson admitted fatalistic thoughts of death: ‘Partly this is the result of defeat – and I do feel awfully defeated…’.153

*Britannia Hospital* is of course at the centre of this complex: it is impossible for me not to remark, with a sense of fated exclusion, how it is totally disregarded, not so much dismissed as unacknowledged even as a failure, as though it had never been [...] It’s impossible to deny, however one despises the ‘acceptance world’, that Fame to some degree is the spur. I do resent lack of acknowledgement. Which I suppose I should accept, and use as a motive for activity, rather than an excuse for inaction.154

Soon the first signs of renewal surfaced. Working with Sherwin on their idea for *Reunion* (in effect *If 2….*), he returned to the theme of rejection, but acknowledged the need for change: ‘No use pretending I am not conscious at every moment of the rejection of *Britannia Hospital* – and the necessity to find a more “naturalistic” style’.155 He noted his intention to disentangle himself from several uncertain prospects, observing: ‘Absurdities like poor Mike Kaplan’s *Whales of August* drag on: and I ought to finish *that* off’.156 In fact, *The Whales of August* became Anderson’s next film project, and indeed he directed it in a more naturalistic style.
Attributing authorship

Mike Bygrave reminds us that Anderson exercised an emphatic choice when he embarked on Britannia Hospital and veered away from the chance of working in Hollywood on Dress Grey, a commercial, naturalistic film. Instead he decided to confirm his attachment to his familiar authorial stance. As Bygrave says, ‘like many directors, Anderson has sought to transform himself into a fully-fledged artist, creating his own vision rather than (in part) interpreting someone else’s’. Thus Bygrave locates Anderson firmly in the tradition of the European auteur director. That fits with the general perception that Britannia Hospital was indeed an ‘Anderson’ film.

We observed that Britannia Hospital brings to a head a tendency that intensified with reviews of successive films by Anderson. Now commentators more plainly than ever characterise his authorial presence within parameters loosely formed by their cultural preoccupations. This makes for quasi-national divisions in their evaluations of ‘Anderson’s’ presence in the text.

Many hostile British reviews revealed not only the ‘maidenly distaste’ for savage comedy that Robinson so seductively predicted. Several exhibited the reciprocal savagery of revengers turning the knife, motivated not necessarily by personal affront (though it would be unwise to rule that out in some instances) but Anderson’s career-long excoriation of indifferent British critical practice.

15 Lindsay Anderson on the set of Britannia Hospital in 1981.
The tendency we identified in American reviews to discover in ‘Anderson’ a darkly comic genius have a different undertow. Collectively, they celebrate (not without glee) an attack by a scathing and witty British satirist on the old, ossified ways of a culture which many Americans still delighted in having broken away from. If knives are out here, they are brandished with good cheer, puncturing the pomposity of the old country with the insider assistance of the ‘Anderson’ they identify. A similar response comes through in Rob White’s welcome for the film firing shots at ‘the many outdated British attitudes and mores (many of which its dominions, such as New Zealand, accepted unquestioningly) that deserve a good kick up the backside’.159

Continental Europeans and a minority of British writers uncovered something different again. They seem to consider this as Anderson’s legacy film, an organic, complex whole, a culmination of long labours to establish his rightful place in opposition to the British film industry. Such writers (including Tranchant, Pierre, Marcorelles, Wajda, the anonymous correspondent for Die Zeit, Bygrave, Robinson and Storey) either explicitly or implicitly laud the ‘Anderson’ whom they perceive in the company of satire’s grandees Voltaire, Defoe and Swift. The present writers stand with this group and indeed with Anderson’s own analyses cited above, since he depicts the very authorial presence in the film that we discern. ‘Anderson’s’ attitudes to British society had become considerably more pessimistic, but the characteristics of his authorship had intensified rather than greatly altered since the two previous Mick

16 Lindsay Anderson faces the demonstrators on the set of Britannia Hospital in 1981.
Travis films. Thankfully, though, this was not to be the last chapter in his legacy.

Notes

3 Much taken by Crowden’s performance, Anderson congratulated him on his capturing the blind vanity of this late twentieth-century Frankenstein: ‘I think the high style of your performance is completely successful. Anyway, it’s exactly what I wanted, and I think the only conceivable way of playing the part which will structure and, so to speak, underpin the film’, correspondence, Anderson to Graham Crowden, 25 November 1981 (LA 1/9/3/5/22).
4 The only script with this title held in the Anderson Archive is an undated, two-page outline (LA 1/9/1/1).
7 Kakutani, ‘Satirist with a Camera’, 1.
8 Diary, 26 April 1979 (LA 6/1/78/2).
9 Ibid.
10 Diary, 23 May 1979 (LA 6/1/78/16).
11 See, for example, diary entries 9 to 17 October 1979 (LA 6/1/79/2 to LA 6/1/79/18).
15 Twentieth Century-Fox inter-office correspondence: Allyn Stewart to Sandy Lieberson, 6 October 1979; David Madden, Reader’s Report, 29 October 1979; Stephen M. Kravit, Basic Terms of the Development Deal, 20 December 1979 (LA 5/4/7/2).
16 Correspondence, Richard Berger, Senior Vice President Worldwide Production, Twentieth Century-Fox to Anderson, 9 September 1980 (LA 5/4/7/2).
18 Correspondence, Anderson to David Sherwin, 14 December 1979 (LA 1/9/3/1/2).
19 Correspondence, Anderson to Tom Maschler, 11 November 1981 (LA 1/9/3/9/3); see also Anderson, Never Apologise, 149.
20 Correspondence, Anderson to David Sherwin, 5 April 1982 (LA 1/9/3/9/15).
21 Anderson, Never Apologise, 149.
22 Correspondence, Anderson to Otis S. (Dick) Blodget, International Creative Management, 14 March 1980 (LA 1/9/3/2/1).
29 Newspaper cuttings, late 1970s (LA 5/7/17).
30 Diary, 3 October 1972 (LA 6/1/64/265).
31 Diary, 24 October 1972 (LA 6/1/64/284).
32 Diary, 6 November 1972 (LA 6/1/64/295).
33 Correspondence, Anderson to David Sherwin, 27 June 1980 (LA 1/9/3/1/3).
34 Diary, 18 July 1980 (LA 6/1/80/2).
35 Diary, 6 October 1980 (LA 6/1/80/9).
36 Diary, 18 July 1980 (LA 6/1/80/4); see also diary, 26 July 1980 (LA 6/1/80/6); and Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 173–9.
37 Correspondence, John Whalley to Anderson, 10 July 1980 (LA 1/9/3/3/1); Anderson to Whalley, 1 August 1980 (LA 1/9/3/3/2); Anderson to Derek Cracknell, 8 April 1981 (LA 1/9/3/3/4).
39 See transcript of discussion between Anderson and Clive Parsons, 28 December 1980 (LA 1/9/2/2/2).
40 Diary, 30 December 1980 (LA 6/1/81/1).
43 Correspondence between Lipkin Gorman (Solicitors), Anderson and Clive Parsons, 11 August 1980 to 8 October 1980 (LA 1/9/3/4/1–6).
44 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 184–7.
45 Diary, 15 January 1985 (LA 6/1/77/40).
46 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 189.
47 Sherwin, Going Mad in Hollywood, 183.
48 Correspondence, Anderson to Pauline Melville, 31 July 1981 (LA 1/9/3/5/10).
51 Diary, 4 January 1982 (LA 6/1/82/3).
52 Diary, 8 January 1982 (LA 6/1/82/4).
53 Diary, 7 January 1982 (LA 6/1/82/4).
54 Ibid.
55 Correspondence, Anderson to Barry Spikings, EMI, 3 March 1982 (LA 1/9/3/6/6) and 5 April 1982 (LA 1/9/3/11/7).
56 Correspondence, Anderson to Barry Spikings, EMI, 9 November 1981 (LA 1/9/3/6/2).
57 Ibid.
58 Correspondence, Anderson to Michael Buist, EMI, 9 December 1981 (LA 1/9/3/6/3).
59 Correspondence, Anderson to Barry Spikings, EMI, 4 January 1982 (LA 1/9/3/6/4).
60 Diary, 8 January 1982 (LA 6/1/82).
61 Correspondence, Anderson to Spikings, 5 April 1982.
62 Correspondence, Anderson to Spikings, 3 March 1982.
63 Correspondence, Anderson to Clive Parsons, 19 April 1982 (LA 1/9/3/11/8).
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66 Ibid.
67 Correspondence, Anderson to Spikings, 5 April 1982.
68 Correspondence, Anderson to Nat Cohen, film producer, 18 May 1982 (LA 1/9/3/6/8).
69 Correspondence, Anderson to Tom Nicholas, EMI, 23 April 1982 (LA 1/9/3/15/17).
70 Ibid.
71 Correspondence, Anderson to Cohen, 18 May 1982.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 See, for example, diary, 2 May 1982 (LA 6/1/82/10).
75 Correspondence, Anderson to Nichols, 23 April 1982.
76 Memorandum, Anderson to Clive Parsons, 5 April 1982 (LA 1/9/3/11/6).
77 Correspondence, Dani Ticktin, UA Classics to Anderson, 12 January 1983 (LA 1/9/3/17/2).
78 Correspondence, Anderson to Dani Ticktin, UA Classics, 31 January 1983 (LA 1/9/3/17/4).
79 Correspondence, Davina Belling (Film & General Productions Inc.) to Anderson, 17 February 1983 (LA 1/9/3/11/14). Anderson agreed he could not count on his ‘current fans’, noting that he was conscious ‘of being unfashionable, and not much of a draw with the current art film crowd’, correspondence, Anderson to Davina Belling, 23 February 1983 (LA 1/9/3/11/15).
80 Diary, 2 May 1982 (LA 6/1/82/9).
87 Correspondence, Clive Parsons to Barry Spikings, EMI, 18 November 1981 (LA 1/9/3/11/1); Parsons to Anderson, 13 August 1982 (LA 1/9/3/11/1).
89 Harley W. Lond, ‘Britannia Hospital’, Box Office (June 1983) 50 (LA 1/9/6/8/16).
91 Weintraub Entertainment Quarterly Statement, 30 September 1987 (LA 1/9/3/14/37).
93 Correspondence, David Storey to Anderson, 28 January 1982 (LA 1/9/3/16/11).
94 Britannia Hospital correspondence file (LA 1/9/3/16/1–62 passim).
95 See for example, correspondence, Anderson to Lawrence Draper, Michael Murphy and Jon Hawkes, 13 August 1982 (LA 1/9/3/16/39).
96 Correspondence, Andrzej Wajda to Anderson, 4 December 1983 (LA 1/9/3/16/62).
Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 178, citing EMI News, 10 March 1981.


‘Common Anguish’, no details (LA 1/9/6/9/19).


Guy Lagorce, ‘La Reine est nue ... mais elle n’est pas seule!’, Le Figaro (10 November 1982) n.p. (LA 1/9/6/7/11).

M. N. Tranchant, ‘Lindsay Anderson: que salubre est le rire’, Le Figaro (22 May 1982) 26 (LA 1/9/6/6/11), our translation.

Ibid.


Review Digest (June 1983) no details (LA 1/9/6/8/15).

Rex Reed, ‘Britannia Rules the Raves at Cannes’ (May 1982) no further details (LA 1/9/6/1/27).


Anderson interviewed by Chris Peachment, ‘Oh Britain!’ Event (27 May–2 June 1982) 9 (LA 1/9/6/1/7).


Sarris, ‘The Gleeful Celebration of Chaos’.
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133 See, for example, Michel Pérez, ‘Britannia Hospital’ de Lindsay Anderson: de la contestation au canular’ Le Matin (24 May 1982) 26 (LA 1/9/6/6/33).
134 Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’ 19.
135 Christie, ‘Suitable Case for Severe Treatment’.
136 Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’, 19.
137 Peachment, ‘Oh Britain!’, 9.
138 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 185–6.
139 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 186.
141 Auty, ‘England’s Fault or Anderson’s?’, 205.
143 Hedling, Lindsay Anderson, 189–92.
146 Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’, 19; Walker, National Heroes, 245.
147 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Fash, 7 March 1983 (LA 1/9/3/5/29).
149 Anderson cited by Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’, 19.
150 Anderson, Never Apologise, 150.
152 Correspondence, Anderson to Belling, 23 February 1983.
153 Diary, 1 January 1985 (LA 6/1/77/23).
154 Diary, 1 January 1985 (LA 6/1/77/23–4).
156 Diary, 13 January 1985 (LA 6/1/77/36).
157 Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’, 19.
158 Robinson, ‘Britannia Hospital a Hit at Cannes’.
159 Rob White, ‘Shock Treatment from “Hospital”’ (no details: New Zealand newspaper) [July 1982] (LA 1/9/6/12/9).
**The Whales of August** (*1987*)

I shall never forget your thoughtful use and faith in a guy who spent most of his career looking at the rear end of Duke Wayne’s horse. (Harry Carey, Jr)

Perhaps you cannot see this yet ... that out of all the agony and exhaustion and patience you had to go through, something really good and quite unique has emerged. (Jocelyn Herbert)

**Introduction**

Two elderly widowed sisters, Libby (Bette Davis) and Sarah (Lillian Gish) have returned to Maine and the cliff-top house where they have taken summer holidays every year since childhood. Libby is crotchety, blind and almost totally dependent upon Sarah. The latter, partly out of gratitude for her elder sister’s care when her soldier husband was killed in the Second World War, looks after Libby with devoted patience. The film focuses on the relationship between these two characters.

Reviewers who said nothing happens in the film missed five crises, all but one registered in speech and the actors’ body language. These crises do not feature the explosive confrontations of action films, yet they threaten deep and painful changes to the characters’ lives.

A decayed member of the former Russian aristocracy Mr Maranov (Vincent Price) has spent his life surviving on the jewellery his mother gave him when the Revolution swept his class away. He has made a career of living on friends. The woman in whose house he has a room has just died leaving him in need of a new place to live. Sarah is sympathetic towards the elderly émigré and entertains him to dinner; but Libby, already irritable because blindness has made her dependent, senses a potential rival for her sister’s attentions. Although the house is Sarah’s, Libby refuses to contemplate Mr Maranov moving in and tells him so sharply.
The night after this crisis, the terrified Libby sees Death in a nightmare. She rushes out of her room and cries out to Sarah that he has come for them both. Sarah refutes this: Libby may choose death if she wishes, but her own life is not yet over. Next morning, worn out by Libby’s goading, and fearing her older sister shows signs of dementia onset, Sarah reaches the painful decision that she can no longer cope and they must live separately.

Tisha (Ann Sothern), a childhood friend who lives locally, has previously asked Sarah (but not Libby) to move in with her. To force the issue, this woman arrives unexpectedly with an estate agent (Frank Grimes) who starts valuing Sarah’s home without so much as asking her permission. Sarah has no thoughts of moving or selling. Indignantly she sends him packing and lets Tisha see that she has severely strained the friendship.

Although Libby would never change her mind about Mr Maranov, she does realise she has been harsh with her sister. She accedes at last to Sarah’s wish to install a picture-frame window so they can see the ocean from the house. They are reconciled and walk down to the point to look for whales, knowing the creatures have long since ceased swimming by the island. The sisters have survived the immediate crises, but have lost one or both local friends and the horizons are closing in as yet another season draws to an end.

The producer’s initiative

Anderson had planned to disentangle himself from several uncertain commitments after the failure of Britannia Hospital, intending as we saw to have no further truck with ‘poor Mike Kaplan’s Whales of August’. But in August 1985 he was still trying to persuade his friend – who had already bought the rights to David Berry’s off-Broadway play – that the project was commercially a non-starter. He added (not without affection), ‘you are a very difficult person to give a definite “no” to’.

Notwithstanding Anderson’s advice, Kaplan persisted in pitching his project to studios. Although his prior experience had been exclusively in public relations and publicity, Anderson noted it was Kaplan’s ‘faith and devotion to [Lillian Gish] which power this entire enterprise’. Her early commitment to the project helped Kaplan secure backing from Embassy Home Entertainment in spring 1986. The distributor agreed to finance the project via Alive Films (a production company in which Kaplan had a minority interest) with the added attraction that Embassy, as distributor, did not acquire rights to interfere in the creative process.
Pre-production

In June 1986, Anderson flew to New York to commence pre-production. Before leaving he sought David Storey’s advice on tightening up Berry’s original script. Marc Sigsworth, Anderson’s amanuensis for pre-production, recorded the discussion. Storey and Anderson decided it was essential to reduce what they saw as the play’s populist generalisations. They wanted characters partially rewritten (particularly Mr Maranov, whom they found unconvincing) and agreed there were too many flashbacks, while dialogue and imagery should be less heavily symbolic.

This discussion provided the bedrock for Anderson’s arguments when he met Berry and Kaplan, the latter having engaged the playwright to redraft his stage play. Anderson noted the chief points he made:

- eliminate flashbacks, confirm Libby’s change of heart over the window and Sarah’s resolve to stay together... use the material [formerly in] the flashbacks to fuel the mood & recollection of the present... take the action out of the house... sharpen Tisha’s attempt to break up Sarah’s ‘dependence’ on Libby...9

Sigsworth’s transcript of this meeting shows Anderson sticking to his agenda and firmly guiding Berry, whose first movie this was. Anderson delivered a master class on scriptwriting for the screen, focusing on the differences that Berry needed to grasp between theatre and cinema. He started with the commonplace idea, which Berry readily accepted, that ‘it’s beneficial to use the cinema for greater concentration; a face; a hand; a gesture for example’. The director paid close attention to the dramatic logic of character interaction and the necessity of anchoring character and action in concrete details. So, for example, he introduced the idea that Tisha should without warning come with the estate agent to put Sarah’s house on the market. This would provide a shock and change the sisters’ relationship: ‘If one can give a recognisable dramatic impulse to a film ... it helps the audience to go with it’. The finished film bears him out. On dialogue, Anderson noted, ‘The idea of film doesn’t actually require more accuracy, but you can get away with more in the theatre. Film sharpens the focus on every line...’. Developing this, he argued that writers often want to emphasise the subtext but Berry should actually reduce the verbal allusions and let more be communicated by the acting.

Since Berry’s play had an autobiographical basis in tender observation of his family, Anderson’s methodical tugging the drama away from his memories and reflections was a jolt to the writer. Nevertheless Berry appeared mostly to have understood what his director wanted and expressed willingness to rise to the challenge.
In the second week of August, Anderson returned to New York accompanied by Jocelyn Herbert who had agreed to design the production. Reading the script again, he began to panic, feeling he had let himself drift towards disaster:

The dialogue is weak, weak, weak – and I have that unquestionable sense that the author cannot do better [...] David is, more and more clearly, a poor, poor writer, and the most amazing – inexplicable – thing is that no one seems to notice: people don’t just find it feasible, they find it ‘charming’ etc…

However, the next day’s entry reveals an uncomfortable Freudian truth: ‘Put it frankly. The rewrite has been completed – how long? I did not read it’. With panic rising again, he turns once more to Herbert. She tells him that she could not understand why he wanted to make a film with such awful dialogue. He replies that the premise, the characters and the phenomenal cast attracted him; but he is not now sure the dialogue can be got right. And he reflects on the many films where all the energy has gone into organisation, financing and deals, while the script is left imperfect: ‘Hence disaster. Are we one of these?’

During this visit to New York, Anderson and Kaplan held further discussions with Berry. Then the director visited the two lead players with Herbert to discuss costume design, hair and make-up. In June, Anderson had doubted whether Gish would have the energy to cope with eight weeks on location.

