British Film Design: A History

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To Teddy, now in ‘silent pictures’...
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Acknowledgments

I would like to record my thanks to the Arts and Humanities Research Council which funded me through its Research Leave Scheme. In addition, I am grateful for the financial assistance of the Centre for European and International Studies Research at the University of Portsmouth.

Countless people have helped me in the course of my research. My special thanks go to the wonderful people at the British Film Institute Library, Sir Ken Adam, John Milvus and my friends at the School of Creative Arts, Film and Media. More than anyone, I would like to thank my divine wife, Maria, for her unstinting support of a world champion obsessive.
General Editor’s Introduction

Art directors and production designers are the unsung heroes of cinema. For they are the men and women who give a film its distinctive ‘look’. What we take away in memory from films is often the result of the work of these imaginative and creative artists. In this unique and ground-breaking study, Laurie Ede traces the evolution of the production designer in British cinema, outlines the careers of the key practitioners and analyses the variety of styles that have graced British films since their earliest days.

Ede begins by exploring the constraints under which art directors and production designers worked: the requirements of producers and directors, the aesthetic, economic and technological imperatives and the need to project Britain and British life. He recovers the largely forgotten era of British silent cinema’s art direction, identifying three successive phases, primitive, transitional and early studio, and highlighting the work of Norman Arnold, Harry Jonas and Walter Murton. During the 1930s, the ‘look’ of British films was decisively influenced by a range of highly talented European émigrés. Pre-eminent among them was the German Alfred Junge, irreverently known as ‘The Kaiser’, whose distinctive production design made a major contribution to the films of Gaumont British in the 1930s, the Archers in the 1940s and MGM British in the 1950s. Equally influential was the Hungarian Vincent Korda who was an integral part of the production team of his brother Alexander, creating the sets for such major spectacles as The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933), The Rise of Catherine the Great (1934) and The Scarlet Pimpernel (1934).
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Many subsequently distinguished British art directors learned their craft working with these towering figures.

Ede covers not only the successful production design, but also the design disasters such as Caesar and Cleopatra (1945), London Town (1946) and the Independent Frame experiment. He explores the work done on very tight budgets for the Carry On series and the Hammer horror films by Alex Vetchinsky and Bernard Robinson. He examines the challenges presented by the location shooting characteristic of British ‘New Wave’ films and how they were tackled by art directors like Ralph Brinton and Ray Simm. He recalls the spectacle and hyper-reality of the films of the ‘Swinging Sixties’: Ken Adam’s designs for the James Bond films and the Baroque extravaganzas that emerged from the partnership of Ken Russell and a succession of art directors (including Derek Jarman) and of Joseph Losey with his production designer Richard MacDonald. He brings the story bang up to date by looking at the crucial contribution of British art directors John Barry and Anton Furst to British-made Hollywood blockbusters such as Star Wars (1977), Batman (1989) and Alien (1979) and the work of Kave Quinn on cult favourites Trainspotting (1996) and Shallow Grave (1994). After Laurie Ede’s book, there will be no excuse for film historians to ignore the seminal contribution of art directors and production designers to British films from their origins to the present day.

Jeffrey Richards
chapter 1

Setting the Scene

This book is about some of the things that we take for granted, in films and elsewhere. It is about built worlds, real worlds, fake worlds and other kinds of worlds that have been created by the British film industry over its 100 and more years of existence. Specifically, this book is concerned with the work of the British film production designer, the person who has assumed most responsibility for contriving the dramatic environments of British films throughout the decades. This work presents a kind of 'inside out' approach to British cinema, which invites people to look beyond the actors to contemplate the narrative power of filmed places and décor.

Ostensibly, this is a simple matter. One might think that writing a history of British film design is an easy business of establishing that so-and-so did such-a-thing at such-a-time. Of course, we will encounter 'so and so' (in all his/her guises) and this book will progress in broadly chronological manner, but the story of British film design has some surprising complexities and twists that require some handling. To begin with, we need to think about what the designer actually does (this point is often misunderstood). Time can be a complex matter too, as it relates to British films; some important moments (Rank’s prestige experiment of the 1940s, ‘Swinging Sixties’ cinema) are absolutely of the moment, but the most important strands – the Hammers, Carry Ons and James Bonds – run through the decades and consequently defy sure fixing in time. Then there are all the sub-themes of British production design that turn out to exert crucial significance over the job. These include changes to the role over time; producer and directorial influence; the possibility of authorial design; links between film, television and stage design; studio sets in relation to real locations; developments in studio technologies; the British designer’s response to national aesthetic
movements; designing for genres; British film design and the generation of culture and (most importantly) the use of British design to service American films and themes. So, a simple matter very swiftly becomes a maddening affair. A meaningful history of British film design can be constructed only if we place moments of design creativity within their contemporary context; i.e. to think why someone did a certain thing at a given moment in time. In practice, this means that one has to attend to all of the determinants outlined in the previous paragraph. But first we need to consider some basic propositions about the work of the British film production designer.

First Thoughts on Production Design

The great British film designer Ken Adam (Dr No 1962, Dr Strangelove 1964, Madness of King George 1994) has provided a pithy summation of his job: ‘I’m a production designer, which is really what it says; it’s designing a film production.’ In similar spirit, Martin Childs (Shakespeare in Love 1998) describes the production designer as ‘the head of the department that designs everything that isn’t hanging off or touching an actor’. Cinema is often characterised as the play of light on photosensitive film; but it’s also, crucially, about the play of light onto structures of various kinds. Those structures, whether built in the studio or found (and frequently built) on location, are the province of the production designer.¹

It is important to note that the modern production designer heads a large department. Historically, the head of the art department was referred to as the ‘art director’ (see Chapter Two), but the term ‘production designer’ gained currency from the late 1930s: The title was actually devised in Hollywood by David O. Selznick to recognise the all-encompassing design efforts, on Gone with the Wind (1939), of William Cameron Menzies; it was subsequently adopted in Britain by the star designers working for the Rank group of companies, such as Alfred Junge and John Bryan. (In this book I use the abbreviations ‘p.d’ or ‘a.d’ to define the design chief of a given film.) The modern production designer heads a complex creative process. Typically, he or she produces initial sketches for the settings, which are then worked up, by them, into finished designs; some designers also use storyboards and models from an early stage. The designs are then translated into floor plans by draughtsmen, for the guidance of construction crews. On the studio floor or on location, the physical building of the set is supervised by the art director, working with assistants and set dressers. Ultimately,
the work of the production designer is part creative, part technical and part organisational. Everyone in the art department answers to the production designer and he or she assumes final responsibility for the basic look of the narrative world. To quote Norman Garwood (Brazil 1985, The Life and Death of Peter Sellars 2005): ‘If you’re going to get the title of production designer, you really should be looking after everything that’s going to be up on that screen.’

Sometimes, the whole process of film design is still referred to as ‘art direction’. On these terms, it’s worth recalling the thoughts of the designer Paul Sheriff (Henry V 1944), who observed that his job was ‘not all art and not all direction’. Fundamentally, production design is applied art and the designer has many demands to fulfil. This theme will resound throughout the pages of this book. In essence, I want to provide an ‘industrial history’ of British art direction, which acknowledges the designer’s (ever-changing) place in the filmmaking process. In part, I want to pursue the critical path outlined many years ago by the famous American designer Hans Dreier:

The purely artistic side of this profession has been treated exhaustively in numerous essays. Nothing conclusive could be said that would not seem like a repetition ... The businessman’s side, however, is touched very lightly upon ... This subject is vital and requires the same judgement of values that everyone has to exercise in his own life and everyday business.

At the same time, I want to remember Lindsay Anderson’s warning that ‘critics judge too much and interpret too little’. Films are not just manifestations of capitalism. They inform our understandings of the material world (and confirm our existing understandings). They also embody the creative efforts of a wide range of artists and technicians and films should be appreciated on these terms. In short, the objective of British Film Design: A History is to place the work of the art director in its proper economic context and – by such a means – encourage a greater appreciation of his/her artistry through the ages of British films.

A Brief Note on Representation

From the foregoing, it may be discerned that film production design is intimately connected with processes of film representation. The designer is required to represent the wishes of the financiers and other senior technical personnel, but he/she also re-presents the narrative world; the places depicted by the script and inhabited by the characters. The latter
consideration has particular implications for the British designer, given this country’s chronic ‘Lumières fixation’: The notion, familiar throughout Europe, that a purposeful and authentic national cinema should be based on realist aesthetic values (as seen first, at the birth of cinema, in the work of Auguste and Louis Lumière). This persistent trait of British cinema can be traced back over 80 years (see Chapter Six) and it has exerted significant influence over the work of a range of British designers including the Morahan brothers, Tom and Jim, at the Ealing studios of the 1940s and 1950s; Ralph Brinton, the leading designer to the British New Wave; and, latterly, Fergus Clegg, Martin Johnson, Alison Chitty and Eve Stewart – the last four being the main designers used by directors Ken Loach and Mike Leigh.

British cinema’s Lumières fixation has led to the afore-mentioned designers being called upon to work outside of the studio, to exploit the supposedly more authentic virtues of real buildings. Actually, realism is never that easy. Inevitably, film representation involves making creative choices which are appropriate to the story, character and, perhaps, the point being made. On one level, this means that realistic sets are not always what they appear to be; neither are they necessarily pedestrian. For example, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) was widely taken at the time of its release to be another instalment in Channel Four’s on-going social realist project, but this underestimated the creative input from the film’s designer Hugo Luczyc-Wyhowski. The film was shot in real South London locations, but these were substantially altered – an old shoe shop became the laundrette and an entire back wall of a Battersea house was removed to afford a better view of a railway line. Intriguingly, Wyhowski also adopted a symbolic approach to his designs; hints of Islamic art were incorporated into the laundrette, as well as some ‘surreal’ touches, including a video of fighting crocodiles. More recently, Eve Stewart incorporated some poetic elements in her 1950s interiors for Mike Leigh’s *Vera Drake* (2004). Vera (Imelda Staunton)’s flat was created from a home on the Peabody Estate in Wandsworth. This was substantially altered to fit the period (electrics, heating and plumbing changed); in addition, Stewart tuned the environment to fit the characters – the little birds that hopped between the branches on the living room wallpaper were intended to suggest Vera’s busy, helpful nature.4

These reflections on British social realism have important wider implications to do with film verisimilitude and the designer’s relationship with it. The prolific British film designer and theorist Edward Carrick concluded that ‘the most important function of the background to dramatic action ... it should be convincingly real’. The italics were Carrick’s
and they were important. Carrick had a profound sense of classical narrative’s claims to realism and the designer’s role in substantiating these. The normal function of the designer is to flow with the mood of the story, to support the aims of the production and to ensure that the sets don’t disrupt the illusion. To the French designer and critic Leon Barsacq, such imperatives were part of ‘screen perspective’, a ‘certain form of realism’ which was quite distinct from theatre’s relatively elusive design language. Similarly, the British designer Anton Furst (Company of Wolves 1984, Batman 1989) affirmed that ‘You’re not dealing with reality with film; you’re dealing with the film’s own reality.’ This means that the designer, in conjunction with the photographer, will attempt to convey the essential, selective information. Occasionally, the settings may be conspicuous and intended to push the film (as in the case of the Bonds or most sci-fi subjects); mainly, they will reside quietly in the background. In any event, good film décor will always have something to tell us; it colours our understanding of characters and their verisimilitudinous screen worlds.5

The End of the Line: Designing Harry Potter

The tenets of screen versimilitude apply to most films, of whatever size. But the work of the designer will tend to be more overt on the big productions. In recent years, the most elaborate British design work has been seen in the Harry Potter series (six to date, 2001–2009). The Potter films have all been production designed by Stuart Craig and shot largely at the Leavesden studios (as developed originally for the Bond movies). They are a leading example of the ‘event film’, a modern, interractive form of the blockbuster where the film heads up a web of consumption, which also includes toys, books, clothes and computer games – everything serves to sell everything else. (In June 2007, it was announced that Craig would design a $200m Harry Potter theme park in Florida.) As with most blockbusters, the strategy depends upon the film possessing startling visuals. There is a kind of fin-de-siècle sensibility to the blockbuster; like the Hogwarts School of the Harry Potter stories, the latest event film is presented as a kind of end-of-the-line – every technological development in cinema has brought us to this point, the show to end them all.

The Harry Potter films are undoubtedly huge productions; the best of them, Prisoner of Azkaban (2004) used up to 12 camera crews, 500-plus crew and took 180 days to film. The Potter movies also foreground the latest filming technologies; the presence of Computer Generated
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Imagery is noted most obviously in the films’ parade of fantastic creatures, ghosts, animated paintings and grand classroom illusions. (The effects are created by a wide range of outside providers including Mill Film, The Motion Picture Company and Framestore CFC.) But the Potter films also exhibit strong continuities with long-standing traditions of British film design. There is a persistent vein of what might be termed ‘British expressionism’. Throughout the ages, the most creative British designers have displayed a strong affinity with the psychological language of German expressionist set design; the British expressionist tendency can be followed from the work of Andre Andrejew and John Bryan in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapters Three and Four), through to Adam’s work on the Bonds in the 1960s and 1970s (see Chapters Seven and Nine). Throughout the Potter series, Craig has forced dynamic contrasts between realistic and expressionist design elements. Hogwarts itself is an extraordinary vision, an inspired meeting of medieval ecclesiastical architecture and German gothicism; it exemplifies Craig’s instinctual belief that ‘fantasy and magic is more powerful when it grows out of something real and credible’. Hogwarts was designed for the first film and, like the other key sets, it has been reused throughout the series (in actuality it is a 1/24 scale model which is enhanced by CGI effects). Over time, it has been joined by other expressionist set pieces. Memorably, Azkaban had the superb sets for the Leaky Cauldron pub; the skewed lines of which dimly recalled Bryan’s peculiar Dickensian/expressionist flourishes of Great Expectations (1946) and Oliver Twist (1948).6

More broadly, and despite their funding by Warner Brothers, the Potter films demonstrate strong continuities with British studio design traditions. Over 90 per cent of Chamber of Secrets (2002) was shot at Leavesden and everywhere Craig has attempted to combine ‘old traditional studio movie crafts with new technology’. Furthermore, he has suggested that the Potters show that ‘there is a very high level of skill in Europe [which] doesn’t exist in America any longer’. At times, Craig has made effective use of the old technique, well known to British studio art directors of the 1930s, of forced perspective; building sets to suggest a feeling of great depth (by such means, 12 feet of corridor set in the Leaky Cauldron gave the impression of being 50 feet in length). The Potter design ethos has incorporated other traditional techniques. The hedge maze of Chamber was created mainly from 25’ moveable pieces, rather than digital effects, and the films make extensive use of conventional built miniatures (models used to represent large sets).7

If the Harry Potter films are the end-of-the-line, they do not represent a point of rupture; rather, they culminate – and then only temporarily – a
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long record of achievement on the part of the British designer. The story to follow will be told from a variety of perspectives (economic, cultural, aesthetic, personal) and it will inevitably be selective. The history of British design relates to the wider history of British films, but it is not the same; so some famous titles may be excluded. I also want to tell the story on its own terms; for this reason, I will not dwell on the awards collected by British designers, unless these have wider implications. (A list of Oscar winning British designers is given at the end of this book.) At every turn – and following Lindsay Anderson’s lead – I hope to create a work that is simultaneously critical, evaluative and, even, celebratory.
Early Stages: British Design in the Silent Era

Charles Barr has noted that ‘Our [Britain’s] film culture has no roots in, and no memory of, the silent film period.’ The problems really lie with one’s definitions. Obviously, silent cinema is characterised by its wordlessness, but the silent period in Britain went through several distinct phases and film culture exhibited massive change in the times leading up to the introduction of sound. In terms of product, the early actuality and elementary comedies gave way to ‘topical’ films and to a more expansive range of fictional productions: these productions grew to feature length as a specialised audience emerged. In terms of technique, British films moved from small outdoor stages to large ‘glasshouse’ studios to equally voluminous dark stages. At the same time, British producers and directors absorbed the emerging grammar of popular film form.¹

British art direction developed alongside these changes, although its growth was uncertain and generally inconspicuous. In the earliest phases of British films, there was no designer at all and it is not until around 1907 that we find any evidence of specialist personnel being employed to create settings. Thereafter, the British film designer languished under a variety of titles – among them ‘technical director’, ‘scenic artist’, ‘scene man’, ‘floor manager’ – until the early 1920s, when the term ‘art director’ came into common usage. Even then, it appeared to some that the title was purely honorific, bestowed upon individuals who, unlike their foreign contemporaries, generally had little scope to influence British film production.
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All of the above is to suggest that the British film designer was the ultimate invisible man within a largely forgotten phase of British film history. To find him, we have to attend closely to the changes which were experienced in British films during their 30 or so years of wordlessness. In essence, and extrapolating Barr’s own taxonomy, there were Three Phases of Silence: the Primitive Phase (the early experimental period of cinema up to 1907); the Transitional Phase (the period between 1907 and 1918 wherein films grew longer and studio practices evolved) and the Early Studio Phase (from 1918 up to 1927). Of course, the literal end of silent cinema didn’t come in Britain until 1929 and the release of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929), but, in terms of film design, 1927 was a decisive year; it was the year when *The Cinematograph Films Act* arrived to draw a heavy line under the first developmental phases of the British film industry.

Phase One of Silence: Primitive Visions

It has become commonplace to refer to the earliest phases of filmmaking as ‘primitive’ cinema; that period, roughly between 1895 and 1907, when filmmakers everywhere started to explore the distinctive possibilities of moving pictures. In the earliest times, the appeal of films lay in the basic sensation of movement. John B. Rathbun recalled in 1914 that ‘The moving picture of the period attracted crowds, not because of the interest of the subject, but simply for the reason that it moved.’ But it appears that the appeal of the actuality film (or ‘animated/living pictures’) was short lived. According to the pioneering British producer Robert W. Paul, audiences started to tire of mundane glimpses of the everyday by 1897 and producers had to deliver new sensations. This led to the development of two new kinds of subject; the ‘topicals’ (films recording newsworthy events such as the funeral of Victoria in 1901) and dramatic or comic ‘made up’ films. It was the latter kind of product that brought the film designer tentatively into the picture.

It is generally assumed that narrative films of the primitive era were played out against painted backcloths; for example, the eminent British art director Laurence Irving argued that early ‘interior settings as were required ... were rude affairs of canvassed paint’. Actually, this was never quite the case – few of the early film producers were satisfied with backcloths alone. A rough sense of three-dimensional verisimilitude prevailed in films such as George Albert Smith’s *The Kiss in the Tunnel* (1899) with its improvised train seats and few bits of luggage or
Paul’s *Come Along Do* (1898), whose poorly painted gallery exterior was dressed with a couple of pot plants. The evidence of these films, and others by early British directors such as James Williamson, suggests that, from the start, British filmmakers tried to impart a sense of depth into their sets.³

The fact that such narrative sets didn’t much resemble the real world was probably a matter of little consequence to the early directors. By the turn of the twentieth century, Paul and the other leading lights of British films made clear distinctions between ‘made up’ and newsy ‘topical’ films. The topicals were the forerunners of the newsreel and, in this light, were presented – sometimes audaciously – as genuine records of authentic events. In contrast, it seemed that nobody expected the ‘made up’ films to really look like the real thing; rather, audiences were primed to suspend disbelief in the face of settings which were essentially theatrical. This lack of care encouraged what might be thought of as the ‘dab hand’ school of film design, whereby the settings and props were entrusted to that member of the crew who appeared to be most adept at art. As a matter of expediency, that person was often the director himself, as the British designer Norman Arnold recalled in 1927:

> In the early days of film production, the director himself was the Jack of all trades. He did practically everything; wrote the story, designed settings, supervised the building, gave a hand with the painting and very often did his own cranking.⁴

This arbitrary attitude towards early British film design can be readily identified in the reminiscences of film pioneers. Paul and Gaumont’s A.C. Bromhead both reported that they developed film stages (in 1899 and 1902 respectively) in order, simply, to create ‘more ambitious’ films; likewise, Cecil Hepworth recalled that his initial self-painted scenery (from 1901) was intended merely ‘to give the appearance of a room, kitchen or drawing [room] or what not’. The films themselves confirm Edward Carrick’s contention that, in the first British cinema, nobody ‘bothered about detail, atmosphere and similar things’. Paul’s films were notably poor in scenic terms. The trick effects of *The Countryman* and *The Cinematograph* (1901) were excellent (a cinema-going bumpkin was terrorised by the sight of a train approaching him on a screen) but the general trappings of the theatre were badly painted. Paul’s *A Chess Dispute* (1903) was cruder still. The film hinged on a comic argument between two chess players, but it was unclear where this took place; the few columns, vases and shrubs signified a weird cross between a bourgeois garden and a conservatory.⁵
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Clearly, the design of films was taken for granted during the primitive period. But the very act of ‘making up’ stories meant that some notion of design was bound to develop. By 1907, this point was being readily acknowledged in America, as a report in The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly demonstrated:

Besides author, stage manager and actors, there is an artist who plays an important part in the production. He must paint scenes that cannot be caught with the camera, and must make them look like the real thing.

In Britain too by this time, the thought was starting to emerge that it might be helpful to employ someone to help the director contrive the physical environments for films. Revealingly, The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly also reported on the work of a film crew in Acton consisting of a stage manager, scene shifters, a ‘property man’ and a ‘bioscope operator’. It was that property man and his ilk that would develop into the first manifestation of the art director, his arrival encouraged by the development of studios in Britain.6

Phase Two of Silence: Design in Transition

The Second Phase of Silence was the period when Britain had studios but no studio system. The latter would finally come in the aftermath of the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927. Between 1907 and 1914 (or thereabouts), British films underwent a period of increased capitalisation, albeit fragmentary, as producers attempted to meet the demands of specialised audiences. Two major things happened, both of significant consequence for British film design: films grew longer; and film factories were devised.

Hepworth reported that the first long silent films came about initially because of director ambition. However, developments in exhibition venues – from the early travelling fairs to converted shops to purpose built cinemas – meant that, from 1909, every producer was obliged to think beyond short subjects. The specialised venues encouraged audiences to expect a full evening’s entertainment in the manner of the theatre. Will Barker’s production of Henry VIII in 1911 was an important innovation, at 25 minutes long, and it was followed shortly by British and Colonial’s 3,000 ft The Battle of Waterloo (1913) and the even longer production of Ivanhoe (1913) from the Independent Film Company. (The latter filmed ambitiously on location at Chepstow Castle.)
Longer subjects brought distinct challenges and possibilities for emerging British designers; Rathbun noted that the ‘demand for [long] plays led to the complete transformation of the motion picture business’. New staging equipment had to be installed in studios to cope with the scenic variety which was introduced by the longer films. Importantly, the long subjects also brought fresh problems of comprehensibility. The multi-reel story might well entail cross-cutting between locations and temporal shifts. Title cards could help to smooth the transitions, but designers were increasingly required to provide clear settings for the various locations, both real and studio-based.

The designer’s task was also affected during the 1910s by developments in studio design. The earliest primitive studios – such as those built by Paul (Muswell Hill), Hepworth (Walton), Bromhead (Brixton) and Smith (Brighton) – were open, alfresco affairs. These early stages turned out to be of limited worth, because of the capricious English weather: Bromhead lamented, ‘Sometimes the whole thing was blown down, wet weather was entirely hopeless, while even on fine days clouds had a habit of obscuring the sun at crucial moments.’ These factors led to British filmmakers going indoors. The technical visionary Paul built a sophisticated raised stage which was partly enclosed (and which had a scene painting room to the rear) and thereafter film companies began to create substantial glass studios. By 1914, these had developed into reasonably sophisticated operations, sometimes with large areas of floor space and well-resourced workshops.

The glass walls were necessary because of the need for maximum sunlight. At the same time, producers realised that light had to be controlled for the sake both of dramatic lighting and studio comfort. Consequently, companies took to fitting their studios with tinted glass and huge window blinds which could be adjusted at will. Edward Carrick remembered seeing such devices in operation when he visited Barker’s studio with his grandmother Ellen Terry at Ealing Green in 1915: ‘[It was] a great big towering glass monster, with blinds that pulled down; “pull that blind up ... that one come down ... that one blind up ... pack it up ... bring that one right up to the top!”’ Palpably, such large operations required expanded workforces and all of the creative departments – photography and design included – gradually developed the kinds of hierarchies, built on specialised and routinised tasks, which were the hallmark of the later studio system. This sense of specialisation was increased further as ‘dark’ – i.e. artificially lit – studios started to emerge. Naturally, it was the cinematographer who was most affected by the new ability to illuminate sets by controllable
light sources, but electric lighting also impacted upon the work of the designer. From 1913, and the development of the first modest dark studios, film design would entail a stronger sense of cooperation between the designer and the photographer.9

The developed bureaucracies and facilities which were in place at Ealing and (from 1915) at Lime Grove, Shepherd’s Bush, were not universal during the 1910s; director Maurice Elvey recalled that, as late as 1913, the Motograph company still expected him to film ‘with the story in your head ... a cameraman and one other person who combined everything’. But British films were generally far better equipped by the mid-1910s. British and Colonial’s studios at Hoe Street were converted (not unusually) from a skating rink and had a huge 18,900 square feet stage which could hold 20 sets at a time. Such facilities helped B&C pull off such design feats as a reproduction of Florence’s Nightingale’s ward for Florence Nightingale (1915), the replica of a ship’s deck for The Loss of the Birkenhead (1914) and also multi-set spectacles such as The Battle of Waterloo (1913). The London Film Company also offered good facilities judged by the standards of the day. Like B&C and Hepworth, LFC claimed that it did not use canvas or painted sets and it boasted that its stock rooms allowed it to produce total screen realism.10

Clearly, British design in the mid-1910s had progressed through a major period of transition; it had even developed standardised production methods in certain instances. But two things were clearly lacking. To begin with, the efforts of designers continued to be unrecognised in the pre-war period, both by the film press and the industry itself; in America, Wilfred Buckland was designated an ‘Art Director’ as early as 1914, but no such title existed in Britain. More importantly, unlike in Italy, America and Germany, the British film industry lacked a coherent idea of the function of the film designer. This becomes apparent if we consider the widely varying approaches to design which were taken by two of the leading British producer-directors of the silent era: Cecil Hepworth and George Pearson.

The careers of Cecil Hepworth and George Pearson overlapped during the silent era. Hepworth was one of the great pioneers of British films and, for a time, he was also one of the great survivors; active between 1899 and 1924, he was the only producer/director to progress beyond the primitive period into the earliest phases of the British studio system. This was in no small part due to Hepworth’s ownership of a nascent factory system at Walton-on-Thames. Unlike Hepworth, Pearson’s career wasn’t confined entirely to the silent period (he made feature
films until 1938) but he produced his most important work between 1912 and 1928. A comparison of the silent cinema of Hepworth and Pearson allows us to contemplate the possibilities that existed for British films in the years leading up to the seminal Films Act of 1927. Hepworth’s approach was stolidly nationalistic; like Michael Balcon decades later, he believed that British films would inevitably prevail if they made faithful representation of British culture and heritage. In scenic terms, this led Hepworth to an unswerving belief in a naturalist cinema, which favoured British locations over settings and natural light over arc lamps. Pearson was far less insular. He felt that British films could learn much from American and German cinema with regard to technique and – moreover – emotional nuance. Pearson took a holistic approach to design which insisted that all recorded scenes, whether studio or location, should be purposeful and thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the film. More than anything – and more than anyone during the mid–silent era – Pearson insisted that design actually mattered.

Hepworth built his first indoor studios in 1905, at Hurst Grove, Walton, from the profits gathered from his great international success *Rescued by Rover* (1905). These first studios were remarkable for their time, featuring not only Muranese glass windows to diffuse light but also some lamps to be used in the event of cloudy atmospheric conditions; with later additions, these light banks would ultimately deliver 240,000 candle power of artificial light. In 1907, Hepworth expanded the studios to feature two stages with an adjoining scene dock. Developing an idea first used by Paul at Muswell Hill, Hepworth also incorporated slots in the studio floors which allowed for the raising and lowering of scenery from the paint shops below.

At root, Hepworth was an inventor but he also had a keen organisational sense, fostered in part by his early experiences as an exhibitor of films. By 1915, Hepworth had assembled many of the elements of a studio system. He employed a ‘scenario editor’ to ‘study patrons and cinema’ and thereby predict demand. He also attempted to build Britain’s first studio star system. Actors such as Alma Taylor and Stuart Rome were placed under exclusive contract, their exploits publicised in Hepworth’s own fan publication *The Hepworth Picture Play Paper*. In addition, he instituted chains of command within his studios. Claude Whitten assumed increasing importance as Hepworth’s production manager and a pool of directors was created, each assuming large responsibility for the production in hand. According to the firm’s publicists such measures were intended by 1916 to ensure that ‘every little scene, every movement ... [is] ... planned out ahead of time’.
The Hepworth art department took many years to develop – the company had no dedicated ‘scene man’ until 1913, although a trick effects expert (Percy Stow) was in place as early as 1901. Inevitably, Hepworth was his own first designer. He was a decent draughtsman and he did not doubt his ability to perform well as the Jack-of-all-Trades that Norman Arnold remembered with a shiver; Hepworth recalled his efforts on *Rescued by Rover* as being ‘jolly good’ by any standards. Thereafter, Hepworth retained a quiet scepticism about design specialists. When he visited Hollywood in 1922 he was consternated to find that the art director was ‘acting as a departmental chief [choosing] the settings and the properties’. He also tended to confer feint praise upon his own first art director, a former theatre front-of-house man called P. Gordon ‘Billy’ Saunders:

he was very clever in arranging and setting scenery ... He was-
very fond of little ‘accents’ – a bunch of flowers or similar effect-
ive touch ... I used to laugh at them and call them ‘Billyisms’
but I seldom removed them.12

*Primitive design*. Living room set of *Rescued by Rover* (1907, dir./a.d.C.M. Hepworth). Note the painted fireplace, door and mirror. *British Film Institute.*
To some extent, Hepworth’s wry attitude towards specialist designers came down to his general dislike of increased specialisation within the film business. Notwithstanding his own efforts to compartmentalise his own studios, Hepworth yearned for the days when everyone in his company pitched in and when directors ‘knew the whole business’. But Hepworth really disliked the artifice of studio settings. As the *Hepworth Picture Player Paper* of August 1916 made clear, sets were organised to complement locations (as found by the director and location finder) and not vice versa. Hepworth had a clear preference for locations and he ordered the cameras out of the studio as much as possible. Many of Hepworth’s outdoor scenes were shot in the immediate environs around the Walton studios: the stone studio gate doubled for the entrance to the Bastille in the historical yarn *The Dead Heart* (1914); Mr Cherry’s chemist shop in the town of Walton-on-Thames made a number of appearances and the River Thames formed a staple part of Hepworth productions. Hepworth also felt that the British producer had a duty to show all parts of England on the screen:

> I would never work indoors if I could possibly get into the open air. It was always in the back of my mind from the very beginning that I was to make English pictures, with all the English countryside for background and with English atmosphere and English idiom throughout.\(^{13}\)

One could find the old spectacular setting in a Hepworth production: a portion of Old London was built for *Barnaby Rudge* (1911); a massive £400 was spent on building a reproduction of Elsinore at Lulworth Cove for *Hamlet*. But Hepworth wanted his films to be a literal breath of fresh air within a form of entertainment that he feared was becoming increasingly fixated with the studio. It was all a matter of authenticity. British films had a duty to represent themselves authentically on the global stage (shrinking though it was after 1910) and films had a general responsibility to reproduce the world as faithfully as possible. Hepworth was noted for his devotion to accurate detail, or, to use his phrase, ‘the well detailed scene’. Historical films were a particular cause for concern. He and his line producers and directors worked manfully to make sure that every detail of setting and costume was accurate on the big period films such as *Trelawny of the Wells* (1916).\(^{14}\)

Throughout this career, Hepworth saw design as a necessary evil. George Pearson took an entirely different attitude. This former teacher started making films in 1912, following a brief stint as a scriptwriter. He went on to direct for G.B. Samuelson at Worton...
Hall and Gaumont at Lime Grove, before making films for his own company – Welsh-Pearson Ltd – at his own studios at Craven Park, Harlesden and elsewhere. At every stage, Pearson asserted that film should be treated as a medium in its own right, which should not feel any obligation towards the stage or literature. This belief led him to become the great British film philosopher of the silent era and one of the very few directors who perceived the emotional value of design.

‘Emotion’ was assuredly the word. Rather like Eisenstein (whom he greatly admired), Pearson believed that directors should strive to impart the greatest emotional value to every scene. Unlike Eisenstein, Pearson felt that this was achieved best by the conscious manipulation of mise-en-scène. His first act as a director was to release the camera from its customary anchored position in the middle of the studio floor. He then set about working with his designers and other craftsmen to achieve a new, expressive fusion of set and camera. Framing was of great concern to Pearson (he once almost got the sack for his anti-naturalist use of close-ups), but he recognised that this was futile unless close attention was paid to all of the things that went before the lens.

Pearson’s campaign for popular cinema was directly opposed to Hepworth’s diet of worthy naturalism. Pearson wasn’t against locations – he pioneered the artful use of British locations to suggest foreign milieux (e.g. South Wales became the American wilderness of his 1914 rendering of A Study in Scarlet) – but these were never allowed to become an end in themselves. Pearson reflected:

The art of the screen must lie in its ability to transmit thought ... She (the screen) has not to concentrate on providing excellent snapshots of things the eyes of all may see ... To aim at reproducing every tiny detail is not art, it is cataloguing.

To Pearson, the camera’s ability to record was far less important than its ability to facilitate the drama. He expected all of his collaborators to play their part in both elucidating the story (there being no words to help explain the action on screen) and heightening the emotional tension. Recalling Stanislavski, Pearson also decreed that every studio process should be geared towards helping the actor express the truth of the story.15

Pearson’s first named designer was an ex–stage painter, Ernest Jones, who was made art director when Pearson and his business partner T.A. Welsh opened the Craven Park studios in 1918.
Despite the studios’ tiny size, Jones benefited from a decent carpenter’s shop and stage-artists’ dock. He was also assisted by the presence of the supremely resourceful property master Jack Ramsey and by a regular collaborator on camera, the Frenchman Emile Lauste. Importantly, Pearson and Welsh did not try to overstretch their resources – the company produced an average of just two films a year at Craven Park – and the director and crew were consequently able to find the space and time to experiment and develop a distinctive production ethos.

To begin with, Pearson encouraged Jones and Lauste to abandon the grey paint which was the hallmark of the silent set. Wary of their unresponsive stock, cameramen and producers usually insisted that walls be painted grey and/or brown; writing in 1922, producer L.C. MacBean averred that burnt umber lightened with white was the best shade ‘from a general photographic point of view’. For Pearson, photographic fidelity was of less importance than the psychological effect of the set upon the actor. For this reason, he instructed Jones to paint the settings in a shade of cream. More importantly, Jones was urged by Pearson to ‘build better and paint less’. The design was intended to be less realistic and more evocative, governed not by an aim to reproduce the elements of the everyday, but to show how those things were transformed by human activity. Pearson explained his theory by describing the narrative function of a door. Few things could be as mundane as a door – generally they were just fetched from stockrooms – but Pearson wanted his designer to appreciate the grades of feeling that were carried by quotidian items:

Take, for example, a narrow ugly slum alley. In it there is a closed door, a chink in the wall through which people will pass. Behind it there is a story yet to be told ... that door is the key to a thrilling mystery ... do all you can to give that door character, its own individuality.16

Jones left Pearson’s crew in 1924, to be replaced by painter Harry Jonas. Jonas integrated himself well into the Pearson group ethos, combining his design duties with the occasional appearance as an actor. Over time, he became a prime interlocutor for Pearson, working towards an ideal of symbolist design. During the early 1920s, when other British producers aimed to place as much detail as possible before the camera lens, Jonas and Pearson aimed to allow the ‘sets [to] suggest more than they determine’. Doubtless influenced by Russian staging technique, the Welsh-Pearson company would often use a prop or two to represent
a whole scene. This technique originated in a scene in *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923, a.d.H. Jonas) where Pearson used a clock mechanism to figure an entire factory; bright light was shone through the workings to create a machine-like shadow on a whitewashed wall. The symbolist house design style was pushed further in *Reveille* (1924, a.d.H. Jonas). Here, constrained as ever by lack of finance, Pearson and Jonas evoked the spirit of Trafalgar Square on Armistice Night by the use of location footage combined with one full-size studio reconstruction of a Landseer lion.17

That faux-stone lion carried an additional message to anyone who was prepared and able to receive it. The illusion worked because of the considered approach which was taken both to the location and the setting. Pearson and Jonas reasoned that the London footage provided all of the detail that the audience required and there was no need to burden satiated minds with an excess of studio-contrived detail. Throughout the silent period, it was customary for studios to regard location work and studio phases as entirely separate elements; in contrast, Pearson’s films demonstrated the value of a total design vision co-ordinated by one mind. In this way, the films of the Welsh-Pearson company presaged the notion of the production designer, although it would be many years before a British producer entrusted a designer to fulfil this task.

Not surprisingly, Pearson’s vision of an artist-led popular cinema found favour with British designers. Edward Carrick, who first encountered the director during his spell as a tenant director at the Stoll studios in Cricklewood, observed that Pearson ‘knew too much for the British industry’; Lawrence P. Williams felt that Welsh-Pearson was the only company that had the technical wherewithal to emulate the great Russian and German films of the silent era. But Pearson’s idealism was built on his sense of apart-ness from mainstream British cinema. The consistent patronage of Welsh gave Pearson the space to maintain his authorial vision and he underscored his economic advantage by choosing to work with a small crew. The circumstances were different for the mainstream British producers who had large studios to maintain. As the silent period progressed, British companies faced increasing problems trying to preserve their market share in the face of European and American competition; by 1925, only 5 per cent of screen time in British cinemas was taken by British-made films and many of the companies which had formed in the pre-war period had gone bankrupt (including the London Film Company, Barker’s Motion Picture Photography Ltd, Broadwest and British and Colonial). The financial stresses of the British
film industry inevitably impacted upon its technical progress. By and large, throughout the greater part of the 1920s British design suffered from a bad case of arrested development.18

**Phase Three of Silence: Dedicated Artists**

As we have seen, the British designer emerged as a matter of practical necessity; as the studios grew they found that settings could no longer be handled by the directors and/or their factotums. So some design specialists were in place during Britain’s Third Phase of Silence, but this did not imply that British films had a settled conception of the designer’s role; in 1922, L.C. MacBean wrote that the art director was merely a desired element within ‘well ordered studios’. Two designers in particular made an impact on British film culture in the years following World War I and leading up to the first Films Act: Walter Murton of Stoll Picture Productions and Norman Arnold. We will contemplate their stories shortly, but to begin with we need to think a little about the circumstances that stunted the development of British film design in the pre-sound years, particularly when compared with the art departments in Germany and Hollywood. Overall, British design suffered from two primary deficiencies: a shortage of money and a lack of vision.19

It is difficult to locate a firm starting point for British films’ economic problems. Pearson felt that the ‘rot’ started as early as 1906, when Britain lost ground to the spectacular films of Italy, America and (in particular) France; Hepworth conceded that British films were being poorly received by domestic audiences, and thus losing their market share, by 1910. But the British film industry was seriously undermined by the First World War. The war brought about man power shortages in British studios and it engendered the collapse of the major export markets for British films. Moreover, the four-year period of enforced quiescence enabled both Germany and America to steal the march on the British film industry. The allied blockade in the First World War had useful consequences for German film producers, who found new markets in the film-starved countries of central Europe; 33 per cent government finance also permitted the development of the powerful UFA vertically integrated combine. The circumstances behind Hollywood’s climatic rise to power were identified, in sardonic manner, in July 1920 by the British producer Martin Sabine:

> Brought to a full stop, as we were by the war ... we have a lot of lost time and lost ground to recover ... Other nations, whose
time until towards the end of the war was more their own, went ahead of us in all the necessary attributes of successful production.\textsuperscript{20}

Sabine explained that America’s war savings had allowed it to create purpose-built studios, large enough to allow for big sets and the full-range of camera shots. Clearly, American films benefited from other natural advantages. The Californian weather was a huge plus. The contemporary observers Robert E. Welsh and Ernest Dench (as well as the British film director Maurice Elvey) all observed that the sun enabled Hollywood producers to maximise the use of their studios – schedules could be planned around the equable weather – and, at the same time, provide the irradiant scenes which swiftly formed part of the aspirational Hollywood brand.\textsuperscript{21}

These broad economic factors impacted daily on the work of the British designer. In Hollywood and in Germany (until its own film slump of 1927) art technicians felt secure within environments which were geared towards making films in a considered and well-resourced manner. British designers felt no such encouragement. L.P. Williams claimed that there were still British studios in 1926 which boasted that they didn’t need an art director. Writing at around that time Norman Arnold noted that art direction had ‘always been considered a luxury’ by the British film industry. Most compellingly, Charles Dalmon, who worked in the 1920s as art director to George Clark Productions, found that the British art director was a despised creature:

As a matter of fact, he scarcely exists at all; and until he does exist in a more concrete form, many shortcomings now so evident in British productions will remain exactly as they are ...

British art directors envied Hollywood designers their power and facilities (Dalmon described the Hollywood design chiefs as ‘tin gods’) and the German designers their creative freedom. Doubtless, Arnold expressed the sentiments of many when he remarked that German designers had the opportunity to ‘exploit the dramatic value of the set’. In contrast, he found that British films were too often satisfied with sets which resembled ‘a cross between a seaside café, a cheap photographer’s studio and a second hand store’.\textsuperscript{22}

Arnold had the right to express an opinion. He had studied German design methods at first hand in 1924. Moreover, he was one of the few British designers of the 1920s to establish a coherent body of work and he did much to formalise the British art department. Arnold entered films in 1920, following architectural training and war service in the
Royal Flying Corps. (Some of Arnold’s paintings of his flying experiences were acquired by the Imperial War Museum.) He was employed initially by First Players Lasky at the new studios in Islington. The studios at Poole Street would in future decades be thought of as a dismal backwater, but in 1920 they were considered state of the art. Converted from a former power station, Poole Street had two stages, a scene dock, a tank and an anti-fog heating system (the last a major boon in an era where shooting, indoor or out, was frequently ruined by London smog). Over time, and after an initial stint as Leslie Dawson’s second-in-command, Arnold established a coherent art department at Islington. By 1921, all the departments had blueprints for sets, based upon the director’s requirements. The diligent Arnold also put other disciplines in place at Islington, such as routines for the striking and storing of sets.

But Arnold was more than just a bureaucrat. He had a strong feeling for the dramatic impact of contrasting décor and he was also a versatile artist. Arnold’s earliest designs, typically in crayon and conte, were precise and they resembled architectural elevations. With experience, and influenced by his experiences in Germany (he designed Herbert Wilcox’s *Chu Chin Chow* and *Decameron Nights* in Germany in 1923 and 1924), Arnold developed other styles. Watching the German artists, he realised that more dramatic subjects sometimes required a more expressive technique. Consequently, from the mid-1920s (he worked in films right up to his death in 1964), Arnold endeavoured to use different mediums and styles to fit the mood of the film.

Arnold was one of the very few British designers to enjoy continuous employment through the latter silent period. But the most prolific designer of all was Walter Murton. Rachael Low rightly adjudged that Murton ‘was responsible more than any other person for the characteristic look of the British films of the period’. Like Arnold, Walter Murton originally set out to work in interior design. Following initial training at the Norwich School of Art (he was born in Norwich in 1892), Murton worked for Interior Design companies in Birmingham and London. His entry into films came directly following his service in the 1914–18 war, when he was taken on as resident art director at the new Stoll’s studios in Cricklewood. For the better part of the 1920s, Murton enjoyed the enviable privilege of continuous employment and he was proud to report to the *Kinematograph Year Book* of 1925 that he had “‘set” every production by this firm [Stoll’s]’.

Stoll Picture Productions Ltd was owned by the Australian-born theatrical impressario Sir Oswald Stoll. The company’s first films were
produced at the Regent House Estate overlooking Surbiton Park, shot both in the 17 acre grounds and in the house itself. In a manner which presaged the later ‘house style’ of Hammer films, Murton was obliged to incorporate the architectural features of Regent House into his designs; in the case of the Elvey-directed *The Swindler* (1919) many scenes were shot in one drawing room. Facilities improved greatly in 1920 when Stoll acquired a former aeroplane factory. This was expensively equipped to form the largest studios in England, capable, as Stoll assured his shareholders, of yielding ‘a very large output of pictures of the most ambitious type’.25

Stoll created his company as a commercial venture, dedicated to the filming of popular plays and novels such as *Comradeship* (1919) and *The Chinese Bungalow* (1926). Murton set about his task in a diligent manner. Uniquely, he made his designs in small format, typically several to the page in 6′ × 4′ frames. These he coloured in tones of grey (probably to mimic the tones available in the sets themselves), punctuated by dashes of white chalk to signify the doors and windows. Many of the actual Murton Stoll films have been lost over time, but it is possible to make a few observations based on the few that remain and the evidence of contemporary studio stills. Notably, it seems clear that Murton paid closer attention to textures and dressings as time moved on. The 1923 production of *Don Quixote* benefited from a few imaginative and well-finished studio town exteriors. *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1922) was better still. The mobile camera helped to reveal the quiet humour of Murton’s fusty sets representing 221b Baker Street. The cramped drawing room, with its stuffed bureau, revealed something about the preoccupied and eccentric detective.

Murton’s assignments at Stoll’s during the 1920s included a number of other highlights. In 1922, he had the distinction of designing Britain’s first colour film; *The Glorious Adventure*, an American-financed costume drama, was filmed using the two-strip Prizma system. Later on, Murton designed the ambitious star vehicle for Harry Lauder, *Huntingtower* (1927). *Picturegoer* magazine claimed that this Pearson-directed comedy featured ‘the largest set ever seen inside a British studio’ (Murton’s Baronial Castle, at 8,000 square feet). It also featured some expansive location sequences, shot in and around Glasgow.26

*Huntingtower* was clearly a British super production of its time, but it joined most of Murton’s silent films in being swiftly forgotten. Murton carried on working in British films up to 1943 (his last work was on Gainsborough’s *The Man in Grey* 1943) but he shared the fate of a number of British technicians in being over-associated with the silent era; to a new
generation of British designers Murton was strictly of ‘The Old School’. It all came down to that key date of 1927. By this time, everyone who worked in films was aware of the imminent arrival, inevitably paradigm-shifting, of sound. At the same time, British film culture was shaken up by the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927. On top of all this, a new generation of British film technicians was being inspired by the superior technique which they saw in continental films of the period.

The Films Act (as it was popularly known) contained a number of protective measures which were designed to nurture British film production. Blind and block booking were outlawed, preventing American distributors from off-loading less desirable films onto exhibitors. Most importantly, the Films Act incorporated the Federation of British Industry’s suggestion of the ‘quota’: henceforth, a proportion of screen time in British cinemas, starting at 5 per cent but rising year by year, would be reserved for domestic films. These measures gave an undoubted boost to British film producers and quite shortly new, purpose-built studios were developed at Ealing, Shepherd’s Bush, Elstree and elsewhere.

The Act served to draw a decisive line under the silent period. Elements of the past were erased (it said everything that Basil Dean’s new ATP studios at Ealing were built on the site of Will Barker’s once industry-leading glasshouse) and hundreds of new technicians were employed. But, at the same time, it seemed obvious that Britain lacked a coherent filmmaking tradition. For the rising generation of British designers, this point was underscored by the examples of foreign art direction which they were able to see in the films shown by the Film Society. From 1925, the society (which was founded by producer Ivor Montagu, director Adrian Brunel, exhibitor Sidney Bernstein and others) used down times in West End cinemas – usually Sunday afternoons – to screen ‘films of intrinsic merit’ for the edification of British film technicians and enthusiasts. The programmes included important titles such as Pandora’s Box (1929), The Threepenny Opera (1931), The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1920), Battleship Potemkin (1925), The Testament of Dr Mabuse (1933) and Tartuffe (1926) and they drew large crowds. Significantly, the audiences included many of the filmmakers who would shape British films during the 1930s and beyond, including producers Michael Balcon and Herbert Wilcox; directors David Lean, Thorold Dickinson, Alfred Hitchcock, and photographers Freddy Young and Desmond Dickinson. They also included a significant number of young art directors, such as Edward Carrick, L.P. Williams, Michael Relph, Maurice Carter, David Rawnsley and John Bryan.

The German films in particular had a marked effect on the minds of the design tyros, mainly because of their overt display of the designer’s
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craft. The expressionist subjects, such as *Caligari* and *Mabuse* demonstrated how lines and planes could be used to indicate a psychological mood; as director Leontine Sagan described, expressionist lines could ‘chisel out the physiognomy of the world [and] nail down the physiognomy of types and things’. The venerated films of the New Objectivity, as associated with director G.W. Pabst, showed what could be achieved via the considered manipulation of props and textures. More than anything, Lang’s prodigious magnum opus *Metropolis* (1927) demonstrated the power that could be wrought by progressive combinations of plastic sets, models and other trick effects. As Laurence Irving enthused,

they [German designers] were beginning to think of the camera as a servant rather than as a capricious master – as a machine, like a lithographic press, to reproduce the conceptions of the artist rather than as a snapper of accidental trifles. They united architecture, light and actors in controlled compositions.

Such ideals were bound to appeal strongly to a new generation of designers who saw the fresh economic circumstances of British films as the opportunity to assert more progressive models of design. One film of 1926 seemed to show what could be done. Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lodger* was designed by Norman Arnold’s brother Wilfred. He had accompanied his elder brother on his trip to Germany in 1923 (as usual employed as his draughtsman) and had also been impressed by what he had seen. *The Lodger* emerged as the first example of British expressionism; it was made at Islington but it could easily have been mistaken for a UFA production, cloaked as it was in doom-laden, Teutonic shadow. Arnold made full use of the facilities at Islington to produce a thoroughly convincing rendering of the three storey London home which lay at the heart of the murder mystery. Effective use was made of Arnold’s stairways and the designer also achieved some strong textural effects; notably, in the composite set which represented the rooms of ‘the visitor’ (Ivor Novello). But *The Lodger* was remarkable mainly for the tight relationship between the direction, photography and design. Arnold’s department provided a glass platform which, when shot from below, revealed the nervous pacing of The Visitor in his upstairs rooms. Moreover, Arnold reacted strongly to Hitchcock’s demands for sparse mise-en-scène in the German manner. The opening murder scene was shot in a dark studio with just a few key dressings: the phone booth, the tea stall, the spare details of the newspaper office combined to telling
psychological effect. *The Lodger* was subtitled ‘a tale of the London fog’: Arnold’s restraint meant that the mind of the viewer was left undistracted by detail and at the same time compelled to think about the threat that lay at the heart of the pea soup.

Surveying the British film releases of 1926, *The Lodger* was clearly an aberration, but it hinted at some of the choices that lay ahead for British films. During the subsequent decade, British films would incorporate continental design ideals directly from émigré designers who came to work in Britain. The development of British art direction was affected irrevocably by the application of the foreign touch.
One of the proponents of the Films Act, Lord Askwith, declared that the legislation would allow British films ‘to hold their own against the rest of the world’. Famously, things didn’t turn out that way. The legislation gave a substantial boost to British production (over 600 new production companies were formed in the first nine years of the Act) but it did not necessarily encourage the expensive, globally competitive films that were envisaged by Lord Askwith and his colleagues. The 1930s turned out to be a period of false promise. Millions were expended on large-scale film production, typically using money borrowed from city institutions, but the returns were disappointing. The American majors were already past masters at protecting their home markets; in addition, they had substantial distribution and exhibition links in Britain. The global ambitions of British production companies were therefore easily suppressed. For these reasons, the period of rapid expansion was followed by another disastrous slump in 1937, as financiers withdrew their support.1

In summary, these were the circumstances which framed the experience of the émigré designer in the British studios during the 1930s. Six foreign designers took art director credits on British films in this period: the German Alfred Junge, Austrian Oscar Werndorff, Hungarians Vincent Korda and Ernő Metzner and Russians Andre Andrejew and Lazare Meerson. Their efforts in British studios were profoundly shaped by the wider philosophical and economic debates which surrounded British film culture. In the years that followed the Films Act there were some British filmmakers who felt that domestic product would be transformed if the
industry followed Hollywood’s example and imported European filmmaking talents. However, the people who took this view were largely the cognoscenti; those people who attended the Film Society screenings and who read the cineastes’ magazine Close-Up. The economic realists of British films – led by battle-scarred producers such as John Maxwell and the film technicians’ union The Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT) – believed that the British film industry should content itself with low-cost domestic films produced by home-grown talents. In the shake-up, two émigré designers – Junge and Korda – came to exert significant influence over the development of British film design. Others endured more difficult times working within the perennially fragile British film industry.

And Still They Come

Viewed from this distance, it seems clear that British film design needed outside help in the early 1930s. The films of Pearson and Hitchcock counted amongst the very few examples of progressive design. Otherwise, British studios continued to treat settings very much as an afterthought.

The point was illustrated by John Maxwell’s company British International Pictures (BIP) at Elstree. In 1927, Maxwell pledged to produce films ‘at the level of the world’s best quality’. By 1930, disappointed by returns from a series of super productions, he had settled for the continuous production of support and quota pictures (films turned out merely to meet the letter of the quota regulations). The sets for these were supervised – or so it was alleged – by Clarence Elder.²

Elder was an object of ridicule to British designers, partly because of his habit of donning an artist’s cap and smock when greeting design underlings. This ruse was intended to command respect, but it was futile within a department where art directors were incensed by 18-hour working days, films without scripts and the knowledge that their one responsibility was to do everything they could to keep the cameras rolling. The BIP designers’ contempt for Elder was summed up by an incident which surrounded an article he wrote on ‘Art Direction’ some time during the 1930s. This was never published, but a copy was later donated to the British Film Institute, complete with scurrilous additions to Elder’s text scribbled in pencil; ‘production’ became ‘lousy production’, and ‘rough ground plans’ was amended to ‘very rough ground plans’ by an unknown ironist who clearly disliked the bombastic design chief.³
Edward Carrick adjudged that Elder initiated a school of design by default at BIP. Elder’s art directors – such as Peter Proud, Cedric Dawe and Duncan Sutherland – learned to think on their feet and stretch a pound beyond its conceivable limits. To Carrick, these were valuable lessons ‘provided one did not try to believe in what one did’. Somewhat better standards were achieved by BIP’s close neighbours at Elstree, Herbert Wilcox’s British and Dominions Picture Corporation. B&D’s design team was headed by the Architectural Association graduate Lawrence P. Williams. By his own admission, Williams was not an imaginative designer, but he was very well organised and he understood the value of architectural discipline. When he entered films in 1928, it was not common for British architects to become film designers, but Williams reasoned that the traditional processes of architecture, from esquisses to elevations to floor plans, could all be applied to transient studio sets.4

Williams’ disciplined approach enabled B&D to produce well-finished sets on relatively small budgets. His designs of the 1930s, for films such as *Nell Gwyn* (1934) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938), were marked by their precision and textural quality. Williams’ idea of adapting architectural techniques to films was also highly influential over the development of British design. However, his sets often seemed formal and unimaginative: dutiful in the case of the historical epics and bland in the case of the comedies. (Williams believed that comedies required ‘lighter’, undramatic backgrounds.)5

Some observers of British design – Carrick and the writers of *Close Up* included – believed that there had to be other paths open to British design. From one perspective, the answer seemed to suggest itself in unfolding economic and political events across Europe. Many of the films that inspired the patrons of the Film Society emanated from the German film industry. This was in dire straits by the early 1930s. The ‘golden period’ of German films between 1920 and 1925 was built on cheap exports which were made possible by a weak Deutschmark. The stabilisation of the Mark in 1924 had chronic consequences for German films, the more so given the catastrophic failure of the two super productions of 1926, *Faust* and *Metropolis*. The German film industry was subsequently undermined further by the arrival of sound; this severely reduced the export potential of German language productions. These economic factors encouraged many technicians to leave Germany to seek work elsewhere. Of course, the Jewish technicians had even more compelling reasons to leave Germany. By 1933, Jewish film-workers had been systematically removed by the National
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Socialist government. The Film Credit Bank (which provided much of the finance for German films) was under the control of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. It instituted the Film Chamber, a compulsory technical organisation which screened the ethnic origins of applicants. Anyone who wished to work in German films had to prove their Aryan descent.\textsuperscript{6}

Such measures, combined with the government persecution of left-wing intellectuals, led to the deconstruction of the German film industry. In October 1933, Cedric Belfrage observed: ‘What is left of the German studios is a joke. All the bright boys and girls of the Berlin studios have left.’ During a time of economic expansion for British films, this fact seemed to offer an opportunity to the nation’s film studios, as the same writer insisted in August 1935:

The British film business is finding itself short of everything it requires except money. There are not enough studios, stars, technicians of all sorts.’

However, many technicians were fearful of an influx of foreign specialists into British studios. Some doubted the legitimacy of the émigré ‘aces’. L.P. Williams thought that foreign technicians were embraced largely because of British films’ lack of self-esteem: ‘People in British films were very conscious of the fact that they were no bloody good.’ He also suggested that émigré art directors were unjustly paid almost twice as much as their British counterparts. This point was endorsed by the Film Society doyen Paul Rotha, who found that ‘any German director ... or cameraman or art director was seized on by the Elstree illiterates’.\textsuperscript{7}

The question of foreign labour was a defining issue in the development of the Association of Cinematograph Technicians. Formed in the Summer of 1933 from the earlier (less militant) British Kinematograph Society, the ACT continually lobbied the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Labour to demand stronger restrictions on work permits for émigré technicians. Undoubtedly, permits were granted with conspicuous ease in the first half of the 1930s; 84 out of 87 applications made up to June 1936 were successful. The technical unions and the government clearly had conflicting interests. The trade departments were anxious not to upset foreign investors in British films; at the same time, as an internal memo made clear, the Board of Trade believed that foreign technicians were vital to the export prospects of British productions: ‘Some latitude in respect of their [foreign technicians’] employment must be given if we are ever to make films which can pretend to cater for the world market.’ For its part, the ACT argued that the security of
its members depended on jobs in British studios being protected for British labour. It also doubted whether the art department in particular required guidance from foreign hands. This point was made clear in June 1937, when an ACT delegation met with officials from the Ministry of Labour. Sidney Cole used the occasion to question whether art direction was really an artistic – and therefore a specialised – task. To him, it was ‘half-artistic, half-technical’, unlike the work of the photographer, and, anyway, most designers ‘worked under the direct supervision of the producer’. In this light, the foreign design expert was clearly an unwarranted luxury.8

The attitude of the ACT was summed up by its rallying cry, repeated in the headlines of the early issues of the *Journal of the ACT*: ‘And still they come!’ The foreign designers who came to Britain endured some difficult times. Nobody at the Ealing studios came to meet the celebrated Andre Andrejew when he arrived to work on *The Dictator* (1935); this, despite the fact that he did not speak a word of English. Working at the same studios, Oscar Werndorff was afraid to seek the advice of his English colleagues for fear that they might exploit his ignorance. It took some years for Alfred Junge to be accepted by British colleagues when he took up the plum post as head of the design department at Gaumont-British. Some of the émigré designers also encountered problems adapting to British studio practice. Alberto Cavalcanti reported that his friend Lazare Meerson was constantly disappointed by the lack of a French-style collaborative ethos among technicians in British studios. This same point vexed Andrejew, who often found his compositions marred by insensitive photography and set dressing. Most starkly of all, Ernő Metzner found himself marginalised when he failed to adapt to the studio system at Gaumont-British. Metzner was hired in 1933 to head the company’s second-string studio at Islington (or ‘Siberia’ as it was known to G-B technicians). The Hungarian was famed for his six films for G.W. Pabst, including *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1926), *Westfront 1918* (1930) and *Comradeship* (1931). Metzner was also noted for his excellence in solving the mechanical problems of set design (he wrote a number of articles on this subject for *Close-Up*). But he found that his progressive design style was out of step with studio practice and he was ultimately demoted at Gaumont-British in favour of Junge’s young assistant Peter Proud.9

The six émigré designers arrived in Britain for various reasons. Andrejew, Meerson and Korda were all economic migrants: the first two (who had previously fled Russia in the wake of its revolution) came to Britain when the French film industry collapsed; Vincent
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Korda arrived in British studios as a consequence of his brother’s global film prospecting. Junge, Werndorff and Metzner were political refugees. Werndorff was Jewish and Junge had a Jewish wife; Metzner fled Germany for fear of political persecution (he was a conspicuous left-wing intellectual). Most made some sort of mark. For all of his disappointments, Meerson showed what could be achieved with plaster and with pure space in Fire Over England (1937) and Knight Without Armour (1937). Andrejew impressed many with the strength of his conte and ink designs; young designers such as John Bryan and Maurice Carter were also thrilled by the incredible murals of his regular sidekick, the Yugoslavian Ferdinand Bellan. (This genius could draw 50-yard classical murals, working on the floor and using a piece of charcoal taped to the end of a stick.) But the greatest impact on British films during the 1930s was made by Alfred Junge and Vincent Korda. These two designers achieved many credits by dint of their central roles in the prolific studio systems of Gaumont-British and London Film Productions. Between them, they created most of the memorable British sets of the period.

Alfred Junge

When Edward Carrick referred to British ‘schools’ of film design of the 1930s, he didn’t mean to imply that young technicians benefited from formal teaching in British studios. Indeed, the opposite was rather the case; as the BIP example showed, at a time of rapid expansion in the film industry, design initiates were often misled by department leaders of dubious legitimacy. This did not apply within the department run by Alfred Junge at Shepherd’s Bush and Islington. Junge helped to formalise design teaching via the Gaumont-British apprenticeship scheme. More importantly, he inspired a great many designers – including Michael Relph, Elliot Scott and William C. Andrews and Ken Adam – with an approach to design which was at once disciplined and supremely expressive.

Junge first came to work in England in October 1927 as art director to the Carr-Gloria-Dupont company, which produced four films at the BIP studios in the late 1920s. The company was built around the eminent German film director E.A. Dupont. At the time, Dupont was one of the two great bankable names of German cinema (the other was G.W. Pabst) and the British company had grand aims; during the glory days at BIP, Carr-Gloria-Dupont announced that it would not ‘rush or scamp’ its films, which would be ‘sufficiently big to secure universal showing irrespective
of any artificial aids’. In the event, the films exhibited declining production values, as Maxwell’s henchmen contracted the purse strings.10

Most of Junge’s early design work was achieved at a distance; he produced finished designs in Germany which were then built on the floor at Elstree by Elder’s underlings. This gave some legitimacy to Elder’s fantastic claim, recorded in the 1929 Spotlight, that ‘my current production is E.A. Dupont’s Piccadilly’. More importantly, Junge’s pioneering efforts in distant design (which would be repeated in the first British assignments of Andre Andrejew) gave clues to the development in Britain of the role of Production Designer. From the late 1930s, it would become common for leading designers to produce work which they did not personally translate into three dimensions on the studio floor.

The outstanding art direction in the Carr-Gloria-Dupont films was showcased undoubtedly in Moulin Rouge (1928) and Piccadilly (1929). The company intended to shoot its first British film almost entirely in real locations, including the Moulin Rouge itself (the über-realist Dupont believed that filmmakers of integrity should aim to shoot in absolutely authentic locations). This ambition was nullified when the owners of the famous Parisian dance hall refused permission to shoot there and Junge consequently had to create the dance hall and other leading interiors in the studio: Moulin Rouge was all the better for it. Junge produced a completely enclosed set for the dance hall itself which was beautifully finished with faux white marble walls and an inlaid wooden floor. (Unusually, this was made from durable inlaid wood rather than the usual varnished brown paper.) He also created other design firsts, such as a balcony that was supported without pillars using a cantilever system.

Junge’s work on Moulin Rouge was celebrated by the emerging high-brows of British cinema; artist Stella Burford even produced two water colours of Junge’s sets for her exhibition at the Bond Street Gallery in 1928. At the same time, British technicians were alarmed at the prodigious production methods employed by Dupont and his crew. Moulin Rouge cost a record £90,000 to make (it was five months in the making) and the costs were doubtless not improved by Dupont’s auteurist affectations, such as his habits of never shooting before noon and fiddling endlessly with minor props. Piccadilly was conceived along similarly grand lines. Arnold Bennett’s florid script revealed Dupont’s unabashed scenic ambitions:

A large gallery surrounds the room; in front, opposite the apparatus, two stairs elegantly curve down from the gallery, which
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is on a level with the entry. Over the whole lies a grey opaque light like a dim fog.

Maxwell’s studio manager Joe Grossman attempted to impose budgetary restrictions on an increasingly extravagant German director; for example, he insisted that the vehicles used in the Piccadilly Circus set should circle around the Elstree lot in Ali Baba fashion, the license plates changed for each set-up. Nonetheless, Piccadilly ended up joining its predecessor in going hugely over budget. The settings for the last two films in Dupont’s British cycle were restricted yet further. Junge’s Middle Eastern village set for Two Worlds (1930) was sanctioned only on the understanding that it would be capable of being redressed for scores of further productions on the BIP lot. Profligacy was discouraged on Cape Forlorn (1931) by a legal clause, appended to Dupont’s copy of the script, which asserted that any trifling adjustments to mise-en-scène and such like ‘would be regarded as a departure from the company’s express instructions’.11

Junge’s Dupont assignments probably provided the ideal introduction to British films, in so far as they exemplified the need for the designer to adjust to the industry’s undulating economic fortunes. The point was comprehensively underscored during the course of Junge’s subsequent five-year tenure as head of the Gaumont-British art department. During this period, Junge’s name was attached to an incredible 47 films. Most of these were first features, sometimes made on large budgets for international markets. All of the films were made in two studios which, by the mid-1930s, were widely viewed as being barely suited to their purpose.

Junge’s arrival at Gaumont-British came about as a result of the reorganisation of the company’s capital in late 1931. At that time, the company consolidated its links with Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Ltd and incorporated that firm’s studios. The reformed Gaumont-British therefore had two facilities – at Lime Grove, Shepherd’s Bush and Poole Street, Islington – and it also had a lively new Head of Production, Michael Balcon. At the time (and in complete contrast to his later sober persona) Balcon was in the grip of his Sam Goldywn-phase and he was the perfect representative for Gaumont-British’s spell of Klondyke-style internationalist prospecting. Balcon enthused in 1936: ‘We must pursue a production policy ever less and less parochial and more and more international in appeal.’ This mindset was demonstrated in Gaumont-British’s extravagant policy of ‘Star Spangled Specials’; films made for world (i.e. mainly American) markets on budgets of at least £100,000. Such productions demanded visuals which could bear favourable comparison
with the leading films of the Big 5 American majors. However, Junge had to work in two studios which – ridiculously – were built upwards, developed in each case from old power stations. The privations were many. There were no lots, sets had to be built on the ground floors and carried up in lifts (thereafter to be stored on the roof, lumped around by old cart horses). The Gaumont-British photographer Clifford Hornby summed up Junge’s problems perfectly when he described the studios at Gaumont-British as a ‘masterpiece of inappropriateness’.12

Remarkably, Junge achieved fabulous things at Gaumont-British. The films themselves were not greatly memorable (this probably explains why Junge is best remembered for his later films for Powell and Pressburger) but the sets were usually impeccable. The designs for the Jessie Matthews musicals were ebullient symbols of their time. Elsewhere, in films such as *I Was a Spy* (1933), *Jew Süss* (1934), *The Iron Duke* (1934) Junge produced surprisingly expansive sets which acknowledged their material constraints but were never submerged by them. It all came down to a question of attitude. Revealingly, in his youth Junge (as he himself recalled) had wanted to be either ‘an artist or a Kaiser’. Working at Gaumont-British he became both.13

Junge was an extraordinary artist. Throughout his career, he expressed a preference for working in conte and wash. The pencil was used to define the architectural features and dressings of the sets – no one drew such things with the precision of Junge. His wash technique emphasised the surface values of the sets; time and again, one is struck by the range of feeling and texture that Junge is able to achieve with his subtle use of watercolour. Ideally, and given the time, Junge would produce hundreds of drawings for his productions (he made 300 for *Jew Süß*) and scores of finished 18’ × 12’ paintings. These were intended to define every aspect of mise-en-scène. Junge had an essentially filmic imagination and his pictures were conceived as fragmentary but definitive moments in film time.

As time went on at Gaumont-British, Junge found himself increasingly pushed to produce totally finished designs. A typical Gaumont production would include 20–40 sets and the supers would often feature many more. Given that Junge was often working on five films at a time, he was inevitably stretched. The tensions are clear if we compare Junge’s designs for his first Gaumont-British production *After the Ball* (1932) with those for the latter *Britannia of Billingsgate* (1933). The former paintings are beautifully finished, with every feature – such as the murals, busts and stands of the League of Nation set – meticulously depicted. The designs for *After the Ball* also indicate Junge’s strong feeling for camera
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placement and movement; a street scene features an iron gate which seems caught in motion thanks to Junge’s framing of it just off centre and at a tilt. In contrast, Junge’s schemes for Britannia of Billingsgate – made at a time when he was working on two other films at the Bush – are hurried. In one, Junge clearly wants to suggest a perspective set to represent St Mary’s Hill, but this is conveyed by an uncharacteristically vague upstroke of his brush.

But even the least impressive of Junge’s designs demonstrated his determination to control the frame. The paintings were never intended merely to describe the settings; rather, they were meant to be definitive guides to the entire conception of the mise-en-scène, including camera distance and angle. Partly, this was a matter of basic practicality. Ever mindful of the limited stage space available to him, Junge felt that it was necessary, as he observed in 1935 to ‘curb the excesses of the fervent scenario writer’. But Junge was also keen to protect the autonomy of the art director. Writing after his retirement in 1958, Junge reflected that

We, as artists have been trained to think visually; and if we are good artists we can’t ever be satisfied with merely interpreting someone else’s compositions.

Remarkably, he extended this ethos to the cameramen on his productions. They were expected to follow his set-ups to the letter and Junge even painted an ‘X’ on the studio floor to make sure that he maintained control of the master shot. Little wonder that his assistant Michael Relph should remember Junge as ‘a most amazing sort of German autocrat’.14

Relph was one of the beneficiaries of the Gaumont-British Apprenticeship Scheme. A Gaumont-British press release of November 1932 announced that this would be run ‘largely on German lines’. Of course, with Junge at the helm, there was little chance of it being anything other. The scheme allowed for apprentices to be given training in all departments, initially on a salary of 5s a week (rising to 20s) with a chance to specialise after six months. Balcon hoped that the scheme would ultimately ease the pressure on department heads by producing young students who could assume responsibility for the programme pictures. However, the intense schedules in place by 1934 meant that Junge was desperate for students to assume a full load quickly. Even then, his perfectionism did not permit him to renege on his teaching duties. By all accounts, Junge was attentive to his students, taking great care over the most minor details and, typically, encouraging his charges to draw in the style of the master. A kind of Rembrandt’s workshop atmosphere
therefore prevailed in the art department at Gaumont-British during the 1930s.15

The major lesson to learn from Junge was connected with screen reality. Throughout his career, Junge exhibited a talent for gently stretching the boundaries of realism by making imaginative use of authentic or authentic-looking objects. Great pains were taken at Gaumont-British to get the smallest details right, as one of Junge’s inventories for Jew Süss demonstrated:

One interesting door knocker; garden flowers, as detailed; plenty of real grass; one ladder to reach to Naomi’s window; one watering can and some gardening tools. Rambling roses growing over rustic work, with buds. Four real birch trees with artificial leaves; five fir tree trunks in various thicknesses, diameters from 9in to 18in; six large branches of real fir trees, about 10ft–15ft long; ivy; small bushes; small forest plants and bushes for outside the gate.

Junge’s department went to similar lengths for the elaborate reproduction of Roulers market square (circa 1916) for I Was a Spy; this was built over 18 days by 300 men in an empty field at Welwyn and ultimately housed 100 props, including period diesel trams and Mercedes cars. But such efforts were not intended to create a documentary feeling. Junge saw realistic detail as a counterpoint to the artificial gaze of the camera lens; he knew that items within a set would be transformed by the camera and studio lights to produce a fundamentally cinematic conception of reality. He also maintained a strong feeling for the key elements within an ostensibly realistic set. In I Was a Spy, Junge made dramatic use of the glass in the café set to underscore the spying theme (he repeated this device ten years later in his sets for The Archers’ production The Silver Fleet). Realistic elements were also transformed in his village theatre set of The Good Companions (1933). This was one of 72 sets in this film, but the attention to detail was nonetheless impeccable. The modest proscenium arch, dirty windows and well-used notice boards suggested the importance of the tiny venue to the imagined community of Rawsley.16

Junge’s very best work occurred in his Jessie Matthews projects. Matthews was Gaumont-British’s most exportable star and, over time, the company strove to place her within the kind of sparkling contemporary interiors which had long been a staple of Hollywood musicals. In Evergreen (1934), It’s Love Again (1936), Head Over Heels (1937), Gangway (1937) and Sailing Along (1938), Junge developed his own
version of the B.W.S. – the ‘Big White Set’ – beloved of MGM’s art chief Cedric Gibbons. In the process, he developed a personal style of Lime Grove Deco, as William K. Everson recalled: ‘They [the Matthews musicals] were hymns of praise to elegance, luxury, glitter and glamour, quite literally art deco films.’ But it was not an untroubled vision. The Matthews films were intended, as Gaumont-British’s bookings manager Arthur Jarrett suggested, to counteract ‘the cheap and shoddy and realism of so many film dramas’. However, they took on an increasingly acrid tone as the cycle developed, in a way which seemed to mirror the wider circumstances within the production company. The internationalist ebullience of the earlier Matthews films, as symbolised by Junge’s sets, was replaced by an atmosphere of doomy self-reflection which looked back at the era of the *style moderne* as a hollow dream.17

Junge’s Lime Grove Deco was really an amalgam of elements borrowed from art deco, the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and wider elements from the Modern Movement in architecture and interior design. It responded to public perceptions of such things formed from contemporary films and architecture (not least from the Odeon cinemas of the time). Junge’s sets also quoted familiar examples of deco design, such as the elegant tables of Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann and the light fittings of Jean Perzel. But, typically, Junge’s vision was never academic – he distilled all of these elements through his imagination. At the same time, he took care to avoid the more anti-sceptic aspects of modern trends in interior design. His sets for the Matthews musicals were characterised by clean lines, geometrical planes and vast expanses of blinding white walls. But he also included features such as Scandinavian wood floors and deep furnishings to impart warmth to his creations.

The highpoint of Lime Grove deco was *It’s Love Again*. The press release for this Victor Saville-directed musical said that it mixed ‘the warm mysteries of the Orient with good old jazz!’. The modernist agenda was declaimed at the start via the fabulous flat of Peter Carlton (Robert Young). A model of a deco clock tower gave way to an expansive hallway, based around a glass and metal stairway. Such design ingredients in a Matthews musical were invariably intended to be symbols of aspiration; the audience was encouraged to join the heroine on her picaresque journey towards celebrity and riches. This point was underscored in the early scenes of *It’s Love Again* by the star details to the balustrades in Peter’s apartment block. Otherwise, Junge’s designs on this film strongly recalled the much-publicised contemporary interiors of the English architect Oliver Hill. Powerful straight lines were contrasted with reassuring curves and the accoutrements of modern living (such as radiograms and
electric heating) were tastefully incorporated into the architecture of the apartments.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{It’s Love Again} was a confident expression of modern trends in architecture and interior design. As such, it represented a highpoint in Gaumont-British’s internationalist campaign. But, even as it was being produced, economic circumstances were changing in British films. Gaumont-British found itself unable to resist the reductions in British film finance caused by the withdrawal of the city institutions; at the same time, it was clear by 1936 that Gaumont-British films were not enjoying wide distribution in the United States. A few months after the release of \textit{It’s Love Again}, Gaumont-British’s President Isidore Ostrer lamented: ‘I have proved my point that nobody can make good pictures here without losing money.’\textsuperscript{19}

Junge’s work for the Matthews musicals proceeded to trace the decline in confidence felt by Gaumont-British. The last two films – \textit{Gangway} and \textit{Sailing Along} – were made at Pinewood as part of a rescue package arranged with J. Arthur Rank’s new company General Film Distributors (GFD). A different atmosphere prevailed within Gaumont-British and in Junge’s department in particular. The \textit{Daily Mail} reported that, within the Pinewood bureaucracy, Junge no longer had easy access to ‘men who can make Norman battleships, baronial halls ... [or] ... period furniture on the jump’. The depressed atmosphere was reflected in Junge’s settings, as the deco motifs were modified and finally abandoned. \textit{Gangway} was billed as ‘a real song and dance about the Thames’ and it broke away from the hothouse studio atmosphere which had contributed so fully to the earlier Matthews films – over 25 per cent of the footage was shot on location. \textit{Sailing Along} substantiated the feeling that the Matthews brand was in decline. Here, the gains of modernism were critiqued. The modernist artist Sylvester (Alistair Sim) was lampooned as a representative of ‘the simple school of painting’ and his pretensions were underlined by his dwelling – a deco-flavoured caravan with chrome features and smooth curves. Moreover, the Le Corbusier-influenced kitchen of Gulliver (Roland Young) was described as ‘a clinic’, a theme which was supported by Junge’s provision of sterile-looking white chairs spaced at regular but remote distance from each other.\textsuperscript{20}

The interiors of \textit{Gangway} and \textit{Sailing Along} expanded a view that modernist architecture had degenerated into a victory of form over function; it was no longer a pungent symbol of aspiration. Junge’s own sense of disillusionment was revealed during the production of the last Matthews project \textit{Climbing High} (1938). This was originally intended as a big budget musical, but GFD insisted on massive cuts. The songs were removed and
many of Junge’s designs were rejected. According to Matthews, Junge ‘was outraged by the new simplicity and departed in a huff’. Ironically, he was replaced on the production by the old school Walter Murton.21

**Vincent Korda**

Junge’s personal influence over British film design in the 1930s was matched only by that of Vincent Korda. During the period, Korda was art director to London Film Productions (LFP), the company owned by his brother Alexander Korda. Alex was the great impresario of British film culture, an incorrigible showman who could think only in the most grandiose terms. This had two important consequences for Vincent. First, Alex’s enterprise allowed his younger brother to build up a long list of first-class credits; Vincent’s name was attached to 27 productions during the 1930s. Second, Alex’s love of spectacle resulted in Vincent designing many of the most memorable sets of the period; LFP productions included such overt designer films as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), *Things to Come* (1936) and *The Four Feathers* (1939).

Vincent’s career in British films was inextricably connected with his brother. Alex first called upon Vincent’s services in France in 1931, when he asked him to replace Junge on his production of *Marius* (Alex complained that Junge did not understand the Marseilles milieux). The phlegmatic Vincent was subsequently bossed by his brother; as Carrick recalled, ‘he [Vincent] knew exactly what he wanted ... but he couldn’t get that over his brother’. It was probably the family dynamic that made Vincent a grumpy traveller through British films. Throughout his career, he accused Alex of corrupting his artistic talent. As a youngster, Vincent had trained as painter in the artists’ colonies of Bela Grunwald and he had also studied in Vienna, Florence and Paris. He never shared Junge’s sense of film design as a vital new art form. Rather, Vincent denigrated it as an ‘applied art form’ and told anyone who was prepared to listen that he yearned to ‘escape to Montmartre’. ‘Misery-Korda’, as he was dubbed by the actors on his third film *Men of Tomorrow* (1932), warned aspirant designers that film design should not be thought of as ‘a sinecure’ and that it was futile for any painter to think that they could ‘change from the easel to the camera’.22

Doubtless, as Frank Bennett remarked, Vincent was ‘quite simply a painter who has turned designer’. This had a number of implications for his design style. Negatively, or so his detractors alleged, Vincent was far more reliant on his collaborators than either Williams or Junge. To the positive, Vincent’s painterly approach meant that he had a superior
feeling for the tonal properties of sets and an instinctive grasp of the potentialities of the film frame (to Vincent, the vision of the camera lens was naturally analogous to the frame on a painting). Moreover, he approached films with the freedom of the painter, never allowing his imagination to be hindered by consideration of the technical difficulties of staging and shooting.  

The Korda approach to design was best summed up by Alex’s famous order (made, allegedly, on the set of The Four Feathers) to ‘build it twice as big and paint it red!’. Alex was the ultimate producer of mise-en-scène and he believed that British films could compete only with Hollywood productions if they had comparable production values. LFP’s films were famously expensive. During the 1930s, it was generally believed that production costs were recoupable provided they did not exceed £60,000 (the maximum returns available from domestic cinemas). LFP films routinely broke this rule. The Ghost Goes West (1936) cost £120,000, Knight Without Armour (1937) £250,000 and I Claudius (1937) expended £103,000 in one month in 1937 before it was abandoned. Even the supposedly frugal Henry VIII cost £97,000. Much of the costs went on sets. Alex moaned in 1937 that there was a general perception that ‘if a set is built [at LFP] it costs more than the Shell Mex building’, but he could hardly complain. Throughout the 1930s, LFP publicists made great play of Vincent’s stunning set pieces. Successively, The Scarlet Pimpernel (1934), The Private Life of Don Juan (1934) and Things to Come (1936) were said to feature the largest sets ever assembled in British studios. Great attention was paid also to the cost of Vincent’s sets, such as the £3,500 and £5,500 spent on the re-creations of the Russian court and the Seville Theatre of The Rise of Catherine the Great (1934) and Don Juan. More than anything, Alex delighted in letting slip details of the incredible dressings which festooned Vincent’s sets. These included the £9,000 worth of Aubusson carpets and chandeliers that were used for Catherine the Great and the regency furniture, valued at several thousand pounds, which Alex borrowed for use on the sets of The Scarlet Pimpernel.  

Carrick observed that Vincent was ‘in the enviable position of being able to build lavishly’. Fortunately, he had the vision to make the most of his opportunity. Despite his reservations, Vincent developed the ability to think in film terms. This was demonstrated in his imaginative use of camera positions. Working closely with the French photographer Georges Périnal, Vincent incorporated powerful top shots into his designs and sets. These ensured that the spectator was prompted to view his creations from an unusual subject position and appreciate them all the more. The top shots
also gave full value to the striking floors which became a trademark of Vincent’s designs from *Henry VIII* on. Furthermore, like Meerson, Vincent had the ability to work spontaneously on the shooting stage. The Austrian designer William Kellner despaired at his boss’s irritating tendency to have ‘a set built on the stage ... the same set in a different version in the carpenter’s shop [and] a different version on the drawing board’, but Vincent understood the value of tuning his sets to achieve the strongest impact on the screen. He had a strong feeling for the textural value of various building materials (in his youth he had trained as a builder) and he was more aware than most designers of the transforming power of light. Many of Vincent’s best sets, such as the banqueting hall of *Henry VIII* or the hunting lodge of *Catherine the Great*, were visions in light. At times, it was difficult to see where the built set ended and the photography began; this is exactly how Vincent planned it.25

Such techniques backed up Robert Myerscough-Walker’s claim that Vincent was ‘infinitely more logical’ than he at first appeared. Throughout his career, Vincent adopted a fey, rather desultory, manner as the means of distancing himself from the pressures of the film industry. But he clearly had an acute filmic intelligence. He also knew what was required of him. At LFP, the emphasis was on achieving an effect which was fundamentally removed from the experience of everyday life. Vincent believed that the human eye was more observant than the camera, which could register only what was placed in front of the lens. The role of the designer was therefore to suggest the things that were not seen on the screen; or as he put it, to create ‘the illusion to be registered in the subconscious mind of the audience, of a world beyond the immediate confines of the set’. Palpably, Vincent was uninterested in screen realism. He felt (and his brother agreed) that cinema should be literally escapist; the audience should never be bored by objects and buildings which they saw in their day-to-day lives. Vincent was unabashed in his dismissal of documentary realism. He freely admitted of *Henry VIII* that he had bypassed historical accuracy in order ‘to suggest the magnificence of Tudor England’. In similar spirit, he said of *I Claudius* that ‘Things were too small in the Roman Empire. I have to make them bigger.’26

The Kordas’ disregard for realism and historical accuracy made them targets for press scorn throughout the 1930s. The LFP publicists tried to emphasise the realistic claims of certain sets, such as the reproduction of a London café in *Cash* (1933) and the Soho market of *21 Days* (1937). Despite this, Vincent’s designs were criticised by the middle brow journalists, who believed that Hollywood illusionism was best countered by founding a British cinema based on documentary values. The tone
was set by *Henry VIII*. This exuberant historical romp was a massive success – it made £50,000 on its first run alone and was shown in 20,000 cinemas by March 1934. It was also a remarkable achievement for Vincent, who, very early in his career, found ways to cope with a meagre budget; most of the sets were built for £50 or less, the costs kept down by a combination of minimal set building, careful positioning of actors and the use of salvaged wood. But such victories were ignored by some critics, who thought that *Henry VIII* trivialised British history. Alistair Cooke lampooned the film for displaying ‘the Hungarian view of history ... cardboard castles and a great deal of filtered cloud’. An article in *The Times* complained similarly of the film’s anachronisms, such as the eighteenth-century warming pans, late sixteenth-century executioner’s sword and Georgian crockery. Ultimately, in May 1937, such concerns led to a BFI inquiry in May 1937 over the ‘Hollywoodisation’ of history and the educational implications of ‘perverting history for the sake of the box office’.²⁷

If anything, the LFP zeal for fantasy grew as the organisation developed. In its first years, LFP operated as a tenant producer, using facilities at Wembley and B&D (where Vincent’s department had to improvise offices from the crowd dressing rooms). LFP opened its own studios at Denham in May 1936. These were designed by the noted American art director Jack Okey and had massive resources, including 118 square feet of stage space spread over 7 stages and large grounds. Vincent’s technical facilities were also boosted greatly by LFP’s development of a strong effects department at Worton Hall led by the Hollywood expert Ned Mann. ‘Ned Mann’s Gulch’ developed into one of the most successful wings of the Korda production empire, nurturing British talents such as Wally Veevers and Cliff Richardson and providing the impressive scenic effects for LFP specials such as *The Ghost Goes West* and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1936). Overall, such facilities allowed the Kordas to make Denham the ultimate fantasy factory.

All of LFP’s resources were brought to bear over Vincent’s great magnum opus of the 1930s, the science fiction epic *Things to Come*. Adapted from H.G. Wells’ 1933 utopian novel, the film was conceived along grand lines. The design team was ludicrously top heavy. Aside from Vincent, the film employed the leading American designer William Cameron Menzies in a dual role as director and associate designer. In addition, Alex employed the modernist artists László Moholy-Nagy and Fernand Leger, alongside scores of young British designers, including Frederick Pusey, John Bryan and Wells’s son, the former Gainsborough design assistant Frank Wells. In many ways, *Things to Come* exemplified
the best and worst of LFP design practice. Some of the visions created
by Vincent’s department endured in the memory (to this day, Things to
Come is a film which looks wonderful in the stills). However, the visuals
overpowered a film which was burdened with a pedestrian script and an
uneven tone.