Then again: does reason enter into it? Is the whole justification of The Whales of August not that it gives an opportunity once again to these mythic creatures...? Suppose Lillian Gish is not ‘up to it’? Would that matter?... These are the questions that arise when one is doing something one doesn’t really believe in.

Anderson also observed that the concern to treat her like a delicate china object meant that people did not look at her impartially. They tended to overlook her unsteadiness in moving and lack of clarity in diction. She covered deafness by anticipating that conversation would pursue a certain line, but when it did not she failed to pick that up. ‘And yet Lillian’s strength, her fibre, her honesty and the firmness with which her opinions are held, all make themselves felt’. He also noticed – as might be expected of an experienced director – how she co-operated completely, deploying the discipline maintained life-long that she had learnt from her work in silent movies with D. W. Griffith. During the weeks of shooting, notwithstanding her difficulty in memorising lines, Anderson’s respect for the old woman, her dignity, loyalty and love for simplicity, was to grow.
Anderson and Herbert visited Bette Davis a few days later, expecting a difficult occasion. He had met the actress in August 1965 to discuss staging Athol Fugard’s *People Are Living There* and found her demands for numerous changes unpredictable and intransigent (see Chapter 5).\(^{20}\) Despite his experience twenty years earlier,

none of us anticipated a meeting of such abrupt discourtesy, such absolute refusal even to listen to ideas, opinions, suggestions [...] I could feel the implacable, fiercely defensive, aggressive vibrations emanating from the tense – desperate? – little black figure in the armchair.\(^{21}\)

Davis was so egregiously rude to Herbert that the latter made an excuse to leave early, afterwards expressing herself ‘both sorry for her as a suffering, self-plagued creature, and disgusted by her offensive, disrespectful behaviour …’.\(^{22}\) Anderson’s fascination with her shows through the hours he devoted to facing her fraught challenges and in his journal, correspondence and (heavily self-censored) interview accounts of working in an atmosphere which she was capable of souring with a few words of bitter savagery. Despite the exhaustion brought on by these recurrent bouts, he drew, all said and done, a balanced psychological portrait of the implacable star.

In June, Kaplan and Anderson had conducted a location search. They were accompanied by Berry (whose childhood home Maine was) and Mike Fash (whom Anderson had again chosen as cinematographer). The Berry family home proved impracticable for filming; but they found the perfect location on Cliff Island in the timber built Pitkin House whose cliff-side position opened views to and from the sea.\(^{23}\) Kaplan said that despite all the difficulties, they never considered doing the interiors elsewhere. ‘We needed the flexibility of being able to move in or out of doors as circumstances required, especially in Maine, where the operating standard is “If you don’t like the weather, wait a minute”’.\(^{24}\) During their August trip, Herbert and Anderson travelled there together and she was delighted with the prospect of turning the house into the elderly sisters’ summer home.\(^{25}\) By taking a side out of the wooden house the crew built a simple downstairs bedroom necessary for the blind Libby. And they rebuilt the front porch which was torn off every winter by storms.\(^{26}\)

Anderson next flew to Los Angeles to cast the other main roles. Danny Kaye and Paul Henreid had been in the running for Maranov, but Anderson ruled both out when they escalated their demands for money and billing. He admired David Opatashu but found he projected the wrong personality for the part.\(^{27}\) In the end, he settled on Vincent Price, not for his fame in the horror genre but for something in his personality
that seemed right. Like all the interviewees, Price was delighted to have the chance of playing the part. Anderson felt that this must be the effect of the rubbish which was all these older actors were ever asked to do. Ann Sothern was cast as the sisters’ friend Tisha while Harry Carey Jr played the island’s handyman Joshua Brackett.

By the end of August, back in New York, Anderson had rewritten the script – Sigsworth assisting with dictation, cutting and pasting sections from older versions, and contributing a few lines. Anderson expressed relief: ‘I guess the whole thing is considerably improved: not just pulled together, but actually dramatised, with points clearly made and dialogue made credible...’. By the end of August, back in New York, Anderson had rewritten the script – Sigsworth assisting with dictation, cutting and pasting sections from older versions, and contributing a few lines. Anderson expressed relief: ‘I guess the whole thing is considerably improved: not just pulled together, but actually dramatised, with points clearly made and dialogue made credible...’.29

Shooting was scheduled for eight weeks from 8 September 1986. On 5 September Bette Davis sailed to Cliff Island from Portland in a cabin cruiser too magnificent for the little jetty. Anderson’s journal contains a brilliant account of the arrival (which he later plundered for an unpublished article).30 It catches the nery mix of universal, absurd deference to the grand dame (who talked inaudibly throughout) while bulky men had to be coerced into lifting the star down to the jetty, ‘spindle legs dangling’ with everyone aware she ‘didn’t like to be touched, steered or helped’.31 A day later Lillian Gish landed from a water taxi without fuss.32

Production

Anderson did not open his journal again until three weeks of shooting had passed. He began:

Bette Davis has been so destructive this week, so fatiguing to everyone, that we desperately need a break, and a recharging of batteries. It all started on Monday, with a clear sunny morning and the ‘Hairbrushing Scene’ on the porch. Bette at her worst. (I suddenly find myself overcome with fatigue and boredom in writing about the wretched, crazy woman: perhaps I’ll take it up tomorrow).33

But he didn’t, not writing his journal again until the end of November, when the film was in post-production in London. He did report in the same unpublished article for the Sunday Times that Gish had been the model of co-operation even though she was not shy of asking for the camera to favour her eyes, or for her dialogue to be altered if she thought takes could be improved. Davis by contrast favoured conflict, rubbing suggestions she did not like and preferring to give directions herself. Anderson’s temperament was not adapted to receiving, even from a national treasure, the kind of treatment he was more used to dishing out. On one occasion he snapped at her and Davis walked off the set.
calling on Kaplan to resolve matters. Looking back, Anderson wrote, ‘It was quite exciting, like old Hollywood’. But Herbert perceived that the constant conflict was emotionally eviscerating for him. It had been so for her too. Davis was not content with constantly trying to rewrite her part to make it more important than Gish’s and destroy the delicate balance between the sisters. The star also tried to turn the set decorator Sosie Hublitz against her, describing Herbert as evil. Although humiliated by Davis’s abusive behaviour, Herbert decided to stay for the duration of the shoot and ensure the Art Department was not subverted.

Fash provided an authoritative account of the location work in American Cinematographer. The cameraman described his director as ‘uncompromising, incisive, provocative and inspirational. No gimmicks – he’s a master craftsman doing exactly the right thing at the right time. His support and encouragement, so important to accomplishing one’s best work, are always unfailing’. Fash’s high regard was reciprocated. Anderson thanked him for his help ‘not only in your own terrific contribution, but for the splendid unit you provided’.

Once on site, Fash had quickly realised that Maine has rapidly changeable weather. The entire crew had to be ready to change plans at a moment’s notice while not neglecting the health and wellbeing of their elderly leading players, some of whose scenes were physically taxing. It was not only weather that impacted on the location: fluxes in temperature, tides and wind did so too. Therefore, in co-ordination with the director and crew, Fash tried to pick weather conditions to suit each scene and then shoot set-ups in sequence to exploit any interesting changes that might occur as a natural progression. This was in keeping with the natural, unromantic look Anderson wanted.

It wasn’t easy. Commenting on Fash’s efficiency in setting up shots, Herbert recorded that as the days advanced into autumn and trees became bare, they had to search out branches with green leaves to shove into the bare bushes and trees. When Trisha gathered blueberries to present to Sarah, the Art Department had to resort to painting rose hips blue. Rather than go for flashy sunsets like On Golden Pond (1981) (which Fash dismissed as easily filmed all in one night), the crew absorbed the surroundings carefully and looked for less obvious subjects to give a feeling harder to capture. To help in this Fash had a lightweight Arriflex set up beside the main camera so he could grab a shot if something suddenly caught his attention. He used silks, filters, reflectors, wind machines and minimal makeup as well as other effects to achieve exactly what he wanted. Although space within Pitkin House was very tight, he resisted an offer to enlarge some of the rooms and make working conditions easier. Instead, whenever possible he lit from outside through the
windowpanes to make for a natural look. As Ron Magid summarised it, the camerawork is so subtle as to be invisible. It creates the mood but never intrudes.

Post-production

Anderson seldom escaped for long the pressures of others’ claims on his support. It is no surprise (remembering David Storey’s encomium that ‘he loved whom he hated and hated those he loved in an endless cycle of retributory affection’) to find he continued simultaneously to support friends and family both willingly and with reluctance. He returned to London where his nephew (still living with him) still needed his support. Meanwhile Frank and Ginnette Grimes and their child also continued to share the flat.

Although domestic life remained fraught, work with editor Nicolas Gaster seems to have run smoothly thanks to ‘his neatness, willingness and adeptness’ and because he was ‘quite quick, craftsmanlike and doesn’t argue…’. Of course, Anderson also thought the opposite, protesting that his associate was not tremendously intuitive or imaginative. Nor did he omit ‘groaning at my fate never (well hardly ever) to strike lucky in this matter of collaborators’.

He kept in touch with Fash while editing and printing proceeded, seeking advice about the opening sequences where a discrepancy existed between the first and second day’s shooting caused by heavy filtering. He contemplated ‘printing the whole of the “Prologue” in, say, sepia – then using a close shot of the Buoy, with the camera creeping round, to mix from sepia into colour and bring us into the Present Day’. Fash evidently thought this idea good; but by the end of January 1987 Anderson was asking for guidance on printing methods. Attempts at printing the sepia sequences had proven unsatisfactory, making the Prologue’s images seem smeared in varnish.

Despite the personal warmth between producer and director, Kaplan often exasperated Anderson at this period through his wish to be involved in every aspect of the work when those charged with particular tasks had professional experience that he lacked. At the turn of 1986–87, with editing almost finished, Kaplan sent seventeen pages of notes to Gaster. The latter forwarded them to Anderson commenting wryly, ‘I didn’t see any point in telling him how fatuous the whole exercise was at this stage’. The editor had annotated two pages to show that some of Kaplan’s proposals were impossible and others revealed a dubious grasp of the scene.
In February and early March 1987 dialogue and sound effects recording was scheduled. Alan Price’s music was also recorded and mixed into the track. By early March Anderson expressed himself pleased with the film. To the owners of Pitkin House, he wrote:

Bette comes out remarkably well, and her extravagance of manner, which I feared might be too much for the frail vehicle, somehow works for the character. And works in juxtaposition with the sublime and altogether captivating truthfulness of Lillian Gish. All the other performances, too, absolutely successful as far as I’m concerned.

Anderson described early audience responses to Vera Dragicevich (who had been a runner on location).

The film itself has come out very satisfactorily. It has had a number of previews and it has always gone extremely well. The performances and look and shape of the whole thing are really exceptional.

In May 1987 The Whales of August was screened out of competition at Cannes and the following months were mainly occupied with preparations for its release. However, the New York Film Festival declined to show it. Anderson had angered its director Richard Roud by reviewing scathingly his Cinema: A Critical Dictionary in 1981. Roud’s fury appears not to have abated by 1987 when, allegedly motivated by personal enmity, he barred The Whales of August from the festival.

Six weeks before the film opened in the USA, Anderson casually dropped into a letter to Kaplan the information that ‘I am going to meet Alan next Monday and spend the day concocting an album’. At the end of October Anderson asked Kaplan to pass the music manuscript to Price and added that the record should have a sleeve note. That might have been the end of the matter (no album was produced) had Kaplan not in April 1988 sent Anderson the lyrics for a single, ‘Down to the point/ Down to the sea/ Waiting for Whales/ Hopefully...’ in the hope that Price would record the tracks.

Anderson was by this time fully extended in pre-production for the television drama Glory! Glory!. Although appreciative of Kaplan’s efforts and realising that his friend, grieving over the box-office fate of The Whales of August, was still thinking up campaigns, he did criticise the lyrics. He wrote sympathetically but firmly to remind Kaplan that it was six months too late to produce music for the marketing campaign and time to give up his obsession. He did not mention that his own attempt to generate an album had also been singularly mistimed.
Publicity and distribution

Anderson’s files leave no doubt that the minor debacles over music publishing followed a publicity campaign that he found distinctive only for its ineptness. He had spotted early signs at Cannes where, despite the success of the press show, the film had not been well presented. He told the producers at Alive Films that the artwork was poor, ‘very bitter, rather weak, and just lacking in the overall design and impact which might make it work’.64 ‘The four [stars’] heads, executed without much dynamic, [had] the disadvantage of not being immediately recognisable’ because people had forgotten Gish, and did not recognise Davis as depicted.65 It was painful for Anderson to admit that very few critics were excited by Gish’s return to the screen. Nor did the Cannes Festival celebrate her presence with due respect until he went into his ‘famous shouting act to ensure that Lillian appeared on the stage after the screening’66.

Once again Anderson found confusion among those responsible for publicity. Alive Films had no one with experience of post-production:67 but although Anderson was plainly right in his objection to the ill-focused art work, the company resolved not to change it.68 In addition, DDA (the group Anderson had fallen out with over Britannia Hospital) had been hired as publicists for the UK release. Anderson was no better impressed with them now than before.69 Meanwhile Embassy, the distributor, was undergoing one of its several corporate reconstructions of the 1980s, emerging from the Hollywood merry-go-round as Nelson Entertainment under Barry Spikings’s leadership. Anderson found, no matter what their banner, they had very little understanding of the problems involved in handling films.70 He consulted Fash again, this time over problems in getting a satisfactory final print: Kaplan had chosen a laboratory that was producing inferior work.71

Similar problems continued during preparation for European release dates. Anderson felt the need to instruct his producers in the processes a film went through before release prints were agreed, itemising the mistakes made on both sides of the Atlantic which had required a great deal of his time to rectify.72 He was not alone in raising such issues. Kaplan drew Embassy’s attention to its want of preparation for the French release.73 Matters got no easier when (not for the first time in his career) Anderson wrote a detailed, hostile critique of the trailer, which the producers had made without consulting him.74 Kaplan then wrote a ten-page letter responding to these and other differences between them.75 It resolved little.

Anderson’s thoughts returned to Bette Davis in summer 1987 because she had made plain her anger over the film. In July he discussed the
star’s billing with Kaplan, believing she was annoyed that Gish’s name was elevated slightly above hers.\textsuperscript{76} Kaplan replied that Alive had settled the matter to Davis’s satisfaction.\textsuperscript{77} Early in September, Anderson read My Mother’s Keeper, the attack on Davis by her daughter B. D. Hyman. Had he read it before shooting, he noted, he would have been better prepared for her compulsive hostility and destructiveness.\textsuperscript{78} Whether billing or some other irritant caused it, Davis’s resentment did not abate. When she appeared on the BBC’s popular Wogan Show, she left Anderson ‘staggered’ to hear not a single reference to his film.\textsuperscript{79} His belief that she was prejudiced against the film (probably through jealousy of Gish) was confirmed by a piece in the Daily Telegraph in which she restricted herself ‘to her same old stale self-publicity’.\textsuperscript{80} Furious, he advised Alive Films not to subsidise her stay in New York for the film’s opening.\textsuperscript{81}

Anderson’s intensifying emotions found outlet in a fascinating letter written to Davis in October 1987 after the New York opening (which she did not attend, just as she had missed Cannes the previous spring). In equal measure frank and courteous, severe and generous, he began with his regret at not seeing her at the opening.

I have often wanted to talk with you – having often enjoyed our chats on Cliff Island, on and off the set. I realise probably we won’t talk together again, and I’m sorry. I have often thought I should say – and I would like to know what your answer would be, your considered answer I mean, not your immediate angry one – ‘Stop fighting unnecessary battles: reserve your energy for the real ones’ (of which God knows there are plenty…)

[…] I’ve no idea why you evidently feel such resentment at the very idea of The Whales of August – and I think it is especially regrettable since you give such a magnificent performance in it, one which shows that your talent has in no way diminished, and if anything has deepened. If I were to give you any advice it would be to use this work – the film I mean, of which we all can and should be proud.

[…] Generosity, you know, is a very attractive characteristic. Also, it’s good to surprise your audience – not always to give them what they expect, and what they’ve seen before.

Well, Bette – Hail and Farewell! I shall always think of you with affection as well as respect. And I’m truly sorry our friendly relationship did not flourish. We did well up there on Cliff Island, you know: and I suppose that’s the most important thing.\textsuperscript{82}

Anderson’s files include an undated note written in scarlet beneath a printed drawing of a Cliff Island house. The touching, barely legible scrawl of a woman coping with the after effects of a stroke seems likely to be Davis’s response to his farewell.
Dear Lindsay, [sic]
I love my lady bug bank. Plus will always treasure your letter.
Thank you for both –
à bien tot.
Bette

The ladybird bank can be reckoned with the small presents Anderson had given Gish and Sothern. The former received a ‘birthday plate’, which amused her greatly. Like Davis, both these actors thanked him, but the others wrote affectionately on a number of occasions.

To read further correspondence on the North American and UK releases is in large part to experience a continuing replay of issues already described. Much is summarised in Kaplan’s eight-page letter to his co-producer Carolyn Pfeiffer after the American release. It starts with a distressed overview of the failings of Alive Films both at home and abroad. Kaplan dwells on the failure to get the older audience out using ammunition provided by mail from a New York exhibitor: Donna Lerner had initiated a popular programme by contacting senior citizens’ organisations and soliciting block bookings for group outings at a discounted rate. She wrote:

> The most significant information that has emerged, however, is the amazing lack of awareness of Whales of August among this audience ... they simply are not reached by traditional marketing strategies.

Kaplan criticised the timidity of the advertising programme and its reduction at the very point when keeping it going would have been productive. He attacked the work of certain in-house colleagues who, with no experience of advertising content, discarded what he regarded as a carefully thought out artistic layout in favour of a campaign with no recognisable visual concept. And he was scathing about the failure emphatically to deploy rave reviews in publicity.

Experienced in publicity, Kaplan sought approval and financial backing to test his own campaign in three or four cities – and the letter gives an account of his proposed methods. Not for the only time, however, he was too late to mount a rearguard action to promote the film. Pfeiffer soothingly reported an increase in business over the New Year in Santa Monica and other cities; and Alive did not run with Kaplan’s proposal.

Pfeiffer was by this time preoccupied with the Oscars, hoping to build on Gish’s success at the National Film Board of Review of Motion Pictures: she had shared best actress award with Holly Hunter. But when early in 1988 Anderson saw the Oscar campaign ads in Hollywood trade papers and compared them with other contenders, he pronounced them unimpressive. To him, however, the more astonishing failure
was not the mediocre campaign but Nelson Entertainment’s refusal as distributor to send the picture to festivals that had asked for it in India and Yugoslavia. To add insult to injury, film bookers in Poland and Scandinavia had informed him that Nelson was making it difficult for them to buy the film.\(^9\) Indeed, it did not open in Helsinki until August 1989.\(^2\)

Well before that, *The Whales of August* found its most faithful audience in Japan. Anderson received the first word from Kawakita Kashiko, a Tokyo distributor and theatre operator who specialised in importing films whose quality she admired.\(^9\)

> Your *Whales of August* was released at our specialized cinema ‘Iwanami Hall’ on 26 Nov [1988]. It has the capacity of about 250. Since the first day it has full house at 3 performances. The audiences are mainly housewives in the daytime and evening office girls. They resemble somewhat those at the *Autumn Sonata* release. There are many women who are fans of Lillian Gish. The faces of the audiences after the show are thoughtful and impressed.