Perhaps the problem with Things to Come lay in its rationale. Alex
announced early on in the film’s 14-month production that ‘the cast
is not important ... this is a film for technicians’. H.G. Wells, who was
heavily involved in the production, also thought that the film should be
a demonstration of technique; the film should stand, in itself, as a dem-
stration of the wonders of modern science. During shooting, Wells
spoke regularly to the press about the kinds of marvels that would be
seen in the film, including dust-free rooms, grapes the size of melons
and air conditioning which encouraged human growth. On the face of
it, such gimmicks seemed the stuff of entertainment; however, both
Wells and Menzies believed (probably against Vincent’s better instincts)
that these things should be presented in a totally sober manner.
Menzies said that the title should be taken at face value, the measure
of a film which presented a ‘newsreel of actual events’ of the future.
Wells instructed the technicians to reject the ‘balderdash’ of general
sci-fi entertainments and exhorted them in particular to ‘take whatever
[Fritz] Lang did in Metropolis as the exact contrary of what we want done
here’.28

Inevitably, Things to Come shared the fate of many LFP films in being
over-engineered, although there was no doubting the ingenuity of the
design work. The City Square was an extraordinary set, which was
built over four acres on the Denham lot. It incorporated many buildings
including a Cathedral, town hall, cinema and some flats. Remarkably, it
was also built in duplicate, to allow for the elaborate bombing scenes
(as orchestrated by Mann). Things to Come featured some additional
triumphs of plastic design. The West End Street was a massive set,
erected at Worton Hall on the largest stage in the country and featuring
a range of contemporary buildings including a hotel and a cinema. The
moon rocket base was another standout achievement. Using a familiar
technique, the moon rocket was created from a combination of built set
and hanging miniature (a model was suspended in place of the camera
to represent the top part of the craft). Even then, Vincent provided a
base which was 100’ in height.29

From a design viewpoint, Things to Come was notable primarily for its
coherecy. Vincent maintained a unified look to a film which was unpar-
alleled in its sophisticated combinations of built sets, models (there
were over 100 miniatures) and special effects. In this way, it testified to Vincent’s skill as a department leader and film artist. Carrick was undoubtedly correct when he observed that Vincent was ‘apt to look on films too much as a commercial product’. But nobody in British films of the time did spectacular design as well as Vincent Korda; his British assistants (including Pusey, Douglas Daniels and the two Morahan brothers Tom and Jim) were inspired by his example of what could be achieved by imaginative film design.30

In the final analysis, Junge and Korda – and, to a lesser extent, Andrejew – were to be prized mainly for the inspiration that they offered to the new generation of British designers. As the ACT argued, this was an intangible commodity but, then, the British art department seemed completely lost for inspiration at the start of the 1930s. In any event, British films would soon feel the benefit of the Foreign Touch, when a fresh attempt was made to assert British films in global markets. During the 1940s, Alfred Junge combined with his British design juniors to form the design wing of J. Arthur Rank’s prestige experiment.
chapter 4

Prestige Design: Working for Rank in the 1940s

The collapse of the British film industry in 1937 appeared to provide incontrovertible evidence of the folly of large-scale internationalist production. But, remarkably, it was tried again in the 1940s in the form of J. Arthur Rank’s ‘Prestige Experiment’. Rank’s idea was to use expensive productions as the means of opening up American markets for British films. To his detractors, notably the ACT and the government’s Palache Committee of 1947, Rank’s experiment was indistinguishable from the failed export campaigns of the 1930s, but there were some important differences. To begin with, Rank had transatlantic distribution and exhibition interests; he believed that these would provide him with some level of financial protection. The films of the Prestige Experiment were also more varied. The glossy 1930s internationalist films were replaced by productions which reflected the varied aesthetic preoccupations of their makers. The Prestige Experiment was an auteur-led movement and it yielded such British design highlights as *Henry V* (1944), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *Oliver Twist* (1948).

The story of J. Arthur Rank’s pilgrim’s progress through British films has been well told elsewhere. The important facts are these. Throughout the 1930s, Rank used part of his milling fortune to acquire a range of production, distribution and exhibition interests. Successively, he either launched or acquired the British National film company (1935), General Film Distributors (1935), Pinewood, Denham and Amalgamated Studios (1936–38) and the Odeon cinema chain (1938). In the early 1940s, Rank additionally purchased the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation (1941) and consolidated his global distribution links via Twentieth Century Fox.
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and his own Eagle-Lion Films. Rank said that all of his endeavours were directed by God (he was a devout Methodist) and it was this – combined with his famously low cultural capital – that inclined him to take a back seat in production matters.¹

The prestige experiment was built around Rank’s elite production concern, Independent Producers Ltd (IPL). This company was formed in 1942 by The Archers, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, who persuaded Rank that a group of top British filmmakers should be granted large budgets to make their own kinds of films (subject to some loose budgetary constraints). IPL grew to take in a number of other important companies of the period, including Cineguild (run by director David Lean in conjunction with Ronald Neame and Anthony Havelock-Allan) and the company owned by Gabriel Pascal. Over time, Rank’s prestige experiment also included films from other companies acquired by Rank, such as Two Cities. Lean enthused that Rank’s top-ranking filmmakers enjoyed more creative freedom than ‘any group of filmmakers anywhere in the world’. There was a kind of creative trickle-down effect for their designers. Talents such as Alfred Junge, Hein Heckroth, John Bryan and Carmen Dillon enjoyed the creative times of their lives.²

Heavenly Visions: Designing for Powell and Pressburger

It is doubtful whether The Archers could have existed without the support of Independent Producers. Prior to joining Rank, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger had made two conventional thrillers for Columbia and British National. At IPL, they developed an extraordinary cinema which was characterised by animistic imagery, meditations on material existence and the transcendent power of art. The Archers’ film project was challenging of popular taste and in design terms it was also uniquely formalist. Pressburger and Powell revered the German scenic traditions (the former had worked in the major German studios); in addition, Powell was preoccupied with finding anti-realist approaches to setting which would merge the worlds of stage and screen. The evolving design universe of Pressburger and, in particular, Powell was reflected closely in the work of their two production designers, Junge and Heckroth.

Junge first worked for The Archers’ on the British National production of Contraband (1940). Since the Gaumont-British debacle, he had managed to find continuous employment as a freelance designer. With the exception of one film for the budget producer Jack Raymond, this was all high level work. When the Cinematograph Films Act was renewed in
1938, it came with new minimum cost clauses for producers plus the bonus of extra quota allowance for companies which staked more on production. This arrangement suited Junge well. His major employers after Gaumont-British – MGM and British National – both paid him richly as part of their enhanced production programmes; Junge received £850 for his work *Contraband*, £500 more than photographer Freddie Young and only £150 less than Pressburger.³

Powell was delighted by The Archers’ acquisition of Junge. During the 1930s, he had directed a series of cheap programme fillers for Gaumont-British and he had been chagrined by the lack of interest shown by the haughty design luminary. Now Powell was proud to say that the ‘Prussian genius ... was taking orders from me’. It was quite something to be able to pull rank over Junge. Although he no longer headed a big department, Junge continued to assert his ‘Kaiser’ side. When the war started, Uncle Alfred (as The Archers’ crew called him, with some irony) was 54 and he seemed to get testier as he got older. His ‘X’ on the studio floor endured, even though he now worked with the same photographers from picture to picture. During the 1940s, Junge also became increasingly protective of the rights of the designer. Carrick recalled that Junge turned into ‘a staunch fighter for the rights of the artist ... in directing the making of the film’; this was signified at the end of the decade by Junge becoming the president of the recently formed Society of British Film Art Directors.⁴

Predictably, Powell and Junge had a tumultuous relationship; the two men were as stubborn as each other. Nonetheless, Junge ultimately saw his time with The Archers as the high point in his career, as he wrote in 1958:

> I was able to work as freely and imaginatively as ever, and to feel that I was helping to contribute creatively to the artistic results achieved.

Junge designed six films for The Archers: *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *The Silver Fleet* (1943), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *I Know Where I’m Going!* (1945), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947). The productions expressed some continuity with his previous work: they were meticulously planned in large format in ink and wash; they were essentially ‘hothouse’ (studio) creations, and the sets were designed to be noticed. But, working for The Archers’ small unit, Junge was freed from bureaucratic burdens. Rank’s patronage also brought the blessing of time to think and plan. Consequently, Junge was able to fully exploit the role of production designer, to devise ever more
elaborate architectural tricks and, more than anything, push further at the boundaries of film realism.\(^5\)

Junge was given the title of Production Designer from the start of his time with The Archers. The role was quite different from the supervising art director duties that he had performed at Gaumont-British. For The Archers, Junge imposed a complete vision of design, which incorporated models, special effects and locations. The most memorable model shot occurred in *Colonel Blimp*. Here, Junge designed a duel sequence which started on a built set and ended up with a top shot of a model – the protagonists finally being seen in a stunning pull-away amidst a numinous snow storm. *A Matter of Life and Death* relied more heavily on special effects. The Archers dubbed this, their technically most ambitious film, ‘a stratospheric joke ... in Technicolor and monochrome’, but it had some serious points to make about the poetic imagination and the nature of perception. The hero, Peter Carter (David Niven), observed correctly that the next world ‘would start where this one leaves off’; Junge underscored this theme with the surgery sequence, which mixed paintings with optical effects to figure the journey to the Other Side. Two ‘eye’ metaphors – an operating theatre light and a gas mask – were followed by the deliberately realistic device of the veins in Carter’s eye. This gave way to further moments of visual punning as corpuscles became stars, veins and cells became clouds, veins became the striped canopy of the Next World and the cells became human beings. Before we knew it we were in Heaven, the whole journey guided firmly by Junge’s ink wash designs.\(^6\)

Rank’s large stages at Denham and Pinewood also gave Junge the opportunity to exercise his architectural skills. He created some spectacular plastic visions for The Archers. These included the elaborate Turkish baths of *Colonel Blimp*, which measured 80’ x 50’ feet, and the Canterbury Cathedral interior of *A Canterbury Tale*; this large Denham reproduction (built because the real Cathedral was window-less during the war) took in the South Porch entrance down to the South Aisle. But the most spectacular instances of Junge’s architectural vision undoubtedly occurred in *Life and Death*. The celestial courtroom filled the entire Stage 4 at Denham (the largest stage) and was marked by humorous contrasts between bureaucracy – the clean, straight lines of the built room – and the ethereal elements, such as the roughly hewn rock pedestals and the godly rays beyond the judge. *Life and Death* also featured the memorable set piece of the stairway to heaven. Junge’s £3,000 staircase (nicknamed ‘Ethel’ by its makers Rowson and Clydesdale) had 106 steps, each 20 feet wide. Those steps were powered, in conveyor belt fashion, by a 12 h.p. motor.\(^7\)
Such feats of design were never gratuitous. Junge displayed an unerring sense of the demands of the production, quirky as these sometimes were. Those, like Powell, who regarded Junge purely as a realist must have been surprised by his sympathetic response to The Archers’ Heavenly visions. The celestial stairway of The Archers’ A Matter of Life and Death (1946, p.d.A. Junge). ITV Global Entertainment.


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anti-realist campaign. Junge said of his own work that there was 'a certain combination of artistry and practicality ... which exists in everything I do'. This was exemplified in his work for Powell and Pressburger. His understanding of the psychological dynamics of Pressburger's work was displayed in Colonel Blimp as he devised a curiously uncomfortable office for a downtrodden official, bounded by seven irregular walls. Junge also expressed an unexpected feeling for expressionism in his Powell and Pressburger projects. The sloping walls of Caligari found their echo in the Palace of Mopu of Black Narcissus and the buildings of Chillingbourne High Street in A Canterbury Tale; the latter compressed 500 yards into 100 feet at Denham, the illusion assisted by a small boy who stood in for a grown man.8

Elsewhere, Junge responded sensitively to Powell's quasi-pagan sensibilities. Junge's sets for Black Narcissus illuminated The Archers' spiritual message. Remarkably, his version of the Himalayas required no location work at all (save for some filming in a botanical garden in Horsham); instead, Junge conveyed the whole frigid atmosphere via a combination of built set and mattes, painted by the veteran artist Percy Day. The author of the source novel, Rumer Godden, hated the results. She said that Junge's House at Mopu looked like 'a ramshackle imitation of the pavilion at Brighton' and she also decried his 'white muslin snows'. But these design elements accorded perfectly with Powell's description of Mopu as a place of 'pagan beauty'. Moreover, Junge's designs captured the sexual dynamics of Black Narcissus, as re-conceived by The Archers. They expressed marvellous contrasts between the ordered world of the Convent of the Order of St Mary and the House at Mopu. Junge's designs for the convent depicted it as a sterile and symmetrical place. This inhibited vision contrasted greatly with his designs for the former brothel at Mopu. The frescoes were highly revealing. Junge drew his designs in pencil and elements were clearly erased and reworked to heighten their sexual content – notably, some of the women's breasts were enlarged.9

The Academy Awards panel agreed that Black Narcissus was an extraordinary moment of film design (Junge received an Oscar for colour art direction and an additional one for best set dressings.) It was odd, then, that it should transpire to be his last picture for The Archers. His departure was probably down to two things. First, it was known that Junge was being courted by MGM to head the art department at their new studios at Boreham Wood. At the same time, Junge had become increasingly alienated from his equally headstrong boss. Powell espoused the benefits of collaboration, but he could be despotic in the
studio; Junge's assistant William Kellner remembered that Powell 'wiped the floor' with him one day at Denham in the absence of the formidable department leader. The flashpoint between Junge and Powell occurred during the initial planning phases of the seventh Archers' film (and the last of their IPL period) – the ballet drama The Red Shoes. Fatally, Junge told Powell that he went 'too far' in his plans to jettison screen realism. The breakdown in the Junge-Powell relationship brought about the second movement of production design at The Archers under the leadership of Junge's former assistant Hein Heckroth.10

Heckroth was also German, but his background was not directly in the cinema. Following initial training in fine art, Heckroth worked in the theatre, designing sets and costumes. Notably, from 1924, he became the principal designer to the Jooss Ballet. In 1935, Heckroth fled Germany – like Junge he had a Jewish wife – to settle down ultimately in Britain. He pursued a productive career in the pre-war British theatre, working for Kurt Weill, Carl Ebert and others; between 1934 and 1939, Heckroth also worked as an art teacher at the progressive Dartington Hall (where the Jooss company was based). Heckroth arrived in films in 1943, following a (ridiculous) spell of internment as an alien in Australia. Vincent Korda managed to find him work as a costume designer on Pascal's vainglorious production of Caesar and Cleopatra. Heckroth was then employed by Junge to design costumes for The Archers.11

Heckroth was essentially a theatre man and a painter. This suited Powell perfectly. From as early as 1946, Powell craved a new kind of film design, which would make a decisive break from film technique and which would resist the tendency, as he saw it, of films being strangled by props. Taking his inspiration from the theatre designs of Reinhardt and Craig, Powell wanted someone who could create the atmosphere of a night club 'with one screen and a flashily dressed spiv'. Heckroth also believed that the designer should leave more to the audience's imagination. What's more, Heckroth had a strong pedigree in the European artistic movements that Powell revered (as an artist he had been associated with the expressionist Otto Dix and the surrealist Max Ernst). More than anything, he was far more malleable than the intransigent Junge. Heckroth would become a prime interlocutor for Powell for the next 20 years.12

The Red Shoes had been a long time in coming. Pressburger first worked up a script for a ballet film in 1937 for Alexander Korda. According to Film Industry magazine the revived project was mentioned 'with bated breath' during the making of Life and Death 'rather like a blushing maiden mentions marriage'. The Archers intended The Red Shoes to be
their definitive statement on art and they insisted that their technicians
got into the spirit, to the extent of issuing free tickets to Covent Garden
for the non-balletomanes. Heckroth needed little encouragement. He
was inspired by the central notion of an original ballet. He also empa-
thised with the idea of a film which deployed non-naturalistic sets as the
means of figuring both the story of The Red Shoes (as written by Hans
Christian Andersen) and wider meditations on the motivations of artis-
tic expression. He shared Powell’s view, expressed at the time of The
Red Shoes, concerning the ‘abject naturalism of so many “real” sets’ in
British films.\(^{13}\)

Given a completely free choice, Heckroth and Powell might well have
abandoned solid sets altogether in The Red Shoes. Their use of trad-
tional sets for the framing love story was governed partly by political
considerations. Rank’s prestige experiment was now in decline. The reo-
pening of Pinewood, in April 1946, had brought a shift in emphasis in
the JARO’s production plans to the effect that the IPL producers were
encouraged to aim for continuous production rather than quality. Rank
had also been disappointed by the American returns of Black Narcissus;
the more so, given the £1,667,000 loss on production which was noti-
fied by the GCFC for 1946–47. The Archers knew that their autonomy
depended on their persuading Rank and his chief advisor John Davis
that The Red Shoes was not an art film. Heckroth’s traditional built sets,
such as the one representing Lady Neston’s house in Belgravia, were
consequently produced as showcases to conceal the general atmos-
phere of artistic experimentation.\(^{14}\)

If Rank and Davis had looked closely, they may have noticed some
subversive elements even within the Belgravia set. Heckroth used the
sheer curtains to symbolise the immateriality of everyday life. More
obviously, this set – in common with the 60 or so others – expressed
a new approach to colour. The Red Shoes was The Archers’ fourth
film in Technicolor and it was the most progressive yet. Junge had
used colours in largely conventional manner, deploying them to
make the familiar emotional associations (red for passion, blue for
cool). In contrast, Heckroth’s sense of colour was highly personal. He
insisted that Technicolor should be used ‘as an actor’ and suggested
that, in nature, colours represented both physical and psychological
states. So, for example, Heckroth speculated that silver greys and
blues were the shades of maturity ‘where man has an understanding
with nature’.\(^{15}\)

The centrepiece Ballet of The Red Shoes was planned in extraordin-
dary detail by Heckroth. The Archers intended the section to represent
their most audacious experiment yet in 'composed' filmmaking; the process, exemplified by Disney (and also used in the jungle-chase scenes of *Black Narcissus*) where the action was tailored to fit the musical score. Accordingly, Heckroth began by spending eight days discussing the ballet with the choreographer Robert Helpmann. These conversations inspired Heckroth's initial 300 sketches, which were copied to Helpmann and the composer Brian Easdale as a guide to the ballet. The sketches also helped Ivor Beddoes to provide 500 paintings which were assembled as a cartoon strip.

The completed ballet ran for 12.5 minutes and it featured a complicated mixture of built set, matte and process shots; in particular, the Gunn Process was used to reconcile the mattes and the moving figures. Such techniques were state of the art, although Heckroth was adamant, as he told Carrick, that 'All the machinery and all the money in the world will come to nothing if you have nothing to say – no idea.' Heckroth intended the ballet to be a Faustian tale, which spoke not just of the need to create but of the high price that was exacted by the creative impulse. The Girl, played by Moira Shearer, expressed her talent but she also danced herself to death within settings that became ever more ghastly. The 'City of Failure' made challenging use of warm colours, the dirty greens and yellows signifying spiritual death. The later 'City of Death' with its lilting walls and demon figures (Heckroth produced 22 surrealistic designs for masks) demonstrated, in its shocking immateriality, the dangers that attended those who relinquished their grip on the material world.16

Heckroth would go on to design a further six films for Michael Powell and/or The Archers, but none was as successful scenically as the ballet film. On *The Red Shoes*, Heckroth succeeded in balancing the demands of traditional plastic and, as he termed it, ‘mobile’ design. Despite his qualms, the built sets played a crucial role in establishing dramatic contrasts and also delineating the mind-numbing materialism of some of the characters. Later projects, notably *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), made showy and rather self-conscious use of theatrical scenery and effects. They were all the poorer for it.

**Romantic Visions: Designing for Cineguild**

Rank’s Prestige Experiment had the primary virtue of allowing a select group of artists the chance to find themselves. The point was illustrated by The Archers’ journey from pure cinema to an eclectic style of filmmaking which adapted elements from the stage. A similar sense
of artistic self-discovery was traceable in the productions of Cineguild. This company was formed in July 1943 by the creative triumvirate of David Lean (director), Anthony Havelock-Allan (producer) and Ronald Neame (cinematographer). It set out with the sole intention of filming the plays of Noel Coward; three films were made during this phase, all using Rank’s money and all shot, at Coward’s insistence, in thoroughly realistic manner. Cineguild’s full incorporation into IPL in January 1946 brought independence from Coward, the chance to create a self-contained production unit and, moreover, the opportunity to develop a distinctive vision. As with The Archers, production design was high on the artistic agenda and Cineguild’s exceptional designer John Bryan exploited the opportunity to create scenes of rare splendour.

The three Coward films were *This Happy Breed* (1944), *Blithe Spirit* (1945) and *Brief Encounter* (1945). The first two were designed by Norman Delaney (a.k.a. ‘C.P. Norman’), the last by L.P. Williams. At the time, Coward was in the grip of his feature-documentary phase; he believed that a socially responsible cinema should show real people on the screen; it said much that Neame’s rationale for the use of Technicolor on *This Happy Breed* was to ‘catch the drabness of middle-class live’. Of course, by this time, Coward’s grasp of social class was severely restricted (the lower middle-class Gibbons family of the first Cineguild film was about as common as it got); nonetheless, there was something to be said for the Coward-Cineguild style of film vérité. In the case of *Brief Encounter*, Williams produced sets that turned out to be highly memorable, in spite of their resounding ordinariness.17

Before the war, Williams had risen to become Britain’s highest paid art director; he received £1,000 for this work on MGM’s *A Yank at Oxford* (1938). He subsequently followed his regular employer Herbert Wilcox to Hollywood where he designed several films for RKO, including *Nurse Edith Cavell* (1939) and Hitchcock’s *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941). In 1940, Williams returned to serve with the RAF, prior to working on camouflage duty for the Special Operations Overseas. Invalided home, his release for *Brief Encounter* was secured by ‘a seedy ex-MP whose whole job was getting people out of uniform’. Williams found that Lean’s film made a good match with his established talents, as he reflected: ‘Being an architect and it being a realistic type of film, I suppose I was more at home.’18

The script for *Brief Encounter* gave Williams few clues; for example, Laura (Celia Johnson)’s home was described merely as being ‘solid, comfortable looking’. This meant that Williams had to arrive at his designs through a series of conversations with Coward. The author
insisted that Williams completely abandon his interior design instincts, to make the interiors ‘as ordinary as you can get ... He just wanted ordinary people who lived in some bloody suburb’. Coward also outlawed Williams’ original sequence for Laura’s daydream, which showed the romantic couple dancing on a desert island, because he felt that it made the film too conventional. To Coward, the key elements were the everyday sights – the Kardomah cafe, Boots chemist, most of all, the Railway buffet. Catherine de la Roche observed that *Brief Encounter* was a ‘film study of the commonplace’. The prosaic environments were vital because they made us aware of the courage required, and the guilt engendered, in Laura’s individualistic pursuit of desire.19

The locations were shot in Carnforth in North Lancashire. The town was chosen because of the quietness of its station and also because of its lax blackout regulations; this was essential, because the film was set in 1938. Williams worked hard to ensure that the studio interiors appeared totally authentic; typically, his Kardomah café incorporated all of the features – teak panelling, decorative plaque work and standardised bronze lettering – that were included in the Kardomahs just before the war. The famous railway café was based on the example at Willesden, North London (Carnforth didn’t have one) and it featured a number of elements that were intended to promote a sense of yearning in the audience. Williams included chocolates and oranges; comestibles that were freely available in 1938 but in short supply in 1945. The frosted windows also served to place the lovers in a state of tender isolation. (Helpfully, they also took away the need for back projected trains.) However, the standardised white cups, the Watney’s sign, the fading flowers, all inculcated a dominant feeling of despair and they helped develop our understanding of Laura’s dilemma. Dowdy as the café was, Laura would stay there forever if Alec (Trevor Howard) was present. But such places are decorated so as to discourage loitering and the audience knew that Laura would therefore be ushered on, in much the same way as circumstances combined to force her in the opposite direction to her desires.20

*Brief Encounter* fulfilled Cineguild’s contract with Coward. Lean, Havelock-Allen and Neame were relieved to be free of Coward’s over-weaning control and it was no coincidence that they chose to avoid contemporary realism in their future projects. Four out of their remaining six films for Rank were set in historical milieux. These were designed, in extraordinary fashion, by Cineguild’s own unit production designer John Bryan.
Bryan was the temperamental opposite of Williams. Where Williams emphasised architectural values and designer humility, Bryan regarded film design as a romantic venture and he fought for his sets to be recognised. He sketched compulsively, seeking to instil the passion and verve which he had admired in the work of Andrejew and he also took an assertive approach to his work on the sound stage. Bryan was the only British designer who dared to emulate Junge’s definitive ‘X’ on the studio floor. Furthermore, he was noted for his predilection for building his sets in forced perspective. Perspective building had long been practiced in British studios as the means of saving on space, but Bryan shared Andrejew’s view that forced perspectives could have a psychological effect on the audience. Bryan termed his approach ‘designed perspective’ to suggest its expressly anti-realist aims. On some subconscious level, Bryan intended his audience to register that all was not right in the worlds that he presented before them.21

Bryan started out as a scenic artist for the stage (his father was the well-known stage producer Herbert Bryan). This work brought him into contact with Laurence Irving who, in 1933, took Bryan on as his assistant at Sound City. He was quickly promoted to full designer status, designing quota quickies for a salary of £7 10s a week. Bryan subsequently moved to Denham where he assisted Vincent Korda on The Ghost Goes West (1935), before rejoining Irving for Gabriel Pascal’s production of Pygmalion. But Bryan’s career really took off during the war years. In 1943, following two years spent working on camouflage projects, Bryan became supervising art director for the Gainsborough studios at Shepherd’s Bush. His costume films for Gainsborough, such as The Wicked Lady (1945) and Caravan (1946) displayed his ability to produce rich-looking sets for very little money. Moreover, they demonstrated his special feeling for texture, camera placement and architectural coherence. Bryan’s work at Gainsborough promoted him to the highest levels of Rank’s technical pool; so did his participation, as art director, on Pascal’s super production of Caesar and Cleopatra (1945). By June 1946, the date of his signing to Cineguild, Bryan was established as the leading British-born production designer.

Bryan’s best work for Cineguild occurred on its two Dickens adaptations; Great Expectations (1946) and Oliver Twist (1948). These took a fresh approach to the design of costume films. In both cases, Bryan incorporated unexpected expressionist elements; instinctively, he perceived a link between the distorted Victorian worlds depicted by Dickens and the fragmented visions that thrilled him in the films of Fritz Lang. On the Dickens films, Bryan also went further in exploiting the popular
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‘mind’s eye’ view of history. Working for Gainsborough, he had pursued the notion that historical veracity in sets was less important than conforming to the audience’s collective sense of history. He pushed this idea on the Dickens films, which were designed to reproduce the spirit of the famous illustrations of Dickens and the Victorian period. In *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, Cruickshank, Hogarth and Doré met Dr Mabuse; the whole sublime enterprise distilled through the imagination of Bryan.

The power of production design was displayed in the opening sequences of *Great Expectations*. Following the example of his chief mentor Irving, Bryan conceived the opening sections in a series of annotated thumbnail sketches. (Irving had dubbed this technique ‘script design’.) These drawings were followed to the letter by Lean and Neame. All of the incremental details – the Marsh puddles, the gloomy countryside, the gallows-like branches – were included in Bryan’s sketches, which also provided strong guidance on the camera set-ups. The results were compelling; each visual element conspired to lead the audience to the shocking moment when Magwitch appeared from behind a gravestone.

The other great design moment of *Great Expectations* occurred in Miss Havisham’s house. This was a surprisingly simple set; Neame remarked that the technical team deliberately left out much of the detail from the book in order not to clutter the imagination of the audience. The consummate dining room was not over-dressed. Some beetles, mice and spiders were, in the mysterious words of the publicists, ‘supplied by a Sevenoaks resident’. Otherwise, Bryan made thoughtful use of an eerie-looking Japanese paper table cloth, but he was careful not to congest the scene. This gave full value to the other crucial elements of mise-en-scène, such as Miss Havisham’s dilapidated wedding dress (as designed by Sophia Harris).22

*Oliver Twist* went into production at Pinewood just six months after the release of the first Dickens films. It repeated some of the visual ideas; notably, Bryan again used thumbnail sketches to plot the opening scenes (this time figuring the gloomy trek of Oliver’s mother to the poor-house). But the city milieux of *Oliver Twist* provoked Bryan’s imagination in fresh ways and he delighted in creating his own three-dimensional renderings of Victorian illustrations. IPL’s historical adviser Peter Hunt said of the research for *Oliver Twist*, ‘we go to Mayhew for facts. We go to Doré for an interpretation’; it was the French illustrator Gustave Doré who guided Bryan’s hand. Doré’s 1872 collection of engravings *London: A Pilgrimage* was a particular inspiration. This was actually 40 years out
of period for the film, but Bryan and Lean believed that it conformed well with the audience’s expectations of Dickens’ London. The sets often quoted Doré closely. Strikingly, the divine long shot of Fagin’s hideaway placed against St Paul’s echoed Doré’s view of St Paul’s as seen from the Barclay and Perkins brewery.23

Somehow, Oliver Twist felt more expansive than Great Expectations, despite the former’s exploitation of the expanses of the Romney Marshes. Oliver Twist had an even greater sense of movement and contrast. Bryan revelled in the tall, twisted buildings but he also enjoyed the contrasts with the cramped interior spaces; he emphasised the claustrophobic elements by placing ‘lids’ (ceilings on many of the sets). Moreover, Bryan used all of the elements of production design – sets, locations and optical effects – to produce an impression of Dickens’ London which was at once believable and exhilarating.

Two Shakespeare Films

The other company which was strongly associated with prestige design during the 1940s was Filippo Del Giudice’s Two Cities. This prolific concern was absorbed into the Rank empire in 1942 and it operated as a kind of mini-IPL. The Italian ex-lawyer Del Giudice saw himself as an ‘administrator’ rather than a producer, whose function was to facilitate the efforts of his directors. This ethos led to the production of a number of films of particular design interest. Chief among these were the two Shakespeare productions Henry V (1944) and Hamlet (1948).

The two Shakespeare films were related in important ways. They were both directed by Laurence Olivier. They were also both deemed by Del Giudice to be ‘eternal’ productions which deserved higher budgets and imaginative treatments. The films also shared one designer, the Two Cities’ regular Carmen Dillon. But they differed widely in their aesthetic sensibilities. Henry V was a thoroughly cinematic production, which used radical setting ideas (and Technicolor) as the means of exploring the various layers of Shakespeare’s play. Conversely, Hamlet was conceived as a hybrid of stage and screen. Some of the staging techniques were traceable to Gordon Craig and they were reconfigured to shed fresh light on the psychologies of the residents of Elsinore.24

Henry V was developed as a middle-brow propaganda piece. Everyone involved in the project at its inception – the Ministry of Information’s Dallas Bower, Del Giudice, Olivier and scriptwriter Alan Dent – saw clear parallels between Agincourt and the on-going British campaign in France; reportedly, Del Giudice enthused to Rank, ‘just imagine the English army
landing on the French bitches [sic]’. However, the long production phase of *Henry V* meant that further contemporary influences were woven into the film; by the time of its release, the film was also understood within the context of D-Day and the Battle of Arnhem.²⁵

The film was designed by Paul Sheriff and Carmen Dillon, who had worked with Olivier previously on *The Demi-Paradise* (1943). The Russian Sheriff had the most glamorous background of any art director in Britain. He was born in Moscow in 1915 and his original name was Count Paul Shouvaloff. The ‘Count’ part came from his family’s royal connections; both his great-grandfather and grandfather had served as ambassador to the Tsar. Such connections guaranteed that the Shouvaloffs would have to flee Russia after the Revolution. The young Sheriff eventually settled in Britain during his teens, where he worked as a mining engineer before taking architectural studies at Oxford. Sheriff’s introduction to films came at the Ealing studios in 1934 when he introduced himself to Andre Andrejew. He subsequently served as a translator and assistant to Andrejew and Lazare Meerson.

Sheriff’s progression to fully fledged art director came about as a result of war-time shortages in personnel. The call-up meant that he and Dillon were able to build up a solid list of credits for Two Cities in the early war years, Sheriff always taking the senior credit when they worked together. They became the great yin and yang coupling of British design. Sheriff was probably the more imaginative figure (certainly Dillon believed this); he spoke expansively of art direction as being part of the ‘junior society of arts’ and painted in a free impressionistic manner. Dillon was more pragmatic. She had been a classmate of L.P. Williams at the Architectural Association and had subsequently gone on to design many quota films for Fox at Wembley during the 1930s. Dillon endured a great many hardships in her quest to become Britain’s first named female art director (she wasn’t even allowed on the floor at Wembley on account of her gender) but she was never ruffled. Her stoicism was also reflected in her work. Dillon was noted for her organised, logical approach to film design, as she noted: ‘The great thing is to meet a problem in the sure knowledge that if one goes about the task calmly and in the right way there is a solution to it.’ ²⁶

Characteristically, it was Dillon who solved the major design problem of *Henry V*. Olivier wanted to avoid the ‘Douglas Fairbanks’ approach to film history, all ‘tiny men against a big superstructure’. He also wanted to find a visual style which would simultaneously depict the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (the times of the real Henry V and Shakespeare)
and suggest Henry’s motivations for fighting. This tall order was met by a crude sketch from Dillon, based on her memory of the Bayeux tapestry, of a boat crammed with 12 figures. This led in turn to Olivier’s suggestion of using the fifteenth-century *Tres Riche Heures de Duc de Berry* as a primary reference. Froissart’s text of 1409 had recently been published as a popular coffee-table edition and its engravings provided the key, as Dillon recalled, to sets based not ‘on forced perspective as much as false perspective’.27

The radical designs forced Sheriff and Dillon to devise some ingenious scenic effects for *Henry V*. The port town of Harfleur was built on the edge of the large tank at Denham. Also they suggested the sunrise at Agincourt by the use of a gauze curtain with cotton wool diffusers. Overall, the designs were noteworthy for their combinations of built components and other scenic devices. Ernest Lindegaard’s scenic art helped to force unique contrasts between the plastic and two-dimensional sets and the model work was unparalleled. The opening London scenes were authentic as well as imaginative. The model of the Globe Theatre and the River Thames was a painstaking enterprise which was based on J.C. Visscher’s early seventeenth-century map. It measured 50’ × 70’ London replica and took over two months to make.

In many ways, *Hamlet* was a simpler production but it was no less evocative. The production designer was a long-standing collaborator of Olivier’s, Roger Furse. Like Heckroth, Furse was at bottom a theatre man. He descended from the acting family The Kembles and the bulk of his design experience was for the theatre, notably on Olivier’s Shakespearean productions at the Old Vic. However, Olivier really valued Furse for his painterly approach to design. Furse had no architectural background, but was trained as an artist at Slade and Eton (he had also worked overseas as a commercial artist). This made Furse the perfect candidate to bring shape to Olivier’s vague ambition for *Hamlet* to be ‘an essay ... an engraving’ in black and white.28

Furse was well accustomed to *Hamlet*; he had designed a modern dress stage version a few years before. His experience led him to believe that the film version had to offer *points d’appui* with the theatre for the sake of clarity; he remarked that he and Oliver didn’t want ‘any violent departure from traditions which have grown up around the presentation of the tragedy’. Furse’s costumes were noticeably traditional. However, such duties paid, Furse felt at liberty to express himself in the sets. These were an architectural jumble – Elsinore carried Romanesque, Norman and Byzantine elements – but they were filled with psychological resonances.29
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The Gordon Craig influences were seen in Furse’s ideals of ‘mobility and flow’. Evoking Craig, Furse used the different levels within Elsinore as a means of imparting energy and movement. The steps and the elevated walkways were intended to destabilise the audience’s perceptions of Hamlet’s environment. The architectural features were also related to the characters’ psychologies; for example, Furse’s stairway carried a secondary function of making the foppish Osric look ridiculous prior to the duel. In addition, the tower was designed to inculcate both supernatural fear and physical danger. These larger architectural themes were fine-tuned by Furse’s subtle textures and dressings. In the queen’s closet a tapestry hung over the bed to suggest ‘a certain sumptuousness’. This contrasted with the bare rooms elsewhere within Elsinore, the sparseness of which inculcated a feeling of discomfort.30

Furse asserted that his designs for Hamlet were governed not so much by stage directions, as by the dialogue. The key line came from Hamlet himself, and was included at the start of the film: ‘Some habit grown too much ... shall in the general censure take corruption from that particular fault.’ This was a story about psychological habits. It was therefore imperative that the sets depicted the mental states of Elsinore’s inhabitants. Ophelia’s closet described a positive, if naive, psychology. The interior was bright, and the walls had floral decorations. The gaiety was carried through to the arches, which featured trivial painted patterns. These were contrasted with those interiors and exteriors which Hamlet chose, which were invariably dank and dark. The King had a point when he observed that ‘There’s something in his [Hamlet’s] soul on which his melancholy sits on to brood.’ Significantly, Furse and Olivier’s Hamlet was a man who literally took the weather with him. Thus, in one key scene, Ophelia’s room resounded with spring spirit, whilst Hamlet languished at the other end of a mist-filled corridor.31

Design Follies

The prestige productions of The Archers, Cineguild and Del Giudice were loaded with middle-brow cultural assumptions. They endorsed the canons of English literature, they extolled the virtues of the theatre and they often carried an implied didactic purpose. However, it should be noted that the best prestige efforts were also focussed; in the area of design, there was a sure reason for virtually everything that was delivered by Junge, Bryan, Dillon, Furse et al. The same could not be said for other productions at the high-cost end of the Rank production empire. Films such as Caesar and Cleopatra, London Town (1946), Christopher
Columbus (1950) and Saraband for Dead Lovers (1948) were meretricious and hollow, over-determined by their desire for spectacle.

Rank’s extravagant design follies came about for a number of reasons. The Palache Committee of 1947 and the ACT put them down to 1930s style adventuring; this had substance in the case of Caesar and Cleopatra. Ironically, some of the other excesses were attributable to the attempts made by Rank executives to rationalise production. The reopening of Pinewood in April 1946 brought the demand for continuous shooting. The following year, the Hollywood ban on exports (as instigated by the British government’s 75 per cent Ad Valorem tax on American films) encouraged increased production. These factors, taken together with the increased influence of senior Rank advisers such as Earl St John and (particularly) his chief accountant John Davis, had a two-way effect on production within the J. Arthur Rank Organisation (JARO). The IPL companies became downwardly mobile, bound by new £250,000 maximum budgets and weekly production meetings under the auspices of Davis. At the same time, the formerly independent production concerns, such as Gainsborough and Ealing, found that they were compelled to produce the odd spectacular to supplement their routine medium-budget programme pictures. This had the effect of disrupting their well-drilled production practices. Oddly, Rank and Davis made Gainsborough and Ealing lose their heads.

Caesar and Cleopatra was produced by the famously prodigious Gabriel Pascal. Pascal made much of his close relationship with George Bernard Shaw, who entrusted him with the filming of his plays. This arrangement – fawning on Pascal’s part, expedient on Shaw’s – led to the great Rank-financed successes of Pygmalion (1938, a.d.L. Irving) and Major Barbara (1939 a.d.V. Korda and J. Bryan) and it seemed to bode well for the next Shaw project; particularly as Pascal promised to bring in the star-filled Caesar and Cleopatra for a reasonable £430,000 on a 16-week schedule. The film ultimately cost £1.3m, took 15 months to film and it still ranks as one of the most costly failures of British film industry. Some of the problems weren’t Pascal’s fault; he faced constant delays wrought by air-raids, shortages of men and materials and the availability of the stars Claude Rains and Vivien Leigh. But Caesar and Cleopatra was undoubtedly a profligate film.

Pascal suffered from ‘multitalentitis’; that tendency (named by Laurence Irving) to believe that a good film would necessarily result when all the best artists were employed. On Caesar and Cleopatra this led to a top-heavy design team featuring, among others, John Bryan (art director), Oliver Messel (décor and costumes), Hein Heckroth (assistant
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art director), Ferdinand Bellan (scenic art/sketching) and Raoh Schorr (sculptor). The problem was that none of these talents knew what their role was meant to be. Bryan and Messel got on particularly badly. By this time, Bryan was accustomed to the role of supervising art director and he was ill-disposed to playing second fiddle to Messel (the more so as the theatre luminary was being paid an extraordinary £10,000). This led to breakdowns in communication in the design phase, with the result that both men produced hundreds of preliminary sketches. The art department also disintegrated as the design assistants pledged their allegiances to either designer.32

Things did not go much better during the shooting phase of Caesar and Cleopatra. Pascal’s wife Valerie claimed, correctly, that many of the stories about the production were fabricated by a hostile press; it wasn’t true, for example, that her husband transported sand to Egypt. But Pascal did buy 400 tons of sand for the desert scenes at Denham. He also wasted days on the lot fussing over a red carpet and adjusting the nose on the 27’ high sphinx. There were also some remarkable events on location. The first outdoor shoots in Devon in spring 1945 were abandoned because of bad weather. Pascal consequently took a large unit to Egypt, complete with a model of the studio sphinx; absurdly, he decided that the real examples were too battered. Caesar and Cleopatra then suffered various depredations in the desert, including the loss of 300 paper-maché battle shields which, tragically, were eaten by the starving Egyptian extras who were attracted by the fish glue.33

If only it had all been worth it. Caesar and Cleopatra had no chance of making money, particularly given the fact that Rank kept only 4 per cent of the American proceeds after distribution, publicity and printing fees. The film was also artistically barren. It had a turgid script and a small theme which did not merit the epic sets. The same was true of London Town. This Wesley Ruggles–directed farrago was an attempt to make a Hollywood-style musical in London. To Davis, the American Ruggles appeared to be made of the wrong stuff. Upon his arrival in England, he announced that his job was ‘to entertain the public [no] matter what it costs’ and he also dubbed Caesar and Cleopatra ‘a magnificent picture’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, London Town quickly went out of shape and ended up costing Rank £1m. This was terrible value for money. The sets were particularly poor. These were produced at Shepperton at a time when the studios were still being half-used for repairing airplanes. This led to great problems for the art director Ward Richards, who had to translate designs made in America by Ernest Fegte. Richards was anyway unused to feature films (he mainly designed Rank’s religious
pictures at the Gate studios) but he was constantly hampered by the fact that most of Fegte’s designs would not fit the small spaces available. Some of the ideas also failed to register on the screen. Set pieces such as a huge plywood piano comprising eight keyboards and a fairy tale silhouette of St Paul’s sounded great on paper, but they lost impact because of the overall lack of vision. Despite its title, London Town had a rootless quality which was exacerbated by its characterless sets.34

Other design follies occurred when Rank’s companies were compelled to abandon their customary design practices. In August 1947, Rank announced that a greater number of regular ‘A’ features would be ordered from all of his major companies, supplemented by the occasional prestige picture. In the cases of Gainsborough and Ealing, the new Rank regime took them into uncharted territory. This was demonstrated by Christopher Columbus. Designer Maurice Carter ultimately turned out a handsome Technicolor film (he could not be blamed for the dull script), but he suffered in the process. His replica of the Santa Maria was incinerated by a cigar butt on location and the expensive studio version broke its hydraulic supports. Ealing’s Hanoverian costume drama Saraband for Dead Lovers was awfully stolid. Here, Michael Relph served as both producer and production designer and his dual function led to his losing the critical distance. His Rembrandt-influenced sets were powerful but they were also monolithic. They easily overpowered a weak and obscure script.

Independent Producers to Independent Frame

Edward Carrick felt that it was a pity that Britain ‘never had an industry strong enough to sustain an organisation like Independent Producers’. He was right in most respects. For a time, the prestige experiment granted a group of executive talents the opportunity to express themselves on large canvases and the best designers exploited the advantage to produce some of the finest visions ever produced by the British studios. At the same time, Rank’s project obscured the fundamental issues concerning the global profile of British films; as with the internationalist surges of the 1930s, Rank’s prestige experiment was determined by an outmoded sense of Britain’s right to govern the film world. Actually, America ruled and, in this light, it behooved British film producers to cut their cloth to suit.35

Such disciplines were urged increasingly by John Davis. The rationalisation of Rank’s production empire revealed his determination to keep Rank’s executive talents in check. In addition, from the mid-1940s, Davis
and the other Rank executives sought new, more economical ways to make films. For a time, this led them to listen to the extraordinary ideas of a dynamic designer called David Rawnsley. In 1944, Rawnsley was appointed design chief to Rank's newly formed central services department Production Facilities (Films) Ltd. Working for PIFFLE, as it was dubbed by Rank employees, Rawnsley devised a package of techniques which he claimed could trim British film production costs by 66 per cent. Rawnsley called his new process 'Independent Frame' (a.k.a. 'IF').

Independent Frame was developed, in great secrecy, over four years by Rawnsley and his team of 29 experts at his secret hideaway at Upper Berkeley Street, W.2. It really amounted to two things: new equipment and new ways of planning. The name derived from Rawnsley's belief that film production would be infinitely more efficient if the trappings of film production – sets, props, costumes, lighting – were produced in advance, and independently, of shooting. Informed, doubtless, by his former life as one of Elder's hapless art directors at B.I.P., Rawnsley believed that nothing should be left to chance on the studio floor; the cameras would simply record everything that had been prepared in advance using the highly detailed 'picture scripts' that Rawnsley decreed should be at the heart of Independent Frame technique. At the same time (and this was where the experts came in) Rawnsley advised the development of, as he termed it, a radical 'blended' form of film design, which would make greater use of back projection techniques. He argued that huge amounts of money could be saved by using transparencies and travelling mattes in place of built sets; the illusion helped, if necessary, by the use of a few fore grounded props. Rawnsley also believed (and his friends Powell and Lean shared the view) that much could be achieved by what he called 'design by inference', suggesting an entire setting via a few key props.36

Rawnsley conceded that many of his ideas weren't new. Back projection had been used in British studios since the late 1920s and picture scripts had been deployed successfully by Bryan and Heckroth. But Rawnsley did devise some new equipment: The Independent Frame package included intriguing technologies such as hexagonal rotating stages (designed to house multiple sets and allow for quick set-ups); high tech back projection tunnels and television-style direction booths set high above the studio floor. Perhaps more significantly, Rawnsley pulled a range of ideas – technological, managerial and ideological – together in one place at one time. Fundamentally, Independent Frame encapsulated a Taylorist process, which depended upon highly trained personnel performing their roles to strict orders in advance of shooting. Rawnsley maintained that any film could be shot in two weeks using his methods.37
In the end, Independent Frame didn’t really happen. Some equipment was ordered by the JARO, at great expense, in 1946 as part of its plan ‘to replace all out of date stages’. Some experimental films were also made using Frame technique, including five from Aquila, a company owned by Rawnsley and the director Donald Wilson. But Rawnsley’s radical scheme was virtually abandoned by 1950. Its failure was attributable to a number of factors. To begin with, the IF idea was not widely supported by technicians. The ACT did not accept Rawnsley’s claims that any reductions in studio personnel (e.g. in set building) would be offset by hugely increased production. Some designers were also hostile; Bryan believed the scheme to be anti-art, Junge declared the whole thing to be ‘a big bluff’. Furthermore, IF was beset by technical problems; bothersome shadows appeared on the 30’ back projection screens in medium shots and actors complained about the limited movement that was available to them when performing against shot footage. The few IF films that were made were also poorly received by critics (one Aquila film of 1949, *Stop Press Girl*, was deemed to be so bad that it wasn’t seen for some years). More than anything, IF was ultimately held hostage to the very economic circumstances that it sought to assuage. Up to 1949, £900,000 was spent on developing the system; it was Rank’s production crisis of 1948 that led to the abandonment of the scheme. A disgruntled Rawnsley left film production to become a potter in Italy and his IF legacy was felt only in the presence at Pinewood of a back projection tunnel and a few high quality screens.  

By the 1950s many involved in the British film industry believed that long-term economic stability depended not on new forms of manufacture, but on a reappraisal of the ambitions of British films. For all their splendour, the IPL films had ultimately fought a doomed internationalist campaign. From the 1950s, a domestic vision of British film culture led to the development of two enduring British film cycles: the *Carry Ons* and the Hammer Horrors. The cut price aesthetics of these films were based on altogether more pragmatic design techniques.
For all its faults, Independent Frame carried a kind of democratic message; David Rawnsley really believed that every kind of production was rendered feasible by IF method. In the wake of its failure, a different production philosophy emerged in the 1950s which suggested, conversely, that first features could be made at support feature prices using traditional setting techniques. It was a question of knowing one’s market and of adjusting production methods accordingly. Two kinds of film exemplified this approach and they became enduring brands of British cinema. The Carry Ons and the Hammer Horrors had few artistic pretensions but they succeeded very well on their own terms. They also gave regular employment to a group of British film designers. Art directors such as Alexander Vetchinsky and Bernard Robinson knew that their primary task was to cut their cloth to suit.

The Carry Ons and the Hammer Horrors emerged at roughly the same time. Carry on Sergeant was released in August 1958, 15 months after the acknowledged first Hammer Horror The Curse of Frankenstein (although the Hammer company had been making films for over 20 years by this time). The dates were significant; the Carry Ons and Hammer Horrors were launched at a time when British films appeared to be in even deeper trouble than usual. Cinema admissions declined rapidly between 1956 and 1961, falling by as much as 20 per cent in 1957 and 1959. Palpably, in the mid-to-late 1950s, cinema fared badly in the battle for disposable income. During this period, there was a strong rise in home-based spending; home ownership increased along with attendant spending on do-it-yourself and household gadgets. Moreover, the
1950s saw a rapid rise in television ownership; the numbers of license holders increased from 15,000 in 1948 to over 8 million in 1957. Undoubtedly, television posed a major threat to routine British film production; John Davis mused in May 1957: ‘The public [feels] that something similar to the average film can be obtained in the home apparently free.’

The *Carry On* comedies and the Hammer Horrors took a pragmatic yet lateral approach to the economic vicissitudes. In both instances, the producers utilised the distinctive advantages of film; Hammer exploited the new ‘X’ certificate as the means of exploring adult themes which were forbidden to television, whilst the *Carry Ons* used the longer format to extend the range of situation comedy. Most importantly, the producers of the *Carry Ons* and the Hammer Horrors kept production costs to levels which were sustainable in British markets alone. Hammer had strong American distribution links and concomitant international ambitions; even then, its Executive Producer Michael Carreras spoke of the need for ‘slide-rule pictures [which could] make a profit in the home market alone’. Similarly, the *Carry On* Producer Peter Rogers was adamant that he would not ‘like to work on a precarious balance by which some of the cost and all of the profit had to be sought from doubtful international markets’.

This shared spirit of caution was maintained in both cases over three decades. Costs rose over time and budgets were sometimes adjusted to meet changing market conditions. Nonetheless, the *Carry Ons* and the Hammer Horrors achieved longevity by dint of their modest production ambitions. Their art directors were centrally involved in the campaign to keep costs down. Various techniques – including recycling, revamping and available locations – were used to provide cheap laughs and cheap thrills.

**Carry On**

The *Carry Ons* were presided over by the producer-director team of Peter Rogers and Gerald Thomas; as *Kinematograph Weekly* observed, these men established a ‘twinship of control’ over the series. Rogers and Thomas were Rank veterans. Rogers started for the company in 1946 when he became a scenario writer for Rank’s religious films unit. He subsequently became scriptwriter and associate producer on a range of films for the JARO, including Gainsborough’s 1947 realist drama *Holiday Camp* (which was produced by Rogers’ brother-in-law Sidney
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Box). Thomas had a parallel career for Rank, working his way up through the editing department prior to becoming a director in 1956. Thomas’s first directorial assignment was for a Children’s Film Foundation film, Circus Friends, and it was here that he first worked with Rogers. It was an excellent match. Rogers and Thomas were both products of the sober post-IPL era at Pinewood and they shared a modest vision of British cinema. The twinship decried prestige production, favoured quiet realist visuals and, more than anything, extolled the virtues of domestic production.3

The Carry Ons were certainly cheap. Sergeant cost around £73,000 to make, at a time when an average Rank comedy was estimated to cost £125,000. Budgets increased over time – Carry on Cruising (1962) cost £140,000, Carry on Cleo £194,323 and Carry on Follow that Camel (1967) £280,000 – but Rogers was still able to claim an average spend of £150,000 per film in 1978. The Carry Ons were also successful. Sergeant recouped its production budget in two weeks and the first three in the series – including, in addition, Carry on Nurse (1959) and Carry on Constable (1959) – all featured in the Top Three grossing film lists for their respective years. (Nurse also grossed $2m in the USA and Canada over two years.) Of course, the financial success of the films was linked directly to Rogers and Thomas’s meagre ambitions; costs were kept down in order to maximise profits. This was achieved partly by suppressing the salaries of the actors; Rogers was adamant that ‘no one was allowed to become a star. If anyone tried to do it, they were certainly put down’. Production budgets were also minimised by conceiving of the films in groups. This gave the scriptwriters – principally Norman Hudis (1958–62) and Talbot Rothwell (1963–74) – the opportunity to develop scripts as the current title was in production. As Rogers affirmed, ‘I like numbers and keeping up supply’.4

The Carry On art departments played a full role in keeping numbers up and costs down. Rogers and Thomas did not own a studio; consequently, they couldn’t develop a studio system by the usual definition. But they were able to establish a coherent set of working practices as tenants at Pinewood. Their method depended upon using experienced technicians from picture to picture. In the art department, these included two men who were well accustomed to the special demands of modestly budgeted first features: Alexander Vetchinsky and Lionel Couch. But every art director who worked on the Carry Ons (there were ten overall) knew that they were required mainly to produce plausible settings at reasonable cost. The method was everything.
Designing the Carry Ons

In 1966, the *Sunday Times Magazine* asked Peter Rogers to describe the film that he would choose to make, given a completely free hand over theme, budget and technicians. Rogers’ technical choices for his imaginary production of *Montserrat* included star names (director David Lean and photographer Otto Heller), but he also opted for Alex Vetchinsky as art director. This was surprising, because Vetchinsky was well known as the great journeyman of British design; someone who was perennially associated with bargain basement art direction. Rogers’ choice of ‘Vetch’ implied one of two things: that the producer couldn’t help but save money, even in his dreams; or that there was more going on with Vetchinsky than met the eye.5

Vetchinsky set the standard for the *Carry Ons* with his designs for the first two films. By the time of *Sergeant* he was well habituated to his place in British films. Vetchinsky had started out as an architect – he was yet another of L.P. Williams’s classmates at the Architectural Association – but he soon settled into a film career. In 1928, following 18 months working in an architect’s office, he stumbled into a job working as Andrew Mazzei’s assistant at the Gainsborough Studios at Islington. Circumstances swiftly combined to propel Vetchinsky up the career ladder. To begin with, the expansion of Gaumont-British meant that it was desperate to recruit art staff; the more so when Mazzei made the ill-advised decision to leave to work for the quota producer Julius Hagen. This led to Vetchinsky achieving his first full credit, on *Michael and Mary* (1931). Furthermore, Vetchinsky benefited from the subsequent downgrading of the Islington studios. By the mid-1930s, Gaumont-British executives realised that it was futile to consider Islington as a comparable facility to Shepherd’s Bush; even following its redevelopment in 1930 it had only two small, poorly appointed stages (as with Lime Grove, this were arranged over two floors). This led to the abandonment of internationalist production at Islington – with the departure of the foreign design luminaries Werndorff and Metzner – in favour of lower cost picture-making under the auspices of the populist British producer Ted Black. By 1935, Vetchinsky was conveniently placed to become a senior member of ‘Black’s Boys’; the production team that dedicated itself to turning out streams of unpretentious fare, such as the comic oeuvres of Will Hay and Crazy Gang.

Clearly, Vetchinsky was no snob. He was no fool either. Instinctively, he realised that his career was best served by working in the middle-cost tier of British film production, protected from the degradation of quota design
and inured also to the perils of irregular prestige work. But Vetchinsky was also undeniably good at what he did. By the time of Sergeant, Vetchinsky had acquired 92 credits, more than any other British designer. These were not brought about purely by good fortune or schmoozing; producers knew that Vetchinsky could be relied upon to turn in effective sets on time and on budget. This aspect of his work was summed up well by an incident that reportedly happened during the shooting of Carry on Follow that Camel at Rye Sands, Sussex in 1967. Rogers made a characteristically outlandish request for ‘the Sahara Desert, burning sands, oases, fort, mirages, Arab tents – the lot’: A nonchalant Vetchinsky replied that he couldn’t guarantee the burning sands.

Even in a ‘desert’, Vetchinsky took the heat off of producers and directors. His technique was based on, as he termed it, ‘camera eye and sense of composition’. Vetchinsky would build only what was strictly necessary for the shot and scene in question. This technique met with approval from both Rogers and Pinewood’s General Manager ‘Kip’ Sherren, who was convinced that art directors tended ‘to build more than the camera will ever see’. Periodically in his career, Vetchinsky had the chance to create some spectacular visions. Notably, in 1957 for A Night to Remember, he built a 300 foot re-creation of a section of the Titanic which was mounted on a hydraulic cradle. But such Vetchinsky set-pieces were never gratuitous. He was absolutely a film technician, who applied himself to the specific demands of every production. This trait explained his casual attitude to his initial designs. There are very few surviving examples of Vetchinsky’s draughtsmanship, largely because he scarcely produced any in the first place. Wherever possible, Vetchinsky preferred to describe his ideas in words, working closely with regular collaborators, such as the set dresser Arthur Taksen. If pressed for a reference, he would often cull illustrations from magazines; on one occasion, he used a strip of bacon to mark a page in a bound volume of English Homes for the benefit of his protégé Maurice Carter.

Vetchinsky was not the most prolific designer of the Carry Ons (he worked on six) but he was doubtless the most influential. Numerically, the leading Carry On designer was Lionel Couch, who achieved 13 credits from Constable (1959) onwards. Couch was one of the many British designers who started in the post-war era and who were influenced by the dominant realist approaches of Vetchinsky, Dillon and Carter. Like Vetchinsky, Couch had set out to be an architect; following initial schooling at the Camberwell School of Art, he worked as an architectural draughtsman and a designer for Pilkington’s glass factory. Following the war (and some time spent on a Burmese construction
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project) Couch was taken on as an assistant art director at Lime Grove, prior to his assimilation into the Pinewood technical pool, initially as a draughtsman.

Couch shared Vetchinsky’s sense of the designer’s need to efface his own efforts for the sake of the Carry On brand; no scenic device was permitted to distract attention from the actors and the script. The remaining designers – who included Dillon (2), Bert Davey (3) and Jack Shampan (2) – were also obliged to keep costs down by routines of recycling and cheap location matching. The Carry On films exemplified the ‘stock approach’ to art direction. The use of Pinewood allowed each designer the opportunity to avail him/herself of the treasures contained within the vast props department. Much larger items were also integrated into the comedies. Standing sets at Pinewood were often re-used. The computer system of Carry on Loving (1970, a.d.L. Couch) was recycled from the Gerry and Sylvia Anderson TV series UFO; the Stodge City of Carry on Cowboy (1965, a.d.B. Davey) was reworked from the modern town set of Rogers’ own comedy The Big Job (1965, also Davey); a number of the Carry Ons utilised the well-worn Village Set at Pinewood. But the most audacious instances of recycling occurred in Carry on Cleo. This project was borne out of Rogers’ amazement at the wastage of money that he saw occurring around him on Twentieth Century Fox’s ill-fated epic Cleopatra. He delighted in using some of the 72 sets, as designed (for £100,000) by the Hollywood designer John DeCuir. Rogers was also pleased to incorporate some expensive sets which were bought for £450 from the producers of the London stage production of Caligula.8

But much of the scenic effect of the Carry Ons was carried by locations. Inevitably, these were shot in the cheapest manner. The longest location trip – 166 miles – occurred on Carry On Up The Khyber, where Watkin Path in Snowdonia was dressed to represent the Khyber Pass. Otherwise, locations were invariably proximate to the studios. Heatherden Hall at Pinewood appeared in nine films (notably as the British Embassy of Khyber and Chayste Place in Camping 1969) and elements of the studio buildings were used in six films, including Spying (1964, a.d.A. Vetchinskiy) where the archive department made an effective laboratory. Windsor was another regular haunt, buildings at 16 Park Street being deployed for Regardless (1961, a.d.L. Couch) and Loving and Again Doctor (1969, a.d.J. Blezard). Burnham Beeches also provided recurring backgrounds, for Camping, Behind (1975, a.d.L. Couch) and others. Location building was kept to a minimum. Only a few simple props adorned the ‘Khyber Pass’ of Khyber. Elsewhere, a sign was
erected to transform Maidenhead Town Hall into the hospital of Matron (1972, a.d.L. Couch) and the mud was painted green in the orchards of Pinewood Studios to impart a dubious 'summery' feeling to the exteriors of Camping; as usual, this film was shot in the Autumn (November) in order to free the stars for their lucrative appearances in summer shows and pantomimes.9

In every respect, designing for Rogers and Thomas was a case of carrying on expediently and, probably, regardless.

Hammer Horrors

‘We have no illusions; we laugh like demons in hell.’ This declamation could easily have emerged from the script of a Hammer Horror; oddly, it came from Hammer’s chief designer Bernard Robinson, as he attempted to describe his work to a journalist. Robinson delighted in comic exaggeration (he couldn’t have done his job otherwise); nonetheless, he knew how his bread was buttered. Like Vetchinsky, Robinson recognised that he and his colleagues had to make a little go an inconceivably long way. Furthermore, Robinson and his fellow ‘demons’ were expected to reach beyond simple realism, to create fantasy worlds which appeared fit for habitation by Hammer’s vampires, monsters and associated ghouls.10

The history of Hammer, and the sets therein, is comparatively complex; mainly because of the shifting nature of its production. Where Rogers and Thomas opted for continuous filming in the one studio, circumstances obliged Hammer to shoot in a variety of venues. It’s useful to think of Hammer films as occurring in three distinct phases, each defined by the centre of production. The nursery phase (1949–57) describes a time when Hammer was largely contented to turn out support films on £20,000 budgets. During this period, the company first hit upon its idea of using a country house as a film studio. The second phase (1957–67) represents Hammer in its pomp. During this time, Hammer perfected its ‘house style’ of filmmaking at Down Place, Bray and produced its most well-remembered titles (the majority designed by Robinson). The third phase (1967–79) is generally thought of as the time when Hammer was in decline. At this time, the company worked as tenant producers in a range of studios, with deleterious consequences for its much-fabled team ethos. Clearly, we need to give most attention to the times at Hammer following 1957 and the seminal production of The Curse of Frankenstein but its design history really needs to be told from the beginning.
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Hammer Design: The Nursery Phase

Hammer Films was formed in 1934, by a part-time music hall comedian called Will Hinds (a.k.a. ‘Will Hammer’). Hinds had some ambition as a film producer; in its earliest days, Hammer made a number of quickies, and a star vehicle for Paul Robeson (Song of Freedom 1936). In 1937, Hinds formed a partnership with Enrique Carreras, who owned the minor Blue Halls group of cinemas as well as a humble distribution company, Exclusive Films. For many years, Hinds and Carreras satisfied themselves with the distribution of old British and American films, but increased demand for support features in the late 1940s encouraged their re-entry into film production. A re-constituted company was created in February 1949, formed around other members of the Hinds/Carreras clans. Enrique’s son James became managing director (and shortly chairman) of Exclusive/Hammer, bringing with him his own son Michael. Hinds’ scion Anthony was also introduced, to share production/executive production duties with Michael Carreras. These men developed the early Hammer production ethos, based around the idea of using country houses as film studios.

In the late 1940s, a number of British quota producers found that they could save on studio costs by filming in country piles; Harry Reynolds’s The Man from Yesterday (1949) and Ghost of Rashmon Hall (1948, a.d.G. Haslam) were other examples of the ‘rent-a-house’ method. But no one pursued the idea with greater vigour than James Carreras. Between 1949 and 1951, Hammer rented four successive country houses, before settling on Down Place, Bray as a permanent home.

The sets of the earliest post-war Hammer productions were devised by two art directors who were eternally associated with poverty row design: James Marchant and Denis Wreford. These men worked for Hammer – at Dial Close, Cookham Dean and Oakley Court, Bray – at a time when it had no higher ambition than to make a 20 per cent return on its rock-bottom outlays. In this context, the two veterans aimed merely to add variety to the unvarying country house interiors by use of a few simple set dressings. Even then, as Hammer’s scriptwriter Jimmy Sangster recalled, it was said that a Hammer film was instantly recognisable ‘because you’d seen the same set dressed the same way in the last three pictures’. Things changed a little in 1951. Dial Close brought the possibility of greater scenic variety, thanks to its large rooms and eclectic architecture; James Carreras mused that ‘the new place [Dial Close] will do for less sombre stories as well’. More significantly, in 1951, Hammer also signed its first American contract, with the Z-Level
producer Robbert Lippert. Michael Carreras remembered that this deal for a limited series of second features brought ‘half-assed American stars’ and raised budgets ‘by about 4d’; but it also brought stability to Hammer and the promise of some guaranteed American distribution.\(^{11}\)

An upturn in the scenic qualities of Hammer films was therefore perceptible in the early Down Place era; the more so after 1953 when the ballroom was converted and a purpose-built brick stage was added. By this time, both Marchant and Wreford had left (the latter to work in television). In 1952, Hammer signed the veteran James Elder-Wills as its chief art director. Elder-Wills had an interesting history. At age 19, during the First World War, he sustained a crippled leg and one deaf ear as a result of a plane crash. Retired from the RAF, Elder-Wills studied architecture prior to becoming a scenic artist in Drury Lane. He entered films in 1926, designing quota films for BIP and others. Significantly, during the 1930s, Elder-Wills also produced and directed a number of films, including _Song of Freedom_. This and some other Hammer design assignments brought Elder-Wills into contact with Will Hinds, who persuaded him to become a shareholder and director of the first Hammer company.

During the 1930s, Elder-Wills saw himself as a film magnate; in addition to his dealings with Hammer, he set up a number of companies (Tudor Films, Beaconsfield) to produce mainly first features. But his entrepreneurial verve led him into difficulty and in March 1939 he was declared bankrupt; a circumstance that he attributed to the cost of entertaining rich financiers. Elder-Wills’ life then took an unexpectedly eventful turn. He volunteered for service in the Second World War, but was rejected on the grounds of his corpulent physique (he weighed 19 stone) and disabilities. He then joined the Royal Engineers and became a pioneering figure in the Special Operations Executive’s camouflage department. Working under the auspices of the Inter-Services Research Bureau (ISRB), Elder-Wills and his team produced a range of usefully specious items, including exploding rats, camouflaged radios and lipstick bombs. During the war, Elder-Wills also served as a camouflage officer to the first and tenth corps in France.\(^{12}\)

At a post-war reception, Elder-Wills told King George VI that he planned ‘to go in for crime in a big way’: working for Hammer saved him the trouble. Elder-Wills designed 16 films for the company between 1952 and 1955, usually working to five-week schedules with a three-man design team. His last Hammer assignment was undoubtedly his most important. The £42,000 thriller _The Quatermass Xperiment_ was a major success and it persuaded the company that it could produce first
features on shoestring budgets; particularly if they were based, as in this instance, on successful television shows.¹³

The visual look of Quatermass was very well conceived. Its director, Val Guest, made great play during the 1950s of his ‘independent frame of mind’; being the techniques that he used to keep costs down. In particular, he favoured a kind of cinema verité approach to location shooting. Quatermass benefited greatly from its quasi-documentary sequences, filmed in Bray, Windsor and Whipsnade Zoo. These combined well with Elder-Wills’ astute interiors. The hospital and laboratory sets were highly convincing, thanks to his effective use of the existing architectural features at Bray; Elder-Wills derived particular value from the glass doors within Quatermass’s scientific kingdom. The rocket interior was also nicely executed. In sum, the sets of Quatermass were not greatly imaginative and they also lacked personal touches (the home and office of Inspector Lomax were notably drab), but they kept up the illusion. This was nine-tenths of the law for the art director who worked at Bray during the nursery phase. More elaborate visual tricks were performed in the second phase of Hammer.

**Hammer Design: The Second Phase**

Most of the tenets of the Hammer studio style were established during its Nursery Phase: a suitable house was found; crews were developed; specialised equipment was created (particularly for lighting); techniques were established for effects and location work, and scripting methods were devised to ensure the feasibility of every visual idea. More than anything, Elder-Wills and others found the means to take the ‘house style’ of production beyond the house; The Quatermass Xperiment showed that all kinds of milieus were possible, with a little thought. But the Hammer art department was really consolidated under Bernard Robinson. He benefited from somewhat expanded facilities following the success of The Curse of Frankenstein (1957) and he exploited every means at his disposal. Like Elder-Wills, Robinson was a practical man but he also had a powerful imagination.

Robinson joined Hammer in June 1956. At the time, he considered this to be a backward step. For the bulk of his career, he had worked on small films; starting – in 1935 – for Warner’s quota production unit at Teddington, before designing minor films at Beaconsfield and Denham. During the war, Robinson worked with Norman Loudon at Sound City on various camouflage projects, including the creation of dummy airfields. In peacetime, it was a case of business as before for Robinson, as he
designed a series of low-to-medium budget films. But then he achieved his big break as named art director on *Reach for the Sky* (1956) and *Carve Her Name with Pride* (1958). To the end (Robinson died in 1970) he regarded the latter as his best film and he recalled how he had to be cajoled into joining the low-rent Bray concern. Robinson’s attitude towards the Hammer product was summed up by his motto: ‘We are, none of us, in this for the furtherance of our artistic ideals.’ But Robinson also took great care in everything he did and, by this token, invariably produced arresting settings. Many Hammer stalwarts – including Sangster, Hinds and the actors Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing – believed Robinson to be the real star at Bray.¹⁴

Robinson characterised himself as the ‘Marks and Spencers’ of art direction; someone who provided value for money. The figures bore out his claim. Over time, the production budgets rose at Hammer, but Robinson always kept a tight grip on art spending. In the case of *Dracula, Prince of Darkness* (1966), £18,750 was spent on sets and models out of a total budget of £152,475; this figure was almost exactly the same as the amount spent on the salaries of the producer, director and scriptwriter. Of course, by this time cheapness was second nature to Robinson. From the mid-1950s onwards, James Carreras established a series of contracts with American companies including Warner Brothers (1956, via Associated Artists Productions), Columbia (1958, 1959 and 1962), Universal (1958), Seven Arts (1956–67) and Twentieth Century Fox (1967). These deals brought worldwide distribution and production advances (the Columbia deal of 1958 also allowed for the substantial development of Bray studios); none the less, the emphasis for Robinson remained on keeping his costs down in order to maximise profits.¹⁵

As with the *Carry Ons*, the budgets of the Hammer films were kept down partly by filming close to the studios. This saved on transportation and accommodation costs and the strategy also meant that cast and crew could be easily recalled to the studio in bad weather; wherever possible, ‘weather cover’ was deployed, scheduling location and studio work at the same time to allow for maximum flexibility and preclude the need for location insurance. A favourite location was Black Park, adjacent to the Pinewood studios. Allegedly, this wood was so named because of its resemblance to the Black Forest. For Hammer it often acted against type, serving variously as Transylvania, Russian countryside, Sherwood Forest and – with some on-location building – a Malaysian village and a Japanese PoW camp. Frensham Ponds was another favourite Hammer location. Its barren vistas made a good match
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with the genuine Dartmoor footage of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959) and the area was also used for (amongst other films) the guillotine scenes of *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) and the country paths of *The Reptile* (1966).\(^{16}\)

Palpably English exteriors formed a familiar part of the Hammer visual mix. In the studio, Robinson made effective use of the twin strategies of recycling and revamping. Hammer films were conceived of in groups; in September 1958 the company claimed to have 12 films ready for shooting. This ethos allowed for rigorous pre-planning of sets, as the producer Anthony Nelson Keys explained in 1958: 'When we are building ... a certain set on the lot we design it not only for the current production but so that it can be modified for use two productions ahead.' Over time, Robinson became Britain's leading revamper. Hammer historian Wayne Kinsey has demonstrated how the Village Square of *Brides of Dracula* (1960) was recycled repeatedly, performing further service as the Chinese waterfronts of *Visa to Canton* (1961) and *Terror of the Tongs* (1961), before being transformed into Spanish village of *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961). Thereafter, a second village was added (built on the site of the former Castle Dracula) which was used for a further four films. There were numerous other instances of revamping on the lot and studio floors at Bray. Nelson Keys estimated that the castle hall of *Dracula* (1958) was re-used eight times. Otherwise, *The Mummy* (1959) used sets from *Yesterday's Enemy* and *The Man Who Cheated Death* (both 1959) and the Chateau Hall of *Brides of Dracula* was modified to form various sets of *Revenge of Frankenstein*. Robinson also recycled many of his most expensive creations. For example, the ship's bridge of the comedy *Further Up the Creek* (1958) was built on top of the original Dracula castle. Over time, Hammer even made a virtue of its recycling of sets. In June 1965, James Carreras announced plans to make four films – *Dracula Prince of Darkness*, *Rasputin. The Mad Monk*, *Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* – in consecutive manner. Carreras proclaimed that ‘the pictures will be made back-to-back, in pairs, and released as two of the greatest all-horror programmes’. Of course, the audacious scenic transitions from Transylvania to St Petersburg to Cornwall were not noteworthy at Hammer, but Carreras’s trumpeting of the setting regime exemplified the studio’s confidence in its cheapjack production ethos.\(^{17}\)

Tony Hinds observed of *Brides of Dracula* that Robinson was ‘in his element, making bricks without straw’. The same might have been said of any of Robinson’s assignments. But this wasn’t to say that art direction at Bray was just a systematic process. Certainly, Robinson was fastidious; his pencil and ink designs were meticulous, leaving no detail
of setting to chance. At the same time, Robinson was an imaginative soul who believed in the rights of the designer to make a statement on screen. Unlike Vetchinsky, he did not see his primary function as being to create space for the cameras (one of Hammer’s photographers, Freddie Francis, complained that Robinson was forever cluttering his sets with beautiful props); Robinson intended his sets to be noticed, even when they cost buttons. This resulted in some memorable sets, not least in Robinson’s own favourite Hammer film Dracula.¹⁸

**Contrapuntal Beauty. Dracula (1958)**

James Carreras proclaimed in May 1958 that he would ‘be prepared to make Strauss Waltzes tomorrow if they’l make money’. The Hammer production philosophy was avowedly versatile, geared to exploiting transient box office trends. Nonetheless, the company became associated primarily with horror films. Its first proper horror *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957, a.d.B. Robinson) was an extraordinary success; made in four weeks for £50,000, it ultimately grossed £2m worldwide. This guaranteed that the company would give particular attention to the horror genre. Instinctively, Carreras realised that horrors provided the means of exploiting the new ‘X’ certificate and thereby finding a niche audience. Hammer executives also recognised that horrors could make special use of Eastmancolour; the press release for *The Curse of Frankenstein* asserted that Robinson and his colleagues ‘have got together to use colour effects which literally scarify in themselves’. (Hammer posters repeatedly implied the relationship between ‘Hammercolor’ and blood.) In addition, horror films offered one distinctive advantage to a cost-conscious production concern, as the *Economist* pointed out in December 1958: ‘Since one rocket or one castle is much the same as another, sets can be used again and again with only small and nerve-jarring differences.’¹⁹

No one at Bray thought of *Dracula* as a special production; as Sangster recalled, Hammer’s attitude was ‘okay, Frankenstein had gone down well ... let’s have another bash’. Neither did the success of its predecessor produce a huge upturn in production ambitions. *Dracula* was planned on a 25-day shooting schedule with a budget between £75,000 and £80,000 (it would ultimately come in at £81,413); at the same time, as usual, Robinson was expected to make sets that could serve for future projects. Nonetheless, *Dracula* became Robinson’s enduring masterpiece; a film that even he felt achieved ‘this contrapuntal thing of horrible things in beautiful places’.²⁰
Dracula benefited from enhanced facilities at Bray. The international success of The Curse of Frankenstein had raised the expectations of Hammer executives, at least to the extent that they ordered the building of a new stage. Consequently, Robinson had three stages to work with, but the facilities were still basic: one of the stages was small (48’ × 40’), another irregularly shaped (110’ × 25’); also, his art department still amounted to just four people (himself plus art director Don Mingaye and

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two draughtsmen). Michael Carreras bragged that Hammer’s first horror had put the company in ‘another bracket’, but Bray remained a humble concern. It was still necessary for Robinson to use aspects of the house itself, such as the long hall and the courtyard, and shooting conditions in the smallest studio continued to contravene basic safety standards as sound and lighting men struggled to place their equipment in inconspicuous nooks.21

The art department costs for *Dracula* were somewhat higher than usual. The construction materials and labour costs came to £10,288 (with an additional £2,000 spent on props). These figures probably induced ulcers in James Carreras. Twelve days into shooting, he fired off a missive to his American partner Elliot Hyman (of Associated Artists Productions) complaining about the lack of up-front finance; ‘it’s a wonder I’m not biting lumps out of the carpet ... what sort of a 50/50 partnership is that?’ But Robinson’s increased spending was inevitable on a film that was intended to initiate a fresh cycle of production. Moreover, and as ever, he planned the sets to be as economical as possible. The large ballroom stage accommodated four main sets: the vestibule, banqueting hall, library and stairway. In addition, Robinson devised every set to be capable of easy and quick transformation; for example, the exterior churchyard was revamped into the dining room, the two sets sharing a common staircase.22

The publicity for *Dracula* promised that the film would ‘out-Dracula them all, complete with coffins, incantations, as much blood as one could wish for’. Robinson saw to it that the film was a great deal more subtle than this description implied. The opening sequences were masterful. An evocative low-angle shot of a stone eagle set the tone for an ambitious 98-second tracking shot which toured the exciting gothic elements of Robinson’s Castle Dracula. The textual values were also excellent, signalling a place which was not merely creepy but deathly (one of the film’s reviews said correctly that the castle looked ‘died in’). The subsequent matte shot with mountains beyond was not convincing but it had a wintry ethereality that was entirely appropriate to the theme.23

This frigid atmosphere was carried into the main interiors. *Dracula* started shooting on 5 November 1957 and somehow the whole film bore witness to the Autumnal dying of the light. The large hallway felt cold, partly because of the conscious lack of ornamentation and the predominant use of grey-blue tones to the walls. Conspicuously, here as elsewhere, Robinson completely avoided heaviness of tone and expressionist motifs; his Castle interiors were a world away from the caliginous expressionism of the Universal gothic horror sets of the 1930s.
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(as designed by Charles D. Hall). Robinson’s bosses were initially dismayed by the distinctive approach which he took to the Dracula legend – they even thought of sacking him – but the sets instilled a cool atmosphere which turned out to be entirely conducive to the tale of eternal torment.24

Some of the sets of Dracula suffered when compared with the major set pieces. The Holmwood family sets were insipid and rather lacking in architectural harmony; in these respects, they recalled the early Elder-Wills assignments at Bray. Van Helsing’s study was also a curiously desultory affair which did not appear lived in. (It would be bettered in Hammer’s subsequent re-workings of the Dracula tale.) But the sets all testified to Robinson’s determination to interpret the story in his own way and Dracula contained some memorable moments. More than anything, Robinson’s settings quietly but forcibly responded to director Terence Fisher’s dictum that horror films should embody ‘hidden hatreds and fears’.25

Hammer Design: The Third Phase

Of course, the beauty of Dracula did not come purely from the sets. In all of the Bray productions, the visual style was created by a group of technicians who worked together from film to film. The notion of the film unit as a ‘family’ is a cliché of British film culture (viz. Ealing, Gainsborough and Rogers’ units), but it had some pertinence at Bray; albeit that the Hammer technical family was kept together by a common dread of going over budget. James Carreras spoke truthfully of Bray when he said ‘Each unit in the organisation ... never loses sight of the work of the rest of his associates.’ So did Sangster when he observed that Hammer wasn’t ‘Terry Fisher or Bernard Robinson ... Peter Cushing or Christopher Lee’. At Down Place, all forms of authorship – design, photographic and (particularly) directorial – were suppressed in honour of the film and the brand. The Hammer economic miracle was sustained on these terms. But this ethos was crucially undermined by a series of economic realignments.26

In June 1966, Hammer’s main American partners Seven Arts took over Warner Brothers. Warners had long-established links in Britain with the Associated British Picture Corporation, which owned the Elstree Studios. The new American company insisted that Hammer should do its bit to keep the stages busy at its British production base; for this reason, The Mummy’s Shroud (1967, p.d.B. Robinson) was the last Hammer film shot at Bray. Other circumstances emerged over time to further
dilute the Hammer production ethos. Throughout the 1970s, Hammer was forced to seek production finance from a range of backers, the more so in 1973 when EMI (which owned ABPC from 1969) withdrew production finance. Temporary financiers – Rank, Twentieth Century Fox, Terra Filmkunst (Germany), Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) – all brought their own production imperatives. All of these circumstances reduced Hammer to the status of a tenant producer at Pinewood and Elstree. Its loss of identity was exacerbated further by the removal of key personnel. James Carreras retired in 1971 and Bernard Robinson managed only four more films after Bray.27

Some continuities in production ethos were noticeable in the post-Bray era. Hammer carried on making films in a variety of genres, with a marked return to its early ruse of the TV spin-off (characterised by the execrable On the Buses series). Also, budgets were still kept down to levels which were attuned to domestic markets: During the third phase Hammer films had budgets of between £200,000 and £250,000 and one film (Captain Kronos, Vampire Hunter) was made for a remarkable £100,000. Costs were minimised by a variety of means including the flexible use of locations and simple cheese-pairing. The Production Manager of To the Devil a Daughter (1976, a.d.D. Picton) kept a running total in his head to determine whether it was cheaper to switch to London location or studio. Budgets were reduced by more traditional methods on Moon Zero Two (1969) and Taste the Blood of Dracula (1970). The designer in both cases was Scott McGregor, who was well attuned to reining in his scenic ambitions. On Moon Zero Two, he was forced to abandon his early notion of styling his moon repair shop after one of Buckminster Fuller’s translucent domes. Some of his Dracula sets were literally done with mirrors – McGregor used these to create an illusion of depth in his four penny Café Royal set. He also made clever use of cheap optical effects to suggest the vampire’s talent for seeing through walls.28

Hammer’s tenant status in the third phase led to their films being art directed by 16 different designers. However, two names predominated, one with authentic connections to the Bray era. Don Mingaye had worked for Hammer since 1954. Following early work as a scenic artist for Gainsborough and others, he joined Hammer as a draughtsman, subsequently progressing through the ranks to become an assistant and (following Robinson’s retirement) an art director and production designer. Mingaye observed that working with Robinson had given him the chance to ‘strive ahead and [become] more confident working’. The two designers developed a tight working relationship, to the extent that Mingaye was able to second-guess his senior’s complex design strategies; he
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found that he was also able to share in some of Robinson’s artistic visions, such as the notion that Dracula should be represented by stone and Frankenstein’s monster by wood. In contrast, Scott McGregor was a Hammer outsider. He had worked on the company’s 1959 comedy Don’t Panic Chaps, but prior to rejoining the company in 1969, McGregor was a jobbing art director. Before the war, he worked in various capacities for a wallpaper manufacturer and theatre companies (including a spell under the famous theatre scenic artist Edward Delaney). McGregor’s break into films then came during the war when he joined Edward Carrick’s design department at the Crown Film Unit; during this phase, he developed a distinctive reputation for performing ribald versions of hymns to his own guitar accompaniment. McGregor’s sense of humour probably served him well during the 1950s and 1960s when he worked on some of the worst films ever produced by the British film industry. His pre-Hammer assignments included the Nazi cryogenics caper The Frozen Dead (1966) and Fire Maidens from Outer Space (1956), where McGregor’s basic space ship interior was ruined by the need to placate a sponsor; a massive Longines clock was rarely out of sight.29

Ostensibly, Hammer designers enjoyed better facilities than before during the third phase. For example, in 1972 it was said that Elstree employed 350 craftsmen who were capable of building up to 15 sets at a time. But the continual requirement for cheapness meant that the art directors were still stretched. Typically, they had to accommodate many sets on one expensive stage. The need to maximise budgets also meant that Mingaye, McGregor and others made use of the familiar techniques of recycling, revamping and nearby locations.30

If anything, Black Park became even more conspicuous in the latter Hammer productions; it appeared in at least seven films, typically used for travel sequences. The company also tended to make use of nearby locales, such as Elstree Country Club in The Devil Rides Out (1968, p.d.B. Robinson). However, increased studio charges sometimes prompted the cameras to move further a-field; particularly on occasions where directors desired a modern, verité approach to horror. Michael Carreras conceded in 1975 that “the so-called Hammer ‘product’ was not viable in an era of Exorcist-style realism. Peter Sykes took this lead on To the Devil a Daughter by including a range of London street locations, including scenes at St Katherine’s Dock, Tower Bridge, Mayfair (supplemented by the Hexagonal mausoleum at High Wycombe and some German scenes which were thrown in to pacify the German backers).31

The use of the larger studios allowed Hammer’s designers to make effective use of existing sets. Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde (1971) was written
to maximise the use of the standing London street sets at Elstree, as built originally by the film’s art director and studio art chief Robert Jones. *Twins of Evil* (1971, a.d.R. Stannard), *Vampire Circus* (1971, a.d.S. McGregor) and *Countess Dracula* (1971, a.d.P. Harrison) all made use of the Village Square at Pinewood. The particularly handsome look of the latter was attributable also to its recycling of the sets of *Anne of a Thousand Days* (1969, p.d.M. Carter): Ironically, a relative of Countess Bathory – the anti-heroine of *Countess Dracula* – wrote that the décor was ‘splendid, as good as film convenience could contrive’. Sometimes, schedules also permitted Hammer designers to revamp their own sets in the old manner. For example, McGregor’s evocative church interior of *Taste the Blood of Dracula* was reworked on three separate occasions, each time to form a Vampire’s castle.32

**Dracula Returns (Again): Dracula A.D. 1972**

The Don Mingaye-designed *Dracula A.D. 1972* typified its times in a number of respects. Deliberately, it sought to update the Dracula myth, by situating the old neck-biter in (as the publicity enthused) ‘the trendy areas of London’s Kings Road ... from the frenetic discotheques to late night launderettes’. The production also reflected the times at Hammer. The very notion of a ‘Swinging London’ vampire, post-facto as it was, came from an outside source; backers Warners ordered the updating in the hope of repeating the success of the American Count Yorga films. In this way, *Dracula A.D. 1972* characterised the lack of focus that dogged Hammer in the post–James Carreras/post-Bray era.

Mingaye, who was paid an impressive £1,696 for his work on the film, seems to have entered into *Dracula A.D. 1972* with some enthusiasm. He felt that the modern milieu gave him ‘a much greater chance for open design’. The script also brought the opportunity for some interesting scenic variety. The most expensive set (at £11,000 including props) represented St Bartoff’s Church. This was convincingly decrepit and formed an effective contrast with Johnny Alucard’s flat. This cost £3,500 to produce and was designed to be ‘extravagantly 1920’s era’; at the same time, it contained some subtle pop art elements which were intended to suggest Johnny’s ambivalent relationship with the hippy scene.33

The script of *Dracula A.D. 1972* was absurd; a strong sense of irony was required to forgive the ridiculous historical preamble which purported to take us ‘to the Victorian metropolis’, as represented by Hyde Park (i.e. Black Park). Visually, Mingaye’s clever ideas were rather sacrificed to drab photography. St Bartoff’s worked fine, particularly when viewed in
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top shot. Johnny’s flat also succeeded, thanks to its effective separation onto two levels (Mingaye also ensured that the dressings didn’t draw undue attention to themselves). The great disappointment was the Cavern Club. Woeful name notwithstanding, this looked fabulous in the stills; strikingly designed around a creepy central motif of spider’s web to the walls. Some of this came over in the film and it was possible also to enjoy Mingaye’s effective use of flimsy modern materials, such as metal sheeting and web curtains. But the whole creation appeared sadly cramped in the film and it totally failed to evoke the activities of London’s latest generation of hipsters.