> The reviews of the daily papers and magazines are splendid. I am so happy to see the Japanese film critics having still deep understanding and appreciation for good films ...\(^9\)

In March 1989 Anderson heard from Barry Spikings, Nelson’s CEO, that *The Whales* ranked among the year’s four biggest grossers in Japan.\(^5\) Come September Kaplan was singing the praises of Kawakita and Iwanami Hall as the film began an unprecedented third first-run engagement. This success was not accidental, but typified the meticulous way that Iwanami Hall researched and marketed the product they handled. A clever innovation was to develop the film’s New York marketing model by publicising a phone number for the most senior citizens to call for transport to get them to the cinema at moderate cost.\(^6\) When they reached the theatre they found it decked with an exquisite poster featuring a shot of the sisters’ house and another of the four principals in character. In addition, patrons were offered an elegant thirty-two-page programme including biographies of the lead players, an essay on Anderson’s filmography and credits for principal cast and crew.\(^7\)

**Box office**

In June 1987 Alive Films sent Anderson a breakdown of payments of his director’s fees amounting to a total of $100,000.\(^8\) Cumulative financial statements submitted to Anderson and his agent Maggie Parker
concerning the film’s cost and takings to June 1989 (the latest held on Anderson’s files) show total sales of just under $3.8 million. These comprised North American theatrical rentals just over half a million dollars; foreign rentals of just under half a million and video sales of $2.74 million.\footnote{99}

Among the outgoings, distribution fees amounted to almost $1 million; advertising and marketing film and video releases came in at nearly $1.5 million; prints and tapes made up the balance of the distributors’ expenditure that totalled just short of $3 million. The net income of $0.86 million went almost nowhere towards paying off the $3 million cost of financing the production once interest on the debt of approximately $0.75 million was taken into account.\footnote{100} These papers give the impression of a film heavily in debt.

However, in summer 1989 (that is, at roughly the same period referred to by the paper trail above) Kaplan was given a verbal ‘account’ of how things were turning out by ‘the finance man from Nelson’.\footnote{101} The latter had said that,

\begin{quote}
Whales was the only film of Alive’s that would come out alright for the company, meaning they – Nelson – will not lose anything. Because of the industry creative accounting and the way distribution profits are figured, the statements will continue to show a loss, but instinctively, once the US video figures were in, I knew Nelson was going to be in good shape.\footnote{102}
\end{quote}

**Reviewers’ reactions**

Press coverage for the lead players was intense, the focus always on Davis and Gish, and often including Price, Sothern and Carey. The stars’ individual and combined ages, along with their impeccable Hollywood heritage were recounted in virtually every location story, interview and review. Moved by the film, several journalists expressed the wish that Gish or Davis should be awarded an Oscar.\footnote{103}

In accordance with industry practice, basic information on the film and its principal talent had been put together in a press pack. Countless reports echoed, and some augmented Anderson’s quotable lines that ‘Bette Davis is a phenomenally skilful actress of power and temperament. She is a consummate technician. Whereas Lillian is an actress of intuition rather than intellect. Her technique comes entirely out of her feeling for the moment, her wonderful sensitivity. Both have a kind of genius’.\footnote{104}

Journalists wanting to get more information from the location had to rely heavily on Anderson and Kaplan. Given that the elderly stars lived
in rented houses on Cliff Island (to save them having to commute by boat across cold seas), a light security presence was able to discourage intrusions from across the water by the public and press alike.\textsuperscript{105} Since Anderson gave more interviews than Kaplan, his public accounts of working with the stars tended to shape press reports further. He spoke with judicious restraint about Davis, muffling the expostulations in his correspondence and private journals. Indeed, when late in 1989 Vincent Canby broke ranks and described Davis’s behaviour on set in terms the director had not sanctioned, Anderson challenged him with writing tittle-tattle rather than facts.\textsuperscript{106} Canby accepted the rebuke, but refuted the charge that he had changed his high opinion of the film voiced at Cannes.\textsuperscript{107}

In interviews Anderson stuck to and developed his press pack themes. He said, for instance, that the different approaches to their roles of Gish and Davis suited the two sisters perfectly, while the alchemy of the actors’ contrasting personalities served the film well.\textsuperscript{108} He was often cited as saying, ‘One cannot exercise this profession without dreaming of directing individuals like Bette and Lillian, who carry with them – beyond talent – almost the entire memory of cinema’.\textsuperscript{109}

Anderson rightly claimed that critical reception for \textit{The Whales of August} was overwhelmingly positive. The omens had been good from the moment when, saluted by a prolonged ovation, the closing images played on screen at Cannes.\textsuperscript{110} Such negative reviews as there were shared, broadly speaking, an insistence on action, as in Jean Roy’s opinion in \textit{L’Humanité}:

\begin{quote}
If one did not know who the actors are, the film would appear to be sluggish, where every scene lasts too long, where the shots are as inventive as those of television news and the action is as foreseeable as a police report after a road accident ...
\end{quote}

At its most boorish, the aggrieved observation that experiencing \textit{Whales} was ‘like watching paint dry’\textsuperscript{112} revealed reviewers (and by extension their readers) loath to open themselves to a film that did not conform to Hollywood’s norms for narrative propulsion.

Some reviewers who otherwise admired the production found Berry’s adaptation of his own screenplay not strong enough.\textsuperscript{113} The symbols were too obvious, the dialogue too manufactured.\textsuperscript{114} For Michel Pérez it was the most insipid of infusions from American psychological theatre.\textsuperscript{115} But most reviewers understood why the pace was slow, the more insightful recognising it as a vital element in a film that exhibited the mastery of each of its principal talents. Virginia Campbell (in the Los Angeles magazine \textit{Movieline}) read the link between aesthetics and theme astutely.
So little conventional drama unfolds in *Whales* that the film pulls you up short after the first twenty minutes, when you realize things aren’t going to speed up. The director refuses to indulge the programmed moviegoing addiction to speed and excitement. Instead, he artfully slows you down to put you in visceral sync with his protagonists’ sensations. Anderson works directly on the viewer’s nervous system by cutting away from the ‘action’ with rhythmic regularity to shots of the ocean, each time catching a different reflected pattern of light until the cutaways themselves take on a unity, becoming a series of visual waves that are, for the viewer, a sensual equivalent to the movement of the ocean. In this he is aided by Mike Fash’s cinematography, which seems to capture light—sunlight, moonlight, and candlelight—just at the instant it falls. The beauty of ongoing, cyclical events is the perfect backdrop to the subdued ebb and flow of human events consisting of observation, politeness, complaint and reverie.

John Russell Taylor wrote with equal sensitivity, in *Film and Filming*.

With perhaps the slightest material he has ever had to work on, Lindsay Anderson has never looked more like a consummate master. Everything depends on tiny nuances, subtleties of pacing, the insertion of sea or sky at precisely the right moment, for precisely the right length of time, so that nature can make its unspoken comment without ever looking like a commercial for wholemeal bread.

In the *Los Angeles Times* Kevin Thomas paid tribute to a ‘transcendent and profoundly moving film’, noting the work of cinematographer Mike Fash, ‘whose interior shots catch the burnished glow of the patina of solid, well-cared-for antiques’; and praising the ‘appropriately brave, elegiac mood to Alan Price’s spare score’.

These three reviewers rely implicitly on a thought that Pierre Fornerod rendered explicitly, namely that Anderson had made the film with tenderness but without nostalgia, speaking of sentiments without sentimentality. This must have pleased the director who had more than once spoken of it as his goal. In an interview with Louis Marcorelles (who had written the French subtitles), Anderson remarked, ‘Some people are surprised that I should suddenly renounce the taste for polemic that marked several of my films. They forget *Every Day Except Christmas* and my productions of Chekhov’. While the claim that *all* his work shared an underlying humanism did not attract many writers, David Robinson had a few months earlier observed that *The Whales* ‘creates a small world as complete and contained as a Chekhov play...’. Others agreed. The Danish reviewer for *Berlingske* wrote that ‘it is on a level where truth and poetry melt together [...] a very great film’. Sauro Borelli likewise saw that Anderson’s ‘magisterial finesse’ vindicated
Sarah’s line, ‘Passion and truth are all that we need’. The reviewer in another Danish paper *Politiken* developed the sense of *The Whales of August* being an exquisitely wrought production.

This film is quite a sensation. A moving film with old stars … There is no action, but it is filled with human beings, with humor and tenderness, pain and insight. Sitting in the cinema one feels one knows a little more of life. This is very rare … The two sisters are sublime … they are like Beethoven’s last quartets.126

While Pérez had objected that what was needed to grandstand the appearance of Gish and Davis was not this insipid screenplay but a subject to fit legends,127 and Roy (astonishingly) wished that Bunuel had directed, Canby and Campbell recognised something subtle and fine that the grandiose suppositions of the other two missed entirely.128 Canby wrote:

When Miss Gish sits in front of a mirror, doing up her hair, we’re seeing a character named Sarah girding herself for further battle with an impossibly demanding sister, as well as a demonstration of how a movie works on all the memories we bring to it.129

Contemplating the overlap between the characters and our knowledge of who the actors are, Campbell perceived that the spectator watching Gish and Davis in *The Whales of August* has the opportunity to look beyond the youthful beauty that we remember they once had to see in them ‘the beauty and expressiveness of old age’.

Their faces fascinate doubly for this extra knowledge and force us to observe the surface of old age on its own terms. We look beyond the point where age is the deterioration of beauty, to the point where it is the expression of spirituality born of long experience.130

To the recognition that Anderson had made the film with tenderness but not nostalgia, sentiment without sentimentality, Thomas added Anderson’s acknowledgement of John Ford. Thomas discerned the influence of Ford (a native of Maine) in the film’s feeling for the island’s rugged landscape, as enduring as its people. This influence enhances the poignant farewells and the valedictory presence of great actors.131 It partakes of cinematic legend not just in the stars’ own right, but deepens where Anderson, in the last sequence of what turned out to be his final feature film, paid tribute to his hero. The sequence starts with a shot that echoes the walk to the poorhouse in *Tobacco Road* (1941) at the end of which a rocking chair on an empty porch tips back and forth in the wind.132 In Ford’s film the principal characters walk to the poorhouse, their lives destroyed by poverty. In *The Whales* the two sisters
walk slowly down to the cliff to seek the leviathans, knowing they have long gone. The scene implies the end of their lives yet the continuity of life itself, as the breeze blows off the ocean across the whispering shrubbery that lines their path.

Anderson’s reactions

Not surprisingly Anderson felt more warmly towards the press than when facing the critical dismissal of previous films – not that he could resist a hit at British reviewers. Having expressed indignation about Cannes’s indifference towards Gish, he told Fash,

The press show went well, though, and many of the hardened critics emerged with tears in their eyes. I think there’ve been some good advance notices in the States, particularly a splendid piece by Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* [...] The British, I’m sorry to say, were more patronising than enthusiastic. One anonymous critic, much quoted in the British provincial press, went on record as saying that watching *Whales* was like ‘watching paint dry’.¹³³

The following winter he reflected to Kaplan on the picture’s failure to get Oscar nominations. He wondered whether it was ‘somehow like snow: beautiful and admired the day after it has fallen, then melted away and simply forgotten…’.¹³⁴ He pondered whether a stronger element of show-biz splash would have given the film more impact.

Perhaps a certain coarseness, a sentimentality or a touch of the meretricious is necessary in this T.V. day and age. Certainly if an August whale had turned up at the end of the picture and gobbled up at least one of the sisters, the picture would have done better at the box-office.¹³⁵

He expressed this more formally to Magid, repeating his analysis of the difference between this and his previous three films and describing the genre of satirical comedy into which his temperament led him as only one aspect of humanism. *The Whales of August* presented another, albeit in a very different key.

I think my film work does vary between the lyric and the satirical, and that’s why I feel it is somewhat unfashionable, because today we are very much stuck with a cinema of effect.¹³⁶
Anderson as author – input

In Magid’s interview, Anderson described filmmaking as an organic growth that required the director to leave space for exploring with the actors ideas that arose as their personalities interacted with those of their characters. *Mutatis mutandis*, similar considerations applied with the cinematographer and editor as the film grew towards maturity. Anderson cited as an instance the first shots of *The Whales* evolving into a monochrome sequence in a way he had not anticipated before viewing the footage in the cutting room. This description reveals Anderson’s authorial practice holding true to what he had written forty years earlier for *Sequence*. Then he had celebrated ‘the living poetry which is the result when even a commonplace story is given shape and meaning by an expressive camera, sympathetic music and design, skilled actors, and above all by creative direction – direction which gathers all these elements together, and gives them unity and life’.

Anderson perceived as the author

As perceived by many in the press, however, ‘Anderson’ the author had, as a consequence of two factors, undergone something of a transformation even though the film’s title sequence, as per contract, described

17 Lindsay Anderson, Lillian Gish and Bette Davis prepare a scene during the making of *The Whales of August* in 1986.
The Whales as ‘A film by Lindsay Anderson’. The first factor (already remarked on) was eloquently expressed in Berlingske. Here, as with coverage by many journalists, the focus on the two lead players was such that they were represented as co-authors alongside Anderson.

Because of the genius of Lindsay Anderson’s direction and the wonderful acting of Lillian Gish and Bette Davis, it is on a level where truth and poetry melt together […] a very great film.

The second factor concerns the general perception that ‘Anderson’ the satirical beast had without warning changed his stripes. He had not this time, as with his previous major releases, made a film in a style calculated to endorse his authorial claim. Not only were few film reviewers familiar with his work in the theatre, most did not know the short films made twenty to thirty-five years earlier: Thursday’s Children (1953), Every Day Except Christmas (1957) and The Singing Lesson (1967). These have, as Anderson claimed, a lyric quality in expressing not only his thoughts but also warmth in tender and affectionate images of their subjects. So the perceptible ‘Anderson’ (the authorial persona or projected image) that emerges through The Whales of August, despite ensuring that his audience experiences the annoyances, fears and vicissitudes of great old age, is neither the angry and restless satirist, nor a newborn creation. Partly of Anderson’s, partly of our invention, ‘he’ is a version of one of the director’s twin masks – this time the mature man who has with the years’ passing learnt acceptance. Which is not to say that the satirical grimace had been cast off forever.
Notes

1 Correspondence, Harry Carey, Jr (actor) to Anderson, 27 October 1986 (LA 1/11/3/4/4).
2 Correspondence, Jocelyn Herbert (production designer) to Anderson, 12 December 1986 (LA 1/11/3/4/5).
3 Diary, 14 January 1985 (LA 6/1/77/36).
4 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 5 August 1985 (LA 1/11/3/1/3).
5 Diary, 11 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/18).
6 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Anderson, 2 May 1986 (LA 1/11/3/1/4).
7 Diary, 27 June 1986 (LA 6/1/88/4).
8 Marc Sigsworth, Verbatim transcript of discussion between Anderson and David Storey on rewriting the original script of The Whales of August for cinema (LA 1/11/3/1).
9 Diary, 27 June 1986 (LA 6/1/88/3).
10 Marc Sigsworth, Verbatim transcript of discussion between Anderson, David Berry, Mike Kaplan on rewriting the original script of The Whales of August for cinema, 12 June 1986 (LA 1/11/1/4).
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Diary, 10 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/13).
15 Diary, 11 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/15).
16 Ibid.
17 Diary, 27 June 1986 (LA 6/1/88/5).
18 Diary, 11 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/16).
19 Ibid.
20 Diary, 3 to 7 August 1986 (LA 6/1/48/197–201).
21 Diary, 14 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/26).
22 Ibid.
24 Mike Kaplan quoted in Press Pack, Production Notes, 13–14 (LA 1/11/5/1).
27 Diary, 16 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/36–8).
28 Diary, 16 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/38).
29 Diary, 25 August 1986 (LA 6/1/88/51).
33 Diary, 26 September 1986 (LA 6/1/88/54).
35 Correspondence, Herbert to Anderson, 12 December 1986.
38 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Fash, 27 November 1986 (LA 1/11/3/6/1).
40 Herbert, Notebook on The Whales of August.
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44 Diary, 30 November 1986 (LA 6/1/89/2–6).
45 Diary, 30 November 1986 (LA 6/1/89/1).
46 Correspondence, Anderson to Fash, 27 November 1986.
47 Ibid.
48 Diary, 30 November 1986 (LA 6/1/89/1).
49 Correspondence, Anderson to Fash, 27 November 1986.
50 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Fash, 29 January 1987 (LA 1/11/3/6/2).
51 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Nicolas Gaster, 29 December 1986 and 7 January 1987 (LA 1/11/3/7/1–3).
52 Correspondence, Nicolas Gaster to Anderson, 16 January 1987 (LA 1/11/3/7/4).
53 Nicolas Gaster, handwritten comments on Mike Kaplan, Editing Notes, 29 December 1986 (LA 1/11/3/7/2).
54 Correspondence, Anderson to Holly Pitkin, 29 January 1987 (LA 1/11/3/4/14).
55 Correspondence, Anderson to Frank Pitkin and Carolyn Longwood, 6 March 1987 (LA 1/11/3/5/4).
56 Correspondence, Anderson to Vera Dragicevich, 6 March 1987 (LA 1/11/3/4/15).
58 Leslie Bennetts, ‘New York Film Festival Head Forced Out’, New York Times (23 October 1987) n.p. (LA 1/11/6/2/20) reported that Roud’s action was one cause of a split among the organisers which culminated in his having to step down as director from the festival he had co-founded almost twenty-five years earlier. On his clipping of this article Anderson exulted, ‘There’s something about this story that gives me that nice, warm (mean) feeling’.
59 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 17 September 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/24).
60 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 29 October 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/26).
61 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Anderson, 8 April 1988 (LA 1/11/3/1/34).
63 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 6 May 1988 (LA 1/11/3/1/35).
64 Correspondence, Anderson to Carolyn Pfeiffer (producer), 28 May 1987 (LA 1/11/3/3/6).
65 Correspondence, Anderson to Shep Gordon (executive producer, Alive Films), 28 May 87 (LA 1/11/3/3/3).
66 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Fash, 18 June 1987 (LA 1/11/3/6/3).
67 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan and Carolyn Pfeiffer, 9 July 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/15).
68 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 4 June 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/12).
69 See correspondence, Anderson to Pfeiffer, 28 May 1987.
70 Correspondence, Anderson to Kaplan and Pfeiffer, 9 July 1987.
71 Correspondence, Anderson to Fash, 18 June 1987.
72 Correspondence, Anderson to Kaplan and Pfeiffer, 9 July 1987.
73 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Ian Jessel (Embassy Home Entertainment), 7 July 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/13); Mike Kaplan to Bruce Polichar (Embassy Home Entertainment), 15 July 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/17).
74 Correspondence, Anderson to Carolyn Pfeiffer and Mike Kaplan, 15 July 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/16).
75 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Anderson, 2 August 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/19).
76 Correspondence, Anderson to Kaplan and Pfeiffer, 9 July 1987.
77 Correspondence, Kaplan to Anderson, 2 August 1987.
78 Diary, 2 September 1987 (LA 6/1/89/12).
79 Correspondence, Anderson to Terry Wogan, 17 September 1987 (LA 1/11/3/15/1).
80 Correspondence, Anderson to Kaplan, 17 September 1987.
83 Correspondence, Bette Davis to Anderson, n.d. (LA 1/11/3/4/35).
84 Correspondence, Lillian Gish to Anderson, 27 October 1987 (LA 1/11/3/4/26).
85 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Carolyn Pfeiffer, 6 December 1987 (LA 1/11/3/14).
86 Correspondence, Donna Lerner to Mike Kaplan, 18 November 1987 (LA 1/11/3/11).
87 Correspondence, Kaplan to Pfeiffer, 6 December 1987.
88 Correspondence, Carolyn Pfeiffer to Anderson, 5 January 1988 (LA 1/11/3/19).
89 Correspondence, Carolyn Pfeiffer to Anderson, 15 December 1987 (LA 1/11/3/16).
90 Correspondence, Anderson to Carolyn Pfeiffer, 6 January 1988 (LA 1/11/3/20).
91 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 4 February 1988 (LA 1/11/3/33).
92 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 16 August 1989 (LA 1/11/3/39).
94 Correspondence, Kawakita Kashiko to Anderson, 1 December 1988 (LA 1/11/3/10/21).
95 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 23 March 1989 (LA 1/11/3/1/38).
96 Correspondence, Mike Kaplan to Anderson, 20 September 1989 (LA 1/11/3/1/40).
97 Photographs and programme from Iwanami Hall (LA 1/11/5/5).
98 Alive Films Breakdown of payments to Anderson, 8 June 1987 (LA 1/11/3/2/5).
100 Ibid. Interest payable was not specified on the June 1989 statement but amounted to $0.72 million at the end of the previous quarter.
101 Correspondence, Kaplan to Anderson, 20 September 1989.
102 Ibid.
106 Correspondence, Anderson to Vincent Canby, 22 November 1989 (LA 1/11/3/13/11).
107 Correspondence, Vincent Canby to Anderson, 1 December 1989 (LA 1/11/3/13/12).
112 Understandably offended, Anderson attributed this to an unnamed British reviewer. This same unnamed writer was cited in several local papers, for example “Festival-Glum” Princess’, East Anglian Daily Times (16 May 1987) n.p. (LA 1/11/6/1/39). In Night Moves (1975), private eye Harry Moseby describes watching an Eric Rohmer film in the same way – Alan Sharp and Arthur Penn’s crisp way of showing the narrowness of the character’s horizons.
120 Correspondence, Anderson to Mike Kaplan, 20 August 1987 (LA 1/11/3/1/22).
123 See, for example, Gian Luigi Rondi, ‘Con la Davis e Lillian Gish una delicata ode alla vecchia’, Il Tempo (16 May 1987) n.p. (LA 1/11/6/1).
125 Borelli, ‘Le vecchiette irresistibile’.
127 Pérez, ‘Troisième âge américain’.
128 Roy, ‘170 Ans’.
129 Canby, ‘Gish and Davis’.
130 Campbell, ‘Age, Beauty & The Whales of August’.
133 Correspondence, Anderson to Fash, 18 June 1987.
134 Correspondence, Anderson to Kaplan, 4 February 1988.
135 Ibid.
138 Lindsay Anderson, ‘Creative Elements’, Sequence 5 (Autumn 1948) in Never Apologise, 199. He had repeated his belief that a good film should grow organically in Joseph Gelmis, The Film Director as Superstar (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 96.
139 Amendments to agreement to direct Whales of August (LA 1/11/3/1/5).
140 Unattributed review, Berlingske (LA 1/11/3/10/33).

**Introduction**

Once again a more detailed plotline is required since *Glory! Glory!* is not publicly available.

For decades charismatic Reverend Dan Stuckey (Barry Morse) has led the Church of the Companions of Christ, loyally supported by his ever-present financial manager Lester Babbit (James Whitmore). The church televises the Reverend’s evangelism, an immensely successful spiritual and business venture. But while calling on the Lord’s powers to heal a paraplegic (a nice satirical touch), Dan is cut down by a stroke. Thereafter he can only communicate by blinking. By this device he indicates biblical chapter and verse, the relevance of which Lester interprets for him – a delicious gloss on the age-old practice of adapting the bible to say whatever the interpreter wishes.

Dan chooses his son to succeed him. Reverend Bobby Joe (Richard Thomas) is a devout biblical scholar, but lacks his father’s common touch. When he preaches, congregations doze and, to Lester’s alarm, the cash flow from the church’s TV audience dries up. Lester declares the church will have to close its doors unless Bobby Joe can revitalise the show – meanwhile he covers his own future by secretly despatching $2,000,000 to a Swiss bank.

Bobby Joe visits the church where his father began, hoping to find spiritual renewal. But the building has become a rock joint featuring Sister Ruth (Ellen Greene), a lead singer with an earthy line in music fuelled by long lines of coke and a voracious appetite for sex, money and fame. The scholarly Bobby Joe sees her fans’ wild excitement and imagines her singing gospel to reawaken his drowsy flock. However, he cannot persuade Ruth to abandon rock ‘n’ roll for the Rock of Ages until he admits needing her to save his ministry from losing eighty-five TV stations. When she discovers that, she accepts instantly.

Lester hears Sister Ruth sing and declares, ‘If rock ‘n’ roll is the music
of the devil, he ain’t just evil incarnate, he’s tone deaf!’ But just this once, Bobby Joe stands up to him and introduces Ruth to the enthusiastic congregation. TV viewers start mailing dollars in again and Lester is mollified.

With Ruth the palace of wisdom is reached only through excess. Soon, to Bobby Joe’s terror, she overdoses. Then he falls in love with her and she takes him to bed, brushing aside his hypocritical guilt about biblical teachings and marriage.

Presently, executives from a television network come calling. They lean on Bobby Joe to give up his lame preaching and become Master of Ceremonies for Ruth’s TV show. Lester keeps his hands on the cash, Sister Ruth runs the television show to augment her own, rather than the Lord’s glory and Bobby Joe’s earthly power leaks away. A further twist: Ruth announces that she is pregnant and the overjoyed Bobby Joe greets ‘the seed’ as his; but she discloses that more than one gardener has been propagating. When she insists on aborting, Bobby Joe can do nothing to change her mind even though the deepest pit of hell seems to gape beneath his feet.

Here endeth the First Part.

The Second Part brings to the forefront deal-making and -breaking between the Church of the Companions of Christ and the network. In the jockeying for power, Ruth is groomed to replace Bobby Joe as the healer. Lester guilefully plays on fears that the church might collapse and coerces Ruth and the appalled Bobby Joe into using actors to fake cures on live television. The deception works, but a mother with an authentically disabled daughter breaks into the line of impostors. Ruth performs her cynical healing act, but is devastated when it works. She takes refuge in liquor and cocaine until, in delirious moonlight, Bobby Joe comes to the rescue by convincing her that, all the more so as a sinner, she is the Lord’s chosen instrument.

Ruth does not abandon her unconventional ways. She crosses swords on a live chat show with the network’s star journalist and challenges him to investigate her and the church – the last thing Lester wants. Chet Madison (Winston Rekert) moves his team in. A game of bluff and double bluff, charge and counter-charge develops, crazily perverted by the healer and journalist starting an affair. Never mind that he’s fucking her, Chet does his utmost to ruin Ruth and the church while preaching the sanctity of his marriage. On camera his expert witnesses ‘prove’ that Sister Ruth cannot heal but merely acts as a placebo. She responds that as an instrument of the Lord she finds even that gift miraculous. Interviewing Bobby Joe, Chet charges him with living extravagantly at his supporters’ expense. But Bobby Joe is learning to master cynical tactics.
He reverses the allegation and makes Chet admit that he too possesses a luxurious house and car: then the preacher coolly makes the case for this church being an effective, loving charity.

The network uncovers Ruth’s secret abortion and Lester’s even more secret Swiss bank account. Warned to expect criminal charges, Lester plays his master card: he has bugged Chet and Sister Ruth making love in order to blackmail the journalist into scrapping his programme. On bended knees, Lester begs Bobby Joe to go along with the blackmail. This is a revelation to the young man (who does not see Lester’s affecting speech as the cynical performance it is). He takes charge and ruthlessly blocks Chet’s exposé: ‘If the truth is to come out, let the whole truth come out!’ Soon Bobby Joe is revelling in his newly discovered power: ‘This is my church! Mine!’ With totalitarian certainty he insists that nothing will now stop him leading his church to glory!

So it comes about that the network hosts The Sister Ruth Revival Hour, a live extravaganza. But things have changed – Ruth now loves God since she has ‘seen’ that God is as imperfect as the people he created. Full throttle, she sings to a living Christ (Ted Hanlan) crucified among the blinding lights of a fifteen-foot cross: ‘Who did this? Killed this gentle man of peace?’ She turns to the congregation: ‘How come you can’t see you did this with every single little lie ...?’ The line ‘Take a look at yourself’ proves too much for her and, to the consternation of Lester and the production crew, she brings the music to a halt. She confesses her hypocrisy and her sins, bewailing her unworthiness to be a church leader. Her naked pain is already stirring the audience when Bobby Joe comes on set, takes her sins on himself and adding his own, announces that it is he, not she who must leave the church. Some in the congregation weep. Lester now too confesses all; but cunning does not fail him in the crisis. He incites the congregation, which promptly chants for Ruth and Bobby Joe to remain church leaders. Meanwhile the TV directors in the gallery smile through their tears and summon their camera crew to redouble their efforts in providing evocative images of the drama.

The band starts, Ruth resumes an upbeat song, Christ climbs down from his electric cross and the choir join the song as the entire cast form a line and shimmy. The curtain call, thematically reminiscent of the closing dance in O Lucky Man!, gives way to a flashback to the opening shot. In the parish church of Bobby Joe’s childhood the congregation sing ‘Shall We Gather at the River’ – the hymn with which (as Anderson well knew) John Ford honoured the devotion of immigrant American farming communities who stood naked and humble before their Lord. Feeding their lust for power, money and fame, the televangelists, urged on by Lester, have abandoned such honest, simple faith.
This said, Lester Babbit has a core function in setting the amused, sardonic tone of *Glory! Glory!* rather than the despairing satire of *O Lucky Man!* and *Britannia Hospital*. Rejoicing in his skill, he wields prayer and the Lord’s name to manoeuvre his fellow leaders into infamy. His mischief making flaunts a wily exuberance, sense of fun and appetite for life. In short, he relishes villainy and secret corruption. Furthermore the play allows its audience to enjoy him.

And yet the mini-series does have a bass subtext. The plot’s twists, turns and naked reversals, the high energy accentuated by the upbeat rock gospel help convey a comedic lightness. That register ameliorates not only Lester’s but also Sister Ruth’s willingness to entertain all manner of sin to gain their ends (not least because she, unlike secretive Lester, is open about her life and goals). But the change in Bobby Joe does shock, does provide a minor instance of the kind of constitutive tension we have become accustomed to finding in Anderson’s screen work. Suddenly wrenching free from deep submersion in his father’s shadow, Bobby Joe becomes no healer but (on the contrary) a totalitarian leader in Christ’s name. Will he now, like the real Pat Robertson who in 1988 campaigned to become the Republican Party’s candidate for the presidency of the USA, seek to develop his newfound powers beyond his church in the political world?

**The set up**

Early in March 1988 a letter requiring urgent attention reached Anderson in London. It conveyed an unexpected invitation to direct ‘Sister Ruth’, a three-and-a-half-hour mini-series for American cable television. Although his schedule should have ruled out any new ventures, a deal had just collapsed under which he would have directed a stage production of *The Admirable Crichton* with Rex Harrison and Edward Fox. So he found himself available.  

Anderson immediately recognised that Stan Daniels’s script for ‘Sister Ruth’ posed considerable problems; but he was roused by its ‘satirical sharpness – unusually frank in its language, its disrespectful attitude to religion, its openness about sex and drugs’. He thought, ‘Maybe it’s time I sold out! I haven’t sold out yet, and I’m getting tired of being labelled as someone of great and rather boring integrity’. Thus by mid-month he was in Los Angeles occupied with pre-production on the show that would reach HBO subscribers’ screens as *Glory! Glory!*.

The production has particular interest for our study of Anderson’s authorship. Although Daniels had wanted to direct (his previous scripts
having included *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*), HBO had insisted on an experienced filmmaker of Anderson’s stature as director. However, despite this and the probability that his name would be integral to marketing the show, Anderson did not anticipate that the project was, in common with American television practice at large, producer-led. Bonny Dore’s letter of invitation hinted at the complexities.

The project will be jointly financed by Orion Television (in association with my company, The Greif-Dore Company), Home Box Office and Atlantis Films (a Canadian co-production entity that is providing Canadian tax shelter funding as well as production services in Toronto). The finished film will be distributed (after the HBO TV run) domestically and worldwide by Orion.

Each of these companies had its producers: Dore herself and Leslie Greif for their company along with Stan Daniels; Seaton Maclean for Atlantis; Bridget Potter, Elaine Sperber and Bill Sanders for HBO; and Dick Rosenbloom for Orion. Charged with defending the rights of their respective companies, they did so in co-ordination, Anderson noted, only when pressing him to keep on time and within budget.

**Pre-production**

Work was well under way when Anderson arrived in Los Angeles. For some days meetings took place at Orion TV. There Dore had her office fifteen stories up in ‘the usual, clean-lined, expensive, glass & soft-furnishing premises’. Anderson’s wariness of Hollywood was once again swiftly triggered. He stitched observations of the way producers spoke and behaved into his feelings about the place.

Each time I come to Hollywood now I find the place more depressing, more shabby under the expensive surfaces, more soulless – or rather with its soul more conclusively sold to the most crass kind of materialism. (As reported to me by Bonny Dore, my pleasant, ‘respectful’ specious producer, the H.B.O. Executive, so well-mannered to meet, called her to insist that when Sister Ruth is really flying in her act, ‘the men in the audience want to cream in their pants’... and ‘in the first scene, Bobby Joe is torn between wanting to fuck her or to hire her’. This is not, in my judgement, exactly the jovial or savage vulgarity of the old-style tycoon: it betrays more the insecurity of the TV executive scared for his job and with no real confidence in his ability or his sense of audience, just parroting the clichés of the business. But of course it betrays also a shallowness, an opportunism, a cheapness of sensibility which only makes more nightmarish the well-carpeted, luxuriously appointed pseudo ‘tasteful’ huge glass-and-concrete palaces in which the Devil’s work is conducted).
He added that this ‘lack of any kind of concentration or thought beyond the moment’, was covered by bland euphemisms. Catchphrases like ‘they’re working on it’ were designed to cover the fact that ‘Nobody thinks: nobody knows anything: everyone is too busy keeping afloat on their little area of the surface.’ Anger at corporate evasiveness would feature in his record of relations with the producers.

Anderson’s cynicism and doubts notwithstanding, pre-production moved ahead satisfactorily. Casting proceeded as he met actors and reached agreements on the lead players. Deals were made, contracts signed. Meanwhile he, Greif, Dore and Daniels worked on rewriting the script, though they could not do it openly because Daniels was on strike with the Writers Guild of America. They could proceed, however, Anderson noted wryly, if Daniels put on his producer’s hat and they attended to the screenplay’s ‘structure’.

Progress notwithstanding, Anderson noted his sense of detachment and admonished himself, ‘Think of the money, think of the money, think of the money…’. This became a defence against anger and dismay over his colleagues’ mediocre debates about scripted characters and narrative logic. He had frequent recourse to the refrain during the weeks on set, but eventually, when editing, he had to admit he had been drawn in deep and was not at all detached.

**Budget**

Anderson had good reason to think of the money, the director’s fee being US$275,000, a notable compensation for what he privately called his fifteen-week sentence in Toronto. In fact he voluntarily extended that ‘sentence’ precisely because he could not detach himself from an unfinished job. He received no fee and paid for his accommodation during those extra weeks of post-production.

The total budget was set at US$6.5 million. The schedule (requiring a faster speed of working than he was familiar with as a film director) had specified seven weeks shooting of five twelve-hour days per week. The unit completed that on time, but a wholly inadequate three weeks had been scheduled for the director’s edit of the three-and-a-quarter hour show. Then, a week into editing, Anderson discovered he had not been informed that the financial situation had altered since the budget had been finalised. The Canadian government had not come up with the subsidies Atlantis expected. HBO declined to put more in for post-production unless Orion took an equal share of the cost overrun, but Orion refused. When Anderson insisted he needed longer to cut the
immense amount of footage, he was met with a blank refusal: 'there is no more money'. Nevertheless he stayed on to finish his edit and support Ruth Foster, his doughty editor, until well into the seventh week. When they showed the director’s finished cut to several of the producers, they were still cutting the last scene as the screening started.

Production

In May Anderson flew from London to Toronto to join the crew, assist with final stages of pre-production (including the casting of Canadian actors) and embark on the rigours of the shoot. By mid-June, after a month on set, he reflected again on the producer problem.

One of the characteristics of Television as opposed to Movies – as I am constantly reminded, with mingled irritation and relief – is the relative unimportance of the director, as opposed to the deal-making producers. Perhaps in this it is more like the old-style Hollywood studio style of production, and not at all like the auteurist director’s paradise of today.

He reflected on John Ford working in the studio system and acknowledged that Glory! Glory! possessed:

many of the characteristics of intelligent, popular entertainment, with much of the script original and much of it obeying the popular conventions. Only we don’t have the benefit of Zanuck, or producers who really know anything about the business of shooting and completing a movie. And this also brings Ford to mind, with his outspoken scorn of producers.

One day Anderson observed five or six producers wholly absorbed by Ellen Greene. She was exercising her contractual right over choice of costume while HBO flexed its parallel right to do the same. Meanwhile, Anderson groaned, they all failed to observe practical necessities like checking that the set for the next morning’s first scene matched the script’s specifications – which it didn’t. He had already commented adversely on his lead producer Dore’s ‘compulsive and confused interfering with every aspect of the production’. This concern was to escalate in post-production.

At the opposite end of the production hierarchy, Chris Terry was attached to the crew under a Canadian programme designed to develop the skills of directors lacking experience in drama. Anderson initially told Terry he would have to be a runner. Soon he made Terry his personal aide, then second unit director; and afterwards Atlantis hired him to supervise post-production. Terry’s account of the shoot confirms that
Anderson did not so much direct actors as encourage them to bring their own interpretation to the role while making occasional subtle suggestions.