Such was the lot of the art director who worked in the popular areas of domestic British film culture in the 1970s. The designers who worked to facilitate the cheap thrills and cheap laughs knew well that they would never enjoy the creative privileges afforded to contemporaries such as John Box and Ken Adam. But art directors such as Robinson, Vetchinsky, Couch, Mingaye and McGregor deserved credit for their devotion to their task and for their relentless solving of distinct production problems.

The roles of the Carry On and Hammer designers differed in one respect. In general, the Carry On artists strove to ensure that their sets did not draw attention away from the key selling points of script and acting. Conversely, Hammer designers – particularly Robinson – delighted in providing a visual appeal which masked the inconsequentialities of plot. Nonetheless, the designers of the Carry Ons and the Hammers were united in their aim of creating believable environments for avowedly commercial products. As Jimmy Sangster said, the whole thing was a case of ‘We’ve only got ten cents to spend, so keep it tight.’
chapter 6

No Sets Please ... We’re British. Polemical Realism via the New Wave

British film culture has a long history of polemical realism; an attitude which asserts that realistic settings of various kinds are the hallmark of a purposeful cinema. At times, as in the films of Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, verisimilitude has been posited as a mark of respect towards the disenfranchised peoples whose lives are depicted on the screen. More broadly, the avowed realists of British cinema have characterised authentic milieu as the cornerstone of a distinctive, inherently counter-hegemonic cinema. Hepworth’s call for scenes of an ‘essentially English character’ could be compared to Ealing producer Michael Balcon’s demand for ‘naturalistic backgrounds and naturalistic human interest’; latterly, Loach’s call for films to ‘speak to their [British people’s] experience’ could be placed alongside Leigh’s desire for films which are ‘organic, honest and truthful’. In every instance, the polemical realists have argued for the existence of a knowable, objective – and therefore, recordable – British reality and they have seen authentic settings as a defence against Hollywood, and Hollywood-style, illusionism. For designers, this had led to an approach which treats locations as the primary resource and decrees that any studio sets be subdued. The ‘no sets please ... we’re British’ approach to design reached its zenith in the films of the British New Wave from the late 1950s. Here, designers such as Ralph Brinton, Ray Simm and Edward Marshall laboured to effectively remove themselves from the picture, in order to provide apparently unmediated scenes of working-class life.¹
With Love or with Anger: The New Wave

The British New Wave is generally said to have occurred between 1958 and 1963. The cycle was initiated by the Jack Clayton–directed Room at the Top (1958, a.d.R. Brinton) and the key films thereafter included Look Back in Anger (1959, a.d.P. Glazier), Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960, a.d.E. Marshall), The Entertainer (1960, a.d.R. Brinton), A Taste of Honey (1961, a.d.R. Brinton), The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962, a.d.R. Brinton) and A Kind of Loving (1962, a.d.R. Simm). In its earliest phases, the New Wave was profoundly influenced by the theatre: two of its leading lights, Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson, had directed at the Royal Court Theatre, the spiritual centre of the emergent social realist art movement (the term ‘Angry Young Man’ was first coined in 1956 in reference to the Richardson-directed play Look Back in Anger).

But, at root, the film New Wave was also a critical movement. Richardson, Anderson and their fellow theorist-in-chief Karel Reisz started out as film critics – for Sequence and Sight and Sound – and, like their contemporaries on the French magazine Cahiers du Cinema, yearned to revise the national cinema.

Richardson et al made their first inroads into filmmaking via their self-initiated Free Cinema movement. From 1953, they directed short films of real life – such as Richardson and Reisz’s Momma Don’t Allow (1955) and Anderson’s Every Day Except Christmas (1957) – in a manner which recalled the ‘poetic’ documentary tradition of Humphrey Jennings. The aesthetic preoccupations of the full-length features to follow were predicted in a pithy phrase from the programme notes for the first Free Cinema programme at the NFT in 1956:

The locations may have figured in British films before. But here is an effort to see and to feel them freshly, with love or with anger – only not coldly, hygienically or conventionally.

Anderson later admitted that the term Free Cinema was a ruse, devised by him to trick ‘idiotic journalists’ into seeing the films. Richardson would add that the succeeding New Wave was again ‘a label ... there are always waves of one sort or another’. Certainly, the movement lacked the sense of stability which was brought to the French Nouvelle Vague by its tightly-knit circle of critics-turned-filmmakers. Anderson did not participate in the New Wave directly until the cycle had virtually run its course; ostensible New Wave features were also made by outsiders such as the television director John Schlesinger (Loving and Billy Liar 1963) and studio men such as Clayton and Bryan Forbes (The L-Shaped Room 1962).
Overall, it is difficult to say whether the New Wave was a movement or just a style. Clearly, British film financiers saw the films of working-class life as a lucrative and cost-effective trend. In 1962, Anglo-Amalgamated, the company associated with the Carry Ons, announced that it would ‘now turn to a more serious type of film-making’. Similarly, Woodfall’s publicity materials for The Entertainer stressed that Richardson’s second feature would ‘convert controversy into cash’.²

Part of the appeal of the New Wave to producers lay in the cheapness of the product. Look Back in Anger cost £250,000, The Entertainer £200,000, A Kind of Loving something between £180,000 and £200,000; most impressively, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning cost just £117,000 and allegedly made a profit of over £500,000. The New Wave represented a rare moment when filmmakers’ ideological concerns made a felicitous match with the desire of British producers for cheap but fashionable product. In the classical European manner, the key creators strove to preserve their freedom by keeping their budgets down. It was partly this that explained their enthusiasm for shooting on real locations and using available light wherever possible. In addition, Richardson and Schlesinger felt that actors gave truer performances when placed in authentic surroundings and they found that liberation from studio bureaucracies allowed them to make spontaneous creative decisions. Richardson maintained that studios encouraged a futile striving for ‘technical perfection [which] doesn’t matter a tiny damn’; Schlesinger argued that alfresco shooting allowed him to escape the studio’s shackles of ‘predetermination’ to catch ‘something in a room, or someone passing a window that you could use to advantage’.³

Schlesinger’s remark revealed the romantic pulse of the New Wave. This took some maintaining. The New Wave style made particular demands of all technicians. Photographers – notably Walter Lassally and Freddie Francis – made use of lightweight lighting units, small Arriflex cameras and new Ilford film stock to facilitate an active filming style. Sound technicians deployed the mobile recording units which were hired out by the Twickenham and Merton Park studios. The art director’s job was to respond. The locations had to accord with the vision of the director; they had to be at once workable, authentic yet dramatic. This meant that locations were often liberally adapted: for example, a bus shelter was built at Coronation Park, Radcliffe for use on A Kind of Loving, complete with graffiti provided by prop men and watching children; The Alhambra Theatre in Morecambe was adapted to become a studio for a month during the shooting of The Entertainer. The locations themselves were often composites, the visual fabric constructed from locales which
were sometimes many miles apart. The films of the New Wave were largely set in the Industrial North and Midlands, but the settings were drawn from an even larger area of England. The roadmap of the New Wave was bounded by Morecambe to the North and Chelsea 260 miles to the South (A Taste of Honey). There were many stops in between and to the sides, including Blackpool (A Taste of Honey); Bradford (Billy Liar); Burnley (A Kind of Loving), Hammersmith (The Entertainer), Kensal Rise and Romford (Look Back in Anger), Nottingham (Billy Liar), Oldham (A Kind of Loving), Shipley (Room at the Top) and Wakefield (This Sporting Life).4

But it’s easy to generalise. Richardson observed of the New Wave that ‘everyone [was] isolated ... there was never some great community of people working in the same way’. The same might be said of the art directors. The designers worked to a similar, apparently modest, brief, but they all played their part in creating the aesthetic of the New Wave; they should be recognised for their individual contributions to British film design history. At the same time, we need to think about the changes to New Wave style that occurred over time. If we look closely, we can see that the New Wave actually went through three aesthetic phases, beginning with the Semi-Studio period (1958–59), through to the Mature Realist phase (1960–62) and culminating with two films in 1963 – Schlesinger’s Billy Liar and Anderson’s This Sporting Life – which represented definite formal Points of Departure. Thinking about the films in such a way we discover that there was no singular New Wave design style: Rather, the art directors had to roll with changing trends and they had to react also to the specific demands of the director during a peculiarly auteurist moment in British film history.5

Designers of the New Wave

No designer was born to the New Wave. Rather, the technicians were selected from the ranks of those who had worked for years in the studios and who were game to lend their talents to the new design ethos. Kinematograph Weekly’s John Champ observed in 1962 that modern methods demanded that ‘if the script calls for shots in a dreary working-class living room then they’ll be shot in a dreary working-class living room’, but not all designers were keen to ride with the changes; Edward Carrick declared outright in the early 1960s that he was quitting films now that the studio was being abandoned. (In fact, he held on until 1965.) Three designers adapted particularly well to the new circumstances of production: Ray Simm, Edward Marshall and, more than anyone, Ralph Brinton.6
Aficionados of the New Wave would probably think of Ralph Brinton as the premier designer of the kitchen sink, mainly because of his presence on four key productions: *Room at the Top*, *The Entertainer*, *A Taste of Honey*, *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Certainly, Brinton developed a close relationship with Richardson over time – he also designed Richardson’s seminal *Tom Jones* (1963) – but he was otherwise an unlikely champion of the new realism. Brinton was nearing retirement age by the time of his first new wave assignment and he was a rather conservative figure; the former Royal Naval lieutenant-commander came from an upper-middle class background (he was Laurence Irving’s cousin) and he had a tweedy manner. But Brinton exemplified that attitude within British film culture which sees the artist as being fundamentally classless. Moreover, he held some progressive artistic ideals.

Brinton was, in theory, part of the architectural school of design. In 1922, following the first stint in the navy, he enrolled at the Architectural Association, eventually graduating alongside Williams and Dillon. Brinton subsequently established an architectural practice, supplementing his wages with spells as a lecturer (on architectural history and design) at the Northern Polytechnic. But Brinton then experienced an epiphany when he attended a series of talks given by Sergei Eisenstein. Addressing the Film Society, Eisenstein spoke of the necessity for spare design and of the contribution that sets could make to the movement of the film. Brinton was enthralled, sufficiently so to approach Irving for a job. He subsequently designed scores of quota pictures at the Sound City and Fox-British studios, in the latter case, working as named designer over Dillon (who during the 1930s found that her gender debarred her from progressing further up the creative chain).

Prior to his work for the New Wave, Brinton was known as a studio man. His most notable achievements were in the area of colour design. Brinton had the distinction of having designed the first British Technicolor film – *Wings of the Morning* (1937) – and he art directed some other notable colour subjects (including *The Mikado* 1939 and *Trottie True* 1949). Brinton cherished some strong views on the use of colour. He believed that Technicolor could serve a symbolic approach to design, familiar colours being used to focus the audience’s attention on a key prop or two (e.g. a stained glass window could be used to represent an entire church). Brinton also believed that colour had to be used sympathetically, from film to film. On *Tom Jones*, he and Ossie Morris were infuriated by the technical experts’ dismissive attitude towards their subdued colour schemes; at one point, Brinton raged, ‘The trouble with them is they’re not artists, they’re chemists!’
Brinton’s outburst said something about his character. He was a humble soul (in 1953, he amazed a 31-year old Ken Adam with his request to become his future draughtsman), but he was fiercely idealistic about the work of the film designer. Prior to the New Wave, Brinton’s passion was clearly shown in his marvellous work on *Odd Man Out* (1948). Ostensibly, this film belonged to Roger Furse, the production designer, but the existing designs show that Brinton played a key role in devising some of the key settings, including the eerily whimsical set for Shell’s hideaway. This film and other Brinton projects, such as *Scrooge* (1951), demonstrated his feeling for the relationships between design and movement in films. Perhaps recalling Eisenstein, Brinton spoke of movement as the ‘third dimension’ in films and, like Irving and Bryan, he believed that it could be suggested by establishing dynamic contrasts between sets.8

Edward (normally ‘Ted’) Marshall assisted Brinton on a number of New Wave projects and designed *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in his own right. Like Brinton, he came from good stock; Marshall was educated at Malvern College. But, unlike his boss, he never felt at home in the grimy urban environments of the New Wave. As he recalled of *Room at the Top*,

> When I went up to Bradford for *Room at the Top* I was really appalled by the environment. Some of my associates saw everything in a very romantic sort of way – the mills, the smoke, the dirt – but for me there was no romance at all. It was sad and desperate.

Marshall got into the mood on this film by studying the paintings of L.S. Lowry and Jack Simcock. He subsequently went on to develop some effective techniques for designing on location. By habit a studio man (he started in films at Denham in 1945), Marshall ultimately found that location design had particular joys. He regretted the inability to move walls in location interiors, but he enjoyed the discipline of making rooms appear larger or smaller through the use of props. Marshall also appreciated the authentic backgrounds that could be seen on location through open doorways and windows and he revelled in his ability to direct the camera lens: Over time, he found that the limited sets available in tight rooms meant that photographers were compelled to focus on the key elements of his set. This wasn’t to suggest that Marshall was a campaigner for designer-power – far from it. Like Brinton, he believed design to be a collaborative process and he placed a high premium on satisfying the director; Marshall remarked in 1965: ‘I think just to produce sketches and build sets and put them up on the stage and say “There it is. Now
go and shoot on it“ is not the way to make a good film.’ Marshall also took a humble approach to the locations themselves. Thinking, presumably, of Blowup (1966, a.d.A. Gorton), Marshall denounced Antonioni’s ‘extremes’ of colour and he expressed his determination to ‘only change things if demanded by the character or ... action’.9

The film career of Ray Simm took a fateful turn in the late 1950s. In 1958 and 1959, he was one of the two designers who were contracted to Cubby Broccoli and Irwin Allen’s Warwick Films. The other – Ken Adam – was subsequently chosen by Broccoli to production design the James Bond films for his new company Eon Productions; meanwhile, Simm continued to turn out unspectacular sets for a range of British production concerns. Simm was noted for his carefully drawn, always practical, sketches. He was also prized for his attention to detail on location and in the studio (his regular assistant Ken Bridgeman recalled him as a thoroughly ‘hands on’ designer). Perhaps more than anything, Simm had an eye for an effective location; and he was well versed in the business of matching the real and the fabricated. These gifts were all demonstrated on The L-Shaped Room. Director Bryan Forbes recalled that Simm used extraordinary powers of persuasion to persuade an eccentric woman to permit the filming of her house, which appeared to be ‘preserved in aspic’ in Notting Hill. Simm subsequently worked hard to ensure that this evocative exterior was matched by the studio interiors. Various techniques were used to age the eponymous interior, including bleaching the wallpaper and repeatedly spraying the plaster mouldings. Simm also dropped the Shepperton carpenters’ immaculate doors from a height to create the right distressed look. He thought that the New Wave demanded new standards of dilapidation:

We’re used to building everything bright and spanking new. But here we had to apply our talents in reverse. And it’s much more difficult to start with something new and make it look aged and decrepit.10

The designers of the New Wave did not work in a unified manner; unlike other European film aesthetic movements, there was no manifesto to work to. Rather, the idea of the New Wave was a vague framing circumstance which corresponded broadly with Karel Reisz’s maxim for screen realism (as written about Elia Kazan): ‘the use of authentic backgrounds adds conviction’. The design work was consequently influenced by the usual factors: the design style of the particular art director; demand of market and finance and – importantly, in the context of this auteurist cinema – the desires of the director.11
New Wave: The Semi-Studio Phase and Look Back in Anger (1959)

In 1958, the New Wave was not unique in its desire for authentic milieus. At the time, British film production was caught up in location mania. In that year, Rank’s companies pursued a policy of shooting on expensive foreign locales to compete with television; this travelogue style was seen in films such as (with major locations in brackets): The Nightcomers (Japan), Sea Fury (Spain), The Wind Cannot Read (India) and Nor the Moon by Night (Kenya). But other producers and directors had more progressive reasons for going on location and had started to use real exteriors and sympathetic sets to underscore their social commentary. Michael Relph and Basil Dearden expressed their Ealing legacy on Sapphire (1959, a.d.C. Dillon), a racial tension subject, which used a wide range of London locations and deployed natural light to subdue the colour (although, worryingly, Dearden declared that the plain exteriors contrasted with the ‘tremendous colour’ of the West Indians). J. Lee Thompson also had progressive aims for Woman in a Dressing Gown; these were translated in the sets by Robert Jones, whose realistic efforts were deemed by Kinematograph Weekly to be ‘as attractive as a bowl of dirty washing-up water’. But the most important aesthetic predecessor of the New Wave was Knave of Hearts (1954). This European co-production was shot in London in a conspicuously spartan manner. Director Rene Clement filmed in real locations wherever possible (sometimes using concealed Arriflex cameras) and, if compelled to use a studio, insisted that walls and ceilings were kept on sets. Such rigour held strong appeal to the waiting authors of the New Wave. Significantly, Knave of Hearts was designed by Ralph Brinton.12

But, by 1958, there were solid commercial reasons for the British film industry to back the New Wave. Chiefly, these came down to the movement’s links with the headline-generating Angry Young Men of British theatre and writing. Romulus, the backers of Room at the Top, claimed that the British film industry loved the new air of truthfulness in British artistic life: Romulus had ‘always been a realistic company’; what’s more, it recognised that post-war Britain was ‘difficult to accept’ for many young people. Of course, Romulus and Associated British (the producers of Look Back in Anger) were drawn to the new fiction’s salacious aspects; the publicity materials portrayed Room at the Top as a ‘savage story of lust and ambition’. In addition, the New Wave films were good for the studio renting companies. Faster film stock meant that films could be shot all year round; Shepperton’s managing director Andy
Worker suggested this got around the old problem of a ‘winter lull’, with significant knock-on benefits for the studios.13

During the first semi-studio phase of the New Wave, British productions attempted to meet the new cultural climate of social realism, by making films which appeared to present new standards of authenticity. In fact, the two films of the first phase rather dipped their toes in the British neo-realism. In many respects, Room at the Top and Look Back in Anger were conventional studio pictures, which matched locations with sets in the usual way and which – sin of sins – even built the odd location on the back lot.

It is ironical that Room at the Top should be customarily thought of as the first New Wave film, since it was directed by the studio stalwart Jack Clayton. There again, Clayton did see himself as a modern realist in 1958; he argued that television had brought values of ‘realism and honesty’ which freed British filmmakers ‘from the kind of junk we used to make’. Forty years later, he still maintained that Room was ‘the first really natural film made in England’. This impression was supported by the publicity for the film. This emphasised that Room was being shot in Bradford (‘the place where the smoke comes from’), whilst other British productions were ‘flying to the more glamorous parts of the world’. Romulus’s press people were also pleased to cite star Laurence Harvey’s endorsement of the film’s large use of locations; he felt that the Bradford streets helped him ‘get into the mood and thinking habits of Joe Lampton’.14

Certainly, Room felt different from other British pictures released in 1958: there were more locations than usual and, notably, these were shot in all weathers, day and night. Nonetheless, Look Back in Anger still appears to have the stronger claims to being the first genuine kitchen sink film. For one thing, it was financed partly by Woodfall, the company formed in 1958 by Richardson and producer Harry Saltzman with the angry young playwright John Osborne. More importantly, Anger cemented the links between social realist theatre and cinema; the film was drawn directly from Osborne’s seminal play.

The film’s production would go on to express a feeling of push-and-pull between the worlds of stage and screen. Richardson averred that he yearned for the expanded scenic canvas of film; the extra sets would give him the chance to explore ‘the lives and backgrounds of the characters’. But he was also anxious about the specialist demands of film and consequently took with him to Elstree his long-standing collaborator and friend, the Australian stage designer Loudon Sainthill. Sainthill would be credited as ‘specialist set designer for the picture’, but there was little
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demand for his delicate design sensibilities. Instead, Saltzman insisted that Richardson use the resident designer Peter Glazier. Glazier was second-in-command at the studios to Robert Jones and he had never designed a film in his own right. (His promotion to full designer showed what ABPC thought of the project.) But Glazier was noted as a very good draughtsman and he had worked at Elstree for 11 years. Consequently, he was the ideal candidate, Jones being otherwise occupied, to give form to the stage adaptation.\textsuperscript{15}

Anger had two principal sets, representing the Porters’ attic flat and the market. The market set was suggested by the scriptwriter, Nigel Kneale, who wanted to ‘open up’ the action. It was modelled, conventionally, on a real life example – Romford Market. Nonetheless, Richardson said he was ‘technically on location’ on the Elstree lot. Glazier’s department dressed the scene with care, as Penelope Houston observed: ‘Cabbage and cauliflower stalks were strewn across the path, a couple of stout dogs posed by a market stall ... A cat was imported at the last minute ... strategically placed in front of a barrow.’ The results fooled many – one journalist praised the ‘marvellously documentary scenes in a pushcart market’ – but the feeling of realism came down mainly to the photography. Ossie Morris’s hand-held camerawork imparted a documentary quality which gave additional value to a simple scene.\textsuperscript{16}

Glazier’s flat set for Anger expanded a little on Alan Tagg’s stage original. It was built as a composite, with stairs built into the tank on one of the small stages; these features helped Richardson provide the sense of movement which he said was ‘needed for the screen’. Glazier also made effective use of glass within the Porter attic residence. This imparted some light within a scene which was otherwise – and by design – horribly claustrophobic. Glazier’s handiwork created a sense of the flat being knocked together by the resident landlady. The walls were dirty and damp, feebly decorated with mass produced prints; water for cooking had to be fetched from the downstairs bathroom. Glazier’s set also gave hints of Jimmy (Richard Burton)’s wilful domination of his home. Books in a low set of shelves spoke of his futile education; so too, in their own way, did various items apparently pilfered from public houses (a pub ashtray and a ‘no drinking outside’ sign). Other items – notably the utility dining set and a pre-war leather sofa inherited from the landlady – poured scorn, as if this were necessary, on Jimmy and Alison (Mary Ure)’s fantasy of their flat as ‘our bear’s cave, our squirrel’s dray’.

The attic flat also featured one notable own goal in the ‘jazz stuff’ which festooned the walls: the photos of Gerry Mulligan, the Modern
Jazz Quartet and others seemed to depict the trad jazz fanatic Jimmy as a be-bop man. Little matter; overall, the sets of Anger succeeded in the humble aims. However, Richardson wanted to go further. After filming, he observed of studio artifice that ‘all material has to be recreated and it is only as good as its recreation’, but this was sophistry. Richardson disliked the studio sensibility of Look Back in Anger and he aimed to limit ‘recreation’ in the future set design of his films. He planned to leave the studio altogether and it was this ambition that took the New Wave into its mature design phase.  

**New Wave: The Mature Phase and A Taste of Honey (1961)**

Richardson was dissatisfied with Look Back in Anger for a combination of commercial and aesthetic reasons. He felt that his artistic vision had been compromised by working within a major studio; furthermore, he had been appalled by the costs. Aesthetically, Richardson had also become convinced that false interiors brought an essentially ‘theatrical viewpoint’ and that a ‘truly cinematic’ approach would allow his actors to react to real surroundings (as Godard and Truffaut did in France). Richardson’s contemporary realists, notably Karel Reisz and John Schlesinger, agreed and the mature phase consequently went further in securing as many settings as possible on location: interiors as well as exteriors. The mature phase also evinced a stronger commitment to showing everything in the cold light of day. 

The mature phase of the New Wave was facilitated by the deal which was made in 1960 between Woodfall and the Bryanston film consortium (the latter led by Michael Balcon). It was then energised by the great success of Reisz’s Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. As Schlesinger affirmed, ‘Suddenly it was possible to make realistic subjects, more directly, done largely on location ... and the public were prepared to accept them.’ Of course, the films had chief appeal to the young, by dint of their themes of alienation and disappointment. Reisz said that Arthur Seaton, the anti-hero of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, had the ‘anarchy that you often find is a sign of the people who are the most alive’. In similar vein, Stan Barstow, the author of A Kind of Loving, remarked that the film was about the ‘emotional compromise’ that inhered to the lives of young, working people. The producers and publicists also ensured that audiences recognised the links between aesthetic realism and emotional integrity. The publicity for Saturday Night and Sunday Morning placed the film within a tradition of honest
and veracious cinema which had hitherto been unknown to Britain, but which had flowered overseas in Italian neo-realism and the French nouvelle vague. The press materials for *A Kind of Loving* stated explicitly that it exemplified the ‘new wave of British film-making’.¹⁹

Richardson was the leading director of the mature phase (he made three films) and also its leading polemicist. Following the disappointments of *Anger*, he developed a Rossellini-like contempt for the studio. The Free Cinema manifesto had declared that ‘perfection is not the aim’; by 1960 he had also decided that ‘once movies retreated from the open air and the winds behind the still doors of sound studios, life waited outside’. Furthermore, he stated that the studio made films fake and engendered a Hollywoodised look which was self-referencing and divorced from life. The collaborative and continuous nature of British New Wave production – Richardson averred that his small crews had ‘an attitude in common’ – meant that the on-location style of working became the norm. True, *The Entertainer* spent two weeks on Brinton’s

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*Playing house.* Jo (Rita Tushingham) and Geoffrey (Murray Melvin) entertain Helen (Dora Bryan) in Ralph Brinton’s improvised flat of *A Taste of Honey* (1961). Everett Collection/ Rex Features.
studio apartment for Archie Rice – *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Kind of Loving* also had a few modest studio interiors (built at Twickenham and Shepperton) – but otherwise the mature phase insisted that actors and crew respond to real exteriors and interiors, as provided by the director in conjunction with the designer. Thus, the borstal of *Long Distance Runner* was fashioned from an abandoned NAAFI at Claygate, Surrey, the details checked for authenticity by two ex-Borstal boys; likewise, the factory scenes of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* were filmed in the Raleigh bicycle factory where writer Alan Sillitoe had once worked (absurdly, some publicity stills showed the stars grinning from bicycle seats). Richardson was adamant about the advantages of real interiors. He declared in 1960: ‘If ever I did an interior set for a realistic film in a studio again I would never allow them to take walls out or anything like that.’

Schlesinger observed of the films of the New Wave that ‘the background is incidental ... what is important is what happens in human terms’. This was a fine thing to say. The locations mania of the mature phase brought major logistical problems. Producers worried about weather breaks; this, despite the savings on studio hire and despite Richardson and Schlesinger’s ideal of shooting in all climes – on *Loving*, Schlesinger had to feed soup and rum to his cast and crew to keep them sentient during a lengthy shoot on a frigid Manchester hillside. Location-shooting also brought problems of crowd control (nouvelle-vague style ‘incidental’ moments were never embraced by the British new wavers) and also difficulties with sound; much energy was expended on *The Entertainer* trying to control the din made by the Morecambe seagulls. The collaborative ethos of the New Wave meant that many of these problems demanded input from the design teams but Brinton, Marshall and Simm had enough issues of their own to deal with. Location-finding could be a problem; on *Long Distance Runner*, Prison Commissioners refused the use of a real borstal because of the ‘anti-establishment’ message of the film. In general, the Metropolitan police were reluctant to allow large unit shooting in London because of the implications for traffic and people control. (This provided additional impetus for the New Wave directors to take their cameras up North.) More than anything, the locations mania served to reduce the imaginative input of the designer; at an extreme, he became an adapter rather than a designer. It was this latter point that made *A Taste of Honey* stand apart from the rest. Here, Brinton extracted great feeling from found environments.

There was a moment in *Honey* when the painted stars that festooned the ceiling of a genuine Manchester dance hall were transformed, via a
straight cut, to become the real night stars as viewed by the love-struck heroine Jo (Rita Tushingham). This visual pun said much about the aesthetic logic of the film. *Honey* was trumpeted in advance as ‘an experiment in neo-realism’. This rang true of the design. Richardson planned the film version of Shelagh Delaney’s hit play as his first (it wasn’t the first as he claimed) all-location subject. Resisting the objections of Bryanston – who wanted to hire a studio for the purposes of weather-cover – Richardson aimed to make *Honey* entirely in real exteriors and interiors, using available light wherever possible. He said that he and his ‘hand picked’ crew craved the dramatic focus that came from working in unorthodox, probably inconvenient, real settings. In April 1961, three weeks into shooting, Richardson told the *Evening Standard*: ‘I am purposely making things difficult for myself so as to get a real atmosphere.’21

Ralph Brinton performed his duties with enthusiasm, as Richardson recalled: ‘My art director, Ralph Brinton – tireless in his late sixties – scoured the backstreets, the smokestacks, the docks of Salford – where Shelagh Delany ... had come from.’22 Interestingly, he also searched much farther a-field. In the end, the ostensibly Salford-based *Honey* had settings which were actually about 250 miles apart, including two buildings in London (at one point in the film, the heroine stepped off a pavement in Salford into a house in Chelsea). Following three weeks shooting in the North West, the cast and crew established its base in a council house in Chelsea which was due for renovation. The house was rented for £80 a month (a net saving, according to Richardson, of £19,980 per week) and was divided between offices on the bottom floor and improvised studios at the top; these were used by Brinton for the dingy flats occupied by Jo and her mother Helen (Dora Bryan). The conditions were difficult for everyone concerned, as a *Daily Herald* report made clear:

> Inside the house is a tangle of cables, a hive of technicians, a chatter of actresses ... It is being made in rooms with real ceilings and walls so the camera cannot swoop, perch overhead, circle round or do anything else much except photograph the acting.

The other building used by *Honey* was a little more capacious, but no less quirky. Richardson was able to use his contacts to secure the use of the scenic workshops of the Royal Court Theatre. These were adapted to become the flat which Jo shared with Geoffrey (Murray Melvin).23

The Royal Court scenes really stood out. The two flats at Chelsea were efficiently done; Brinton made effective use of the attic spaces and a few key props to suggest Helen’s deracinated lifestyle. But Jo
and Geoffrey’s dwelling was a memorable creation. Richardson suggested that the play was ‘about life and loneliness and reality’; but it was concerned equally with Jo’s courageous attempts to break with convention and forge new relationships, away from the precarious obligations of family. In a triumphant moment, she exclaimed, ‘we’re unique, we’re unrivalled, we’re bloody marvellous!’ and the flat substantiated the fragile wonder of her pretend marriage to Geoffrey. It was endearingly quirky, formed of slanting wooden walls and ill-assorted windows; on conventional terms, a space fit for demolition. But, Brinton dressed the space carefully, to show the love that was felt for the citified shack. When living alone, Jo was seen to add a few items – a blanket to divide the room, some pegs for a calendar – in the manner almost of a child playing ‘house’. Geoffrey also added some cheap but effective flourishes. His paper lanterns, cheap fabric throws and curtains, ballerina mural and tourist posters were attractively captured by Lassally using superior Ilford HP3 stock (to contrast with the lower grade film used in the down-at-heel Chelsea interiors). Together, Brinton and Lassally created an oddly alluring set which articulated the right of the young to define themselves against the hide-bound expectations of their elders.

New Wave: Points of Departure

Richardson’s films of the mature phase were the zenith of New Wave aesthetics; they showed that feature films could be made in real places using available light. Following Long Distance Runner, he decided to find out whether his aesthetic theories could be applied to films other than his signature projects ‘about the world we are living in, films that are part of that world’. This led him in the direction of Tom Jones, a costume film which was shot on similar lines, but which, as Richardson pledged, marked a ‘holiday ... from social significance’: It would go on to exert influence over both British historical films and, perhaps ironically, the ‘Swinging London’ films of the 1960s. Richardson’s withdrawal from the New Wave stripped the fragile movement of its chief ideologue. At the same time, long-standing adherents to the new realism wanted to go further in exploring the boundaries of film verity. This led to two concluding films of the New Wave, which used realistic sets as a counter-point to formalist experimentation. The lifelike settings of Lindsay Anderson’s This Sporting Life and Schlesinger’s Billy Liar performed a rhetorical function, anchoring the narratives and at the same time providing solid platforms for projects which strove to find subjective truths within apparently real environments.24
This Sporting Life was Anderson’s first film for five years (since his Free Cinema short Every Day Except Christmas) and his first contribution to the New Wave proper. From a distance, working largely in theatre, he had felt that the movement had become too preoccupied with surface detail. In 1963, Anderson wrote that film realism ‘could ... be restrictive ... if we make films for too long with an eye on what is representative – films about “working class” people, looked at objectively’. At the same time, Anderson was chronically suspicious of tricksy settings: writing for Sequence, he had denounced the hollow spectacle of Independent Producers’ sets and condemned Heckroth’s work on The Archers’ The Small Back Room as an ‘unhappy essay in expressionism’. Appropriately, the intense, personal drama of This Sporting Life was played largely against realistic sets provided by Alan Withy at Beaconsfield.25

Withy had entered films in 1947, following initial work as a draughtsman and engineer. His early film credits included draughtsman’s duties on The Red Shoes and the Independent Frame feature Warning to Wantons (both 1948). Withy continued to function as a draughtsman until 1957, when he was taken on as a full art director at the Ealing studios. By This Sporting Life, he had acquired ten full credits and had also gained a reputation for his rigorous handling of studio assignments built on architectural principles. Withy was an assiduous planner and he was also a master of perspective and other traditional stocks in trade of the British designer. These facets were all displayed to good effect on The Sporting Life, which benefited from a remarkably consistent visual tone.

Anderson observed that the locations of This Sporting Life – which included documentary scenes taken at the Wakefield Trinity rugby league ground – combined with the studio interiors to create a ‘background rough and hard: no room for proletarian sentimentalism’. Withy’s studio interiors were highly effective. The studios were terribly cramped (the three shooting stages offered just 11,501 square feet of space), but Withy used the tight spaces to bring focus to his exceptionally detailed sets. The home of the nouveau riche Weavers was planned in great detail, the key action and shots being incorporated by Withy into a meticulous floor plan. He also built the three storey home to be airy and light; this in contrast to the dreary house endured by Margaret Hammond (Rachel Roberts) and her lodger/lover Frank Machin (Richard Harris). Machin lamented that Margaret ‘just put up the shutters and stopped living’. Quite. Her home was a decrepit creation, built as a composite to include kitchen, living room and stairs, and over-dressed, by Peter Lamont, to suggest the emotional implosion of its inhabitants. Some weeks were spent on Withy’s set, its tight confines serving, as
POLEMICAL REALISM VIA THE NEW WAVE

Anderson recalled, to ‘infect’ everyone present with the ‘tense, grinding emotionalism of the situation’.26

The stories of This Sporting Life and Billy Liar were related in the sense that they were both concerned with themes of personal change. In Anderson’s film, Machin attempted to expunge his psychological demons through his rugby career and, moreover, his relationship with Mrs Hammond; Withy’s solid settings played their part in substantiating the over-riding sense of Machin’s entrapment. On Billy Liar, Schlesinger contrasted the architectural changes in Bradford with the mental confinement of the quixotic eponymous hero. The publicity materials exclaimed that the tale was set ‘against the modernistic setting of a Yorkshire town, daily being created anew with light, expansive buildings, dazzling to an eye’. Schlesinger affirmed that Bradford was chosen for its ‘sense of impending change’. These visual elements helped to underline the tragedy of the timorous Billy Fisher (Tom Courtenay); change was everywhere, but he did not have the courage to embrace it for himself. In this light, Billy ‘settled for living in a world of fantasy’.27

The script of Billy Liar, by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, took a broadly positive approach to urban redevelopment. Lampooning the New Wave, it asserted that ‘there is nothing of the Northern mill-town atmosphere about the story’. This accorded with Schlesinger’s aim of avoiding the ‘same skyline of black smokestacks’. But the filmmakers also wanted to show that the redevelopment could not mask the essential ‘provincialism’ of the new Bradford. Waterhouse and Hall indicated that the feeling of progress was tempered by the sense of a ‘chunk of corn exchange gothic always obtruding on the view of the newer, lighter buildings’. Imperiously, they also suggested that the new Bradfordian drank in ‘modern “roadhouses” with composition-tiled floors’ and bought from shops “modernised” with plastic fronting’. These elements of the visual fabric were important because they hinted at the palliative features of the modern world that could keep a dreamer like Billy in his place.28

Designer Ray Simm took care to ensure that his interiors supported the feeling of hollow social progress. Nearly 50 per cent of the film was shot on location, but there were some telling Shepperton-built sets. Billy Liar was a film about dreams of all kinds, material ones included. This theme was underscored by the set which represented the Fisher family home. The semi-detached house was designed to suggest the assuredness of Fisher senior (Wilfred Pickles), a self-employed TV engineer, who exemplified the emergent lower middle class. The somewhat garish dwelling was stuffed with items which illustrated the determination of
the Fishers to define themselves by their possessions. Typically, Simm had firm guidance from the script, which took a dim view of the Fishers. Waterhouse and Hall described the house as ‘an ugly pre-war “desirable residence”’, the living room of which was furnished with ‘ghastly chain-store furniture – uncut moquette suite, plaster ornaments, half-moon hearth rug, ‘flashy cocktail cabinet, tiled fireplace’. Palpably, Billy was dominated by the setting. His bedroom was as carefully decorated as the rest and there were few signs of his occupation: the few books and pictures culled from war magazines demonstrated his suppression by the environment.29

Schlesinger took great care in Billy Liar to exclude any overt fantasy elements; the dream images, he said, were intended to seem ‘readily available to a youth in suburbia in a provincial town’. They were deliberately mundane, played out against Simm’s conventional domestic and public exteriors. The dominant dream of Billy Liar was consequently the collective one of social progress and development. Simm depicted the changes further in his meticulous set for the Duxbury and Shadrack funeral parlour. This composite – comprising front office, waiting room and the private offices of the two owners – was traditional Victorian gothic, every item chosen to maintain the dreary feeling of deathly decorum. But Shadrack’s office was different: He represented the new Bradford and his office was consequently decked out with light veneer walls, modern lighting and slim-line desk – the latter bearing a small model of the plastic ‘coffin of the future’. The premises of Duxbury and Shadrack were therefore a metaphor for wider social change. The dark wood and Victorian ironwork of the front office represented the old values of Duxbury (Finlay Currie) and his disappearing Bradford. In contrast, Shadrack (Leonard Rossiter) gloried in his sense that ‘it’s all clean lines nowadays’. Ray Simm’s sets helped to create Billy Liar as a kind of modern reworking of Ruskin’s ‘Stones of Venice’, although the film was notably unsentimental about the eraure of old decorative motifs and values. The sets supported the notion that individual liberty was everything, in any epoch.

In their own ways, This Sporting Life and Billy Liar dwelt on existential truths. It was partly this that set them apart from the New Wave movement (although Reisz had always argued that the films should present something more than just a ‘sociological moment’). But there were other, formal, points that spoke of the disintegration of the British neorealist ideal. Life and Liar both contained visual elements which seemed right out of the New Wave text book. Both contained quiet documentary moments and both had large sections shot on location. But the films also avoided Richardson’s ascetic attitude towards studio shooting.
techniques: Look closely and you could see tracking shots, top shots, crane shots, pull-aways and, withal, precious little use of the Arriflex. *(This Sporting Life even used conventional back projection for the travelling car sequences.)* Most strikingly, both films built their interiors in the studio, in a manner which strongly recalled the modified realism of the studio-based Ealing films. In this context, the late formalist phase of the New Wave expressed continuities with the earlier films mainly in its devotion to working class themes (albeit an upwardly mobile working class); the aesthetic pact had been broken. *The Times* was undoubtedly correct in its assertion, made whilst *Life* and *Liar* were in production, that ‘during the last year or so most of our newer directors have shown signs that they no longer find it [realism] enough’.

In many respects, *This Sporting Life* and *Billy Liar* revealed the tensions that had always resided within the supposed movement of the British New Wave. Colloquially, the phase had been summed up by an outstanding prop – the kitchen sink. In the final analysis, it was the sets that, in their quiet way, expressed the absence of a truly coherent aesthetic. The art direction undertook a sort of circular journey, starting with the kind of studio sets that Richardson abhorred and ending up with the same. Nonetheless, the New Wave achieved something concrete in helping to re-establish a sense of an authentic British cinema, and Richardson’s films in particular suggested new approaches to design and photography. His endeavours helped to establish a tradition of on-the-spot design which would be carried into the films of Loach, Leigh and other later polemical realists.

The New Wave also helped to instigate an era in British films which would repel Richardson in particular and which would take British design into more expansive areas. The kitchen sink film suggested ways of tapping into the lucrative youth market. These elements fascinated American investors who struggled to make similar gains at home and it was partly their sense of domestic failure that led them to invest heavily in British production. In the post–New Wave era, during the 1960s, British film production acquired a kind of ‘international style’ which reconstituted indigenous themes and visions for worldwide consumption. Amidst all the fluff, this led to some of the finest – and certainly most expansive – production design ever produced within the British studios.
Do They Mean Us? 
American-Financed Design of the 1960s

In 1968, film critic Derek Todd noted a curiously Freudian dimension to British film finance. He wrote: ‘The Americans have come here to participate ... it’s penetration, deep and broad.’ Todd really alluded to the difference between love and rape. Previously, Hollywood financiers had made rough use of British studios and technicians: in the 1930s, throwing small sums at the production of endless quota quickies; in the 1950s, exploiting tax concessions, frozen tax credits and the Eady Levy to make ‘runaway’ spectacles such as *Ivanhoe* (1952, a.d.A. Junge) and *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958, a.d.J. Box and G. Drake). In both cases, a spirit of ‘cut and run’ prevailed, but – as Todd implied – things appeared to be different in the 1960s. Clearly, the Eady Levy offered continued inducements to film here, but the Hollywood companies also wanted to tap the British scene. Common sensically, the Britain of the 1960s was the land of *The Beatles* and Carnaby Street and for a time the American producers exploited British culture (or versions of it) for worldwide consumption. In their different ways, films such as *The Knack ... and How to Get It* (1965), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and the James Bonds expressed a new kind of international style of filmmaking.¹

There were various consequences for British production designers. Some established names – such as Michael Stringer, Ken Adam and John Box – enjoyed greater success as a result of the American invasion. The climate of financial stability also served to accelerate the careers of

¹
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new talents such as Assheton Gorton and Stephen Grimes. Such luminaries found their work to be valued highly during the 1960s, as Stanley Price observed in September 1964:

The new art directors are as indispensable to a film as the star or the director. They are in on the film from its first conception ... haggle with the producers about them, and then get to work.

But Hollywood money was less helpful to the lowlier British designers. American finance brought fewer, but bigger, pictures; it also caused the virtual extinction of the second feature (only six were made in 1966). The overall film shortage meant that some older designers struggled to find work. The gifted Duncan Sutherland, who had once created memorable sets for the Ealing films of Robert Hamer, was compelled to work on meagre films from z-level producers such as Trionx; other former leading lights, such as Cedric Dawe, left films altogether to design television adverts. Most poignantly, by the early sixties, the Arnold brothers were eking out livings at the very lowest echelons of the British film industry: Wilfred made sets for Merton Park’s 30-minute support features (all of them shot on seven-day schedules) whilst Norman worked at the notoriously cheap New Elstree studios, building sets to furnish three films or TV shows at a time.2

Nonetheless, the 1960s was probably the most important decade for the development of British film design. American money nurtured some important careers and it enabled much of the most memorable British design work to date (from the Bonds to Blowup to Doctor Zhivago). But finding honest patterns within British film design of the 1960s is a tricky task, mainly because of the erratic patterns of American production during the period. Hollywood production cash was often used speculatively, as the declining majors attempted to find new formulas to appeal to changing audience tastes. This makes it impossible to think of American films in terms either of production company or genre. The one thing that held the British-American films of the 1960s together was a preoccupation with time. The films were of the time – Hollywood was here, because Britain was hip. Furthermore, many of the films took an existential approach to time. Approaching history, filmmakers spoke of their desire to make history ‘come alive’ for the now generation; for example, John Schlesinger spoke of the ‘timely ... passions and actions’ at the heart of Far from the Madding Crowd (1967, p.d.R. MacDonald). Science Fiction was also given a contemporary twist, as Kubrick strove to make 2001 ‘a logical extension’ of the present and Truffaut proposed...