Anderson is marvellously flexible, especially when staging or blocking a scene. He usually spent a good hour or more at the beginning of a scene blocking and reblocking the actors and camera through all the action until he was certain it would work. He rarely made notes beforehand and tended to be truly spontaneous in executing every scene.30

Anderson's journal gives his own thoughts on the principal actors. He admired James Whitmore's incarnation of Lester, loving the actor's 'theatrical relish and enormous idiosyncratic richness'.31 He also praised Richard Thomas in the role of Bobby Joe for 'his intense internal energy which enables him to turn apparently passive into active'.32 He 'manages to inform every scene with such specific and truthful intensity of feeling'.33 Anderson felt sure that by the end they would achieve for Bobby Joe the true passion of Power;34 and when the mini-series was complete he celebrated the way Thomas had Bobby Joe make the transition from a weak, indecisive figure to a fascistic leader.35 For his part, Thomas was delighted to escape his type-casting (dating back to The Waltons, 1972) as a good boy.36

Once again, however, Anderson found himself working with a leading actor who had a difficult temperament. Ellen Greene, he alleged, had 'announced herself to be unreliable, hysterical and anything but “part of the team”'.37 With her doubts and anxieties she caused intolerable delays in the tight schedule. Anderson noted her total egotism, self-pity, lack of technique and prudery about the words she was willing to utter in role.38 They had bruising encounters when she insisted on rewriting the script – in his opinion execrably. He noted how the production was saved on one occasion by Daniels persuading her to put a line into her script which would make it easy to cut a couple of her worst paragraphs.39

News of Greene’s obstructiveness became public when on the eve of transmission Howard Polskin published eyewitness reports of problems she had caused throughout the shoot. He did, however, add the significant rider that her rebelliousness had the effect of spicing up the movie.40 Although Anderson did not express it like that, he too recognised that at its best her energetic commitment to the role invigorated the show. Midway through the shoot he remarked on her increasing confidence and his sense that a distinctive performance should come out with a strong, sympathetic appeal.41 Some weeks later, intensively watching her scenes while editing, he reached a fuller verdict: 'Ellen has a conviction in her playing, when the scene has an element of
aggression or determination in it. But she is horribly inclined to sentimentality, and disastrously lacking in humour [and] terribly lacking in technique...'.43

Despite the efficiency of first assistant director Jamie Paul Rock and of Mike Fash and his camera crew, the schedule oppressed Anderson constantly. It left no chance for making improvements, nor retakes.43 He complained to his agent that its only purpose was to prove that the inadequate budget was feasible.44 Its effect resembled ‘solving a crossword puzzle at speed – and I’ve never been any good at crossword puzzles whether at speed or not’.45

I realise with greater force than ever that ‘instant’ staging is absolutely not my forte. I have never been able to find instant solutions to where people should sit and move – nor am I able to accept an absolutely un inventive, dull, static positioning of characters, with the kind of concentration on dialogue which I suppose is necessary for this kind of shooting.46

‘This kind of shooting’ turns out to be an indicative phrase since Anderson was unable to define the mini-series’s hybrid nature: ‘I can’t quite call it a film, nor is it a TV play – it is uncomfortably halfway between the two’.47 These thoughts link with doubts about changes in technology raised by viewing the rushes. He found it galling to view scenes on monitors that gave the full Academy image but not the TV framing and with over-contrasting images.

Reflection: how lightly and ignorantly we embark – or they embark – on the exploitation of all these latest technical, technological ‘advances’ in the use of film, video and film-and-video, and how quickly it can be revealed that nobody exactly knows what is happening or how the wretched image is likely to emerge from the complicated processes to which it is submitted. As Mike remarked – is he to change his lighting to accommodate this system of transfer from film to video? If the material is later to be used on film rather than on video, it will certainly suffer if he adjusts his lighting to accommodate the demands of the video system. And what should be the principle of framing the shots, which will certainly be projected first on HBO Television at television ratio, but may be projected later on cinema screens at a ratio of 1:66? To feel ourselves so at the mercy of complex technological systems which nobody quite understands, as well as the multiple demands of screening in all the various ways now possible, is frustrating, dehumanising. Just another aspect of the contemporary ‘Made for Television’ nightmare. At times during the projection I have had to close my eyes and repeat the magic words: ‘Two hundred and seventy five thousand dollars... two hundred and seventy five thousand dollars...’48
Post-production

The schedule for post-production specified that the director's cut be locked on 26 August prior to his departure for London three days later, at which time the producer’s cut was to begin. Anderson recognised the implications of the first date, but may have missed those of the second. Whereas he had found it hard to keep to thirty-five days for the shoot, he said repeatedly from the moment post-production was scheduled that three weeks to edit would be impossible. As mentioned, when the allotted time expired he stayed on until he and Foster had completed his cut.

Untutored in electronic cutting, he and even the highly skilled Foster faced particular technological problems with the system at their disposal. The film stock had been uploaded onto an Ediflex nonlinear system, an intermediate, short-lived technology which soon became obsolete with the next phase of digital evolution. It allowed the editor to select scenes by touching a light pen to a line of dialogue or action displayed in an image of the script on the system’s control monitor. As Anderson conceded, it did speed some complex procedures but it slowed other operations that were simple when editing on film. Equally troubling, its operations were unpredictable. Anderson noted that nobody, including a specialist technician, knew how it worked, partly because its developer sent them upgrades as they became available. One software package arrived very late, though welcome for allowing the editor to make dissolves and remove such unwanted things from the soundtrack as calls for action. Technological and budgetary constraints deepened Anderson’s sense of being at the focal point of conflicting pressures. To those practical issues was added his awareness of the improbability of character motivations, dialogue and the plotting of certain scenes. He concluded that the whole project was in the hands of accountants rather than artists. ‘All the lip-service has been paid, it is only a product that we are producing’.

Despite the difficulties caused by the Ediflex, the editing process together with Foster’s accuracy and enthusiasm re-ignited Anderson’s passion. As noted earlier, his attempts at detachment fell away as they got deep into the monumental task. Partly too he felt a moral commitment to the people involved in the seven-week shoot even though they had gone about their business.

There remains that time of service and cheerful collaboration which can’t be forgotten or dismissed. Even stronger is the demand of the work itself. Too much has gone into the gathering and performing of the material that it would be unthinkable to leave it in pieces, to be hacked or botched together by the unthinking and the unskilful, whose only
aim is the fulfilment of a contract. As the scenes come together, and as they ‘work’, the film acquires its own strange life – much too late for abortion.53

Ten days after returning from New York, his edit completed, he reviewed the process in terms which put it at the core of the cinematic art. He had rediscovered that it had ‘an intensity which demands full engagement’.54

So far have I departed – as any idiot could have foretold – from that initial resolution of ‘detached commitment’, of ‘taking the money and running’ – or, as it seems more like, of taking the money and prevailing home... It isn’t just the investment of so much skill, conscience, professionalism, dedication that the shooting of a film represents. The real attachment, as far as I’m concerned, comes in the time of editing, the time of intimate and scrupulous work on the material, when one’s whole effort and concentration and feeling goes into the rhythmic ordering, the exact pointing by cutting and juxtaposition of every foot of film we have shot. It is at this stage that film most closely corresponds to Pater’s dictum that ‘all art constantly aspires to the condition of music’. And I am reminded of Coleridge’s phrase, ‘shaping spirit of imagination’. With the reservation, of course, that one is often labouring to atone for the deficiency of imagination in shooting – for those days when the breakneck speed (panic even) imposed by an all-but impossible schedule, or perhaps simply just fatigue, have resulted in one just shooting the script, line by line, without any imagination at all...

In editing, obsessiveness is all. Absolute accuracy of timing (which is the basis of all important rhythm) is essential: every imperfection must be ironed out, or disguised, or worked around, to create the whole that will be (seen to be) as seamless, as expressive, as rhythmically satisfying as possible. This is something every artist – musician or poet or painter or performer – will recognise. Only half a dozen out of every hundred thousand (million?) readers, listeners, viewers will ever notice the felicity we struggle for or understand it or appreciate that the ‘message’ of any work is contained within it. And if any one of that half dozen is a ‘critic’, we will be extremely lucky. Most certainly it will not be a ‘Producer’. Nevertheless, we are compelled to struggle for perfection, compelled to run on in pursuit of Milton’s ‘immortal garland’, compelled to stretch out, ever seeking to grasp the inviolable shade. That is one of the definitions of the word ‘Artist’.55

Albeit hedged around by his understanding of all that could interfere with the ‘struggle for perfection’, and in the face of his lack of control of the previous phases of production, his dedication to and theorisation of editing amounts to Anderson’s personal claim to authorship of Glory! Glory! and his sense in that moment that it had come out well.
On 20 September he screened his cut to the producers, who expressed themselves well pleased. Yet when next day he met Dore and Maclean for lunch prior to his departure for home, Anderson had the strong feeling that they were ill at ease. He was left wondering what would happen when his back was turned. That became apparent in November. Having been sent the colour-graded tape in anticipation of his return to Toronto to supervise the dub and mix of the soundtrack, he quickly perceived that Dore had moved into the cutting room to “exercise her right of “Producer’s Cut”, and leave her foolish little signature scribbled across various passages of carefully timed, edited and considered work”. He did not conceal his fury from her, Maclean at Atlantis or Potter at HBO. He accepted that adjustment had been necessary to rectify voice synch on one Sister Ruth number and admitted to having overlooked it. But for the rest he argued bitterly that Dore had introduced changes that made nonsense of various moments in the narrative. In his mind, all testified to her “absolute lack of humour, sense of rhythm or construction, [her] “televisual” insensibility...”.

Nevertheless Anderson did return to Toronto after clearing the air and restoring good relations. During one last gruelling week, he supervised cleaning up the dialogue, laying effects and finalising the mix; then he screened the colour-graded version of the picture with the resultant track. By the end, he had reached that point which many editors and directors encounter, having been over the film so often that ‘the whole thing, more-or-less, has become meaningless, and completely impossible to judge’.

**Public relations and industry recognition**

Greene and Thomas met the press as did Dore and Anderson. Intriguingly, each of them (and Stan Daniels talking to Stephen Farber) made the point that they had no desire to offend religion but rather wished to mock its cynical exploitation. Although the archive holds no evidence to that effect, it reads like a co-ordinated campaign – more of which later.

Anderson (albeit in the British journal *Sight & Sound*) had reiterated his familiar desire to stir things up, expressing pleasure that *Glory!* was more hard hitting than might have been expected. For this thanks were due to HBO which had been anxious to produce the kind of work that could not be seen on network TV.

In the USA, screen industry reaction was favourable with *Glory!* gaining six nominations for Awards for Cable Excellence (ACE): Richard Thomas for Best Actor in a movie or mini-series; Ellen Greene
for Best Actress; James Whitmore for Best Supporting Actor; and three for songs. Whitmore won his category in competition against several greats including John Gielgud in *A Man for All Seasons*. Despite this, we have not seen evidence to suggest these nominations had a sufficiently high profile to sell the show to Pay TV viewers.

Press reviews and attributions of authorship – North America

Several themes dominated North American reviewers’ responses when HBO transmitted *Glory! Glory!* in two parts on 19 and 20 February 1989. The show had aired following extensive media coverage of sanctimonious preachers. The scandal of televangelist Jim Bakker’s affair with a model and alleged defrauding of his church had been writ large across the nation’s press for two years. In March 1988 Jimmy Swaggart, another such preacher, had confessed to adultery. So some reviewers thought the theme had already been done to death in press and TV features; but most press reaction was positive. The performances of Greene, Thomas and Whitmore were widely praised. Many journalists were delighted to see on cable TV a mini-series more barbed and satirical than the familiar, bland network drama. Robert DiMatteo was not alone in welcoming the ‘savaging of the gimmickry and hypocrisy of televangelism’. This general welcome notwithstanding, many reviewers (including some who enjoyed the mini-series) did notice in the second part such weaknesses as lack of focus, a tendency to meander and take on too many targets. These had troubled Anderson during production.

The controversy Anderson hoped to arouse was not much in evidence. A rare exception was Tom Shales’s rant in the *Washington Post* against ‘the fat and nasty pay cable outfit [which] apparently sees its challenge as creating movies more abrasive and dirty-minded than those the networks can come up with’. We shall say more about the satirical register later.

As far as attribution of authorship was concerned, the North American press gave Bonny Dore’s work initiating the drama roughly equal billing with Anderson’s input. Journalists were intrigued that some eight years earlier the respected televangelist Oral Roberts had hired her for her knowledge of lighting and staging big shows. Dore recalled her amazement at the amount of money he could deploy to spice up his evangelical show. The vast funds raised by this mode of preaching (rather than any suspicion of fraud) seem to have provided her original stimulus to produce *Glory! Glory!*. During the years it took to get
the project approved, she researched such organisations and found a common pattern: they had ‘simply adopted the structural organisation of corporate America into the making of their churches’ profits’.73

Several reviewers name-checked Anderson for his recent Whales of August, but they were more impressed by If..., O Lucky Man! and Britannia Hospital. By referring to the latter two, North American journalists could readily (albeit under-crediting Stan Daniels) account for the show’s satirical elements. From Canada Jim Bawden wrote enthusiastically, ‘Like all Anderson movies [...] Glory! Glory! is clever, nasty and outrageous, this time in an all-out attack on the power of TV preachers’.74

Press reviews and attributions of authorship – Britain

In Britain, the long-delayed BBC2 transmission of Glory! Glory! occurred in August 1990 on two successive Saturday nights. It secured viewing figures of 1.3 million.75 Anderson asserted to some of those involved in its production that the British liked Glory! Glory! even better than US audiences – maybe because Americans rather than the English were being laughed at for a change.76

This was probably his personal assessment: no such opinion was voiced in the limited British press coverage. More than a year before British transmission, Sight & Sound carried Gerald Pratley’s interview with Anderson.77 To coincide with transmission, the film critic David Robinson published another interview in The Times;78 and Derek Winnert expressed the opinion in TV Films that

Anyone who thinks they know Anderson’s work is in for a surprise. The 67-year-old director takes to the (for him) new form with all the exuberance of youth, directing with astonishing power and lightness of touch.79

Winnert added, ‘What Anderson has made is a real delight, one of the best TV films ever’.80 Like Kevin Jackson in The Independent, Winnert turned to Anderson to account for the programme’s success.81 Because Pay TV channels such as HBO were not part of the British television spectrum, neither of these reviewers reflected on the commercial role of the mini-series in reinforcing niche-marketing patterns for subscribers to such services. In the absence of this context, they depended on Anderson’s maverick reputation with their readers as a main means of anchoring their reviews in familiar territory. In effect, like Adam Sweeting in The Guardian, they introduced authorship cinema-style in a way that few American journalists found appropriate.82
Anderson’s relish for stirring things up might have been flattered when the BBC forwarded a handful of protest letters. One came from an evangelical preacher.

I felt the programme was in extremely bad taste, and indeed offensive. The kind of sincere preaching that many evangelists, of honourable character, do deliver, is the only door of hope to a searching world.83

Only one correspondent expostulated with incandescent rage against ‘such evil’. He was [sic] ‘deeply offended at the portrait of a Christians indulging in ex martial sex & abortion. This is a gross distortion of the Christian faith, had it being depicted as a Moslem or Hindu then you would be described a racist’.84 In general, however, Glory! Glory! seems to have aroused laughter among British viewers, but a great deal less controversy than Anderson might have desired.

Authorship in context

Unlike a movie, which may run and run, the mini-series played over two nights in both North America and Britain, transmitted once and then forgotten. No festivals, no directorial public appearances, relatively few interviews, precious little glory, no repeats, no commercial afterlife on VHS. These were factors ensuring that, with few exceptions, television had not yet created many authors. Their combined effect on both sides of the Atlantic (but more particularly in North America) was to reduce Anderson’s significance as the perceived author of Glory! Glory!.

In most American reviews a number of factors mitigated against identifying Anderson as sole author of the mini-series. As we have indicated, press coverage tended to refer to his earlier films to summon a general sense of his being a satirist; but the reviewers of 1989 did not assume he was well known to their readers or the television audience at large.

Systemic factors concerning the market niche occupied by cable TV also affected responses in the USA and Canada. In a report for the Federal Communications Commission, Keith S. Brown and Robert J. Cavazos observed of network television that:

Advertisers prefer programming content that best ‘frames’ their advertising. Such content tends to be light and ‘unchallenging’. Viewers preferring darker and more challenging content go under-served.85

Possibly because the broadcast networks forgo advertising-unfriendly program content, the cable channel HBO responds with a deliberate counter-programming niche strategy, explicitly airing programming with ‘darker’ and ‘more difficult' advertising-unfriendly content.86
By the mid-1980s US cable television (with HBO one of its major players) had enjoyed massive growth over the previous decade and served almost 40 million subscribers. The corporation had developed their market strategy by the time they co-produced *Glory! Glory!* and eschewed carrying adverts in order to appeal to a distinct audience. Their subscribers (by 2003, 26 million people paying at least $10 per month) may have wished to be challenged and excited by their entertainment, but few, it seems fair to assume, would have chosen to pay for the privilege of being outraged in their own homes. We should remember that producer Dore, director Anderson, scriptwriter Daniels, together with leading players Greene and Thomas all emphasised publicly that they had no desire to offend religion in *Glory! Glory!* but intended instead to mock its cynical exploitation.

If what remained for Pay TV viewers of Anderson’s perceived authorship of *Glory! Glory!* was satire, and since that satire proved entertaining but not a source of outrage, it suggests that Bridget Potter and her associated producers (contrary to Anderson’s more radical preferences) made the mini-series they thought appropriate to fit the channel’s market strategy. Despite Anderson’s justifiable sense that he had taken authorial control while producing the director’s cut, any claim he might have to overall control in the mini-series (which might have established a dominant authorial presence) was undercut not so much by Dore’s re-editing some scenes as by the process of shaping it to fit neatly in the...
niche for which it was intended. As we mentioned, Anderson had grumbled that he was making a product for accountants; but the constraints on him were also cultural in that he was working to producers who had a clear sense of the broad generic conventions that the Pay TV audience would accept.

Notes

1 Lester may be named after Sinclair Lewis’s dedicated materialist, George F. Babbitt.
2 Diary, 16 March 1988 (LA 6/1/90/2).
3 Ibid.
5 ‘Sister Ruth’ was dropped after President Jimmy Carter’s evangelist sister published a book about herself under that title. Diary, 16 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/10).
7 Correspondence, Dore to Anderson, 4 March 1988.
8 See diary, 23 May 1988 (LA 6/1/90/20).
9 Diary, 6 April 1988 (LA 6/1/90/17).
10 Diary, 17 March 1988 (LA 6/1/90/7).
15 Ibid.
16 Diary, 30 March 1988 (LA 6/1/90/13).
17 Diary, 6 April 1988 (LA 6/1/90/17).
18 Diary, 14 August 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/50).
19 Final Revised Budget, 18 May 1988 (LA 2/7/2/2).
20 Diary, 23 May 1988 (LA 6/1/90/20); correspondence, Anderson to Ronda Gomez (his American agent) 30 November 1988 (LA 2/7/3/5/2).
21 Final Revised Budget.
22 Diary, 8 August 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/48–9).
23 Diary, 21 September 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/57).
24 From the start of June and until he had finished with Glory! Glory!, he adopted a different method of making journal entries, recording his thoughts on tape for transcription.
25 Diary, 16 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/10).
26 Diary, 2 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/22–3).
27 Diary, 16 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/10–11).
28 Diary, 7 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/2).
29 Terry also enjoyed Anderson’s wit; he scripted and shot a spoof of a DeBeers commercial where a woman opened a man’s hand to reveal a diamond. In Anderson’s version, the hand opened to reveal a condom. The producers cut it out of the film. Chris Terry, ‘From a Dog’s Body’, Canadian Independent Film Caucus, 10 (Spring 1989) 5 (LA 2/7/6/1/108).
30 Terry, 'From a Dog's Body', 4.
31 Diary, 8 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/27).
32 Diary, 25 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/77).
33 Diary, 8 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/26).
34 Diary, 25 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/37).
35 Lindsay Anderson interviewed by Michael Quigley, 'Life Is Art in Glory! Glory!', TV Times (17 February 1989) 16 (LA 2/7/6/1/29).
37 Diary, 8 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/2). 38 Ibid.
39 Diary, 24 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/39).
41 Diary, 8 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/26).
42 Diary, 19 September 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/55).
43 Diary, 2 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/22–3).
44 Correspondence, Anderson to Ronda Gomez, 15 August 1988 (LA 2/7/3/5/1).
45 Diary, 12 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/6).
46 Diary, 12 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/4).
47 Diary, 12 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/6).
48 Diary, 14 June 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/8).
49 Post-production schedule, 21 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/8).
52 Diary, 17 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/33) and 2 July 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/22).
53 Diary, 14 August 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/50).
54 Ibid.
55 Diary, 3 October 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/62).
56 Diary, 21 September 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/57–8).
57 Diary, 25 September 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/60).
58 Diary, 13 November 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6) n.p.
59 Ibid.; correspondence, Anderson to Bridget Potter, HBO, 1 December 1988 (LA 2/7/3/7/3); correspondence, Anderson to Bonny Dore, 1 December 1988 (LA 2/7/3/1/3).
60 Diary, 22 November 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6) n.p.
62 Anderson interviewed by Gerald Pratley, '35 Days in Toronto', 94.
63 Tom Bierbaum, 'HBO, ‘Crypt’ Top ACE Nominations', Variety (26 October 1989) 1, 8, 18 (LA 2/7/6/1/100).
64 Note from Bonny Dore to Anderson, 5 February 1990 (LA 2/7/3/1/5).
65 For example, 'Video', LA Magazine (February 1989) 222 (LA 2/7/6/1/37).
68 DiMatteo, ‘Worth Watching’.
71 Eric Gerber, ‘And Unto HBO Is Born’.
75 Correspondence, Brian Baxter (BBC TV) to Anderson, 23 August 1990 (LA 2/7/3/9/7).
77 Pratley, ‘35 Days in Toronto’.
79 Derek Winnert, ‘Anderson’s Holy War’, TV Films [July–August 1990] n.p. (LA 2/7/6/2/5). Anderson must have been cheered by this because DiMatteo had dropped into his otherwise favourable review the thought that while Anderson’s direction of Glory! Glory! revealed the spirit of O Lucky Man! in some places, in others it betrayed ‘some of the geriatric stodginess that marred his recent Whales of August’ (DiMatteo, ‘Worth Watching’).
80 Winnert, ‘Anderson’s Holy War’.
81 Kevin Jackson, ‘Glory! Glory!’, The Independent (6 August 1990) n.p (LA 2/7/6/2/6).
83 Douglas Wilkinson to Viewer and Listener Correspondence BBC, 7 August 1990 (LA 2/7/3/11/3).
84 Correspondence from a viewer to the BBC, 6 August 1990 (LA 2/7/3/11/1).
Is That All There Is? (1992)

Anderson’s final film, simultaneously an on-screen essay and a mock-documentary self-portrait, was commissioned for television by BBC Scotland. It was one in a series ‘The Director’s Place’ in which six filmmakers were given complete freedom with their subject: the way they lived and worked. Anderson’s film commences covering a supposedly typical day in his life. Starting with his waking moments, a bath and a trip to local shops, there follow visits from friends and family and working meetings, all scenes full of sly humour and simmering anger at injustices in the world. Near the middle of the film it becomes apparent (as he takes breakfast for a second time while cross-questioning his cleaner on the state of London transport) that the twenty-four-hour clock has been abandoned in favour of interviews. The film concludes in another register altogether when Anderson throws a riverboat party of old friends and colleagues to scatter the ashes of Rachel Roberts and Jill Bennett in the Thames.

Production

As Head of Music and Arts at BBC Scotland, John Archer approached Anderson late in 1991 inviting him to contribute a fifty-minute film to the series. Archer offered a notional budget (based on comparison with John Boorman’s film for the series) of £111,500. In March 1992, Anderson responded with the first sketch of an idea that appealed to him for:

something centred on this flat and on life (my life?) today. Not at all on the poetic-fantasy lines of John Boorman’s piece. More a fragmented account of life today – perhaps the kind of thing people might find interesting in a hundred years’ time...

The title that has been running through my mind is derived from an old Peggy Lee song, ‘Is That All There Is’? I have also thought of
Flaubert’s remark, quoted to me by David Sherwin, that everything is interesting if you look at it long enough. And I believe that Brecht said ‘Everything is Interesting’.2

In this letter he mooted scattering Rachel Roberts’s ashes from a river steamer. Roberts, it may be recalled, committed suicide in 1980. Her last lover (in what looks like a final act of rejection) had delivered to Anderson a glossy Gianni Versace bag containing the box with her ashes. For twelve years it had lain in Anderson’s flat, its future undetermined.3 Soon after sending Archer his first ideas for the film, Anderson discovered that the remains of Jill Bennett (who in 1990 had also killed herself) were being kept by her former secretary Linda Drew. He had the idea that the ashes of the two friends might be scattered together: ‘I think that they would both have thought it extremely appropriate and been happy to cock a snook at propriety’.4

Preparations moved ahead swiftly. Trevor Ingman of Yaffle Films was appointed producer. By mid-June 1992 Anderson had completed the draft outline that forms the recognisable basis for the film.5 The differences between it and the finished product reflect the usual negotiations in documentary pre-production. Anderson had wanted to film a bust up with his nephew but the scene does not appear in the draft because Sandy had refused to re-enact the incident. However, the young man changed his mind courageously a week before shooting began.6 The list of visitors invited to the flat differs from those filmed because not everyone had yet committed.7 Alan Price’s agreement to participate in the riverboat party (a crucial step in shaping the film’s last sequence) had still to be secured. One planned sequence was dropped. It was to show Anderson at the National Theatre rehearsing his current production, David Storey’s Stages. Very likely the idea proved too costly to realise, and a wry, easily covered sequence substituted it: Anderson, Storey and Jocelyn Herbert (Stages production designer) discuss lighting a scene, demonstrating various ideas on her model theatre. Their inability to agree readily is an in-joke for the theatrical coterie alluding to their history of squabbling over such issues.

Pre-production of four weeks’ duration began formally on 17 August 1992. Principal cinematography (on 16 mm film, not video!) was scheduled for two weeks with an extra Saturday afternoon in October for the riverboat party. Ten weeks were allocated (and required) for post-production, culminating in delivery of the finished film in the first week of December 1992.8 Post-production looked long, Ingman told Archer, because it had to be arranged around Anderson’s commitment to Stages.9 Ingman also sent Archer a draft budget totalling £116,570. Roughly equivalent to Boorman’s after adjustment for inflation, it
incorporated all-inclusive fees of £11,000 for himself and £20,000 for Anderson.10

On the evidence in Anderson’s files, production and post-production proceeded smoothly and working relationships between the team’s principal members remained cordial throughout. He did say that he missed the quality of camerawork produced by Miroslav Ondricek and Mike Fash;11 but his doubts about his cameraman’s output may have been augmented by the stresses of production. Notably, despite his reservations about Nicolas Gaster’s editing on *The Whales of August*, Anderson invited him back to help cut this production.

His files contain correspondence with people whom Anderson had invited to join the riverboat party. Some regretted that poor health or age would keep them away; others wrote thanking him for a memorable occasion. Sir John Gielgud, by this time eighty-eight years old, wrote an exquisite letter regretting that he now dreaded parties and memorial events, even when, as with Roberts and Bennett, good friends were being commemorated.12 Touched by this, Anderson replied at length mentioning the activities of a number of mutual friends. He also revealed the personal origins of his title while noting that his contribution to the series,

will be distinctly patchy, but maybe it will communicate some humorous and critical spirit. Appropriate? I’m calling it *Is That All There Is?*, which is a quotation from the Peggy Lee song, which I remember Rachel singing one night in Los Angeles, extremely drunk and sitting on the floor of her living room, and irritating me (as she knew perfectly well) to Hell… In the film the song is played and sung by Alan Price, sitting at his electric piano on the deck of the riverboat. He did it awfully well and with great good humour. Seemingly unchanged since those cherished days of *Home*.13

The production kept to schedule despite Anderson’s heavy commitments. But he did tell Archer mid-way through the editing process that, with *Stages* soon to open at the National Theatre, he was looking forward to not running two jobs in parallel.14 In fact, as planned, *Is That All There Is?* was ready in time for the Florence Film Festival in December 1992 where it won Anderson the Special Jury Prize.15

As matters turned out, apart from a few screenings the film was not seen until shortly after his death. The BBC delayed transmission because, as Archer admitted in March 1993, he was finding it hard to get directors of sufficient stature to fill all the slots in ‘The Director’s Place’.16 Sympathetically, Anderson suggested several people.17

Sheila Whittaker programmed the film for the London Film Festival in November 1993 and invited Anderson to attend and answer audience
Disliking such events, he declined, but Ted Craig (one of those who had sailed in the riverboat party) was present as his guest and afterwards described the warm appreciation of a large audience at the NFT.

At last in May 1994, Archer asked if Anderson would do publicity and interviews. The latter agreed and, in line with his usual practice, suggested critics he thought might be favourably inclined – including David Robinson, Alexander Walker and Philip French. Finally Archer’s office was able to tell him that transmission was set for a prime-time slot, opening the series for BBC2 on Saturday 17 September 1994. But on 30 August while holidaying in France as the guest of Lois Sutcliffe Smith, the friend who had started his filmmaking career, Anderson went for a swim, collapsed and died instantly. Inadvertently, he had made one of the many obituaries that marked his death.

The film viewed and appreciated

At Anderson’s invitation Gavin Lambert had in February 1993 written a personal appreciation of *Is That All There Is?* The director thought his old friend would be well placed to understand the film and was delighted with the result (although, admitting that the editorial impulse dies hard, he did offer a number of minor emendations, most of which Lambert accepted). They both hoped to see it published in *Sight & Sound* when the film was transmitted. It was, but in tandem with Lambert’s obituary.

Lambert perceived clearly the integral structure and purpose of the film, noting that it ‘creates its own unexpected form, a kind of controlled free association. One episode follows another, seemingly isolated, but in fact linked by a subtext’. Derek Elley, in *Variety*’s mandatory throttled tones, complemented Lambert’s observation: ‘It is never clear which parts of the film are scripted, and this blurring of lines lends pic a teasing feel’. However, close attention suggests that a script did exist secretly in Anderson’s head. Elley recognised one function of this *modus operandi*: ‘In this staged reality, Anderson clearly relishes his role of puppet master, drawing out his colleagues’ views and dispensing his own with knowing, crusty humour’.

Lambert’s and Elley’s insights are vindicated by a scene in which, over friendly glasses of vodka in his kitchen, Anderson questions one of his visitors, Marc Sigsworth. (The latter had written an undergraduate dissertation on the director’s films which Anderson had praised, subsequently appointing the young man his amanuensis on *The Whales*.)
of August.) All innocence, Anderson asks Sigsworth (now an assistant producer of documentaries at the BBC) what films he has made lately. Sigsworth cites seven programmes on topics concerning social issues. Anderson springs a trap.

Anderson: Exercises in journalistic futility! Or – do you think that’s unfair?
Sigsworth (refusing the challenge): Do you always wear your hat indoors?
Anderson (insouciantly tosses it on the floor): Well, why do you make these films?
Sigsworth: To make people think about what’s going on.
Anderson: Do you really think people want to think?
Sigsworth: Some people.
Anderson (sardonically measuring every word): Not the kind of people we make films for... Old boy!
He empties his glass with relish and the sequence ends.

The trap has been set in earlier, apparently unrelated episodes where Anderson seeks answers to questions that the other person ought to know. As Philip French commented in his obituary, ‘In conversation he had a method of putting a question that implied an answer and suggested that disagreement would expose your moral inferiority’. So Anderson asks the friendly assistant at his dry cleaners whether she knows David Mellor’s name. She doesn’t, but he reminds her that the then junior minister has been on the front page of the tabloids for weeks. Later, he asks his cleaner Catherine O’Neill to identify Antonia de Sancha. O’Neill thinks she is an opera singer rather than Mellor’s kiss-and-tell mistress. Far from touchy, Anderson lets his liking for both women show; but the two conversations go further than merely test their personal knowledge. Since both read tabloid newspapers, their responses reinforce his contention to Sigsworth about the futility of journalism.

In his original proposal to Archer, Anderson had said that he thought of making ‘a fragmented account of life today’. He was as good as his word. Just as in If.... and O Lucky Man!, he divided this film into sections with chapter headings. Breaking narrative continuity in favour of fragmentation is of course a Brechtian device, but not the only one in Is That All There Is?. A dialectic typical of Anderson’s satires is in play. Consider the recurrent conflict between themes from Anderson’s life touched on in one mode and, in another, the intercut TV news reports. For example, shots of starving Somalians are cut into a sequence where jaded shoppers choose food from overloaded shelves in Anderson’s local supermarket.

Another instance occurs when Oprah Winfrey interviews a self-satisfied Ron Howard who admits coyly that his latest Hollywood movie is a
triumph. Cut to David Sherwin in Anderson’s flat where the two men survey a sheaf of rejection letters for several scripts – scripts which the director, dominant as ever, requires a subservient Sherwin to admit that Anderson contributed to substantially. Cut to a clip from a soft porn film – a juxtaposition that must have amused Anderson wickedly for its play with female dominance (in this context a satirical nod at the psychological relationship between himself and the co-author he regularly cowed). In lugubrious play, an almost nude woman, pistol in hand, forces a man to ‘perform’ cunnilingus. The viewer is left to strip away the flimsily covered suspicion that Anderson and Sherwin might have had greater success if they too had gone down to serve the market’s baser needs. Our wider point is that in this last film Anderson frames himself, his friends, colleagues and the mediated world at large in his satirical gaze.

The register of *Is That All There Is?* is not uniformly witty and satirical, but interspersed with elegiac interludes. From time to time Anderson surveys the posters for his films and plays decorating the walls of his flat. While drafting programme notes for *Stages* with his secretary Kathy Burke, he reflects that it’s not a bad selection for a life’s work. Later he turns to drafting the commentary for his 1992 BBC *Omnibus* programme on John Ford. He reads his valediction, lionising his hero as both a professional and poetic filmmaker. Since by ‘professional’ Anderson had in mind Ford’s ability to satisfy the requirements of the Hollywood studios, he knew that this obituary could relate to his own work only in the poetic respect.

Embedded in the film lies one other ironic and elegiac moment. In the chapter ‘At Your Age’, Anderson attends the Royal Free Hospital which he had often, unhappily, visited with Rachel Roberts. A doctor tests his heart and reassures him it is functioning exactly as should be; but when *Is That All There Is?* was transmitted no viewer could fail to know that two years after the scan that heart had stopped.

Anderson devoted the penultimate chapter of *Is That All There Is?* to his final visitor, ‘Murray Anderson, Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar’. This, of course, is his older brother, Sandy’s father. In contrast to the way he deals with other visitors, Lindsay allows Murray to deliver an uninterrupted sermon, merely cutting away to photographs of the older man’s childhood and wartime years in the RAF. Murray’s theme (developed at some length while he pares an apple and munches it complacently) is how, despite the sad fact that all concerned are doing their best, the British Empire is unravelling from its core. He concludes by mouthing with comfortable despair a ritualised moan of the generation who had fought and survived the Second World War: ‘So ... what do we do?
Nothing! Just slowly go down the drain!'. These words cue a hard cut to another ritual conclusion, the last night of the Proms where thousands of impassioned young Britons wave the national flag and chant Thomas Arne’s *Rule Britannia*: ‘Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!’.

The pointed nature of this, Lindsay’s juxtaposition, nicely satirises both positions. Comfortable melancholy aroused by thoughts of terminal national decline contrasts with jingoist assertions of British bulldog resilience. Since Murray’s regrets about national decline were not radically distinct from Lindsay’s at his more despondent, the juxtaposition also lets Lindsay imply that Murray’s ineffectual moaning resembles his own. It makes for intimate, frank and witty satire, but (though this would not have been known to the public) it does not lack personal forgiveness. Privately (as we learn from his journals), Lindsay had in earlier years resented what he saw as Murray’s cavalier abandonment to him of responsibility for nurturing his children and coping with the fallout from the broken family.

The final sequence blends mourning and celebration. It rounds out a poignant portrait of the artist as an old man. Anderson, his friends and colleagues board a Thames riverboat to hold a party and scatter the ashes of Rachel Roberts and Jill Bennett. Anderson closes his film-making career as he and his guests (many of them elderly members of the various artistic milieux in which he had worked for forty-five years) face their own, as well as the late actresses’ mortality. But sorrow does not dominate the event unchallenged. Once more Alan Price provides the music, rendering with light touch the defiant song that Peggy Lee made famous.

> Is that all there is, is that all there is?  
> If that’s all there is my friends, then let’s keep dancing!  
> Let’s break out the booze and have a ball,  
> If that’s all there is!12

This chorus is heard for the last time only after the ashes and flowers have been cast into the river, and the image dissolves slowly to a photograph of the two actresses in their gorgeous prime. As the end titles roll Price speaks the last part of the song in which the singer, although betrayed by love and deeply unhappy, rejects the notion of suicide. So it is that the chorus cited above marks out on Anderson’s behalf the defiant route to the end of life that he meant to (and did) follow despite the failure of his loving attempts to persuade his two dear friends to exercise the same courage.

Near the end of his appreciation of *Is That All There Is?*, Lambert had written:
Like Ford, his favourite director, Lindsay is part rebel and part traditionalist. But where Ford’s lack of sympathy with contemporary life led him to a poetic idealisation of the past, Lindsay’s distaste for an age of moral shabbiness and closed hearts has fired him to attack it directly... But the last delayed echo I hear is of unrequited love, for a country of the mind, the better place that he would like England to be ...

Lambert developed this theme in his obituary, characterising Anderson’s work in cinema as basically that of a romantic who became a satirist when the changes he had hoped for in England (and which If.... flagged up) never happened.

The genuine satirist has always been a rare and endangered species, and not just because he makes a lot of people angry. His satire is a defence against pain, and he scolds because he loves. In his last film, Lindsay was as unsparing with himself as with the society he targeted. There’s self-mockery in his self-portrait, he knows the role he’s expected to play, but the most lasting impression is of something wonderfully benign behind the ritual severity, like the sense of nostalgia and regret behind his account of Mick Travers’ [sic] progress. ‘A style is an attitude. An attitude is a style,’ he once wrote. This director’s world lives because he followed his own commandment to the end.

Thus Lambert, in the film’s only sensitive appreciation, reads Is That All There Is? as the director’s own final, on-screen summation of his cinematic authorship. Lambert’s ascription of authorship, in
demonstrating how this film holds the complete dialectic (the tenderness towards humanity and the satirical perspective) coincides with our observation of such tensions as underlying almost the entire body of Lindsay Anderson’s screen work.