If the internationalist films of the 1960s were preoccupied with time, then it makes sense to divide the films up with regard to three obvious temporal categories: The Past, The Present and The Future.

**Designing the Present: Swinging London and James Bond**

It is sometimes argued that the dazzling costume film *Tom Jones* set the tone for the swinging era; director Tony Richardson recalled: ‘The Sixties were starting to swing, and Tom Jones became part of the “revolution”.’ But the swinging sensibility was caught best in the two types of films that engaged most obviously with contemporary times: the Swinging London films and the James Bonds. These productions did much to establish the iconography of the age and their designers – pre-eminently Assheton Gorton and Ken Adam – helped to style the decade.⁴

The swinging London mythology has been well described elsewhere, but we should remind ourselves of some of its central features. ‘Central’ was a key word; London was deemed to be potently symbolic of a reinvigorated Britain. For a large part of the 1960s, young consumers were persuaded that London was Britain and that it swung; naturally and unconditionally. There again, swinging London was aware of its own construction. The whole thing hinged on a pre-Baudrillardian acceptance of hyper-reality as a fact of life; consequently, the image-makers themselves – filmmakers, designers, outstandingly photographers – were lauded for their skill in serving up more exciting representations of us. And we were all involved, apparently. Piri Halasz’s definitive guide to swinging London in the April 1966 edition of *Time* magazine made no mention of people who might be excluded from ‘the scene’ on economic grounds. Halasz enthused that ‘London [Britain] ... had shed much ... of the arrogance that often went with the stamp of privilege’; so everyone could shop at Biba’s and leisure in Crockford’s casino in Mayfair. This meritocratic agenda to swinging London was underscored by its range of cultural resources, including The Beatles (working-class lads made very good) and the films of the period. At the same time, the swinging mythology referenced other forms of culture in a way that implied a wholesale deconstruction of old artistic cannons; in swinging Britain everyone could get into art (pop and/or op) and experimental theatre. We were all critics and we were all consumers.⁵

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Aesthetically, the Swinging London films were influenced by the previous New Wave; they were shot in real locations in real light. But there were key differences in the kinds of locations that were chosen and the uses that were made of them. The designers of the Swinging London films were themselves cast as hyper-realists, whose function was to create sets which were recognisably of the capital but were altered to suggest its modernity. Notable contributions to this style were made by Ray Simm (A Hard Day’s Night 1964, Help! 1965) Ken Bridgeman (Smashing Time 1967), Peter Mullins (Alfie 1966) and Reece Pemberton (Nothing but the Best 1964). But the design approach was exemplified by the work of Assheton Gorton. His sets for The Knack and Blow Up showed what could be achieved by the considered adaptation of real locations. Gorton believed that the films of the New Wave showed ‘the set become important and designing very exciting’ and during the 1960s, inspired by his directors Richard Lester and Michaelangelo Antonioni, he used the dimensions and shapes of real buildings to focus his imagination. Anything could be built in the studio (Gorton would go on to prove this in latter assignments such as Legend 1985) but his early films expressed a determination to extract drama from found buildings and places.

Gorton had studied architecture and art (at Cambridge and Slade), but he felt himself to be a product of television. During the 1950s, he designed scores of Armchair Theatre productions, working under ATV’s progressive Head of Design, Tim O’Brien. Gorton enjoyed the frenetic pace and variety of TV production, which – much more than his architectural studies – bred an appreciation of interior design. Equally, he valued the patronage of O’Brien, a follower of Brecht, who campaigned for the autonomy of the designer and who felt that ‘light and fluent scenery’ should make ‘an apt and parallel comment of its own’. Gorton recalled that ‘the whole world came through the studios’ at ATV and that O’Brien ‘taught [him] everything’.6

Gorton’s reputation as the premier designer of Swinging London cinema rested on just two films: The Knack and Blowup. The films looked markedly different; the first was shot in black and white, the second in colour; Blowup also had a more eclectic range of locations. But they were unified in their suggestion of a semiotic approach to design. Lester and Antonioni were both fascinated by the modern, mediated world of images. Lester had directed many TV adverts and he had a love for ‘instant impact’ in films based on ad-style ‘associated images’. He knew full well that Swinging London was the ‘Time magazine/ad man’s view’ of the capital, but he loved its ebullience. Antonioni said of Blowup that
he was not ‘trying to capture reality ... [but] trying to find out what it is’.
He found modern man to be alienated, lost in a world of shallow images.
Gorton’s task was the same in either case; to show London as it was
represented via culture’s hall of mirrors. As he later recalled, art direc-
tion was ‘like being an actor ... The director may want you to offer up an
interpretation of London’.

The Knack was based on a play by Ann Jellicoe which had been
produced at the Royal Court in 1962. Lester and writer Charles Wood
imparted a tone of levity to the original text and they also expanded
upon the range of settings. The locations were shot, in spontaneous
manner, in November 1964 in a range of places, including Ruislip Lido, a
junk yard at Ewell, Notting Hill and a Kensington square. Together, these
formed a breathless patchwork of the modern metropolis (Newsweek
suggested that The Knack caught ‘the spirit of a generation in full flight’).
The major set of Colin (Michael Crawford)’s house was created in a
Victorian house at Melrose Terrace, Shepherd’s Bush. The rooms were
painted in three contrasting tones to bluntly suggest the psychologies of
the three inhabitants: the devilish Tolen (Ray Brooks) occupied a black
room; the frenetic Tom painted his walls vivid white and Colin’s inherent
conservatism was suggested by his grey rooms. Gorton took a highly
imaginative approach to the dressings. He intended the house to be a
torpid demonstration of bad, modern taste of the 1930s; specifically,
on the part of Colin’s deceased aunt whom he visualised as ‘a mad Art
Deco do-it-yourself decorator before the war’.

Interestingly, Gorton’s deco fantasies occurred two years before the
start of the ‘nostalgia craze’ of the 1960s; that time when first art nou-
veau and then deco were reconstituted by ad people and commercial
designers to form part of a new vocabulary of social freedom. No such
freedom existed for Colin, in Gorton’s mind. The 1930s mass produced
deco items in the house (including sun ray mirrors and cabinets and a
bakelite radio) were moribund, not stylish. Moreover, the walnut veneers
and parquet flooring overpowered the small house and its owner. The
Knack did not offer a tribute to deco; rather, the style was presented as
being part of austy old order, a counter-point to the zany antics of the
paradigmatic modern swingers.

The locations of The Knack served as a groovy backdrop; the build-
ings, old and new, offered silent approval to a fabulously crazed gen-
eration. The real exteriors and interiors performed a different function
on Blowup. Here, Gorton developed a more elusive design vocabulary,
which was heavily informed by Antonioni’s instinctive feeling for col-
our. The great sage of the New Italian Cinema intended his portrait of
Swinging London to be a reflection on bad communication between people and Man’s shaping by environment. In addition, he wanted to depict the impossibility of meaning within a modern world shaped by photographers, ‘the new persuaders who have invented the norms of beauty’. In other words, Antonioni wanted to give the lie to swinging times and he saw colour as his primary weapon. Gorton was instructed to paint a distant building red for one scene; brown roads were painted black (so too were 35 pigeons and the famous tennis court at the end of the film); other objects were rendered in dazzling white. The colourful adaptation of exterior locations was unique in British films, determined, as Gorton recalled, by the desire to ‘neutralise and emphasise certain shapes’. By such means, Antonioni and Gorton prompted the viewer to reflect upon the basic elements of the built world (the lines and shapes) and thereby critique it. Eric Shorter moaned that Antonioni ‘succeeded in making London look as unlike itself as possible’, but this was really the whole point: He and Gorton made the world strange in order that we could see it with greater clarity.10

The script of *Blowup* was filled with architectural allusions: The opening shots were to show ‘the iron skeleton of a skyscraper under construction’; later, the deserted stock exchange was to appear ‘spotless, like a cathedral’. In the event, the locations included a Chelsea flat, Carnaby Street and a Georgian townhouse at Cheyne Walk (site of the party, where the ‘jeunesse dorée’ of London wore only black, silver and white). The principal interior was the studio of photographer Thomas (David Hemmings). This was converted from the Holland Park studio of the fashion photographer John Cowan; a converted slaughter house, which Gorton adapted further to include two gantries. Again the colours were carefully controlled, the whitewashed walls and black beams contrasting effectively with muted lilacs and greys. The colours found their echo in Thomas’s tasteful clothes and, in their quietude, they also allowed for certain key props – a beige telephone, prop feathers, colourful scenic paper – to explode out of the mise-en-scène. Barsacq observed correctly that *Blowup* sparkled ‘like a symphony of colours’; at the same time, the trivial props spoke of the lack of substance within the modern, mediated world.11

*Blowup* was the extreme example of the anti–Swinging London film. Oddly, the style/genre was self-critiqued almost from the start. The settings generally exalted the swinging times – even in the dying phases, *Bedazzled* (1967, a.d.T. Knight) was sold as being ‘set against the backdrop of today’s swinging London’ – but the scripts often expressed self-doubts. Definitively, *Smashing Time* was said by Paramount publicists

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to ‘finally put the lights out on the so-called “Swinging London”’. The James Bond films did not suffer from diffidence. Par excellence designer films, the six ‘official’ Bonds (excluding the aberrant Casino Royale 1967, p.d.M. Stringer) had brio in spades; the sets expressed an attitude that conflated the present and the future as the means of bidding a sorrowless farewell to Britain’s imperial past. The chief Bond designer, the German Ken Adam summed up the whole ethos in 1964: ‘They are the big spectacles of the twentieth century, the big epics.’

Ken (Klaus) Adam was the last of the great émigré designers to Britain. His Jewish family left Berlin in 1934 as National Socialism took hold (when Adam was 13) settling first in Edinburgh and then London. Adam’s mother ran a guest house which was frequented by refugees and it was here that Klaus first met Vincent Korda. The Hungarian luminary advised Adam, who was already stuck on the idea of a career in film design, to obtain a grounding in architecture. This led him to pursue part-time studies at Bartlett’s while working for a firm of architects, although his training was interrupted by the war. Adam went on to have a successful career in the RAF – he was probably Britain’s only German fighter pilot during the Second World War – but he maintained his aim of working in films. In 1947, he was taken on as a draughtsman at Hammersmith by Andrew Mazzei, at a time when the British-Italian designer was struggling to maintain continuous production for the cut-price Alliance group. Adam’s career developed quickly thereafter. He worked as a draughtsman to Oliver Messel and William Kellner on Queen of Spades (1948) at Welwyn, before progressing to assistant on the Sutherland-designed Obsession (1948). Five years later, Adam gained full art director status on a support feature The Devil’s Pass, prior to getting his big break via Mike Todd’s spectacular Around the World in 80 Days (1956). By the end of the 1950s, Adam was regarded as one of Britain’s premier production designers (he took this title first on Jacques Tourneur’s Night of the Demon 1958). Importantly, his work for American companies, particularly for Irving Allen and Cubby Broccoli’s Warwick Productions, eventually suggested Adam as the natural choice to design the James Bond films.

No one thought that the Bonds were a big deal as the first in the series – Dr No – went into production in January 1962. Some noises had been made in the past about filming Ian Fleming’s popular novels, but these were muted, given the obsolescent state of the thriller genre. When Broccoli eventually embarked upon Bond production, in the company of Harry Saltzman – the two formed Eon Productions for the purpose – the stakes were kept deliberately low. No star was signed and Adam was given a moderate £14,000 to provide all the sets for Dr No, as the major
backers, United Artists, strove to limit its risk. However, Adam had a crucial realisation early on. Faced by a production that no one cared much about in advance (he and his wife included), he decided to have fun and ‘experiment with a new form of design’. The results were unique and extraordinary and they did much to establish the radical brand values of the Bond series. Adam’s ultra-modern sets and gadgets helped to make Dr No a huge success and he went on to design three other Bond movies in the 1960s. Dr No, Goldfinger (1964), Thunderball (1965) and You Only Live Twice (1967) set the pattern for Bondian design. They also expressed his personal vision of production design, as built on three interlocking principles: purity of line; modernity and the primacy of imagination.14

Adam’s sets for the Bond movies were marked by their use of bold architectural planes. This was ironic, because he had a mixed relationship with architectural theory. As a child, he developed a love for the Bauhaus; he recalled that the work of Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe ‘formed part of my future education’ (along with other German artists of the pre-war zeitgeist-like Gross and Dix). But Adam was subsequently alienated by the conservative architectural standards – all Georgian and beaux arts – promulgated by the Head at Bartlett’s, the architectural historian Professor Richardson. The Bond films, more so than his few architectural assignments, enabled Adam to refocus his mind on the pure power of the line. His sketches (since 1958 performed with a responsive felt tip) reduced built structures to raw verticals and horizontals and these were preserved in the Bond sets. The 600 square feet Rumpus Room of Goldfinger, a witty amplification of American ranch-style architecture, was dominated by the strong lines of the walls and ceilings. Powerful lines were also displayed in Adam’s most grandiose set of the time, the £1m volcano of You Only Live Twice. The off-centre lake to the top added extra value – fundamentally cinematic value – to the strong, sloped walls of his 400’ × 126’ × 70’ creation.15

Adam’s love for the Bauhaus went hand in hand with a love for expressionism. Significantly, Adam always regarded expressionism not as a romantic movement, but a modernist one and he was powerfully attracted to its spirit of artistic experimentation. Much more so than Heckroth, Andrejew or Bryan (all of whom he admired), Adam looked to forge active, emotional relationships between wild geometrical planes. Repeatedly, Adam’s Bond sets paid quiet homage to two films that had impressed him greatly whilst he was in his teens: The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1920) and Fritz Lang’s Dr Mabuse (1920). Both productions inspired him for their theatrical rejection of reality and subjective use
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of lines. Even prior to *Dr No*, Adam experimented with ‘out of plumb’ walls for *Child in the House* (1956) but he took his expressionist intent further in the Bonds. Most memorably, for *Dr No* he created a ghastly ‘tarantula room’ in forced perspective, with Caligariist shadows and stark furnishings; characteristically, the effect within this cheap (£450) set was completed by a strong circular feature – in this case, a round skylight.\(^{16}\)

Happily, Adam’s inherent feeling for line and space made a perfect match with contemporary design trends. Unabashedly, he felt like a man of the moment, as he recalled: ‘I think it [Bond] was part of the sixties and it’s funny because at the time it was second nature to me. I never worried.’ Adam was aware of an on-going ‘revolution in the arts’ and the Bond films represented his attitude towards it; in a like manner (as he believed) to Sean Kenny’s radical settings in the theatre for Joan Littlewood. From the start of the Bond series, Adam felt that he wanted to ‘play around with new materials, new technologies, new techniques’; consequently, working closely with the Pinewood department heads, he developed metallic, plastic and mirror effects for his sets. He also worked to simplify the look of the everyday items on his sets (chairs, tables and lampshades) in ways which expressed the design rationale of the age. Cunningly, such features were often contrasted with more classical elements. Most famously, Adam mixed contemporary furniture with antiques within the undersea lair of *Dr No* (whimsically, he also added a self-painted reproduction of a Goya painting, as recently stolen from the National Gallery). The effect was to combine past and present in a way which hinted at Britain’s progressive march towards the future.\(^{17}\)

Naturally, Adam’s range of gadgets came from an implied future. He felt that the small items – the various weapons, the electronic doodads, micro communication technologies – were ‘pacemakers for the plot’. Certainly, they emphasised the essential now-ness of the Bond films. This was suggested by the publicity for *Goldfinger* which highlighted Adam’s ruse of the laser as an instrument of torture: ‘Adam once again has dramatised the story’s scientific equipment to give it a malignant evil of its own.’ Adam was frustrated by the frequent suggestions during the 1960s that he was primarily a designer of gadgets; he urged that the tricksy items should be thought of as part of ‘the entire look of the film’. But the mechanical items, large and small, came to form a large part of his production design style. Within Adam’s design universe, the robust architectural elements worked against such memorable action props as the giant rockets of *You Only Live Twice*; the turbo-powered yacht of *Thunderball* (in fact a converted hydrofoil), and – abidingly – Bond’s Aston

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Martins. Those cars cost £4,000 per se, but were refitted (machine guns, ejector seats, scythe wheels and all) for another £25,000.¹⁸

Adam was often surprised that his Bondian machines worked; for all his love of fast cars and planes, he claimed to have no mechanical intelligence. But he believed that the designer had to take risks. This aspect of his character also helped to explain his love of spectacle. As the Bonds developed, Adam challenged himself to create larger effects. At the same time, he was aware that the public was growing accustomed to progressively more elaborate design. For the first time in British film history, the sets were taking the lead; as Saltzman exclaimed of Adam's slyly £56,000 Bank of England dining room of Goldfinger:

This is what the public comes to see. They don't care if a thing costs £8 or £8,000 but they do know if a thing looks like the dining room of the Bank of England ... Only thing is the Bank of England couldn't afford a set like this!

The sense of public expectation surrounding Bondian art direction was confirmed by the reviews of the early films – journalists picked up on Adam's joyous excesses from the start. David Robinson praised Dr No's 'green-lit Gothick [sic] dungeons and Caligari dens'; Pat Williams described Dr No's hideaway as 'an Esquire-via-Scientific American version of what the hip millionaire would want in his fall out shelter'; most perceptively of all, John Coleman found Adam's sets to be 'a perfect visual correlative ... of that vulgar Bondage to brand names and money being seen to be spent'.¹⁹

Adam's sets for the Bonds were remarkable flights of fancy. He took a disciplined approach to design; unlike his early hero Korda, he did not leave art directors in the lurch without references and he also practised a restrained approach to the use of colour (he claimed that paint tins should come with the warning, 'Danger – handle with care'). But Adam believed design to be an imaginative quest and he backed himself to find an interesting visual idea in any set. Like Junge, he eschewed references but he went further still in forsaking realism. As early as 1957, Adam spoke of his love of 'stylisation' in design; later, he often spoke of straight draughtsmanship as being the mark of the apprentice. Ultimately, Adam felt that the film designer should seek to create screen worlds that were plausible but imaginative:

It's not so much about getting away from reality, but creating a different kind of reality, I can achieve for an audience a
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more dramatic or believable effect than just by showing reality.
(Emphasis in original.)

On the Bonds, Adam showed what the world would look like if real life was sufficiently dramatic. So, on Goldfinger he built his Fort Knox to be like ‘a prison’, the bars keeping safe vast reserves of heavy gold bars which, absurdly, were stored in big piles. Adam also extracted great humour from his exaggerated sets. Exploding gas meters, castrating lasers and ejector seats that dispatched baddies upwards or downwards (see the funny chairs of the SPECTRE hq in Thunderball) were all part of Adam’s ‘tongue-in-cheek’ design style; rare manifestations, to use Rodney Ackland’s phrase, of the ‘custard pie of Caligari’.20

Clearly, Adam was a central figure in the Bond creative team; he, Broccoli, Saltzman, photographer Ted Moore, titles designer Maurice Binder and composer John Barry created and maintained the Bond brand. Things weren’t quite the same when Adam was away. He absented himself from the second and sixth Eon-produced Bonds. From Russia with Love (1963) and On Her Majesty’s Secret Service (1969) were both designed by Adam’s art director Syd Cain and their sets paled in comparison.

Cain had come through the ranks at Pinewood, learning his trade under stalwarts such as Alex Vetchinsky, Carmen Dillon and Tom Morahan. His mature design style was marked by an ease with storyboarding – Cain would break down scripts into key ‘phases’ (visual moments) – and a gift for organisation. Broccoli saw Cain as a safe pair of hands in Adam’s absence and he produced solid work. From Russia with Love had a Venetian chess room, designed, as Cain remembered, to ‘reflect the kind of old-world elegance found in Venetian buildings’, but he also included some quiet humour in the blue and yellow checked floor, which echoed the chess board. Humour of a different kind was to be found in Cain’s reproduction Turkish sewers, where the rats were dusted with cocoa powder to resemble their cousins in the wild. In contrast, On Her Majesty’s Secret Service was conceived as a realist production by director Peter Hunt and there were few design flourishes. However, there was one notable set. Blofeld’s headquarters – Piz Gloria – were built on location at a partly finished ski resort near Murren on the Schilthorn Mountain in Switzerland. Cain furbished these at a cost of £125,000, a minor part of the budget going on the gold-effect screens and pillars which gleamed within Blofeld’s modernist living area (as converted from the resort’s 40’ circular restaurant).21
Designing the Past

At one point in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, Bond (George Lazenby) was led to Blofeld’s underground offices. These were created by Cain to be a kind of villainous home-from-home which pointed subtly to Blofeld’s Dr No-like love of old objects; at the same time, we caught glimpses of his sci-fi laboratories, displayed behind huge glass panels. Blofeld, like the Bond villains (and, for that matter, the heroes) before him was shown as Technological Man and therefore Modern Man; everyone and everything in the Bond universe were products of the white heat of technology and the films were confident embodiments of the supposed present. But American-financed costume films also played a surprising role in British films’ modernist campaign of the 1960s, albeit in a relatively introspective fashion. The stories of famous people from history – Anne Boleyn, Henry II, Isadora Duncan, Cromwell and others – were used to comment upon eternal political and personal truths. This notion was confirmed by the publicity materials for the 1960s costume dramas. *Anne of a Thousand Days* (p.d.M. Carter) was said to have a ‘youthful accent’, *A Lion in Winter* (1968, a.d.P. Murton) was promoted as a metaphor for broken families and women’s liberation, the eponymous heroine of *Isadora* (1968, p.d.J. Herbert) was declared to be ‘a hippy at heart’ and *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968, a.d.T. Marshall) was claimed to ‘go beyond the façade of history ... [to] dare to ask – the reason why’.22

The director of *Charge of the Light Brigade*, Tony Richardson, warned his crew repeatedly of the perils of ‘epicitis’; a Korda-like tendency to build history two times as big and paint it red. This wasn’t to suggest that history came cheap in the 1960s. The seminal *Tom Jones* came in for a bargain £500,000 but the flood of American money that followed turned even Richardson’s head. *Charge* cost around $6m and elsewhere, costume films continued to be an expensive venture. Clive Donner demanded ‘a big canvas’ for *Alfred the Great* (1969, p.d.M. Stringer); Avco-Embassy spent £4m on *The Lion in Winter* (£40,000 of it on Peter Murton’s three-acre Chinon Castle set at Bray in Ireland); director Ken Hughes spontaneously added a ‘two thousand horse race across a battlefield’ to the visual mix of *Cromwell* (1970, p.d.J. Stoll). Most strikingly, *Zulu* (1963, a.d.E. Archer) declared of itself: ‘Dwarfing the mightiest! Towering over the greatest!’. In general, British-American costume films of the 1960s attempted to say personal things in big ways and it is hard to differentiate them in terms of their basic scope. Three films stood out as having a distinctive epic quality and they held
special design importance: the David Lean period trilogy comprising Lawrence of Arabia (1962), Doctor Zhivago (1965) (both p.d.J. Box) and Ryan’s Daughter 1970 (p.d.S. Grimes). Otherwise, three design trends were observable in the run of British-American costume films: a devotion to realism; a tendency to shoot on location, and in two films – Anne of Thousand Days and Becket (1964, p.d.J. Bryan) – the continuance of old standards of studio period design.23

British-American costume films were marked by a tone of sober realism. Tom Jones typified the approach with its determination (as expressed by Richardson) to ‘make English countryside look as if it was unchanged from the eighteenth century’. Great efforts were made everywhere to get historical details right. Richardson, Ted Marshall and a range of historical experts (including John and Andrew Mollo’s recently formed Historical Research Unit) strove hard to make an authentic spectacle of Charge; all minor details were checked (such as the design of bronze canons and regimental silverware) and Marshall even ploughed the Turkish valley which was used for the battle scenes to remove any traces of appealing greenness. Ernest Archer was equally assiduous on Zulu, using thousands of historical references to direct his re-creation of Rorke’s Drift; this was built at Royal Natal National Park, complete with hospital, church and cattle kraal, and was conceived as ‘a re-creation of history’. (Amusingly, the site was taken over post-filming by a colony of obstreperous baboons.) Similarly, Alfred was billed as the first attempt to portray Saxon times ‘authentically’. Production designer Michael Stringer and costume designer Jocelyn Rickards were thereby compelled to spend eight months collecting scarce visual references from early letters, diaries and manuscripts.24

The realist fervour of 1960s costume producers and directors led to much self-reflection over the use of colour. Richardson sought to avoid ‘painted poster effect’ on Tom Jones (to this end, he commanded Lassally on location to ‘wait until the sun’s gone!’). The crews of A Man for All Seasons (1966, p.d.J. Box), Far from the Madding Crowd and – even – Chitty, Chitty Bang, Bang (1968, p.d.K. Adam) also strove to subdue their colours. But, predictably, the main thrust of the realist campaign lay in location shooting. Sons and Lovers (1960) was the first film to make a major break with the studio traditions of costume film design; production designer Tom Morahan created all of the dramatic environments from authentic Lawrentian locales around Nottingham. But Tom Jones was the more influential production. This was shot in the latter New Wave manner, marked by careful interventions into found environments. Brinton adapted his West Country and London locations
with care to create a past which was at once rugged and painterly; his eighteenth-century London street scenes were particularly memorable, fashioned from some warehouses in Southwark. *Isadora* took this approach to a different level. Here, Jocelyn Herbert made use of real, but rarely authentic, locations. For various practical and political reasons, Yugoslavian environments stood in for Russian, German and French locales (e.g. Opatja became Nice and the National Theatre in Ruejeka was transformed in the Berlin Opera House). But Herbert’s most cunning conversions occurred on British soil. The lobby of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane became the lobby of a late Victorian hotel and a club was fashioned from the Methodist Youth Club at Battersea. Also, parts of Oldway House (latterly Paignton Civic Centre) were restored to Victorian standards.25

*Becket* and *Anne of a Thousand Days* also made good use of locations, but these were deployed in traditional manner to supplement the studio set-pieces. The studio sensibility of both films was not surprising, given that they were designed by two stalwarts of the old Gainsborough studios: John Bryan and Maurice Carter. Bryan was returning to production design following a 12-year spell as a producer and he saw *Becket* as his grand opus. Like Edward Carrick, he disliked the modern movement towards location setting and he saw *Becket* as the opportunity to restate the imaginative virtues of the studio. Some scenes were shot at Bamburgh and Alnwick Castles (and also at Black Park) but these were secondary to Bryan’s imaginative sets. The centrepiece was the reproduction of Canterbury Cathedral. This was 80’×40’ yards and it filled the massive Stage H at Shepperton (as built originally for *Things to Come*). Bryan’s Cathedral took four months to build and the designer approached the task with something resembling religious fervour; he enjoined the record 300 plus crew that this was a rare opportunity to display their craftsmanship. Characteristically, Bryan hoped that the viewer would feel involved in the sets (which also included evocative renderings of the papal palace, Henry’s court and a French town and camp). He worked the textures and planes to ‘dramatise’ the settings and encourage the viewer to feel he/she was ‘a privileged person, sitting in on what’s happening’. Bryan also provided strong contrasts in the colours; the drabness of the austere English sets was set against the pastel French shades and the ‘pure, jewel-like colours’ of the ecclesiastical settings and costumes. By such means, Bryan set up a hierarchy of colour which underscored the film’s theme of earthly ambition in conflict with faith.26

Maurice Carter was born in the same year as Bryan – 1912 – but he always regarded him as his chief mentor. At Shepherd’s Bush during
the 1940s, Carter had admired the expressionist flourishes in Bryan’s sketches (both designers were awed by Andrejew); he also respected Bryan’s ability to command a production. The two men finally worked together in 1956, on the Bryan-produced and scripted *The Spanish Gardener*. Carter always recalled this as a highpoint in his career; a rare moment when the concerns of the art department were intimately understood by the front office. He could not say the same of *Anne of a Thousand Days*. This film was produced by Hal Wallis for Universal and Carter felt constantly undermined by the Burbank veteran. Ceilings were removed because of Wallis’s fear, unfounded by 1969, that the cinematographer would not be able to light the sets. Carter was also outraged by Wallis’s insistence that every detail on the sets should be shown. The designer found the resultant deep focus photography to be ‘not very conducive to an artistic product’. Nonetheless, Carter produced some exceptional work. The locations – at Hever Place, Penshurst Palace and elsewhere – blended well with the large Pinewood creations; notably in Carter’s sizeable re-creation, after Holbein, of Greenwich Hall.27

In essence, *Anne* was caught between two desires: Wallace wanted an old-style costume picture, but Carter knew that public taste (and studio technique) had changed. No such ambiguities attached themselves to the David Lean period trilogy. *Lawrence of Arabia, Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan’s Daughter* had their existential moments, but they were all planned as epics. Lean lamented after *Lawrence* that he had ‘become a big film man’, but he knew he couldn’t help himself. More than any other director, he saw history as a site of escape – to him, controversially, *Zhivago* was about ‘passions, affections ... heartbreaks’, not revolution – and his romantic instincts led him invariably in the direction of heart-stopping visuals.28

*Lawrence* and *Zhivago* were both designed by John Box. Box was a beautifully paradoxical figure. Following early architectural training (at the Polytechnic of North London), he had pursued a successful career in the Royal Armoured Corps; he took part in the Normandy landing and became a colonel at the age of 25 (in 1945). Throughout his life, Box gave the appearance of being a military man – he was precise in his appearance and manner – but he saw life through the eyes of the artist and seemed eternally fascinated by the things that lay beyond this world of appearances. Not surprisingly, Box too was a great fan of Bryan and it was the experience of seeing *Great Expectations* – and his finding upon demobilisation that trained architects were called upon to do little more than ‘design public lavatories’ – that led him to pursue a career as an art director. Consequently, he went to work as a draughtsman at
Pinewood in 1948. Box’s career developed rapidly from that point and he achieved his first art director credit in 1954 on the Bryan-produced *Million Pound Note*. He then went to design some of the big runaway films of the period, including *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) and *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958).

Box was a very practical art director (like others he credited Dillon and Vetchinsky with teaching him about the constructional realities of design), but his style was marked by a special feeling for line and atmosphere. Box did not regret his architectural training. He believed in the precise use of lines – ‘great draughtsmanship’ – and he also felt that his grounding in architecture taught him ‘never to be arbitrary’. At the same time, Box believed that every line had to be drawn self-consciously, subordinated to the highly specific demands of the film. Repeatedly, he stressed that the designer was ‘designing for people’ – director, audience, most importantly actors – and that ‘the all important factor is atmosphere’. Despite his glamorous credits, Box denied that he was primarily a designer of big pictures (the relatively modest *Man for All Seasons* was one of his favourite films); in every case, his aim was to use all aspects of mise-en-scène as the means of extending the emotional range of the story. Box placed particular emphasis on the human
elements within the frame; revealingly, he wrote of his exquisite designs for Auda’s camp at Wadi Ramm in Lawrence: ‘We must get [the Bedouins] to pitch their tents to give us pattern and design.’

The Columbia-financed Lawrence was a prodigious production; during its 20 month production, costs rose from $3m to $20m. This gave the lie to any thoughts that all-location films were cheaper – there again, Lean was not greatly preoccupied with the relative costs. His 1957 epic Bridge on the River Kwai (a.d.D. Ashton) had sold him on the idea of ‘focussing closely on the situation of one man ... placed by fate in an interesting locality’. Box was in favour of shooting Lawrence in real desert locations. From an early phase in the production, he saw the possibility of using the shifting landscapes as the means of suggesting Lawrence’s ‘efforts to find a fundamental philosophy’; he would underscore Lawrence’s sense of despair by making his robes thinner as the film progressed (this to suggest the philosopher-soldier’s increasing ethereality). Box also became entranced by the contrasting natural shapes that he found in the main locations in Jordan (Jebel Tubeiq, Jafir, Wadi Rumm), Morocco (Ourzazate) and Almeria. The rock formations and horizons seemed to Box to form a huge natural set, which ‘helped to extenuate Lawrence’s very personal problem’.

Lawrence of Arabia included some traditional art direction. Three hundred houses were built in Almeria to represent the town of Aquaba: Some Moorish buildings were adapted at Sevilla to represent various settings, including the Ducque de Alba’s palace; on a much smaller scale, Box lampooned the belligerent General Murray by dressing his office with military paintings, complete with absurdly inflated guns. But ultimately, Lawrence was a film of the desert and Box achieved his most memorable work within the ‘awe inspiring and fascinating’ mudflats at Jafir. It was here that Lawrence (Peter O’Toole) first met Ali (Omar Sharif) as he approached, from a distance, through a mirage. Box reasoned that a filmed mirage was a contradiction in terms (‘It ceases to be a mirage.’). Consequently, he laid lines of black and white pebbles to ‘concentrate’ the eye of the viewer as Ali approached on his camel. Photgrapher Freddie Young dismissed Box’s lines as ‘art department bullshit’, but the designer and director were convinced that they brought shape to the scene.

In any event, Lawrence of Arabia marked the fullest realisation to date of the location setting ideal. Lean, Box and Young composed every frame and the exteriors were pretty as pictures. The $15m Doctor Zhivago was a touch more traditional in its design approach and it had 117 built sets. To some extent these were forced upon the production
team. Initially, producer Carlo Ponti wanted to film Zhivago in authentic settings in Russia. Unsurprisingly, the Russian authorities took a dim view of Boris Pasternak's novel and declined Ponti permission to shoot on its soil. Lean and Box were consequently obliged to travel 36,000 miles around Europe and North America looking for suitable locations. Ultimately some scenes were shot 75 miles from the Russian border at Joensuu, Finland; here, Box staged the Siberian railway scenes, using state-owned trains which were altered slightly to fit the period. Otherwise, the bulk of filming was done in two Spanish locations, at Madrid and Soria.32

Spain offered a number of advantages to Lean and Box. Labour was plentiful (and cheap); the country also offered the prospect of farmland, mountains and snowy wastes. Two of Box's settings stood out: the Moscow streets and the house at Varykino. The former was a bravura composition, built over ten acres on an old rubbish dump in the Madridian suburb of Canillejas. Box employed 780 construction workers to build his detailed set which listed among its many features the Kremlin, a tram line, a church and a statue of Alexander II on horseback. Huge amounts of construction materials were consumed in the four months building period including 135 miles of tubular steel, 11,600 square feet of glass, 92,000 feet of vermiculite (the new lightweight concrete substitute) and 57,600 pounds of paint. Some of the paint was used to alter the street signage and shop fronts during filming. The story of Zhivago stretched over three decades and Box found he had to alter the lettering to signal the changes that occurred in the Russian alphabet from 1905.33

The massive Moscow street scenes testified to the ability of Box and his team (chiefly art director Terry Marsh) to organise large, realist work. In contrast, Varykino was an imaginative composition. Box's references for the house were unusual: He based the exterior on an image that he chanced to find on a Russian stamp; spookily, the frozen interior was prompted by his memory of the famous image of Captain Scott lying dead in his Antarctic cabin. Box used these visual cues for his evocative paintings of Varykino, which pictured the house standing bravely in long shot amidst a deathly snow storm. Ironically, Box experienced great difficulty in building the elements into his finished set. The Spanish mountain location of Soria was chosen for its legendarily heavy snow falls, but no snow fell for Box. Consequently, he had to whitewash the neighbouring bushes to suggest the flurries, further dressing the house and grounds with white marble dust. The chilly interiors of Varykino were suggested by icicles and sheets of ice to the windows which were made from candle wax.34
Following Zhivago, Box left Lean to pursue a new career as a Bryan-styled producer/designer. In the event, he produced only one film (The Looking Glass War 1969, a.d.T. Marsh) but he did create further extraordinary sets, notably for the musical Oliver! (1968). Box’s Doré-inspired Bloomsbury Square and connecting London streets covered 5.5. acres at Shepperton and carried some unusual practical elements (one house was built in full, outside and in). Meanwhile, the design duties on Lean’s last historical picture of the period – Ryan’s Daughter – were given to one of Box’s former assistants, Stephen Grimes. Grimes was a remarkable artist; his paintings were clear but never pedantic, marked by a strong feeling for light and other natural phenomena. Grimes was also an excellent sketch artist and it was this gift that first brought him to the attention of film producers. In 1945, Alexander Korda contracted the 17-year-old Grimes to provide sketches for the large productions at Denham. Subsequently, Grimes developed a close relationship with the American director John Huston, producing sketches and storyboards for Moby Dick (1956, p.d.G. Drake). It was Huston who first engaged him as a full art director, on Heaven Knows Mr Allison (1957). Grimes then designed a number of films on either side of the Atlantic (including The Misfits 1961) prior to becoming an associate art director on Lawrence of Arabia.

Lean suggested during filming that he did not see Ryan’s Daughter as ‘an epic in the popular sense of casts of thousands and costly sets’; this was just as well, perhaps, given his knowledge that MGM saw the film as a ‘make or break’ venture for their flagging British wing. Nonetheless, Grimes supervised some major building work on location. Kinrary was built from scratch by 200 Irish craftsmen over 8 months in the Autumn/Winter/Spring of 1968 and 1969. Hundreds of tons of slate and stone were used to make the 43 houses, church and school. A bleak pocket of the Dunquin Peninsula was thus transformed, to the general delight of local tradesmen (after filming, one ironmonger lamented the fact that Ryan had only one daughter). Ryan’s Daughter also led to a boom for the regional tourist industry. At the same time, the film – along with the other major Irish-based production of the period, Alfred the Great – suggested some of the problems that were associated with the modern phenomenon of British-American runaway production. The Irish government hoped that the country might gain a new village in the wake of Ryan’s Daughter, but the stone cottages proved to be useless as dwellings because of the huge cost of installing mainline services. Following consultations with the local council, Lean ordered the destruction of Kinrary; even then, Peter Lennon of The Observer found that Ireland was
rapidly becoming ‘a dumping ground for the debris of other people’s film-making’.36

Designing the Future: Science Fiction

The first British-American science fiction films of the 1960s followed a familiar pattern. MGM’s *Village of the Damned* (1960, a.d.I. King) and Columbia’s *The First Men in the Moon* (1964, a.d.J. Blezard) were cheaply made in the spirit of 1950s Hollywood ‘B’ productions. But a few ambitious sci-fi films emerged during the decade which were very much part of the times. In 1966, David Robinson noted that printed sci-fi had moved from its ‘Gothick [sic] period’ to become ‘the most consistently philosophical kind of popular literature’ (emphasis in original). The changes were manifested in British-American science fiction films. The Stanley Kubrick sci-fi pairing – *Dr Strangelove* (1964) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) – and the Francois Truffaut-directed *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) were unusually reflective. The sets of Ken Adam, Tony Masters and Syd Cain matched the pensive mood, responding (with general success) to the message, whether fretful or Utopian.37

Universal’s $1.5m production of *Fahrenheit 451* was the most straightforward sci-fi film of the period. Even then, it had its share of complexities. Truffaut disliked sci-fi, which he found to be ‘too far from reality, too arbitrary in its events’. Consequently, he set out to film Ray Bradbury’s short story as a ‘super simple story’ about the modern mediated world with ‘nothing portentous about it’ (albeit with a quirky subtext on the theme of narcissism). He also sought to avoid the gee-whiz atmosphere that was generally associated with sci-fi cinema. Truffaut ordered that *Fahrenheit 451* should show ‘the world as we know it, but with [only] a slight anticipation in time’ and he also introduced some knowing anachronisms – telephones from silent movies, Carole Lombard dresses and a fire engine recalled from Frank Capra’s film *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) – in order to disrupt expectations of the genre.38

It was left to Syd Cain to make scenic sense of it all and he enjoyed mixed success. By 1966, Truffaut was coming out of his essentialist locations phase (he no longer preached that films had to be shot ‘in front of walls that are dirty for real’). Nevertheless, *Fahrenheit 451* featured a great deal of footage gathered within the modernist architectural environs of Roehampton and Maidenhead (with the monorail scenes shot at Chateauneuf-dur-Loire, France). In addition, Cain created some sets from the buildings at Pinewood, including a street scene made from a corner of the studio compound and a fire station entrance fashioned
from the doorway to Stage H (dressed with copper foil and salamander motifs). Cain also adapted a section of Black Park to form the book men’s camp. Truffaut fussed greatly over the studio interiors. He found Cain’s fire station to be ‘enchanting’; one instance where his aim was achieved of ‘making out-of-the-ordinary scenes look ordinary and everyday scenes look abnormal’. But Truffaut was less happy with the domestic interiors. For some reason, he wanted Montag (Oscar Werner)’s apartment to have an ‘ancient modern’ feeling; instead, Truffaut felt saddled with ‘a rather good-looking middle-class interior’.39

In sum, Truffaut desired a sci-fi film which was stateless, naive and which, above all, avoided the current vogues for ‘James Bond, Courrèges, Pop Art and Godard’. Cain was probably onto a loser and the sets did not register well. Montag’s bungalow was a timid conception, marked by depressing brown veneers and ostensive department store furniture. Cain’s large wall-mounted television (or ‘wallset’) was a neat idea, so were the automatic doors (although, typically, these were let down by contemporary door handles). The overall palette was also depressingly uniform, despite Truffaut’s aim to ‘have fun’ with colour. The dominant browns and greys performed a function in so far as they hinted at a future society that had lost its soul, but they didn’t make for pleasurable viewing.40

The two Stanley Kubrick films were more assured visually; fundamentally auteurist productions which demonstrated the value of an overarching artistic vision. In a way, Kubrick’s career predicted the auteur politics of the New Hollywood, but at a distance of 2,000 miles. He left Hollywood in the early 1960s, as the means of escaping the still-powerful studio ‘front offices’; from Lolita (1962, a.d.W.C. Andrews) on, Kubrick became a leading player in the American trend, as identified by Penelope Houston, of ‘using a good deal of British talent to develop an international cinema’. As everyone knows, Kubrick was an erratic talent – fitful, fretful and prone to maddening flights of fancy – but he was also fearsomely determined. In the end, it was this that brought a striking aesthetic unity to Dr Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb and 2001: A Space Odyssey. Kubrick did not have a strong grasp of design technique but he had a supernatural ability to pull together the myriad elements of a production. In the process, the sets for the Kubrick sci-fi films provided points of certainty within a personal philosophical storm.41

The Kubrick philosophy of the 1960s could be summed up in one line: the end of the world is nigh – we had better find another one. The Columbia-financed Dr Strangelove offered a dystopian vision of a slightly
future world. The film was based on a serious 1958 novel about nuclear war, Peter George’s *Red Alert*, but a jittery Kubrick found that he could face the subject only if it was treated with some humour. The result was a very black comedy, the humour of which was said by Kubrick to come from ‘the depiction of everyday human behaviour in a nightmarish situation’. In other words, and this became a familiar Kubrick theme, he wanted to posit the routine elements of everyday existence (the things we term ‘civilisation’) against the collective psychological undercurrents. To this end, Kubrick offered that he wanted *Dr Strangelove* to be ‘a really truthful movie’, the message of which ‘has to be completely entwined with a sense of life as it is, and has to be got across through a subtle injection into the audience’s consciousness’.