Notes

1 Correspondence, John Archer to Anderson, 21 November 1991 (LA 2/9/3/1/1) and 29 January 1992 (LA 2/9/3/1/2).
2 Correspondence, Anderson to John Archer, 17 March 1992 (LA 2/9/3/1/3).
3 Ibd.; see also Alexander Walker, ‘Drama World Pays Tribute to Actresses on the Thames’, Evening Standard (12 October 1992) 16 (LA 2/9/6/1/1).
4 Correspondence, Anderson to John Archer, 1 April 1992 (LA 2/9/3/1/5).
5 Lindsay Anderson’s ‘Is That All There Is?’, draft outline, Yaffle Films, 17 June 1992 (LA 2/9/2/1).
6 Correspondence, Sandy Anderson to Lindsay Anderson, 7 September 1992 (LA 2/9/3/3/1).
7 The schedule for Is That All There Is? dated 16 September 1992 lists more on-camera participants than the drafts written earlier that month (LA 2/9/2/5).
8 Schedule for Is That All There Is?.
9 Correspondence, Trevor Ingman, producer, Yaffle Films to John Archer, 31 July 1992 (LA 2/9/3/2/2).
10 Correspondence and draft budget, Trevor Ingman to John Archer, 1 July 1992 (LA 2/9/3/2/1).
15 Correspondence, Trevor Ingman to Ian Christie and Barry Edson, Heads of Distribution and Acquisitions, British Film Institute, 10 December 1992 (LA 2/9/5/1).
16 Correspondence, John Archer to Anderson, 18 March 1993 (LA 2/9/3/1/9).
17 Correspondence, Anderson to John Archer, 31 March 1993 (LA 2/9/3/1/10).
18 Correspondence, Sheila Whittaker, Director London Film Festival to Anderson, 11 October 1993 (LA 2/9/3/3/5).
19 Correspondence, Ted Craig to Anderson, 22 November 1993 (LA 2/9/3/3/3).
20 Correspondence, John Archer to Anderson, 19 May 1994 (LA 2/9/3/1/19).
21 Correspondence, Anderson to John Archer, 26 May 1994 (LA 2/9/3/1/20).
22 Correspondence, Evelyn Robertson, Secretary to John Archer, to Anderson, 16 August 1994 (LA 2/9/3/1/21).
23 Gavin Lambert, Typescript Is That All There Is? (LA 2/9/6/3); correspondence Gavin Lambert to Anderson, 8 February 1993 (LA 2/9/3/6/1).
24 Correspondence, Anderson to Gavin Lambert, 17 February 1993 (LA 2/9/3/6/2).
28 Ibid.
31 Anderson wrote, ‘David and I have a peculiar working relationship. [...] There is a great deal of my shouting at him and his being reduced to a state of neurotic impotence’, Never Apologise: The Collected Writings, ed. Paul Ryan (London: Plexus, 2004) 149.
32 Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Song, ‘Is That All There Is?’ (1968).
Lindsay Anderson in the archive: empirical, named and implied author

Anderson was a renowned critic but, as we have seen, no theorist. Had he spent less energy reviling film theorists such as Peter Wollen for his *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* and more on understanding semiotics, he might have understood that the director as a historical person involved in the processes of production is not the same as the director whom audiences may perceive both through, and as a source of the resultant film. Nor is the empirical director the same as the identically named author deployed by publicity departments in promoting the film.

Anderson did not differentiate these manifestations of cinematic authorship, but treated them as identical. He believed that the failure on the part of semioticians and structuralists to respond to the criticism of their work voiced in his *About John Ford* showed that the terms they used were entirely self-referential and did not engage with the real world. Charged in Anderson’s 1981 paper with ‘Critical Betrayal’, some such theoreticians may intellectually have been scouring the interior of the ivory tower into which he implied they had locked themselves. But Anderson’s adamant rejection of new models for comprehending cinematic signs and meaning showed him equally shackled in his fiercely defended fort. His reflections on his own authorship are always pertinent to analysis of his input to films; but his observations on the ‘auteur theory’ were both inconsistent and tramelled in the confused debates that preceded the theoretical developments of the 1970s which he so angrily repugned. Thankfully, we are not constrained in the same way.

The practising director as author

In our accounts of the films Anderson directed we paid attention to contributions by certain principal crewmembers, a demonstration (if one were needed) that the collaborative nature of a film’s production
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processes admits a variety of claims to partaking in authorship of the finished work. Such claims may come from, among others, screenplay writers, the cinematographer and editors imposing a distinctive visual or narrative style, the composer and sound editor inflecting the emotional impact of the narrative, or the producer who exercises tight control on behalf of the studio or television channel funding the production. The examples we encountered in Anderson’s films reveal that, although he was not always the sole author, his was always the dominant presence during the production process. His colleagues recognised it. A few of his producers challenged his vision after he had finished a film they had funded (Oscar Lewenstein with *The White Bus*, Warner Bros. with *O Lucky Man!* and Bonny Dore for Atlantis and HBO with *Glory! Glory!*).

As we have seen, Anderson believed in collaborative work and depended on it, particularly when scriptwriting. He more than once lamented (as when agonising over how better to script the prison sequence in *O Lucky Man!* ‘the lack, of a creative writing collaborator’. This he felt despite Sherwin’s active engagement in the project and the sharing of early drafting between them and Malcolm McDowell. Indeed, as the latter recalled in his commemorative film about the director, even the title resulted from shared thoughts. Sherwin and McDowell having offered Anderson *Lucky Man*, the director, he added the O! It reflects his famously conflicted personality that, although (as here) he rarely expressed in his journals unmitigated satisfaction with their input, in public Anderson wholeheartedly praised writers for their co-authorship of the scripts – Storey and Harris for the screenplay of *This Sporting Life*; Delaney, Sherwin, Bennett and Daniels for the satires. Nevertheless, Anderson dominated each pairing; and a writing partnership with him never amounted to equal co-authorship of the finished film. As McDowell said of Anderson completing the title of *O Lucky Man!* he could not let the original suggestion stand without showing that he was in charge, but ‘He was right – because it made it epic’.7

So far as actors were concerned, Anderson maintained that one of the principal skills of a director of stage productions lay in casting the players.8 He took similar care when casting for the screen, and nurtured actors’ performances by exploring with them the ideas that arose as their personalities interacted with their characters.9 During the production of *If....* he followed both predilections, as McDowell bore witness.10 Anderson cast him and Christine Noonan after McDowell had to audition for the role of Travis without time to digest the script of the scene – the Packhorse Café. So McDowell concentrated on the one thing he remembered it specified, the kiss. Noonan responded
to his none-too-innocent inquiry with a hefty clout and that started a lively catfight. When it came to filming the scene, McDowell (incited, he recalled, by lust for the actress) suggested to Anderson that he and Noonan should strip in the nude—an idea that the director took up to fine effect. However, although Anderson preferred to work collaboratively with actors, he always remained in command. McDowell experienced this too. Inspired by Laurence Olivier’s deployment in *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* of a sudden gesture that astonished his audience, McDowell decided to imitate him. Next day, while shooting a scene for *If....*, he introduced his own bit of business. It was met by Anderson’s excoriating inquiry, ‘What on earth are you doing, Malcolm?’ and the command, ‘Just do what you’re supposed to do!’

It was the same with other leading talents in his production teams. He was, for example, happy to collaborate with cinematographers when (like Mike Fash) they inspired him with confidence in their efficiency and willingness to serve the project with their vision. Conversely, towards the end of his professional relationship with Miroslav Ondricek, Anderson fought against him, ostensibly on the grounds that the latter was producing inadequate work, but probably also because he intuited that the cameraman was arrogating too much power over *O Lucky Man!*

All said and done, Anderson’s goal (as he declared in interview with Joseph Gelmis) was an integrated practice that acknowledged the inner dynamics of the film’s fabric. Not for the only time, he compared these in their ideal form to those sustaining a piece of music. By analogy, that required the director to orchestrate and sustain an internal rhythm somewhat like a conductor.

But for a good film, the rhythm of the editing must be implicit in the construction of the script. A really good film is an organic growth from the very beginning through the stage of scripting, the shooting that follows out of the scripting, the editing that follows out of the shooting. It follows that the director must depend on the principal talent at his disposal. Thus logically Anderson recognised that only in collaboration does the truth and poetry of art arise.

Fully aware of the nature of his authorial input, Anderson consciously veered away from working in Hollywood. Mike Bygrave noted that he did so when declining the commercial film *Dress Grey* to embark on *Britannia Hospital*. In truth that decision merely confirmed Anderson’s established authorial stance and developed the musings over his professional proclivities and limitations which he had written while directing *O Lucky Man!* (see Chapter 7). The evidence is clear in the years 1976 to 1981 when he sought to develop a number of film projects for the major studios. He and Gavin Lambert offered Columbia *Grand Babylon Hotel*
in 1976–77. Columbia did not green light it but immediately counteroffered him John Carpenter’s script. Anderson thought it ‘the biggest mish-mash of pseudo-sophisticated rubbish’; but Irvin Kershner was to direct it as the 1978 box-office hit *The Eyes of Laura Mars*, starring Faye Dunaway. Two years later, after trying to get other projects approved by EMI in Britain, Anderson sought to develop a number of titles for Orion, some mentioned in Chapter 10. Yet by April 1977 Anderson had already expressed disillusion to Columbia’s British Productions department.

It is really maddening – and gallingly as well – to feel that interest on the Coast for anything British is very superficial and unlikely to be supported. I find it awfully hard to take seriously the idea of doing an American picture, when the approaches from Hollywood are so thoughtless and amateurish. On the other hand, is there really any possibility that Columbia would ever be interested in a successor to the kind of films which they claim to admire so much – i.e. *This Sporting Life* and/or *If...*?

No doubt with such issues in mind, Bygrave located Anderson in the tradition of the European author-director, adding, ‘like many directors, Anderson ... sought to transform himself into a fully-fledged artist, creating his own vision rather than (in part) interpreting someone else’s’. That impulse shows in a number of stylistic devices including: references to his previous films; using Mick Travis three times as a character name; repeated casting of actors; allocating actors to more than one role in a film; epic performances; Brechtian devices; allusions to pre-existing artefacts (paintings, plays, fiction, poetry); insertion of chapter headings; and on one occasion playing the director on screen.

Anderson’s latent connections with the European New Wave surfaced again as late as 1987 when, talking about his own practice, he said the filmmaking process was not a series of steps but an organic whole, ‘like the growth of a tree’ that climaxed in the editing of the work ‘where the whole thing flowers’. This echoes the belief behind the *politique des auteurs* that the expression of a true auteur’s personality brings organic unity to the work. And, of course, it links with Anderson’s insistence that films should be personal. Anderson had not, however, registered Wollen’s resistance to the thrust of the *politique in which the latter revised the concept of a director’s personal input, arguing that auteur theory should be detached from “any suspicion that it represents a “cult of personality” or apotheosis of the director”.*

Anderson’s long journal entry on editing *Glory! Glory!* (excerpted in Chapter 12) invites us to apply Wollen’s *aperçu* to his work. Anderson elaborates on the importance of editing and associates it with music: ‘It
is at this stage that film most closely corresponds to Pater’s dictum that “all art constantly aspires to the condition of music”. Marrying belief and practice, he always controlled the cutting and decided what music to select and how to mix it into the soundtrack. When collaborating with Alan Price, he also had a formative say in commissioning the music. For Anderson, editing and music were powerfully bonded.

In a 1978 letter to Charles Silet, Anderson summarised music’s importance to him, suggesting that the academic alter his book on the films to add a passage on music.

I think if anyone is looking for stylistic affinities between things I’ve done at different stages of my career, the use of music would be one of the most consistent. This is something that’s come quite naturally to me: I’ve always found music to be an enormous help in the construction of a film and the ordering of its rhythm. Besides of course making an emotional lyrical comment.

Anderson’s references to music reinforce the feelings he noted during the course of filmmaking and reveal that his emotions were major drivers motivating the work. Where emotions are aroused, energies of which the individual is neither entirely conscious nor in control are in play. Wollen, albeit inchoately, recognised that this element of a director’s input could be discerned in certain (but by no means all) cases.

By a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or world-view, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which auteur analysis disengages from the film.

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved.

Wollen accounts here for the way authorship is assigned not on the basis of empirical research but by means of tracing of a coded structure in the work. He does not posit that directors lack awareness and control of the greater part of their input but rather that some elements of their contribution arise beyond consciousness.

Anderson’s journal adds to the expectation provided by clues embedded in the films that audiences might find unconscious traces of his input in them. One May morning while directing O Lucky Man! he awoke at 5:30 and (at that time of day when unconscious prompting enters consciousness with less resistance than later in the day) contemplated the dual, conflicting aspects of his personality. He identified the
first with ‘emotional and sensual cravings which reveal themselves in
times of solitude, in fantasies [...]’; and the second with ‘this role of
responsibility and authority and creative assertion which is the other
half of my persona – the one the world sees and imagines it knows...’.25
This split and the tension it generated run in parallel with the divide
between the lyrically tender and the satirical that we have followed in his
films. What is particularly interesting, in the context of embedding his
personality in themes, is that he appears in this journal entry conscious
of investing only the second, authoritarian aspect of his personality in
his films. He rarely admitted to investing his yearnings in them. That
is not to say that he did not do so as our analyses of the films have
revealed. However, his apologia for the final Mick Travis film is a rare
public recognition of the emotional element in his work: ‘If I didn’t care
about Britain and about humanity, then I wouldn’t be making films
like Britannia Hospital. Satire always comes from people who care too
much to live in a world which is wasteful of its potential, without saying
anything about it’.26

The author name: the director as marketing tool

Directors dignified by the film industry as authors are presented in
publicity material as having, along with their films’ lead players, some-
thing akin to a starring role. Since distributors tag a movie with the
director’s name primarily for commercial reasons, they seldom do
so without identifying advantages in associating themselves with the
individual’s reputation. The director’s name may imply the cachet of
cultural respectability, or cult status, or a certain distinctive style.27 Alter-
natively it may invoke certain attitudes or themes (clearly an attraction
of Anderson the satirist after If....); but even when a cinematic triumph
may bathe a distributor in reflected glory, that is usually of secondary
importance to marketing opportunities.

The mid-period of Anderson’s filmmaking illustrates the phenom-
enon. Reviewing If...., Gene Moskowitz wrote in Variety, ‘It reveals
Lindsay Anderson as one of the more individual and dynamic film-
makers on the British scene’.28 Since the primary function of that paper
was (then as now) to evaluate films in advance of release to North Amer-
ican exhibitors, Moskowitz’s comments indicate that in 1968 Anderson
did not have an established reputation as a named author in the USA. In
part this was because If.... (helped by its triumph at Cannes) was his first
feature to win significant distribution and attention there. In part too,
the American practice of identifying directors as authors in marketing
English language films developed only when the American New Wave urged practices established by the European New Wave on Hollywood. Timothy Corrigan identifies this shift in policy with the waning of the studio system and their need to find new ways to mark a movie other than with a studio’s signature. One prong of studio strategy was to generate an artistic aura to distinguish films from less elevated forms of entertainment, notably television.29

From the late 1960s, wherever the strategy seemed potentially advantageous, publicists of English language movies used the director’s name as a signifier of authorship. The intention was both to offer a guarantee of a film’s quality and broadly indicate its nature by hinting at the type of characters, plot and themes dealt with. This was particularly relevant should the director’s new release fall into a quasi-generic relation with his or her recent productions. In 1973, when Warner Bros. used Anderson’s name they had in mind promoting O Lucky Man! to a prospective audience with positive memories of If..... By means of his name, publicists associated the new film with the popularity of its predecessor to build audience anticipation of another uninhibited satire. As we saw, the corporation’s publicists highlighted the names of three stars currently in the public eye. McDowell’s name recalled the rambunctious star of both If.... and A Clockwork Orange. The third was Alan Price for his recent album releases. So each of the three names highlighted on the billboard imported the idea of different characteristics. For marketing purposes O Lucky Man! had three author names attached.

Anderson’s experiences of Hollywood mentioned above make the point that in the late 1970s the studios were less interested in the films he might have brought them than their director. Anderson was now someone with a track record, someone whom they saw, perhaps, as another John Schlesinger, a British director who could move from ‘art house’ films to mainstream Hollywood fare, bringing his marketable name with him. Of course, the other side to this was Anderson’s reluctance to make that shift into the commercial mainstream.

When EMI marketed Britannia Hospital as a Lindsay Anderson film, they were both fulfilling his contract and following what had become standard industry practice with films whose director might be recognised as an author.30 Unfortunately they ignored market research which anticipated that this director’s name would be effective mainly with older people and not with the greater part of the movie-going audience, the young – not least because it had been ten years since the release of O Lucky Man.

In publicity for The Whales of August (‘A film by Lindsay Anderson’),31 his name fronted the promotional material along with veteran stars
Lillian Gish, Bette Davis and Vincent Price. It was another instance of marketing through multiple author names. However, the promotional strategy for this film was poorly focused. As a consequence some reviewers felt the absence of ‘Anderson’ the bitter satirist without knowing how to characterise his role as director of this film. In fact, as Richard Dyer has shown in his work on stars, Hollywood studios have long experience of marketing the sudden reversal of an established character type;\(^3^2\) but *The Whales*’s publicists did not try to do this.

With *Glory! Glory!* Anderson’s author name as satirist was once again viable. In this instance of production for cable TV, it was deployed in roughly equally weighted credit share with the producers. This did not embrace all six of them but one individual (Bonny Dore, for her previous work for a televangelist who had inspired the basic idea for the mini-series) and one corporation (HBO because its market niche encouraged it to transmit distinctive material).

By way of historical footnote, we may add that after Anderson’s death David Sherwin, Gavin Lambert, Malcolm McDowell and Mike Kaplan inevitably employed their friend’s name to help market their recollections of working with him.\(^3^3\)

The perceived author

The figure we have termed the perceived author is also known by theorists as the author function, and the implied, ideal or surrogate author. Spectators construct this imagined figure from their engagement with the text. Wollen posits the critic as ‘someone who persists in learning to see the film differently and is able to specify the mechanisms which make this possible’.\(^3^4\) The critic does not produce the one true reading, but simply another reading that gives rise to more meaning.\(^3^5\) Thus the perceived author has the merit, C. Paul Sellors states, that it does not require critics to guess what was in an actual author’s mind as his or her intention when contributing to a film’s making, nor to perform what Sellors wryly calls acts of ‘psychobiography’.\(^3^6\)

Sellors notes that theorists such as Wayne Booth and Seymour Chatman, who endorse the concept of the author surrogate as a function of an individual text, agree that the people who make a film are ‘logically distinct from the entity [the surrogate author] that appears as a chimera in a text during the acts of reading and spectating’.\(^3^7\) For Sellors, however, the weakness of the perceived author lies precisely in that it is produced by an act of interpretation. Logically therefore the perceived author cannot be responsible for nor prompt that interpretation. In his
opinion it follows that each author surrogate is unique to each and every spectator: there are as many perceived authors of a narrative as there are spectators who engage with the fiction.\textsuperscript{38}

While theoretical purity of the kind Sellors argues for may be tenable by academics labouring at their desks to distinguish formally between manifestations of authorship, it does not fully account for spectators’ urge to imagine an individual existing in the real world who has first communicated through the film, and second should be able to answer questions such as, ‘What is the filmmaker saying? What is his or her personal vision?’ According to David Bordwell, who recognises these questions, the urge to discover an author behind a film is the stronger the more that film’s narrational procedures deviate from the familiar conventions of classical Hollywood exposition.\textsuperscript{39} Thus the distinctive stylistic qualities of Anderson’s features could have contributed to spectators’ construction of a perceived ‘Anderson’.

In application to actual case histories, the neatness of theorising that seeks to separate completely the empirical author-director from the author name and the perceived author breaks down when we consider potential leakages between the three types. Such leakages are plainly visible in Anderson’s case.

Sellors cites Gregory Currie to develop the idea that individuals invent the perceived author of a film as a consequence of viewing the film as if in isolation. For whatever reason, readers will invariably interpret meanings into works that were never intended by the author. This is not an error on the part of the reader, since the evidence beyond the text to guide interpretation is typically absent.\textsuperscript{40}

We will return to the matter of spectators interpreting meanings unintended by an author, but first take issue with the notion that audience members lack evidence beyond the text to guide their interpretation. In our opinion the perceived author is rarely invented by a solitary spectator, reviewer or critic sitting in isolation while the film text unrolls on screen. Leaving aside for the moment the impact of sharing the cinematic experience with an audience, several factors contest the notion that spectators are isolated and uninformed. In Anderson’s case, dedicated film fans could in the 1940s and 1950s have gained access to his critical observations on cinema through articles in \textit{Sequence} and \textit{Sight & Sound}. With the release of \textit{This Sporting Life} and his subsequent features, he became known by means of published interviews not only in specialist journals, but also to an altogether larger readership through broadsheet and tabloid papers. He had too his parallel career as a theatre director which augmented his media presence and fame.
During his career, the print media devoted ever more pages to film, profiling directors and promoting them rather like stars; journalists augmented such columns with information contained in press packs; and authors developed their publicity material by means of interviews, being often contractually obliged to do so. Typically (then as now) they might describe aspects of the production process, praise the starring actors and sketch an outline of the story and its themes. Also during Anderson’s career, the broadcast media extended exponentially their engagement with cinema, redoubling the ‘leaks’ between actual, named and perceived author.

Anderson habitually exploited his media presence to steer audiences (including reviewers). He often told his interviewers – even while remarking that spectators should make up their own minds – how his films should be interpreted. Few directors do so with such emphasis, and not all have the access to press, radio and television that a controversialist like Anderson could obtain at the height of his fame. But even without such directorial intervention many spectators will glean an advance idea of the author’s opinions as well as his or her achievements through reviews (which indeed frequently depend heavily on press releases).

Sellors argues that each spectator of a film generates a unique perceived author; but this does not take account of the implications of Rick Altman’s hypothesis about how film audiences enjoy genre movies:

> generic spectatorship is always implicitly a group affair, even when – perhaps especially when – group members are separated or unknown to each other.41

Altman argues that learning about a genre changes its configuration for those spectators whom it engages. Incremental knowledge not only makes a genre increasingly wonderful and interesting to them, ‘it also creates a more or less powerful bond with a part-real and part-imagined group of genre viewers’.42 Given that authors are perceived largely through characteristic traces that spectators seek out in a number of films, the processes that fans go through in seeking out a particular surrogate author are comparable to those of other fans when they deepen their experience of a genre. Altman makes the point that they enter a relationship with each other centred on the genre they favour. He goes further than claiming merely that they are in direct communication by means of face-to-face contact or reading the same interviews and reviews (though they may be connected in that manner too). Lateral communication (as he calls it) also constellates communities in indirect ways. He argues that,
the film industry has long done everything possible to imply that a given film will maximize isolated viewers’ symbolic integration into a larger and much valued audience.43

For some spectators, it follows, genre films reflect the existence of other members of the community that loves the genre – the films become signs of other like-minded spectators even when they never meet. And this is so because the community of fans is active. Its members decode the text made by its original authors but then rewrite it, so to speak, to share ritually agreed and endlessly shifting meanings with other members of their community.44 That constellated community can then be understood ‘both as authors of the film’s ability to signify the existence of other community members, and as readers of the signs thus constituted’.45 Since one facet of being a fan is precisely enjoyment of the sense that one’s enthusiasm is amplified by the part-real, part-imagined group one has joined, we argue that Altman’s model is equally applicable to spectators of films made by authors whom they admire.

It is apparent that such an evolution of theoretical ideas about the nature of authorship, makes it possible to understand in a new light the reception of Anderson’s films insofar as the creation of the surrogate or perceived author is concerned.

Actual cinematic authors may realise their complexes and project them as fantasies through their films onto their imagined or ideal spectators. Conversely actual spectators introject the images aroused in the film as fantasies that may excite the interchange between their conscious and unconscious responses. Ira Konigsberg explains the process of emotional investment.

In the silent, darkened theater, removed from a direct confrontation with reality, and perceiving images that seem half-real and transitional we slip into a state of half-wakefulness, into a reverie that weakens our defenses and sets loose our own fantasies and wishes to interact and fuse with the characters and even the landscape that we see on the screen. I do not have to describe for you the way in which we loosen hold of ourselves at times and become fastened to what we see on the screen, but not completely fastened – a merging takes place, a sense of the characters as me and not-me, as part of my subjective world and part of objective reality. What actually transpires is a process of introjection followed by projection, a process by which we … take in the images and then project ourselves into them as they appear before us – a process of introjection and projective identification …

In the dynamics I am describing, the introjection of the film images triggers an internal process by which we invest these images with our own psychic and emotional overlays and then project them back out,
along with our own involvement, onto their imprints on the screen – a process that continues, back and forth, as we watch the film. I need only remind you of the sudden jolt we feel, of our sense of loneliness and incompleteness as we are forced to pull back into ourselves, as our ties with the images on the screen are suddenly severed when the film ends.\footnote{46}

In the process of projecting their own complexes back onto the film, spectators may imagine a perceived author as the source of the cinematic fantasies that have so excited their imaginations. But cinema going is not only an individual but also a collective activity. As Luke Hockley says, members of the audience, self-evidently in social association, share a physical, somatic experience given ‘the sheer size of the screen and weight of the sound’\footnote{47} Their experience is collective too in its psychological impact as spectators introject the fantasies playing on screen as Konigsberg outlines. In this process spectators mould their responses to those fantasies through both the shared culture in which they participate as audience members and the deeper investment in and from the collective unconscious.\footnote{48}

Unfortunately Anderson’s files do not contain evidence relating to exchanges between fans of his films, and we believe further work should be undertaken to test the model we have sketched out – whether in relation to Anderson or other directors. Nevertheless anecdotal evidence suggests that in one instance the community of his British fans probably did, in the collective and lateral manner outlined above and in harmony with many reviewers, create ‘Anderson’ the perceived author. This was when the release of If... coincided with the May 1968 Paris uprisings and a marked change in student culture which created a crisis atmosphere in British schools, colleges and universities.\footnote{49} As the perceived author, ‘Anderson’ appears to have been seen as a satirist with a revolutionary bent.

As far as reviewers’ creation of the perceived author is concerned, we have uncovered abundant evidence in Anderson’s case (surely typical in this respect) that the process is by no means hermetically sealed. On the contrary, not only the film itself, but professional knowledge of the man and his work, together in some cases with strong personal feelings, play a part in forming their portraits. Reviewers read each other’s columns of course; but in addition, as became apparent in coverage of Britannia Hospital, the assignments of authorship they make can be shaped by the cultural formations within which they work.
How should Anderson’s authorship of his films be attributed some twenty years after his death? As Stephen Crofts notes, perceived authors are constructed differently in different times and places probably because of changes in the film-cultural formation of the critics concerned: ‘Not only the author and the text but, just as importantly, the reading must be seen as historically and culturally shaped’. Our own experience of working in his archives without contact with the living man assures us that it is a viable method – not necessarily better than others, but certainly different from the approaches of our predecessors and likely to be a main means of access to ‘Lindsay Anderson’ until the films are next revalued by a new public coming to them with fresh eyes.

Nevertheless, archival work, like any approach, is subject to preconceptions – in this case those built by the intense intimacy of the research. Consider the initial response of one of our team to If You Were There... (1985), a film in rough-cut form featuring the pop group Wham! (George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley) on tour in China. For reasons that will become clear, with one exception, reviewers did not have the opportunity to discuss it.

By 1985, Anderson’s competence to fulfil a remit was beyond question. He had made numerous television commercials and also an effective public information film Foot and Mouth (1955). None were authorship vehicles. In January 1984 he had directed a pop video for the singer Carmel, ‘More, More, More’. Undoubtedly he could have directed a publicity film for Wham! in the same genre – the kind of piece eventually realised in Foreign Skies, which was cut from his footage after the group fired him.

Anderson’s papers reveal that Wham! managers appointed him without a clear remit. He found them unsure of what they wanted; and they had left planning to an inexperienced producer before hiring him to direct. Even in the early stages of editing ‘miles and miles of material – some of it excellent, much of it unusable’, Anderson was complaining, ‘I don’t honestly know whether we are making a film or a video or a TV programme... Perhaps all three’. Anderson was aware that the vagaries of pop stars and their promoters exposed him to the risk of changes of intention. As when directing Glory! Glory! three years later, he tried to shelter himself from creative involvement and believed that he had succeeded while on location.

Unfortunately, it’s not so easy to preserve an ironic detachment in the cutting room. In fact, impossible. And when we started going through the material, finding the shape and starting to create a film, I found
myself quite unable to resist the temptation to behave like an artist. And
indeed, even if it has to be categorised as piece d’occasion, I’d certainly
claim that *If You Were There* came out as a movie of some originality,
charm and quality.\(^5\)

Neither George Michael nor his managers explained why, shortly after
viewing a rough cut which they appeared to enjoy heartily, they sacked
Anderson. He himself speculated that his film had not sufficiently flat-
ttered Michael’s ego;\(^5\) alternatively that it had been caught in destructive
wrangling between the two managers in their battle to gain sole control
of the pop star.\(^5\) He may have been right on both counts; but we note
too (as did Nick Rosen in the *Mail on Sunday*) that his rough cut did
not give much time to the concerts.\(^5\) Of fourteen chapters, only four
feature Wham! in vision on stage; and the end credits are superimposed
on the last of these. Whatever caused their antipathy, Michael or his
management to this day deny permission for public screenings. ‘The
usual performer’s vanity, I suppose’, Anderson commented, ‘though
the ironic thing is that they have included [in *Foreign Skies*] quite a
lot of footage which I had cut out because I thought it made George
and Andrew look either foolish or amateurish or gross’.\(^5\) Anderson
described *The White Bus* as his lost film. *If You Were There*... is his only
suppressed film.\(^5\)

As work-in-progress, the rough cut that he entitled *If You Were
There*... is sufficiently developed to reveal much about Anderson’s inten-
tions.\(^5\) He clearly meant it to be an authored film – and not just because
it is divided into chapters and has a title that echoes his 1968 popular
success.

It is worth mentioning how our analysis of this film developed as a
reflection on our use of archive material. As a team we watched it early
in our project but came to write about it nearly three years later when
we drafted an outline critique before re-screening the film. At this time,
the main thrust of work already undertaken led us in all logic to assume
that *If You Were There* was a satire and that Anderson’s cut highlighted
the pop stars’ indifference to China’s people and the various honours
offered them by their hosts. We had in mind developing this approach
to assert that Anderson’s satirical mask had seized him once again like
a persona he could no longer escape. So it was instructive to rerun the
film and discover that this construction was mistaken. As researchers
imbued in the archival records for three years, we had unconsciously
acquired a predisposition to find satire, in effect indulging our own
rather than Anderson’s authorship.

Not that *If You Were There*... lacks satirical elements entirely. They
centre on two aspects of the coverage. In Chapter 2, on their arrival in
Beijing, the Western press pack surrounds George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley so that, be it at the British Ambassador’s reception, the Great Wall or Tiananmen Square (where Ridgeley waves the Chinese flag in response to photographers’ directions) ordinary Chinese people can scarcely be seen. Then, in Chapters 2, 3 and 7, ranking party officials make the band welcome in a succession of stiff formal speeches. The two stars are out of their depth and struggle to respond in the appropriate tone while Anderson highlights the divide between the performers and the world they have been dropped into.

The relationship between performers and the social milieu in which they are working brings to mind some sequences from *O Dreamland*. In *If You Were There...* the po-faced bureaucrats and police embody one side of a clash of cultures. As the film proceeds it shows the cultural divide is not just that separating East and West. It is equally marked between, on one side, those exercising power at every level of the state apparatus in The People’s Republic and, on the other, the young fans avid for access to Western culture – not only pop music, but language too.63

A film that contains satirical elements is not *ipso facto* a satire. As *If You Were There...* proceeds, less is seen of the apparatchiks and police, more of people going about their business. In Chapter 4 ‘Meeting People’, Michael and Ridgeley walk through a street market and begin to engage with the vendors. They offer a man selling cassette players one of their tapes, letting him keep it when they move on. The next but one chapter, ‘Afternoon Off – In the Park We Practise English’, features local people boating and playing. While some converse with the two stars about pop music, others speak earnestly in favour of offering service to their country in preference to serving material appetites.

Soon the film divides its attention between, in one strand, preparations for the show, fans gathering, the razzmatazz and excitement of the first performance. In the other, we see demonstrations of ‘China’s Past in China’s Present’ (Chapter 10) – martial arts, traditional music, people offering devotion at a Buddhist temple and others practising Chi Gong. This culminates in high-energy, multi-camera coverage of the Beijing concert.

The band travels to Canton (now Guangzhou) where the documentary mode resumes. Classical musicians demonstrate their art to Michael and Ridgeley and they try some of the instruments. Then the Brits visit another food market where local delicacies including snake, toad and dog meat are sold. When they dine lavishly once again, the young men seem more at ease with Chinese food than in Beijing.

Chapter 13, ‘Canton Concert’, is the climax. It starts with the band on stage performing a high-energy number but then cuts to the city streets
at rush hour. People wash in the great Pearl River. Ferries move through the water and for some moments the sound track is occupied by river sounds. Barges pass across the screen, viewed through telephoto lenses, while the sailors (and on one boat small children playing) look back at us as if from another universe – a touching homage to Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante*. Then, as the orange sun silhouettes people going home over a metal bridge, Anderson and his editors overdub the long, elegiac saxophone introduction to ‘Careless Whisper’. With the sound of applause rippling as if in the distance, the lissom music courses over these relaxed images blending all in a momentary exquisite unity. When we cut back into the concert hall, George Michael, singled out by a spotlight pulls the energy which that prelude has built into a beautifully expressive solo. It is a superlative example of Anderson and his editor Peter West applying a technique the director learnt thirty-five years earlier from Humphrey Jennings to create an edit in which his art aspires to the condition of music.

With *The White Bus* and most of the films that follow, we often found Anderson’s authorial signature in footage that opposes document and lampoon, realism and imagination. This remains the case in *If You Were There…* with the emphasis on documenting people’s daily lives in Beijing and Guandong and lampoon reserved for the apparatchiks and their minions.

But there is something else, that other element which recurs in several films including *If You Were There…. It appears in retrospect to be hard won and easily extinguished. It consists of those rare, but distinctive lyric moments when characters are briefly at peace and, to our perception, ‘Anderson’ too appears at ease. In these moments he sometimes salutes Jennings, Vigo or John Ford and gives presence to a tenderness he often found less difficult to express when music added to the scenes’ emotional tone. One such moment occurs in *Every Day Except Christmas* when a pre-dawn lull precedes the start of Covent Garden business. There is another when the Girl finally escapes the mayoral tour in *The White Bus* and wanders through her town’s back streets. It’s exultantly present in scenes of students and their professor in *The Singing Lesson* and again when in *If…. Mick steals the motor-bike and meets his match in the Girl from the Packhorse Café. From *O Lucky Man!* another fantasy resonates with lyrical tenderness when the vicar’s wife suckles Mick, restores him to life and entrusts him to her children. The two elderly sisters in *The Whales of August* reconcile their differences and take their ritual walk down to the point to look for the great creatures that they know have long gone. And of course similar elegiac lyricism closes *Is That All There Is*? as Gavin Lambert perceived
in demonstrating how that last film holds the complete dialectic – the
tenderness towards humanity and the satirical perspective. In ascribing
authorship both to Anderson the man and to ‘Anderson’s’ presence in
and behind films that he knew so well, Lambert brings a unity to the two
arising from his own privileged point of view.

Envoi

In practice, members of the audience at large blend material provided to
them by the actual author and the publicity machine promoting a film’s
release. To create their perceived author they mix in with this informa-
tion their fantasy of the individual who is communicating by means of
this film and others in which the same individual has played a dominant
role. The perceived author has indicative value for three reasons. First, it
will usually be shaped (just as ideas of genre movies are usually formed)
not by individuals responding in isolation but constellated groups of
film fans. Second, the perceived author will confirm the values placed
on a film’s received meanings by those groups. And last, it will thereby
reflect the ideologies of the various (often opposed) groups responding
to a given film.

As a group of researchers we did something broadly comparable to
fans, but distinct in methodology. We built our accounts of Anderson
the working author and Anderson the marketable author-name on our
evaluation of information in his records. Mainly by referring to press
coverage of each film, we attempted to reflect our predecessors’ prin-
cipal evocations of him as a perceived author. The twin advantages of
access to a great deal more information and time to reflect on it than
most fans or reviewers can enjoy gave us a privileged point of view.
We then took another less conventional step, in effect using our prede-
cessors as constellated groups whose readings of ‘Anderson’ we could
endorse or resist. Having checked what the text of each film licensed,
we allowed our own perception of ‘Anderson’ to evolve, accepting that it
must change to some extent with each successive film while inevitably
being coloured by an element of fantasy inescapable in the reception
of cinema. We leave it now, as we must, to our successors in their turn
to rewrite Lindsay Anderson, confident that whatever judgements they
make, he will always emerge as a distinctive cinematic author.
Notes

3 Draft of Sydney lecture.
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5 Diary, 3 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/8).
6 See Malcolm McDowell, Never Apologize: A Visit with Lindsay Anderson (directed by Mike Kaplan) (Region free DVD, Double M Productions, DAP 7756, 2008).
7 Ibid.
10 McDowell, Never Apologize.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Mike Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’, Time Out (4–10 June 1982) 19 (LA 1/9/6/1/8).
15 Correspondence, Anderson to Gavin Lambert, 5, 7 and 21 July 1976 (LA 5/4/2/3).
16 Correspondence, Anderson to Gavin Lambert, 30 March 1977 (LA 5/4/2/3).
17 Correspondence, Anderson to Boaty Boatwright (Columbia British Productions Ltd), 12 April 1977 (LA 5/4/2/3).
18 Bygrave, ‘Britain’s Bunuel?’.
21 Diary, 3 October 1988 (LA 2/7/2/6/62).
23 Correspondence, Anderson to Charles L. Silet, 22 March 1978 (LA 5/1/2/51/17).
25 Diary, 3 May 1972 (LA 6/1/64/7).
28 Gene Moskowitz [Mosk], Review of If...., Variety (10 December 1968) 30, 32 (LA 1/6/6/6/45).
30 Agreement between Lindsay Anderson and Film and General Productions Ltd to direct Britannia Hospital, Clause 8 (ii) (LA 1/9/6/2/3).
31 Amendments to agreement to direct Whales of August (LA 1/11/3/1/5).
34 Wollen, Signs and Meaning, 116.
35 Ibid.
37 Sellors, Film Authorship, 56.
38 Ibid.
43 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 171.
44 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 172.
45 Ibid.
48 For a fuller discussion of fantasy, culture, the unconscious and film see John Izod, *Screen, Culture, Psyche: A Post-Jungian Approach to Working with the Audience* (Hove: Routledge, 2006) 1–18.
51 The exception was Davide Ferrario, ‘O Unlucky Man!’, *Rockerilla* (December 1985) 44 (LA 1/10/6/1/2). He had seen Anderson’s VHS copy of the rough cut and pronounced it ‘a most beautiful documentary, both lyrical and ironic, on China and the phenomenon of rock’s diffusion among communist youth’, our translation.
53 *Foreign Skies* was screened at Wham!’s farewell concert, Wembley Stadium, 28 June 1986.
54 Lindsay Anderson, ‘If You Were There Formerly Known as Wham! In China!’, open letter to the crew, November 1985 (LA 1/10/3/7/1).
55 Correspondence, Anderson to Karen Cooper, Director, Film Forum New York who had asked if she could screen the film, 20 June 1985 (LA 1/10/3/2/2).
56 Correspondence, Anderson to David Myers, his director of photography, 10 January 1986 (LA 1/10/3/4/4).
57 Correspondence, Anderson to David Myers, 29 July 1986 (LA 1/10/3/4/3).
58 Correspondence, Anderson to Keith W. Rouse, his documentary sound man, 20 March 1986 (LA 1/10/3/12/2).
60 Correspondence, Anderson to Myers, 29 July 1986.
61 In 2009, the rights owner, Sony Pictures, agreed to a public screening of Anderson’s copy in the Norman McLaren Filmhouse at the University of Stirling; but George Michael’s management rescinded permission before it could occur.
62 Anderson and his editors were permitted to insert titles and make personal copies of their rough cut before vacating the cutting rooms.
63 See Ferrario, ‘O Unlucky Man!’, 44.
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