Left to his own devices, Kubrick may well have opted for perfectly realistic settings, but he had latterly been impressed by Adam’s quirky sets for *Dr No* (happily, Adam himself was an affirmed fan of Kubrick’s 1957 *Paths of Glory*). Adam got Kubrick’s point about reality, but he took it in a different direction. The Kubrick/Adam relationship quickly became akin to the relationship in the human mind between the left and right sides of the brain: Kubrick was the ‘left’, all linear and logical; Adam was the right, instinctive and spontaneous. Adam was pleased to
call Kubrick ‘the most fascinating and most charismatic person’ that he had ever known personally and he regarded *Dr Strangelove* as his most important assignment. But there were distinct problems attached to being Kubrick’s spontaneous side, as he explained:

I think that he had an instinctual side, but there is conflict in his own mind the whole time, that even if he has the right instinct, or if he feels that someone else has the right instinct, he has to intellectually be able to justify it, to prove it. And that is soul-destroying, I mean, not only for the artist but for him as well.

To Adam, Kubrick was a blessing and a curse. He valued Kubrick being at his shoulder, challenging him to dream up new ideas; he also felt that the director had ‘an incredible visual eye’ (Kubrick was a photographer of some note.) But Kubrick was also a world champion pedant, who, as scriptwriter Terry Southern averred, ‘scarcely let as much as a trouser pleat go unsupervised’. Inevitably, working closely with Kubrick meant that you were drawn into his complex psychological world (the more so if, like Adam, you also drove him into work each day). Adam didn’t emerge unscathed – during *Strangelove* he developed eczema and ‘lived on tranquilisers’ – but he also felt that Kubrick pushed him to produce his very best work.43

The sense of push and pull between left and right brain was felt throughout *Strangelove*. Adam included some realistic ingredients at Shepperton. Ripper (Sterling Hayden)’s office was sober, matched by realistic corridors beyond; the B-52 bomber interior was an accurate reconstruction, based on references from *Flight* and *Jane* magazines. But the staunch Adam got much of his own stuff in. Turgidson (George C. Scott)’s bedroom was an authentic Adam creation, built around sleek modern lines and making audacious use of a large mirror (a boon to the resident narcissist). Best of all was the scenic centrepiece of the war room. This famous set drove Adam almost insane at its conception. Kubrick initially agreed Adam’s plan to build the set on two levels, but at the crucial hour he changed his mind, reasoning (correctly) that a second tier would present him with the problem of having to generate dramatic business for supernumerary extras. So, Adam had to think of something else and he fell back on his love for the circle placed against a sloping line. Actually, there were two strong circles, one made by the huge table, the other formed by the ceiling. These served to compress the scene in eerie fashion; as Adam recalled, the war room had ‘a claustrophobic effect on anyone who was working or acting on it’. These round lines
contrasted beautifully – or, rather, horribly – with the sloped line of the wall, which carried large maps with flashing lights. Kubrick congratulated Adam on creating an environment which felt like a hellish cross between a fall-out shelter and a casino.\(^{44}\)

Adam was incensed at one point that Kubrick denied him a master shot of his beloved war room. (Adam has often cited this as his personal favourite creation.) But he was forced to concede that Kubrick was right to reveal the set by degree; in the final analysis, the comic-drama of \textit{Strangelove} was about the personal vices of omnipotent people and there was little need for grand establishing shots. \textit{2001} was a different matter. This £10.5m space epic was derived from Arthur C. Clarke’s short story \textit{The Sentinel} and it was planned by Kubrick and Clarke to be a ‘majestic visual experience’ which took an affirmative attitude towards science and scientific progress. The tight close-ups and obfuscating shadows of \textit{Strangelove} would be abandoned in favour of polemical spectacle. Kubrick wanted the visuals to declaim the message that science ‘will transform our civilisation, as the voyages of the renaissance brought about the end of the Dark Ages’\(^{45}\).

The art department of \textit{2001} was led by Tony Masters, who was engaged to the project in April 1965, following a flat refusal from a once-bitten Ken Adam. The 36-year-old Masters was not from the front ranks of British design; till \textit{2001} he was known for his art direction of routine fare such as \textit{Dentist on the Job} (1961) and \textit{The Day the Earth Caught Fire} (1961). But producer Victor Lyndon, who recommended Masters to Kubrick, knew that Masters was an excellent draughtsman, who had a rich experience of organising studio-based films; Masters had worked in films since the 1930s and achieved his first art director credit in 1956. These technical gifts were of greater use to Kubrick than Adam’s imaginative flourishes, on a picture which Kubrick conceived from the start as the ultimate in film realism. The director said repeatedly that he wanted \textit{2001} to be an emotional experience, but he reasoned that audiences would feel alienated by unreal settings: ‘It is very rare to find anyone who can become emotionally involved with an abstraction.’ A dispassionate attitude to design was guaranteed by Kubrick’s hiring of two former NASA boffins to work alongside Masters. The German Harry Lange and American Frederick Ordway were close friends, who had both worked at the Marshall Space Flight Centre, Alabama. They worked on \textit{2001} from the start in February 1965, advising on every scientific aspect. As Ordway summarised, ‘We insisted on knowing the purpose and functioning of each assembly and component.’ Masters welcomed the scientists’ input; he affirmed that Lange was a ‘stabilising influence’
who prevented him and Kubrick from ‘going beserk’ in the usual sci-fi manner.46

2001 was probably the most logical sci-fi film of all time. Masters, Lange and Ordway did a huge amount of preparatory work prior to the start of shooting in December 1965 – Ordway turned up to the MGM studios with 20 trunks of notes (at one point, his American bosses dubbed the Borehamwood Studios ‘Nasa East’). Kubrick and Clarke spoke expansively of a spiritual dimension to 2001, but they wanted to demonstrate God’s existence by scientific means; Clarke declared that the film was a ‘realistic myth’ about everyday life. Consequently, everything within the frame had to have a logical rationale, right down to the design of the drinking glasses and wristwatches of the future. The left side of Kubrick’s brain was thoroughly triggered, to galling effect for the design staff around him. Masters found that the director had poor powers of visualisation when it came to sets and props; consequently, he had to hide items that were in the process of being made for fear that Kubrick would summarily reject them. Kubrick would also fret over minor details, such as the colour of the moon sand for the opening sequence (90 tons of this unimaginable substance ended up being washed), the design of the monolith (14 were made) and the unseen engineering details. Masters’ art director John Hoesli was so exasperated by Kubrick’s ‘endless questioning’ about the space hibernation system that he ‘had to shout out in mid-stream, “look, Stanley, I don’t know!”’.47

Masters’ department turned out two key sets for 2001; Space Station 5 and the Discovery space craft. The first was 150’ long and 40’ high and was built with sloping floors to suggest a circular shape to the station (based on a design that had once been proposed by Lange and Ordway’s former boss, Werner von Braun). Masters designed the black lettering and coloured accessories to create a ‘Mondrian effect’ within the reception areas. He also cleverly extrapolated contemporary design and commercial trends. The waiting lounge of Space Station 5 offered souvenirs of the kind found in the expanding airports of 1965; a stall sold moon rock, space dolls and postcards of moon craters. Masters’ furniture also extended contemporary design trends, the seats in the waiting area being a sort of comfy rendering of Arne Jacobsen’s stacking ant chairs. The £750,000 set of the Discovery was the most substantial British studio engineering feat since Junge’s A Matter of Life and Death. The centrifuge was also built by Vickers Armstrong and it was 38’ in diameter and 10’ wide (it weighed 40 tons). Masters compared the huge contraption to a pair of coffee tin lids, but it was more like a ferris wheel; the giant device was designed to rotate at speeds of up to...
3 m.p.h. Kubrick’s unit shot for six weeks within the *Discovery* in very trying conditions. Lighting and set dressing were tricky within the cramped environs; also, technicians had to wear safety helmets to protect them from the pieces of debris (such as exploding light bulbs) that showered down from the monstrous creation.48

*2001* had some philosophical flaws. The view of human progress was unabashedly technologically deterministic. What’s more, human/technological progress was seen to lie in the hands of multi-national corporations; *2001* was endorsed by a host of companies – including Whirlpool, General Electric, IBM, PanAm – and it carried an implicit message that capitalism will always find a way. Strangely, *2001* was also not the greatest set design spectacle. The zeal for realism strangled the imagination of the art department and yielded clinical sets that somehow looked better in the stills than in motion. Nonetheless, *2001* was a key film in the history of British film design. Uniquely, it had three production designers – Masters, Lange and Ernie Archer – all of whom had distinct functions. (Archer created the ‘Dawn of Man’ sequences in Independent Frame manner using front projection, small bits of set and large transparencies.) Moreover, the sheer scale of the production meant that *2001* functioned like the British *Metropolis*, providing valuable experience for a new generation of designers, including Alan Tomkins, Brian Ackland-Snow, Anton Furst and John Graysmark. More than anything, *2001* demonstrated the pulling power of special effects – the film had no stars to speak of – and, in this way, suggested one future direction for runaway American film production; British studios could provide a service function for Hollywood. In 1969, Andrew Lumsden wrote of Tom Howard, Wally Veevers and the other British veterans who, with American experts Douglas Trumbull and Con Peterson, had created the space worlds of *2001*: ‘In their joint abilities lie the prospects for the British film industry in the 1970s.’49

Postscript: The Outsider-Insider Vision of Joseph Losey

In May 1966, a British film producer told *Variety*: ‘We have a thriving film production industry in this country which is virtually owned lock, stock and barrel, by Hollywood.’ The figures supported his claims; by 1968, *Kinematograph Weekly* estimated that over 90 per cent of British production was American financed. However, there were some important anomalies, including one design film of great note. *The Servant* (1963) was financed, for £141,000, by Elstree Distributors (the Grade
Organisation and ABPC) in partnership with the filmmakers themselves. Released one month after the epochal *Tom Jones* and just a few months before *A Hard Day’s Night, The Servant* refuted the mid-Atlantic visions of British society. It portrayed Britain as being not so much swinging as confused and riven with class conflict; at the same time, it avoided New Wave style celebration of authentic working-class life. *The Servant* stood apart and it provided a unique outsider-insider’s view of the contemporary British scene: Intriguingly, the film was directed and co-produced by an American ex-Pat, Joseph Losey.50

Losey was not the standard American abroad. He came to Britain, in 1953, after being blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee and proceeded to create a highly personal body of work (albeit initially under an assumed name). Losey saw *The Servant* as the opportunity to fully express himself; he observed that it was ‘the only picture I have made in my life where there was no interference from beginning to end’. Amongst other things, the film – which was scripted by Harold Pinter from a novel by Robin Maugham – allowed Losey to pursue his ideals of production design. From his first British film, *The Sleeping Tiger* (1954, a.d.J. Stoll), Losey had been frustrated by the conventional standards of design that he encountered amongst the art directors provided by the studios and the Association of Cinema and Television Technicians. Typically, he denounced Ralph Brinton, the designer of *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1957), as a studio stalwart ‘who would build a set and then say to a director “Now here’s where you put the camera because in this position you get the maximum benefit of the set”’. John Stoll, Bernard Sarron (*Time Without Pity* [1957]) and Edward Carrick (*Blind Date*, 1959) were decried on similar terms (the latter characterised Losey as a ‘weirdy’). In contrast, Losey wanted his designer to be a chief interlocutor, who assumed a prime role in establishing the visual tone(s) of the film, mapping out dramatic spaces and even developing characters.51

Losey developed his ideal of ‘pre-design’ with Richard MacDonald. The Royal College of Art graduate MacDonald regarded himself primarily as a visual artist: He remarked, ‘I am a painter ... a painter who spends far too much time working in the cinema’; he also observed of his craft that ‘someone who can’t draw isn’t a designer, they’re a chooser’. MacDonald first met Losey when the American was freshly arrived in Britain. The artist, who was working as an art teacher in Camberwell at the time, was recommended to Losey as someone who could help with sketches for his first British project. This was crucial news to the director, who was anxious to establish in Britain the kind of relationship
that he had latterly enjoyed in America, working with the cartoonist John Hubley; Losey admitted that ‘I always needed a sounding-board, somebody ... to hear my own ideas and ... test them or reject them in the telling.’ However, there were problems using MacDonald in such a role. For one thing he was very gainfully employed; from the mid-1950s, MacDonald developed a highly successful career in television advertising (working in London and New York for BBD & O, MacDonald became a genuine MadMan). Moreover, for many years, MacDonald was denied ACTT membership as a fully fledged art director – The Servant was MacDonald’s first British-made film as credited production designer. Consequently, between 1954 and 1963, Losey and MacDonald had to work by a kind of subterfuge, meeting after studio hours to discuss the problems of the production in hand, the artist/interlocutor making sketches for the guidance of the frequently chagrined studio art director. (For political reasons, Losey would sometimes pass off sketches as his.)

Of course, the term ‘pre-design’ was tautological and, as Losey later conceded, inherently meaningless. Nonetheless, The Servant showed the benefit of Losey and MacDonald’s extensive sketching sessions. The Shepperton-built sets, whilst relatively small, allowed for extraordinary camera movement (including some circular tracking shots). The talks also helped to nail the minutiae of character, as revealed in the sets; at the time, Losey and MacDonald were developing an ideal of ‘selective reality’, planning lighting and props to direct the eye towards crucial elements of mise-en-scène. The Servant had a simple plot: A recently bereaved upper class young man, Tony (James Fox) buys a house in Chelsea and employs a servant, Barrett (Dirk Bogarde); the devious underling then contrives to reverse the master-servant relationship. But the simple premise allowed Losey to make some pungent observations on themes of personal entrapment and contemporary relationships between status and taste – these themes all underscored superbly by MacDonald’s extraordinary sets.

The chief set represented Tony’s house at Royal Avenue, Chelsea. This four storey creation was conceived by Losey as a kind of upright conch shell, built around MacDonald’s elaborate spiral staircase. This ran up the centre of the house, from the basement up to the, as Losey described, ‘final trap’ of Vera’s bedroom. (Sarah Miles’ character played a crucial role in the degradation of Tony.) MacDonald said that the house wrapped around the stairway just as a shell is built around a snail and the whole ‘entity’ was devised to suggest futile ‘circular movements’. At the same time, the Iago-like Barrett was provided with numerous means...
of exit and entry; MacDonald provided a superfluity of doors including three to Tony’s bedroom and a sardonically funny exit concealed within a bookcase. The general feeling of imprisonment was further underlined by the disintegration of the house throughout the film. Cinematographer Douglas Slocombe devised a four-phase lighting scheme, which included periods of visual ‘excitement’ and doomy chiaroscuro. Simultaneously, MacDonald provided a ‘refurbished and properly furnished’ house which subsequently ‘closed in on itself’ and became marked by detritus and dead flowers.53

Losey was coy about the meanings which inhered to Pinter’s script and MacDonald’s des-res prison. Repeatedly, he suggested that both Tony and Barrett were destroyed by their sin of trying to live by ‘false and obsolete standards’. But the tragedy was clearly Tony’s. Losey and MacDonald conceived the young man as being ‘Fourth generation Harrods’, a deracinated toff who was lost in a world of changed class expectations. Tony had a paternalistic sense of noblesse oblige (he harboured daft post-imperialist dreams to build a jungle city for displaced natives) but he lacked his father’s aristocratic sense of self-assuredness. This left him vulnerable to Barrett, in particular on the battleground of taste. Importantly, the revised script of The Servant of January 1963 carried many annotations from Losey which were devoted to the key relationships between status and taste. Between pages 16 and 17 Losey added Barrett’s crucial line (delivered archly to Tony): ‘the simple and classic is always the best’. Elsewhere, Losey suggested Susan (Wendy Craig)’s clumsy mention of Barrett’s white Italian butler’s gloves; on page 28, he also appended a remark concerning Barrett’s linkages between ‘taste and fashion’ (this in response to Pinter’s brilliant line concerning the current chic-ness of ‘mandarin red and fuchsia’).54

John Russell Taylor enthused that Losey derived ‘every last ounce of value’ from MacDonald’s house. This was quite right. The Servant was a design-led film on the subject of domestic design and the relationships between the two areas were suggested in compelling fashion. MacDonald would go on to further design victories with Losey – his Bridget Riley – inspired interiors would lift the otherwise hopeless adventure Modesty Blaise (1967) and he built an entire house on location at Capo Caccia, Sardinia for Boom! (1968) – but The Servant endured as his British masterwork. The rooms of the house were designed to disorientate; at the same time, MacDonald built them carefully to allow for precise character and camera movement. In toto, The Servant demonstrated his creed that the artist had to strive for the audience to ‘actually feel the space ... feel fabrics ... feel rooms’.55
The Servant was a forward-looking film in a number of ways. Broadly, it showed what could be achieved on a small budget; in the classic European art film manner, Losey found that he had creative freedom just so long as he shot quickly and cheaply. This was an important consideration at a time when the British film industry was staking its future on what some (notably the technical unions and the British Federation of British Film Makers) thought was a temporary whim on the part of Hollywood companies. A Kinematograph Weekly headline of August 1966 carried a key question for British filmmakers: ‘What happens when it’s Swinging Reykjavik?’ The American companies never did head for Iceland, but they did curtail their British operations in order to focus on the latest trends back home. The withdrawal of American capital had inevitable and chronic effects for the British film industry. However, the perennial atmosphere of financial uncertainty also led to isolated pockets of creativity, as some new auteur directors established themselves on picture-by-picture deals. Some of the best design work in the subsequent decades emerged from the fragile oeuvres of the new directors of mise-en-scène, Pictorialist Directors such as Ken Russell, Terry Gilliam and Derek Jarman.
chapter 8

Pictorial Design

The withdrawal of American money in the late 1960s left the British film industry with a large hole that it had little chance of filling. Writing in June 1969, a disappointed Bryan Forbes described the native industry as ‘a garden filled with half rotted ambitions ... our infrequent blooms cross-pollinated with alien strains’. Things got worse, thereafter. By 1974, American funding had decreased to just $2.9m, as compared to the 1968 peak figure of $31.3m. At the same time, the American financial invasion of the 1960s greatly inflated British production costs. During the boom years, American companies had been prepared to pay high salaries to British talent of all kinds; a worried Peter Rogers observed in 1970 that ‘this inflation has left a lot of people up there. And they can’t get down again’. The combination of increased costs and reduced funds led inevitably to reduced ambitions on the part of the British film industry during the 1970s and 1980s. But the fracturing of British film finance also led to the emergence of a new group of British auteur directors. Strikingly, some of these placed a high premium on the purely visual aspects of their film craft. During this period, Stanley Kubrick, Ken Russell, Robert Fuest, Terry Gilliam and Derek Jarman developed a pictorialist approach to filmmaking, which privileged the image over the word. Naturally, this led to some important design work from a range of film designers, including Christopher Hobbs, Brian Eatwell, Norman Garwood and John Barry.¹

When the American companies curtailed funding, the British film industry was forced to confront some familiar problems. The domestic cinema audience was small; in 1969, Britain had only 5 per cent of the world market share and film investment was therefore a risky venture for any potential production investors. Those who tried met with, at best, mixed fortunes during the 1970s and 1980s. EMI-MGM’s £4m
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experiment in domestic film production ground to a halt, after two years, in 1971; the chronically troubled British Lion company was finally dissolved in 1976; Lord Grade’s bold internationalist venture, Associated Communications Corporation, founded in 1980, following its £8m losses on *Raise the Titanic*; Jake Ebberts’s similarly ambitious Goldcrest Films achieved great success with its package-financed films (*Chariots of Fire* 1981, *Gandhi* 1982), but it too was wound up by 1987. Patterns of state finance were also fragile during the period. The National Film Finance Corporation was susceptible to conflicting political demands and was able to extend only £4m worth of loans between 1973 and 1981; furthermore, the Eady Levy was suspended in 1985 (two years after the abolition of the protective quota mechanism). The film studios suffered as well. The increased production costs in British studios, combined with often unfavourable exchange rates, meant that American companies felt inclined during much of the 1970s to film their runaway productions elsewhere in Europe; notably, the big costume dramas *Antony and Cleopatra* (1972) and *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1971) were filmed in Spain, albeit using British designers (Maurice Pelling and John Box).2

Certainly, Channel 4 offered a lifeline to British filmmakers upon its launch in November 1982; Ballieu and Goodchild do not exaggerate with their claim that ‘It helped to keep the British film industry alive for much of the 1980s and 1990s’. Nonetheless, British filmmaking after the American economic influx was sporadic and characterised by complex – frequently one-off – funding arrangements. But, in any era, directorial authorship is defined by transcendence of economic vicissitudes: such was the case with the directors under study here. Ken Russell was forced to mortgage his house to finance his pet project *Savage Messiah* (1972); on *Mahler*, he had to radically cut his location plans to cope with the collapse of the British-German funding. Robert Fuest invariably faced funding problems on his idiosyncratic projects, normally relying upon American B-picture financiers such as AIP and New World Pictures to supply his meagre budgets. Gilliam’s early pictures were bedevilled by financial issues, *Time Bandits* and *Brazil* being made in the face of disinterest – and even hostility – from the Hollywood majors. Derek Jarman’s needs were comparatively modest, but he struggled nonetheless. He was entirely inactive in films between 1979 and 1985 and was able to recommence only by adopting cheap filming methods (Super 8 and video) and seeking out piece-meal funding from a range of international sources (British, Japanese, German and, even, Iranian).3
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Clearly, these directors worked in different ways to substantially different budgets, but they were united by being, on the classic terms of auteurism, directors of mise-en-scène. In their individual ways, each director fulfilled Robin Wood’s famous requirement of the auteur ‘to place the actors significantly within the décor, so that the décor itself becomes an actor’. Moreover, all of the directors spoke of the need for visual elements – sets included – to come first. Russell believed that ‘the whole thing is mise-en-scène’; Fuest talked of ‘abandoning the obvious’ in films by use of carefully contrived décor; Gilliam conceded that ‘in my films there’s always a danger of being swamped by the visuals’. But the pictorialist approach was described best by Derek Jarman. He spoke of the need for directors to become more aware of the ‘grammar of design’ and he lamented the wordiness of modern cinema: ‘It [cinema] is silent. There are no words in a movie camera. Someone put them there in the ‘20s’.4

But this is to paint in broad strokes. The directors under consideration are, admittedly, a miscellaneous bunch, whose oeuvres of the 1970s and 1980s are linked only by their primary devotion to the power of images. To get to grips with the specific design practices, we need to consider the oeuvres of the pictorialists, one-by-one.

**Stanley Kubrick and A Clockwork Orange (1971)**

The resurfacing of Stanley Kubrick in this section may seem anomalous, but, then, he was an anomalous talent. Kubrick was a part of the American invasion of the 1960s, but he was also apart from it. As we have seen, the films of the American financial invasion were style and brand-led, and this fact tended to militate against the development of auteur directors. Kubrick was different. The production money from his homeland, extended at a time when Hollywood was, perforce, looking for new directions, had underwritten his directorial freedom during the 1960s and enabled his personalised takes on sci-fi genre. During the 1970s, the wilful Kubrick extended his oeuvre via two films of particular design interest, *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

In a sense, *Barry Lyndon* was the more conventional film. Per se, the all-location shoot was not unusual by 1975, but Kubrick made typically unique use of his real exteriors and interiors – to the profound detriment of his production designer, Ken Adam. By the start of shooting in the winter of 1973, Kubrick was convinced of the dramatic value of
available and source (integrated) lighting. Consequently, Adam had to design the locations in such a way as to minimise the use of studio lighting. More than this, Adam had to respond constantly to Kubrick’s quirky and changeable attitude to historical locations. *Barry Lyndon* was based on a novel – Thackeray’s eighteenth-century *Luck of Barry Lyndon* – but Kubrick wanted his film to serve additionally as a ‘documentary’ of eighteenth-century life. So the real milieux of *Barry Lyndon* were intended to serve both an entertainment and a treatise: on history and perceptions of history. This was a near-impossible brief, particularly when working away from the studio, and Adam was almost destroyed by the experience.

Prior to *Barry Lyndon*, Adam had considered location films to be a simple matter. He remarked earlier in 1973: ‘As a rule I find location shooting to be much simpler ... The function is more of concept and of adaptation rather than in technical know-how.’ These turned out to be famous last words. Adam should not have allowed himself to have been cajoled onto *Barry Lyndon* (Kubrick pressed him into service after another designer had declined) and in the event he found that location modification was the least of it. Kubrick was in a dark phase in his life, following the furore caused by *A Clockwork Orange*. He had received death threats in the post and consequently refused to film beyond a 30-mile radius

of his Elstree home; he told Adam that ‘you never know what’s around the corner’. Inevitably, this accorded badly with his aim to find a full range of authentic eighteenth-century locations. Adam also found that Kubrick’s unhelpful mercurial streak had grown since *Strangelove*. He was consequently obliged to cater to the director’s whims: crucially, to move the whole production to Ireland (where the director felt relatively secure).5

*Barry Lyndon* was an unhappy experience for Adam in all sorts of ways. He could not convince Kubrick of his view that paintings should be regarded as interpretations of the past (and not records, as such); consequently, Kubrick stuck doggedly to his strict references gleaned from contemporary painters such as Gainsborough, Constable, Reynolds, Stubbs and Zoffany. Adam also found that Kubrick had historical blind spots: He wanted the slightest prop to be in period, but wondered nonetheless whether they could use attractive Victorian wallpaper. Adam also encountered problems with house owners on location – some demanded more money, others refused to allow filming over the festive period – and he was constantly vexed by the lack of a script. More than anything, the ever-conscientious Adam took on too much responsibility for *Barry Lyndon*. He knew that Kubrick was psychologically frail and he came to feel responsible for the production. Finally, the director’s decision to close down the production for two weeks pushed Adam too far and he had a nervous breakdown.6

Somehow, but as always happened with Kubrick’s films, *Barry Lyndon* was a remarkably coherent film. Adam’s location montages, including one (for Lady Lyndon’s house) formed from 12 different buildings, worked beautifully. The other locations – filmed at Dublin and Caher Castles, Waterford, Kilkenny, Postdam, York and elsewhere – looked handsome on the screen. A *Clockwork Orange* was a different matter. Here, Kubrick and his production designer John Barry contrived to produce an ugly vision of the future, which was terrifyingly rooted in the present.

John Barry (or ‘Jonathan’ as he called himself at the time to avoid confusion with the like-named Bond composer) was not a front-ranking designer at the time of *A Clockwork Orange*. Following architectural training, he had entered the film industry in 1961, as a draughtsman at Pinewood (on *Cleopatra*). Subsequently, he became Elliot Scott’s assistant at Boreham Wood and attained two minor designer credits. The $2.5m Kubrick assignment was a major boost to his career and, inevitably, he found it to be an arduous rite of passage. Budgetary restrictions meant that the film was shot only partly in a studio (and then
a warehouse which Barry had to convert prior to filming). Predictably, the locations, props and fixtures were subject to Kubrick’s dickering. Barry presented hundreds of photographs of council flats as Kubrick searched for the perfect location home for Alex (Malcolm McDowell); the interiors of the Korova milk bar were created from moveable blocks, designed by Barry to comprise a ‘big Meccano set’ that Kubrick could play with at will. Like Tony Masters before him, Barry found that the director demanded numerous permutations in props, but was then hamstrung by his indecisiveness. Notably, during the shooting of *A Clockwork Orange* Barry made the mistake of presenting Kubrick with a catalogue for a modern furniture exhibition. This led to a nationwide goose chase after exhibits from a latterly dismantled show, as Barry and his colleagues endeavoured to find the perfect items to adorn the ultra-modern home of Mr Alexander (Patrick Magee).

Barry said that the design of *A Clockwork Orange* was anyway complicated by the absence of setting detail in Anthony Burgess’s source novel; in addition, the first person narrative of the book meant that Alex’s personal set dressings had to be conceived from scratch. From another perspective, Barry and Kubrick had great visual latitude and they used this to depressing – and ultimately conservative – ends. Conventionally, the film of *A Clockwork Orange* is conceived of as a radical moment in British film history; a film that was just too challenging for its times and which therefore became embroiled in contemporary moral panics. Actually, *A Clockwork Orange* was the product of a purely personal panic and Barry’s sets did their bit to cement Kubrick’s dyspeptic vision of contemporary Britain. Conspicuously, the futuristic (and recent, 1968) Thamesmead development – home to Alex in the film – was depicted as not just Brutalist but brutal; a dreadful carbuncle *avant la lettre*, festooned with classical murals which were inevitably defaced by local roughs. The interior of Alex’s flat was equally dismissive of working-class culture. This was a mess of clashing colours (silver, blue, yellow, black) and the rooms were filled with awful items; mass art prints, a Bontempi organ, a corner bar. Barry was explicit about the set’s meaning:

> we tried to project the degeneration of modern design to a further degeneracy in the near future ... It was an effort to design the ill-informed taste of intellectually deprived people who rely on commercial interest to form their tastes.

But there was no real sociological subtext. The proletariat were dupes who cluttered their lives with kitsch. Elsewhere, the ‘not-too-distant’ (i.e. contemporary) world was characterised by the demise of old high
cultural standards. The cat lady’s house, as Barry conceded, was
described neutrally in the book as ‘a rather shabby old house’. But he and
Kubrick transformed it to include pornographic prints and a large vinyl
phallus. The latter was described by the resident as ‘a very important art
work’; clearly, in the modern world, pornography was being passed off
as art and the death of old standards could bring only chaos.8

In the designed world of A Clockwork Orange, pornography was every-
where. Memorably, the lurid set for the Korova included statues of naked
women on lighted plinths; these based on Barry’s photographs of actual
models. Presented, blankly, as if for sex, those four women spoke power-
fully of Kubrick’s fears for the modern world. He claimed that A Clockwork
Orange was not ‘primarily or even significantly, a topical, social story’ but
about ‘an aspect of human personality’ (as represented by Alex). He also
remarked that films provided a forum ‘where you can explore things with-
out any responsibility or conscious ego or conscience’. So A Clockwork
Orange was an effusion from the sub-conscious and it was all the more
terrifying for this. In the end, the film amounted to a kind of critique of the
modern world based on the original sin. The vivid sets were a fundamen-
tal part of the horrid fabric and, like Adam, Barry followed his director’s
visions to the letter. Everything was horribly effective.9

**Ken Russell and The Devils (1971)**

In 1975, Ken Russell claimed that ‘there is really no difference between
nuns with no clothes on and tap dancers in goggles. It’s all material’.
Conspicuously, it was all visual material. During the 1970s, Russell was
undoubtedly Britain’s most prominent auteur and his fame was based in
no small part on the purely visual elements within his films; the ‘passion
to shock’ that Gavin Millar observed in his work was built on the crazy
juxtapositions and bold (sometimes crude) symbolic gestures within
Russell’s mise-en-scène. Inevitably, his designers were implicated fully
in his pictorialist campaign. He said that, next to him, the designer was
‘Lord of all he surveys’.10

Russell’s best film was in many ways his most traditional work; The
Devils gloried in singular sets conceived by Derek Jarman, but these
were built in conventional manner at Pinewood. Otherwise, Russell’s
nine British films of the period — starting with Women in Love (1969)
and ending with Valentino (1977) — were characterised by a distinctive
design ethos. This developed organically in response to the economic
variables, but it had three key elements: the use of non-studio design-
ers, mobile design and the metaphorical use of props.
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Russell’s early career was built on his remarkable musical biographies for the BBC, and he maintained a preference for working with small crews from a television background. These included the designers Philip Harrison (designer of Lisztomania 1975 and Valentino), Luciana Arrighi (Women in Love) and Natasha Kroll (The Music Lovers 1970). Harrison, like Assheton Gorton (and also Fuest, Brian Eatwell and Norman Garwood) had trained within the hectic environment at ATV during the 1960s, making a particular mark on episodes of Armchair Theatre and The Avengers; Arrighi and Kroll were both graduates of Richard Levin’s progressive art department at the BBC of the 1960s, which, opposing contemporary trends in British film, abandoned notions of realist design. In addition, the eclectic Russell enjoyed working with designers drawn from theatre and the wider visual arts. Tony Walton was known mainly for his work on the London and New York stage; he was therefore well placed to become a prime interlocutor on Russell’s mise en abîme musical The Boyfriend (1971). Jarman and Paul Dufficey were principally painters at the time of their first contact with Russell (they were also friends) and they both brought an outsider’s vision to the work of the film designer; Russell believed that Dufficey created ‘a new world of decoration’ for Tommy (1975).11

Over time, Russell’s designers developed a mobile design style, based on the use of a few key props within real environments. His zeal for locations was a throwback to his television days, when he would gather ‘a group of friends ... just rush out in a car and start filming’. Filming on location seemed to bring out Russell’s Von Sternberg streak. On Tommy, he caused £500,000 worth of damage when he accidentally set fire to South Parade Pier in Southsea; his team also failed to warn the residents of nearby Fratton of his plan to cause huge explosions in the abandoned Agincourt Road. (The enraged local mayor suggested ‘this Russell man is a damn nuisance’ and accused him of trying to flatten the bits of Portsmouth that the Luftwaffe had missed.) But Russell’s style of location adaptation became a kind of design trademark. On The Boyfriend, Tony Walton created witty deco sets within the derelict Theatre Royal, Portsmouth to underscore the layered themes of the story (Sandy Wilson’s pastiche of a 1920s musical was combined with a pastiche of Busby Berkley film musicals.) For Tommy, Dufficey’s spare props imparted a cartoon-like element to the early holiday camp scenes (filmed on Hayling Island). Best of all, on The Music Lovers Kroll staged a wondrous re-creation of Swan Lake in the grounds of West Wycombe House using sparse pieces of stage scenery.12

No English director to date has gone as far as Russell in using props for metaphorical effect. There were many examples. Tommy had large
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ball-bearings (alluding both to the pinball wizardry of the eponymous hero and to the RAF/munitions backgrounds of his parents); it also had a large statue of Marilyn Monroe, to suggest the false icons of popular culture. For Mahler, the actor-turned-designer Ian Whittaker contrived large busts of the composer’s head to signify his earthly vanity. Such gestures amounted to ‘tuppence coloured banality’ according to a reviewer from Sight and Sound, but Russell argued that modern cinema demanded a new design language. He claimed that his introduction of ‘symbolism into scenes of reality’ allowed him to ‘say two things at once’. The visual metaphors were also part of his anti-realistic campaign. Russell believed in getting the details right on historical films but he also felt that films had to appeal to the collective sub-conscious. Strikingly, the biographical subjects (Mahler, The Music Lovers, Savage Messiah, Valentino) dwelt on the conflicts between the artistic imagination and the consensual real world. In this context, the visual allusions were intended to appeal to something hidden in the viewer, to keep him/her ‘on their toes, alive’.13

Undoubtedly, Russell’s technique was scattershot; with some justification, Private Eye lampooned his style as ‘a trainload of lunatics singing the hallelujah chorus as they plunge to their deaths off the Tay Bridge’. But it was rewarding when it all came together. This point was proven by The Devils. The film was based on fact; the events leading up to the destruction of Loudon, France in 1634 and the burning of its maverick religious leader Father Urbain Grandier. Directly, The Devils was based on John Whiting’s successful play of the same name combined with Aldous Huxley’s novel The Devils of Loudun (1952). Russell had wanted to film the story since 1961, motivated, he said, by its message concerning the ‘lasting impact the individual has, even when he loses’. The Devils subsequently became a kind of quest for Russell, which survived the early withdrawal of funding by United Artists (it was ultimately financed by Warner Brothers), insuperable censorship problems and a trying 18-week shoot.14

Jarman became involved in The Devils as a result of a chance meeting on a train with a friend of Russell’s (a teacher from the Royal College of Art). Jarman had trained as a stage set designer at the Slade and he had subsequently performed some important work in the theatre, but he had recently decided to concentrate on his own artistic projects. Russell visited Jarman at his docklands warehouse studio and was immediately taken with the artist’s on-going ‘exhibition of cardinals’ capes’; plastic articles fashioned from the detritus of the Thames. By chance, Russell and Jarman were both investigating themes of religious hypocrisy and
they were natural collaborators for *The Devils*. Jarman shortly set about imagining sets for the film based on a range of sources, including the neo-classical French architects Ledoux and Boullee (Jarman had once studied architecture, at King’s College, under Nicholas Pevsner) and the established designer’s favourite, the eighteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni Piranesi. The drawings were informed by long conversations with Russell in a manner which recalled the informal ‘pre-designing’ of Losey and MacDonald; they were subsequently worked up into working plans by the art director George Lack and translated into a three-dimensional model by students at the Central School.¹⁵

A still bewildered Jarman recalled later how he ‘went to Pinewood and was invited to build a city’. He found it to be a hateful experience. Jarman felt alienated within the ‘enormous machine’ of Pinewood; the more so, when the studio veterans dubbed him ‘the artist’. He also disliked the abuses wrought by American studio chiefs (the ‘Hollywood Mafia’), such as the time executives took a bread knife to the model of the city to demonstrate their planned financial cuts. Ken Russell was also difficult to get on with at times: Jarman took a dim view of Russell’s silly additions to the script (notably Louis XIII’s glib aside ‘Bye Bye Blackbird’ as he shot a religious dissenter); Russell was also prone to rages – particularly when he blew up part of the £97,000 Loudun set by mistake (it took ten days to rebuild). More than anything, Jarman hated the hierarchical structure at Pinewood; he was dismayed by the thought that artists were ‘brought together for money, not by a community of interest’.*¹⁶

Nonetheless, in *The Devils*, Jarman’s Loudun was everything. The film was highly traditional in the sense that location shooting and optical effects were minimised; everything took place within the custom-built city (which had the distinction of being the first British set built to metric standards). Russell and Jarman were adamant that the city should avoid Hollywood medievalism – all ‘grunge and grime and crumbling stone’. Instead, their town was a modernist vision, built from white wooden blocks; Russell reasoning that people, in any age, consider themselves to be modernists. The remarkable creation was inspired by two additional references. Not unusually, *The Devils* was influenced by the underground city of Lang’s *Metropolis*; this impressed Russell and Jarman because of its impersonality and Loudon mirrored its size and lack of architectural detail (Jarman merely suggested arches, windows and doorways using prominent lines.) But the unique glazed white bricks were prompted by a standout line from Huxley: ‘The exorcism of Sister Jeanne was equivalent to a rape in a public lavatory.’ Loudun was
therefore conceived as an anti-septic environment which was at once modern and clinical.\textsuperscript{17}

Jarman’s Loudun also underlined the film’s ambiguous attitude towards religion. Father Grandier (Oliver Reed) was heroic, but he was also a philanderer; the nuns were ruthlessly oppressed. In the film, the convent is described as ‘a closed order’ – Jarman took this to mean a prison, rather than a place of refuge. This feeling was underscored by his use of tight, semi-circular arches and brutish black iron grills. In contrast, Grandier’s quarters were tactile, marked by indulgent items such as furs, flowers and secular statues. His modernity, and individualism, was characterised further by the architectural features of his abode. The apartment was created as a circle, which was built around a circular staircase; this was a kind of bat pole, which transported Grandier straight down to the church. By such means, Jarman showed us a man of the moment who was irrevocably shackled to his conservative beliefs.

One scene of The Devils was described in the production notes as ‘a crazy clutter of the medieval mind. Horses’ hooves, human bones, the foetus of a whale’. But the film wasn’t purely a vision from Bosch. The grotesque elements coalesced somehow with the precise architectural features; the whole creation set off by weirdly accurate items from the past (such as dark glasses and green lipstick). The Devils was a challenging film in all sorts of ways and Jarman’s precise sets helped to impose a sense of order. Jarman brought shape to Russell’s shocking passions and in the process – and despite his misgivings – he produced some of the most compelling sets in British film design history.\textsuperscript{18}

Robert Fuest and The Abominable Dr. Phibes (1971)

Robert Fuest is rarely thought of as one of the auteurs of British films. The critical neglect of Fuest, if it can considered as such, is probably attributable to two things: his small oeuvre (he made only eight films between 1968 and 1982, the last in Germany); and the low profile of his films at the time (some suffered from being released as support features). But Fuest’s films were remarkable in many ways. The most celebrated titles – The Abominable Dr. Phibes (1971) and Dr Phibes Rises Again (1973) – made astute connections with the on-going nostalgia craze in British visual and youth culture; Fuest’s films also demonstrated the increased feeling of synergy between film and television technique. Most pertinently, Fuest was a prime (and rare) example of the designer-turned-director and his work demonstrated a consistent devotion to the
power of images. Molly Plowright’s observation of his first film – *Just Like a Woman* (1968, a.d.B. Eatwell) – stood for the rest: ‘It’s the frame that counts ... Each frame has been composed for colour as well as shape.’

Significantly, Fuest came from an art background. He studied art at Wimbledon and had his first painting accepted by the Royal Academy when he was 18 years old. Over time, he also worked as a book and magazine illustrator and as an art teacher, prior to entering television design. Fuest worked at ABC-TV from 1957 – designing for Richard Lester and many others – and then, via *The Avengers*, found the means to combine directing and designing. Starting in 1961, Fuest designed nine and directed eight episodes of the camp crime series. That enjoyment of camp persisted in his subsequent film work. So too did the pure enthusiasm for pictorial values that Fuest found amongst his colleagues who worked on *The Avengers*. The director Peter Hammond was a particular influence. Like Fuest, Hammond was a fan of the great auteurs of mise-en-scène, Lang and Fellini, and he was an inspirational figure. Fuest recalled: ‘[Hammond was] not mad about actors, but [he was] mad about pictures – images.’

As a film director, Fuest continued to take a highly active interest in design. He produced storyboards for all of his films – including the all-location *Wuthering Heights* (1970) – and he sometimes used his initial sketches as the means of luring potential investors. In the case of *The Final Programme* (1973), he installed himself formally as production designer, above the art director Philip Harrison, reasoning that he knew best how to create the elaborate sci-fi sets for the meagre $50,000 dollar design budget (Fuest conceded that this was ‘the most insulting and rotten thing to do to an art director.’) On every film, Fuest maintained an unusually close relationship with his named designers. He had two principal design collaborators: Harrison (the named designer on *Wuthering Heights* and *And Soon the Darkness* 1970) and Brian Eatwell.

Eatwell came from a theatre and TV background. He trained as a stage designer at the Old Vic Theatre School (later on, he would be a founder of the National Youth Theatre), but subsequently went to work at ABC-TV and the BBC. Eatwell entered films in 1967, working on the mid-budget comedies that characterised the late swinging era. On paper, the three Fuest films were also modest assignments, but their startling visuals meant that the designer’s work was conspicuous and Eatwell’s career was boosted by his association with his former colleague in television. Eatwell was frequently name-checked in the reviews for the *Phibes*...
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films and his work was praised in the highest terms in 1976 by the film critic/design aficionado Elliot Stein. He described Eatwell as ‘the first resident genius on the British film scene since the death of Junge’ and extolled his ‘cool, insidiously outrageous ... talent for camp, color and clutter’.\textsuperscript{21}

Each of the Fuest films declaimed his desire to fill the frame with significant detail. Of his nature, Fuest was a hothouse director but, indoors or out, he strove for telling pictorial effects: In the case of Wuthering Heights, he used the authentic Howarth locations to show how Bronte’s characters ‘bleed off, and blend into, that landscape’. The remaining films demonstrated his feeling for unity and spare-ness in design, as well as his rather Adam-like visual humour. In The Abominable Dr. Phibes, unity was maintained across a wide variety of settings by the use of recurring decorative motifs and the clever deployment of plain, coloured backings beyond the windows and doors. The sense of spare-ness was felt elsewhere; Harrison created simple, interchangeable blocks to form every interior set of The Final Programme, otherwise entire Fuest sequences – such as Phibes’ arrival in Egypt of Dr. Phibes Rises Again – were contrived with just a few props set placed within darkened studios at Elstree. Such techniques were cost-effective and they also helped the ethereal atmosphere of the films. The general lack of design fuss also allowed for the funny moments to shine through. Fuest said that he and Eatwell aimed to ‘wrong foot’ the audience with the whimsical elements of the Phibes mise-en-scène, such as the wax heads of victims, Phibes’s face on the pull-down blind in his ancient car or the daft machines of torture. In addition, he and Harrison created dry humour within the nightclub set of The Final Programme, which was conceived as a multi-coloured pinball machine, with transparent balls propelled, internally, by men and women. (Seeing this vision, a visiting Ken Russell exclaimed: ‘Now I know how to do Tommy!’.)\textsuperscript{22}

The Abominable Dr. Phibes was essentially a studio film. A few location sequences were included (Highgate Cemetery, Caldecote Towers) but these were secondary to Eatwell’s splendid sets. Phibes provided a demonstration of the language of design – the lead character didn’t even speak for 31 minutes – and it was a language based very largely on art deco. Fuest maintained that the deco elements were a personal creative decision based on his sense of the match between the time period of the story and contemporary times; he argued that the 1930s were also ‘a tense age trying to wipe away the past’. Actually, the story was apparently set in 1925 – the year of the famous Paris Exhibition of
the Decorative Arts – and the press materials for Phibes stressed the care that was taken to suggest the period:

It is an elaborate production in which particular attention was given to designing sets that emphasise the period – tubular steel furniture, first attempts to streamline frosted lighting, etc – a period that stressed art deco.

Of course, such things were highly modish in 1972. According to Bevis Hillier, the nostalgia craze would not peak until the following year, with the opening of the Biba store in Kensington. So Phibes was hip. The nouveau and deco motifs within the sets echoed similar decorations to be found in modern clothes, home furnishings and – potently – in the lettering on album covers and rock festival posters.23

Fuest and Eatwell’s rendering of deco would not have satisfied the purist; the critic Richard Roszarski summed up Phibes as ‘an art deco anachronistic period horror musical camp fantasy’. The sets were eclectic and impressionistic. Phibes showed some of the links between nouveau and deco; the former elements were seen in the filigree detail around the proscenium archway and also the organic elements in Phibes’s home. Otherwise, the film conflated periods to create a commonsense world of deco. Dr Vesalius (Joseph Cotten)’s house and the hospital interior had streamline moderne windows and decorative chrome features drawn from the mid-1930s; but the doctor’s house also featured earlier elements, including a familiar woman and hound figurine, modelled after the work of Otto Poertzel or Louis Icart. (Humorously, this was echoed in a location scene where Phibes’s female sidekick was seen walking an elegant greyhound.)24

Most reviews of Phibes picked up on the wild sets. Typically, The Times referred to the film’s ‘chrome and veneer smuggery’ and Village Voice described the film as ‘a designer’s dream in the ultimate sense’. The deco sets became part of the modest Phibes brand and many of the elements were carried through into the sequel Dr. Phibes Rises Again, which, in addition, had some ship and ‘plane murals styled after Robert Mallet-Stevens (seen in the ship cabins) and numerous Egyptian decorations (thus acknowledging art deco’s debt to ancient Egyptian art). In a sense, the Phibes films completed a cycle that was initiated with The Knack. Where in 1965, Assheton Gorton decried art deco as being part of a fusty old order, Fuest and Eatwell demonstrated its enduring value. At the same time, they showed how a commercial horror film could be constructed around rich imagery, even as the Hammer aesthetic project was in decline.25
As Fuest remarked later, he and Eatwell were ‘like two art directors on heat!’.

**Terry Gilliam and Brazil (1985)**

Terry Gilliam’s directorial career to date has proceeded through two phases. The period between 1977 and 1985 can be thought of as his ‘British period’; that time when he was able to use his adopted country (Gilliam is American by birth) as his production base. This phase started with *Jabberwocky* and ended with *Brazil* and it saw Gilliam establish his own artistic voice, away from the early strong influence from the Monty Python television comedy team (for whom he was animator, actor and general collaborator). Gilliam’s production budgets also grew sharply during this period, rising from £550,000 for the first feature to almost £15m for *Brazil*; subsequently, they grew further still, forcing the director to become a truly international filmmaker. Throughout, Gilliam has been the Don Quixote of commercial cinema; an undeniable auteur, who has tilted his talents against the orthodox values of Hollywood and the orthodoxies of life that they promulgate. His mise-en-scène is filled with purpose. Gilliam once remarked: ‘The architecture in the film is as much a set of characters as those that speak and wear clothes. All the sets … represent specific ideas.’

Gilliam’s approach to design was developed through his British period. It was uniquely collaborative. Between 1977 and 1985, Gilliam used three production designers – Roy Forge Smith (*Jabberwocky*), Millie Burns (*Time Bandits* 1981) and Norman Garwood (*Brazil*) – but he nurtured a collective approach to design. In 1985, Gilliam spoke of his determination to ‘break down all the hierarchies and destroy all the empires’ within the film studio; at the same time, as a former cartoonist/animator, Gilliam has always been an inveterate designer (‘I can’t not draw stuff and I can’t not say it should be this way’). Gilliam’s designers therefore found themselves having to adjust to a working environment which was highly stimulating and supportive, but which also devolved the designer’s role. Gilliam disliked the modern phenomenon – as exemplified by the sci-fi blockbuster *Bladerunner* (1982, p.d.L.G. Paull) of the auteur designer. Instead, he developed a ‘leapfrog process’, whereby his designers were challenged continually to improve upon his storyboards and sketches. At the same time, Gilliam wanted everyone in the design team to offer ideas for on-going design problems; typically, the abseiling scene of *Brazil* was conceived, on location, by Gilliam and the location manager.

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Gilliam’s mise-en-scène bore clear recurring elements during his British phase. His love of Breughel and Bosch grotesquery was evident in both Jabberwocky and Time Bandits (Gilliam adored the artists’ ‘textures – the mud and shit’); Piranesi was a clear influence over Time Bandits and Brazil. Certain Gilliam motifs – notably plastic and oversized air ducts – also reappeared in the films. But the designers played a key role in materialising the Gilliam vision and building on it. Gilliam preferred to work on location (‘there’s so much reality there to begin with’) and this involved a great deal of adaptation of real buildings; from Jabberwocky onwards his crew carried a standard ‘kit of bits and pieces’ to disguise the locations, which included Bosherston Quarry, Chepstow Castle (Jabberwocky), Raglan Castle and the streets of Bracknell (Time Bandits). Gilliam’s designers also played a central role in creating convincing settings at knockdown prices. Roy Smith recycled a number of standing sets at Shepperton for Jabberwocky, including Box’s London streets of Oliver!, and some buildings that had been built for a German TV production of the Marriage of Figaro. Smith also created some convincing sets from a few props; a castle interior was devised largely from a few rubber flagstones and black velvet. Millie Burns’ sets for Time Bandits were equally cost-effective. The Fortress of Ultimate Darkness was made from a 12’ × 25’ piece of polystyrene and elsewhere sections of set were placed on wheels so that they could be easily switched around to form other sets.29

These techniques were refined for Gilliam’s British grand opus Brazil. This futuristic black comedy was nine months in shooting and made great demands of the production designer Norman Garwood. Garwood had entered films in 1981, following a long career in television design; his first film credit was as art director to Burns on Time Bandits and he subsequently became the named designer on The Missionary (1983). Garwood worked effectively with Gilliam, whom he found to be a ‘very visual director’. He had a similar sense of humour (like Gilliam, he felt that sets could be funny); he was able to respond to the director’s spontaneous demands, and he was an exceptionally capable locations designer. Above all, Garwood had a strong ability to translate Gilliam’s visions into three dimensions. It was all a question of making dreams manifest.30

Brazil was about dreams, both literal (sleeping) and metaphorical (dreams of a ‘better life’). Gilliam had conceived the film whilst sat on Port Talbot beach; somehow, the bleak environs provoked a childhood memory of hearing Arry Barroso’s famous escapist tune ‘Brazil’ and he was struck by the gulf between human desire and achievement; and also
of the factors (such as pop tunes and material goodies) that help to keep the masses in their place. In the film, Sam (Jonathan Pryce)’s sleeping dreams were mainly the preserve of the effects department, but they were anyway less memorable than the visions created by Garwood’s team. Garwood used the basic colour palette of Brazil to signify the difference between dreamscape and oppressive reality; the noir ministerial interiors (modelled after Lang and Caligari) were starkly grey, whereas the outside world was brightly coloured. In many cases, those colours were applied to consumer items. The 1930s Messerschmitt cars, the 1950s Beige kitchen items, the brightly coloured televisions all symbolised the illusions – the false dreams – of modern, consumer society. Despite being set in the ‘other side of now’, the design style of Brazil was avowedly retro: In addition, the computers (actually old ribbon typewriter machines) were fitted with 1960s TV magnifying glasses; many of the rooms had glass bricks (a key decorative feature of the 1930s and 1940s) and Garwood utilised government posters from the 1930s and 1940s. Together, Gilliam intended these retro elements to comprise ‘a twentieth century look’ which lampooned western societies’ ‘dreams of technological progress’.31

Clearly, Brazil was intended as a defence of the individual and the human imagination. The forces of oppression were well characterised in the sets of the Ministry of Information. The exterior was filmed at Croydon Power Station (which also provided the cooling tower used for Sam’s torture). This was matched by Garwood’s set for the foyer which was built, largely from marbled sections of hardboard, on the smallest stage at Lee International studios. This and some other sets were shot through a wide angle lens to give the impression of greater scale. The bombastic vision of the foyer was contrasted with minor office items, which seemed to emerge from an Ealing comedy. The clerks’ pool, constructed within a flour mill at Victoria Docks, had outsized desks as well as high cabinets that were beyond the reach of most employees. Palpably, bureaucracy was not only brutal but terribly inefficient.

The Ministry sets included one other, particularly creepy, feature. The upper floors recalled The Devils in their use of large, white tiles. These were wipe-clean, intended to repel the blood of the common people who were routinely tortured by the higher-ups at the Ministry. For all his expressed love of viscera and mess, Gilliam would clearly agree with Milan Kundera’s assertion that ‘civilisation is built on a denial of shit’. In Brazil, this was expressed also in the air ducts, as seen in the restaurant (actually Mentmore House) and elsewhere. Directly, the massive pipes were based on the Pompidou Centre in Paris and other exoskeletal
‘post modern’ buildings which displayed their workings in the fashionable manner. In the film, the pipes helped to bring unity to the sets and they also symbolised the inefficiency of the government-run Central Services. But Gilliam was more interested in the pipes’ psychological associations. They were ‘viscera … guts … intestines’; the things that usually lurked beneath the surface and which spoke of our determination to contain the unpleasant undercurrents of life.32

Brazil, it should be admitted, lacked a coherent political position. Undoubtedly, the well-off characters were seen to lead privileged lives; Garwood affirmed that Mrs Lowry’s home, built within the National Liberal Club in London, was ‘wonderful and glittery … out of the general standard’. At the same time, the critique of state-run bureaucracies and the extolling of the rights of the individual were eerily (but inadvertently) Thatcherite in tone. However, Brazil was remarkably coherent in visual terms and the noir spirit was carried through to genuinely uncomfortable effect in both the sets and costumes; it painted a convincing picture of a world where escapism offered no prospect of escape. The sets also helped to underscore a universal theme of loss; as Gilliam said of, ‘nostalgia, or melancholy … or things missed’.33

Derek Jarman and Caravaggio (1986)

The pictorial ambitions of the directors under study were necessarily shaped by financial considerations. This was particularly true of Derek Jarman. In 1987, he estimated that his six features had cost less than £1m and he argued always that debates over film aesthetics were futile if they were divorced from considerations of film finance. (Jarman’s contempt for Channel 4 was built partly on his sense of its, as he saw it, bourgeois championing of social realism.) But Jarman was also a romantic artist and his film career was essentially concerned with the struggle to create meaningful images, even if this meant shooting home movies on Super 8 in the company of friends. Jarman hated the ‘mayhem’ of commercial film production; he also felt that, as a painter, he could ‘make something from nothing’. Ironically, perhaps, Jarman recorded his most memorable images on one occasion when he had next to nothing – the BFI-sponsored £475,000 production of Caravaggio (p.d.C. Hobbs).34

Jarman’s talent for low-cost imagery was expressed in his first feature, Sebastiane (1976). This was shot for £40,000, largely on location at Cala Domestica, Sardinia, but with ‘Roman Palace’ opening scenes contrived in a friend’s flat at Butler’s Wharf. (Dicoletian’s party consumed £750 of the total £2,750 art budget.) Overall, the visuals belied the cost, mainly
because of Jarman’s feeling for the locations: The fisherman’s house, which doubled as the Roman soldiers’ quarters and the crew’s shooting base, was well used; moreover, Jarman demonstrated a Pasolini-like attachment to the ethereal landscape. Later Jarman films would also benefit from well-chosen locations; pre-eminently, The Tempest was filmed at the deserted Stoneleigh Abbey, which was decorated with tattered curtains and zodiac signs by Yolanda Sonnabend to suggest the nightmare in Prospero’s mind. But Jarman’s visuals, whether captured in the studio or on location, were really the product of an ideal which viewed the camera frame as being the equivalent of the artist’s canvas; Jarman never abandoned the sense that his films ‘filled in the empty spaces of my painting’.35

Jarman’s cinema was ideologically driven; he was a ‘visual director’, but he felt that all processes of filmmaking should be subordinated to the point being made: in his work, concerned centrally with issues of gay politics, media influence and the social functioning of the artist. Nonetheless, Jarman’s 11 features exhibited two broad aesthetic tendencies to do with the construction of reality and the presentation of history.

Jarman was dismissive of British social realism. He opposed the critical orthodoxy that ‘reality is an art-ful black and white film set in some Northern industrial town’; he also thought that the New Wave had served up a ‘colour supplement’ view of British life. Doubtless, Jarman’s dislike of British realist traditions was built on a feeling of distrust for the critical establishment – he felt that his work (like Michael Powell’s before him) had been dismissed because ‘it was made outside of the social realist kind of analysis’ – but he also had a strong feeling for the psychological dimensions of cinema. To Jarman, films should be about life as it is experienced; in this light, film design should reject any sense of observable reality in favour of an approach which privileged subjective experience: ‘Everything is to be interpreted, as [Joseph] Beuys said, “Everyone is an artist”, and we live in creation.’ Thus, the sole set of Edward II (1991, p.d.C. Hobbs) was intended as a geographically unspecific ‘metaphor for the trapped country, the prison of our lives’; the Isle of Grain, East London was selected as a location for Angelic Conversations because it was a ‘mysterious landscape, one of the oddest places’; the exterior of Bamburgh Castle was shot in such a way in The Tempest to resemble a ‘silhouette that could have been cut out of paper’. Very often, Jarman intended his settings to be free of recognisable signifiers and amenable to the subjective interpretations of the viewer.36
Jarman believed that the past should also be an imaginative space. The weird tower of *Sebastiane* set the tone; it could have been a lookout post, part of a wrecked castle ... or anything – some mysteries were best left in the past. Jarman believed ‘authentic’ re-creations of history to be both ineffectual and potentially damaging. Designers could never compensate for history’s ‘limited wasteland of forgetfulness’ and the choices that were made by British directors and technicians for conventional costume dramas (‘artificial style in period settings’) served mainly to justify class inequality in the modern world; the stately homes and castles reminded the viewer of his social place. Characteristically, Jarman favoured an imaginative approach to history on screen. He thought Olivier’s *Henry V* (1945) to be the best Shakespearian adaptation to date; even then, he found Sheriff and Dillon’s sets to ‘[be] caught between the artificiality of the medieval miniatures ... and the damp naturalism of the Irish countryside’. He preferred to reject all claims to historical representation. *Jubilee* compressed diverse historical epochs and *The Tempest* was designed to reflect the 300-year history of the source play. Jarman’s films also contained many knowing anachronisms. *Edward II* was staged along established theatrical lines in modern setting and dress; the sets of *Caravaggio* contained many modern items, including a typewriter, gold calculator, a motorbike and a glossy art magazine.37

Jarman’s aesthetic preoccupations were shared by his chief design collaborator (and occasional cast member) Christopher Hobbs. Like Jarman, Hobbs is a versatilist, whose artistic life, to use his own phrase, has not progressed chronologically but ‘in parallel circles’. He trained himself in painting by copying the work of old masters and he subsequently pursued careers in shop and theatre prop design. When he first met Jarman, in late 1969, Hobbs was working in building restoration (he continues to gain many commissions in this field, with a special expertise in free-hand plasterwork) and he was shortly absorbed into Ken Russell’s design community. Hobbs devised props and special effects for *The Devils*, *Valentino* and *Tommy*; notably, he and Jarman laboured for days on the marble sculptures of *Savage Messiah*, driven on by Russell’s Sternbergian exhortation: ‘What I need is a torso, a torso like no other, in snow-white marble.’ Jarman found Hobbs to be a uniquely useful collaborator on his own films. In 1986, he observed: ‘He [Hobbs] can make anything, from the smallest special-effect object to the streets and palaces of 16-century Rome ... [he is] a jack of many trades and master of them all.’38
Undoubtedly, Caravaggio was Jarman and Hobbs’ most elaborate collaboration; but the project was substantially revised throughout its tortuous seven-year gestation period. The artist biopic was first proposed in March 1978, at which time Jarman visualised ‘a much bigger film [than his previous work]’ and Hobbs ‘a Zeffirelli type production [costing] millions of pounds’. However, Jarman soon found that the American financiers ‘were only interested in films like Star Wars’ and the original Italian investors also pulled out of the project at an early stage. Ultimately, Caravaggio was rescued by the BFI, at a time when, under the chairmanship of Colin McCabe, it aimed to become actively involved in feature production. The financial problems had implications both for the script (which went through 17 rewrites) and the set designs: As Jane Barnwell has demonstrated, Hobbs ended up having to provide two groups of storyboards; the first to present to would-be producers, the second to demonstrate how the visuals could be achieved on a much-reduced budget.  

Hobbs came to enjoy the challenges of Caravaggio. He shared Jarman’s interest in the morally ambiguous subject; an artist whose heavenly subjects contrasted sharply with his earthly and violent nature. Hobbs also valued the new responsibility of designing a film from scratch (his earlier Jarman assignment Jubilee had involved him in nothing more than ‘emptying skips onto a warehouse floor’). But the duties were onerous on Caravaggio. Hobbs not only had to somehow ‘evoke the atmosphere of a timeless Rome’ within the Limehouse warehouse that Jarman hired for a studio; he also had to produce re-creations of Caravaggio paintings at various stages of completion (some of which were 15′ high). Inevitably, Hobbs’s endeavours were defined by a tight budget. He had only £50,000 to work with and consequently developed a spare design style which relied heavily on the 70 flats that he had at his disposal, combined with fair-seeming props found variously in the Brick Lane and Camden Lock markets, Italian restaurants and private homes (Hobbs could not afford to hire props).

Superficially, it was tempting to see Caravaggio as being akin to traditional plays of films, such as the 1952 Murder in the Cathedral (a.d.P. Pendrey) or Othello (1965, a.d.W. Kellner); the sets were theatrical in appearance and no locations were used. But the scenery was far more fluid and the props had specific functions in every scene: the camera angles were also carefully selected to impart a strong feeling of movement within the tight confines of the improvised studio. Jarman conveyed the spirit of Caravaggio with his remark: ‘It’s nearer to the essence of a twenties movie than an eighties movie.’ The production could almost have come out of Lime Grove, such was the ingenuity and variety in the
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studio-bound sets. But, unlike the old scenic wizards of Gaumont-British, Hobbs used only a small number of props. Statues were created from ‘a giant foot here and an arm there’; The Vatican was assembled from four chandeliers found amongst the rubbish on the warehouse floor; in all scenic matters (and partly out of desperation), Hobbs and Jarman adopted the slogan ‘less is more’. The scenic economy of Caravaggio was startling and it had some happy knock-on effects. The rich paintings appeared to rise out of the frame, helped also by the carefully chosen lighting schemes (Jarman said that ‘light dictated the architecture’); the key props – such as Caravaggio’s famous knife – achieved greater prominence; everywhere, the restrained dressings permitted the film to stay in the dream realm.41

The films of the pictorialist directors of the 1970s and 1980s were oddly pulled together by dreams: Kubrick’s nightmares, Russell’s sub-Freudian reveries, Fuest’s dreamy deco, Gilliam’s Blakeian visions of twilight worlds and Jarman’s dreams of England and history. But, from the late 1970s, other material influences started to be felt in British film culture which would exert more lasting impact on the work of the British designer. In the final chapter, I want to consider the new Runaway spirit which pervaded British studios in the era of the modern Blockbuster; again, American money would facilitate remarkable British design, but it was scarcely recognisable as such. I also want to think about recent design trends that, on the face of it, have established closer contact with authentic British culture.
chapter 9

Do We Mean Us?
British Visions ... and
Visions of Britain

From the late 1970s British studios experienced what might be thought of as the ‘Fourth Wave’ of major Hollywood production finance in Britain, to follow; the quota quickies of the 1930s, the first Runaway productions of the 1950s and the ‘swinging’ films of the 1960s. For various reasons, including the inevitable financial ones, American companies started to use British studios to create their modern blockbusters, such as Superman (1978), Star Wars (1979) and Alien (1979). These films brought obvious and considerable benefits to British studios, with knock-on gains for a few British production designers. They also brought fresh impetus to British films’ never-ending ‘Culture and Commerce’ dilemma: The debate over whether the British film industry should be just that, an industry creating wealth and jobs; or whether it should serve to represent, nurture and nourish British culture. That discussion has carried on ever since, through changed political and social times. In effect, it hinges on questions of representation and especially of whether British filmmaking talent should be set to work producing visions from Britain (films which bear little or no contact with British culture) or whether this nation’s filmmakers should create visions of Britain (films which represent the past and Britain, or which, at least, represent genres that we have come to call our own). These concerns impact crucially upon the work of the British designer, because they are really concerned with the designer’s central purpose of representation – of re-presenting the world.
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We can pursue the links between Commerce, Culture and Design if we think about some of the leading modern productions in terms of a kind of scale of representation. The Blockbusters and, in most respects, the modern James Bonds are visions from Britain. Conversely, modern costume films have remained at the heart of British film culture, producing leading visions of Britain. Finally, I want to think about one key designer film of the mid-1990s which took issue with the fusty standards of British film representation. The Kave Quinn–designed Trainspotting was one film of the New British Cinema of the 1990s (perhaps the only one) which took representation into genuinely new areas.

Visions from Britain I: Homes Fit for Superheroes

Writing in 2005, Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher characterised ‘Hollywood’ as a mobile signifier, ‘an illustrative example of post-Fordism and the de-territorialisation of cultural production characteristic of globalisation’. From the late 1970s, Hollywood has become a brand, its products manufactured in the most cost-effective, and otherwise attractive, areas of the world; as Ben Goldsmith and Tom O’Regan suggest, American companies’ globetrotting, to Britain and elsewhere, has been encouraged also by a range of other factors, including the requirement for ‘authentic’ or exotic locations and the wish to tailor films for national audiences by filming indigenous places and stars. The effects of Hollywood’s modern production ethos on British filmmaking can be readily identified if we consider some of the famous films produced in this country over the past 30 years or so, which have been classified as ‘British’ under the existing law. Leading titles include Star Wars (1977), Superman (1978), Alien (1979), Aliens (1986), The Shining (1980), Batman (1989), Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves (1991) and The Big Lebowski (1998). Clearly, none of these films has made strong contact with British culture, but they have made a fundamental contribution to the British film industry. This point was summed up by Pinewood’s managing director Cyril Howard in 1985. Surveying the six ‘mega films’ that filled his 18 stages, he observed: ‘Without American productions I do cease to exist. In fact the British film industry ceases to exist.’ Inevitably, the blockbusters provided a few British designers with some of their biggest assignments. Four titles were particularly significant to British film design history: Star Wars, Superman, Alien and Batman.¹

The first two were designed by John Barry and they both presented major planning problems. The sets of Superman were so large and so
numerous that they had to be housed simultaneously at Pinewood and Shepperton. In addition, Barry was vexed by the ‘endless complications’ of the sets; these were exacerbated, as he remarked, by the consideration that ‘the principals don’t just walk onto a set, they smash through walls or crash through doors – or fly in’ (emphasis in original). But at least Barry knew where he was on Superman. The sets of Star Wars grew with the increased ambitions of its director George Lucas. For all his admiration for Kubrick’s sci-fi classic, Lucas intended Star Wars to be the anti-2001; a Flash Gordon style fantasy which must not ‘be about anything that would happen or be real’ and ‘the most spectacular thing you’ve ever seen’! But Lucas was also in the throes of his New Hollywood hangover and he still had one foot in the semi-documentary tradition; Barry observed during shooting of Star Wars that the director ‘wanted to make it look like it’s shot on location’ and it was partly this that led the design team to create parts of the sets from recycled junk. Of course, spectacle won out on Star Wars; despite a relatively modest design budget of $1m, Barry created 45 startling sets over 11 sound stages.2

Barry found that he enjoyed the new challenges of sci-fi design. He told David Petrou:

I like doing science fiction and fantasy films. You can let yourself go. I prefer designing surrealist things. I find it much easier, too, because you’re free to choose. When you’re in a jam, you can simply change the rules.

Barry’s best sci-fi set came in Superman in the form of the Fortress of Solitude. The director of this film, Richard Donner, was also a believer in film realism; he declared to staff that ‘the whole concept of the film is verisimilitude’ (to reinforce this point, he had the word printed large on the wall behind his desk). Consequently, Barry’s creative use of a range of modern materials – including Lucite, Styrofoam and Plexiglas – was governed by the requirement to treat the legend with ‘dignity [and] truth’. The Fortress of Solitude was a suitably noble creation. It took two months to build and it filled the massive 007 stage at Pinewood. The Styrofoam and plywood glaciers were dressed with £6,000 worth of dendritic dairy salt to give a sparkling effect. Extra sparkle was provided by the large cyclorama (curved painted backdrop) of the aurora borealis, which had gauze netting placed in front of it to diffuse the light created by 16 generator trucks.3

Alien and Batman took a more psychological approach to sci-fi genre: The designs of the former were heavily informed by the psychosexual
visions of the Swiss illustrator H.R. Giger; the sets of the latter were rooted in plastic expressionism. The visual tone for *Alien* was established by Giger’s design for the monster. This was a standout example of his ‘biomechanoid’ approach to design, which fused bodies and machines and which attempted (as Giger insisted) to trouble the subconscious of the viewer and provoke them to uncover ‘another kind of peace’. The effect was intensified by Giger’s derelict spacecraft of *Alien* which, as Brooks Landon correctly observed, set a trend in future-looking film design for ‘bones, muscles and tendons indistinguishable from the mount’s tubes, cables and conduit’. But Giger’s eerie art nouveau-inspired creations also benefited from their contrast with the starkly realistic space craft interiors, as contrived by director Ridley Scott and his production designer Michael Seymour.4

Scott and Seymour were well matched. Both had studied art at the Royal College of Art (Seymour after initial training at the Bournemouth College of Art); both had passed through television design (albeit unhappily in Seymour’s case) and the two had worked previously on Scott’s television commercials. Most importantly, Scott shared the sense that the remaining sets for *Alien* should have a quietly dramatic function. Film design was a central preoccupation of Scott. Whilst at the BBC he had felt ‘there could be a close affinity between designing and directing’ and he had retained his feeling for ‘extraneous things, tactile things’ within his mise-en-scène. In turn, Seymour found that ‘working with someone who is visually-oriented and who communicates in those terms is very stimulating’.5

As with *Star Wars*, the ambitions of *Alien* grew in the pre-production phase. Initially, it was conceived as a cheap thriller, but Scott used his elaborate storyboards to persuade Fox to finally invest $8m in the project. Even then, Seymour struggled to get the production value from his own £770,000 budget. The derelict spaceship was smaller than was originally intended and had just one fixed wall; floors were made from milk crates to save money, and some bits of set (notably the ship’s landing legs) were recycled. The plans for the central set of the spaceship Nostromo were also revised in pre-shooting. Initially, Scott and Seymour intended to build the three-storey salvage craft as a kind of vertical composite set, but, sensibly, they opted to separate the three levels onto three separate stages at Shepperton.6

Overall, the sets of *Alien* demonstrated Seymour’s planning intelligence and his ethos of ‘deep focus’ design; an approach which attended to everyday setting issues whilst thinking ahead to future design problems (the film had an intense 16-week shoot). But *Alien* was more than
just a technical achievement; Seymour opened-up fresh ground in sci-fi design by making space feel *lived in*. Seymour observed that he and Scott pictured the Nostromo ‘as an inter-galactic super-tanker schlepping its way through space. We wanted to avoid anything sleek or shiny’. The ship was a working environment, habituated by people who were long desensitised to the wonders of space travel. Great efforts were made by Seymour’s 110 craftsmen to ensure that the Nostromo’s surfaces appeared worn and dirty; for, as Seymour reasoned, ‘the crew members of the Nostromo are really inter-stellar truckers, just doing their ordinary day-to-day work who happen to operate a space-tug instead of a truck along the motorways of earth’. Seymour’s sets implied that, in space, no one could make you clean.7

The sets of *Alien* conveyed a kind of psychological realism; Seymour’s everyday interiors were the knowingly quotidian counter-point to Giger’s devilish emanations from the unconscious. Anton Furst jettisoned realism altogether in his designs for *Batman*. Furst’s designs were infused with his dark, romantic spirit and they conveyed his passion for ‘servicing an atmosphere, a tone and a feel to the story’. Furst was a designer in the John Bryan studio tradition and, like Bryan, he believed that films should present the other side of reality. He asserted: ‘What is reality anyway? ... [Federico] Fellini has always said that it is only the extent of your imagination – and that’s how I operate.’ The $40,000,000 Pinewood super-production of *Batman* liberated Furst’s imagination. He found a sympathetic director in Tim Burton (both men had Gothic tendencies and they both favoured black garb); moreover, Furst found that he could form a rich architectural mix from Gotham City and its dressings. The amplified buildings and the low-key lighting placed *Batman* firmly in the expressionist tradition, but Furst was able to incorporate an extraordinary range of other architectural influences, including Gaudi, Frank Lloyd Wright and Shin Takamatsu. Disarmingly, Furst aimed to create an ‘unfamiliar familiarity’ from the private and public worlds of the formerly fun-filled comic book hero.8

Furst had a unique artistic background. He trained for four years at the RCA, working through all of its departments – theatre design included – before developing a special interest in holography. Following his art training, Furst worked as an architect and designer for television, before joining the special effects team of 2001. Thereafter, he combined his interests in effects with film design assignments. Furst’s expertise in laser technology was employed on several films, including *Star Wars*; in addition, he produced the ‘Light Fantastic’ laser shows in Piccadilly in the late 1970s (sponsored by The Who). His film credits prior to *Batman*...
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included two notable titles. On *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Furst accommodated Kubrick’s travel phobia by creating a Vietnamese town at an abandoned gas works at Woolwich; like Adam before him, he ended up exhausted and resolved never to work for Kubrick again. The fantasy film *Company of Wolves* (1984) was a far happier experience. Furst was delighted by producer Stephen Wooley’s notion of a studio forest (such a thing hadn’t been seen in a British studio since Lazare Meerson’s sylvan creation for the 1937 Denham-production of *As You Like It*) and he strove to create it ‘as a kind of cross between Dali and Doré’.9

Burton’s *Batman* responded to the recent trend in comic books – notably Frank Miller’s *Dark Knight* – of depicting the superhero as psychologically disturbed. Furst built Batman’s mental frailty into some of the sets: The Batcave was imagined as an improvised environment, formed from the huge metal supports of the city above; Furst remarked that it was ‘all rather treacherous and it was always my intention to suggest what he’s doing may not work’. But this Batman was also a sociological phenomenon; Furst’s sets for Gotham City demonstrated that wider society was equally maladjusted and out of control. This was the biggest set at Pinewood since Cleopatra; it cost $5.5m and was built on metal tubing set into massive concrete pads (Furst wasn’t about to repeat Barry’s mistake on *Superman* where part of Metropolis was blown away in high winds) and it was conceived as a crazy mess. Furst affirmed that his Gotham was a vision of how New York City would look if there were no planning permission. The designer’s artistic eclecticism reached its highpoint in this city. Lang’s *Metropolis* provided an obvious reference, but Furst found those sets to be too unified and perfect. Consequently, he crossed Lang with elements drawn from Italian futurism, Bauhaus and fascist architecture. Furst’s Gotham City was gross in both senses of the word. Main Street was built to full scale on the back lot at Pinewood and its size was expanded further by Furst’s addition of a bridge and alleyways (pithigantly, one of these was formed from one of Rawnsley’s old Independent Frame projection tunnels); by design, Gotham was also ugly, to Furst, ‘a garage sale of architecture’.10

Furst delighted in traditional design – he and Burton had a mutual dislike for ‘the ILM [Industrial Light and Magic] school of film-making’. Gotham City was built and so too were all of the key props, including the all-important Batmobile. Furst could easily have left the design of the super car to General Motors; it announced early on in pre-production that it would be prepared to build such a thing as an expensive gimmick (GM was prepared to put $6m into the project). But Furst was never one
to take the easy route. He worried that GM would take too long to make the car; moreover, he wanted to create something sinister: ‘None of us wanted something geared towards the consumer, just a pure piece of brutal expressionism which fitted in with the timelessness of the movie.’ The finished design was based on over 200 Furst drawings, which were in turn inspired by 1930s speed machines, of the kind that were tested on the Utah Salt Flats, and 1950s Stingray cars. His Batmobile ended up being a bombastic item which had inevitable phallic connotations for the emasculated hero; toy manufacturers were consternated by Furst’s inclusion of a penis-like nose piece.11

*Batman* and the other big runaways showed that British studios could deliver the goods in the age of the blockbuster. They also served to promote a few designers to the top ranks of world art direction. Sadly, neither John Barry nor Anton Furst was able to exploit the advantage; Barry died of meningitis in 1979 (aged 44) and Furst committed suicide in Los Angeles in 1991 (aged 47). But, naturally, the big Hollywood productions left Britain just as soon as the fiscal advantages dried up. In this context, there has been a measure of reassurance in the continuing presence of the traditionally international James Bond films.

**Visions from Britain 2: The Post-Adam Bonds**

Ken Adam designed three further Bonds following the swinging era: *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) and *Moonraker* (1979). These followed a logical trajectory from the 1960s films in that the sets became ever more fanciful and hypertrophic; during the shooting of *Moonraker*, he admitted that he was pursuing a path of ‘absurdist reality’. Adam’s 1970s Bond sets featured laughs-a-plenty and ever more audacious spectacle. There was something almost self-parodying about his ‘operatic, less realistic’ American penthouse of *Diamonds Are Forever* (which was based on a real one that had been owned by Howard Hughes) and he found a great deal of humour in the ‘moonscape and lunar-vehicle chase sequences’ of *Moonraker*. Adam’s grandest visions included the super tanker of *The Spy Who Loved Me* and the space station of *Moonraker*. The script of *Spy* insisted that the tanker should be capable of ‘swallowing’ three nuclear submarines. Inevitably, the monstrous set brought out the two sides of Adam’s character; the challenge was irresistible, but it was also a massive worry. Sensibly, and recalling the dreadful waste incurred by his volcano of *You Only Live Twice*, Adam decided to take the opportunity of the super tanker to create a reusable facility at Pinewood. The vessel was built to 5/8 scale and Adam
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built a stage around it (for a total cost of $750m). Ingeniously, he clad the walls of the new 007 stage in sheet metal to suggest the interior surfaces of the super tanker. Adam’s space station of Moonraker also turned out to be a signature set. Uncharacteristically, during pre-production, Adam spoke of his desire to deliver ‘science fact’ with his space sets and he studied NASA's latest designs for spacecraft. But he swiftly rejected these as being visually dull and opted instead for ‘a system of tubes, a mobile-like rotating structure’ which had a logical premise – it simulated artificial gravity – but which, more importantly, was original and visually appealing.12

Clearly, Adam’s highest achievement of the 1970s on the Bonds was continuing to be himself. Towards the end of his tenure with Cubby Broccoli, he was highly aware of the powerful scenic effects of the new science fiction blockbusters (Star Wars and Superman were literally all around him at Pinewood) but he never responded with mere spectacle. Adam’s sets continued to express his personal signature. His love of taut straight lines was demonstrated to remarkable effect in the Pyramid Control room set of Moonraker; this was redolent of the Holstenwall of Caligari and Heckroth’s City of Lost Souls of The Ballet of the Red Shoes, and no one but Adam would have thought of putting expressionism into space. During the 1970s, Adam also developed an intensified interest in circular features. His submersible Atlantis set of Spy was strangely spider-like and it was all the more eerie, somehow, for being created from ostensibly friendly rounded features. Adam observed that this set was ‘all curves and circles’ and he said that his fresh combinations of circles and straight lines ‘excited me ... Something just clicked and I knew I’d done right’.13

Adam’s departure from Bond was brought about by a number of factors. He felt that the space setting of Moonraker was as far as the series could go; he was dismayed at being accused of over-spending on his last Bond project (portentously, Adam said during the shooting of Spy that ‘the spectacle aspect is very important and ... you have to be prepared to spend money’); perhaps more than anything, Adam felt that the Bonds had had their day – they were ‘a British expression of the 1960s and 1970s which I could relate to’. Of course, they have carried on ever since, although their style has grown more varied as the senior producers – latterly Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli (daughter to Cubby, who died in 1997) – have sought to keep up with market trends, whilst retaining the brand production values. Barbara Broccoli has asserted that the Bond team ‘try to make them [the films] a little different every time but we have certain parameters’. The eternal...
‘parameters’ of the art department were well explained by one of the Bond directors, Guy Hamilton in 1974:

Audiences go to the annual pantomime and they say, ‘what have you got for us this time?’ We say, ‘Well children, we’ve got some goodies for you which you haven’t seen on television or in other pictures. The producers and myself demand very high standards. There is no fun in building sets just to look at them.’

Six men have designed Bond films in the post-Adam era: Peter Lamont (ten films), Peter Murton (one), Allan Cameron (one), Syd Cain (one, as supervising art director of the American-produced *Live and Let Die* 1973) and Stephen Grimes and Philip Harrison (who, together, designed the ‘unofficial’ *Never Say Never Again* in 1983). By and large, the design chiefs have been recruited from the ranks of the Bond team and, importantly, they have all worked mainly at Pinewood alongside other Bond veterans. Undoubtedly, the Bond films have trained British technicians, in all departments, to produce large-scale effects (this was one factor that brought *Superman* to the UK); at the same time, the Bond producers have remained loyal to Pinewood. Cubby Broccoli said in 1981 that he and his colleagues had become ‘accustomed to it [Pinewood] and its ways’; not coincidentally, continuity in production methods and personnel has also enabled the Bond producers to control budgets.

Palpably, Peter Lamont has exerted the greatest influence over Bond design in recent times (at the time of writing, he has been chief designer to the series for 27 years). Lamont has had a long career in British films. He entered the British art department in 1950 (following an initial stint as a print boy) working as a draughtsman for Carmen Dillon, Ralph Brinton, Ernie Archer and others. Eventually, Lamont gained work as a set dresser for film and television, notably on *This Sporting Life* (1963, a.d.A. Withy). Nonetheless, Lamont’s most important assignment of the early 1960s was as a draughtsman on *Goldfinger*. His work here, including his plans for Adam’s £40,000 Fort Knox set, placed him in line to benefit from the emerging Bond craze. Lamont subsequently rose to become Adam’s assistant on *You Only Live Twice*, co-art director on the Murton-designed *Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) and production designer on *For Your Eyes Only* (1981). He has maintained that position since and his work on the Bonds has had additional benefits. Lamont’s impressive record for organising large-scale productions (his Bond films invariably have over 50 sets) has made him attractive to visiting Hollywood directors.
Consequently, Lamont’s production design credits also include such high profile modern runaways as *True Lies* (1994), *Aliens* (1986) and *Titanic* (1997).

In general, Lamont’s Bond sets have been marked by a stronger sense of realism. Strangely, Bond producers and directors have spoken for years of their desire to bring greater realism to the Bond franchise: Michael Apted sought to express his ‘documentary roots’ in *The World Is Not Enough* (1997); Roger Spottiswoode indicated his preference for a ‘strong reality base’ at the time of *Tomorrow Never Dies* (p.d.A. Cameron); Barbara Broccoli has said that the more sober look of *Casino Royale* (2006) and *Quantum of Solace* (2009) is appropriate to the new ‘psychological era’ for Bond. Such sentiments accord well with Lamont’s instincts as a designer. He has said that ‘it’s always good to design realism – to reflect what’s happening in the real world’. He has also commented of his method for location/studio matching (always a primary concern of the Bond designer) that ‘the real building dictates what happens to the set’.16

Conspicuously, Lamont’s sets have broken with Adam’s quirky expressionism. The films have had their dark moments, particularly in the recent productions, but these have been driven by the photography in the manner of the old film noirs; realistic sets have been cast in low key lighting. This is not to say that Lamont’s designs have been short of fun or spectacle. Throughout the decades, the Bonds have continued to rank among the few films where the sets can make you laugh. Octopussy’s octopus-shaped bed (*Octopussy* 1983) was a traditional Bond sight gag, the humour based on the fathomless narcissism of the villain. The same could be said of Whittaker’s lair in *The Living Daylights* (1987). This was based on the interior of the Forbes Museum, Tangier and it included nine life-sized wax effigies of famous military leaders, all bearing the face of the megalomaniac Whittaker (Joe Don Baker). Other set and prop-led jokes have been admirably silly. The slicing of a car in two by the ‘saw helicopters’ of *The World Is Not Enough* was inspired by a Laurel and Hardy gag from their short *Busy Bodies* (1933). Lamont also had fun with his ‘sunken Roman villa’ set of *For Your Eyes Only* (1981). This 700 piece, 6000 square feet creation was built at Pinewood and was subsequently sunk in the Bahamas. The villa was absurdly pristine (it came complete with mosaic floor, amphorae and columns) and Lamont was happy to concede that it was ‘a ridiculous idea’.17

Lamont’s Bonds have also had their fair share of spectacular sets. The caviar factory of *The World Is Not Enough* was based on an actual
oil construction in the Caspian sea and was built, from wood, over the exterior paddock at Pinewood. The ice palace of *Die Another Day* (2002) was another memorable Lamont set. Again, this was suggested by a real example (an ice hotel in Sweden) but the set came largely from Lamont’s imagination. The exterior was reminiscent of the Sydney opera house, but the overlapping shells were here shored with large, spider-like supports. Perhaps Lamont’s best set of all for the Bonds occurred in the St Petersburg sets of *Goldeneye* (1995). The large street complex was built at the Bond team’s temporary studio at Leavesden airfield and it had much of the *Zhivago* spirit about it. Ideally, Cubby Broccoli would have preferred to have shot the tank chase scenes of *Goldeneye* in the real location, but the Russian authorities were worried about the possible damage to sewers and mains. (Broccoli was equally worried about their bill for $15m to shoot in the real streets of St Petersburg.) Consequently, Lamont built his streets from bricks and mortar, complete with statues, a post office and a low bridge.18

The larger Lamont sets have testified to his planning intelligence. The Bond films have become increasingly complex affairs, their visual fabric built from intricate arrangements of set, locations (for almost 30 years the Bond films have employed 5 camera units within and without the studio), special effects and visual effects. Lamont has often referred to the collaborative nature of Bondian visuals (‘people must never forget – all these Bond pictures are a huge team effort’) but his frequently massive sets form the solid core of the total design. At the same time, Lamont’s best work has been characterised by his attention to the small details. His feeling for set dressing and texture was revealed latterly in the set representing M’s penthouse apartment in *Casino Royale*. This set was a notable first – it was the first time that the audience had been invited to view the personal world of Bond’s boss. Of course, M has been played in recent times by a woman (Judi Dench), but Lamont produced an essentially genderless environment which had no feminine touches. Rather, it was a bureaucratic place – a kind of tied penthouse for senior civil servants – marked by deco ornamentation, glass tables, tubular furnishings (a nice throwback to the old Bonds) and a stark lack of separation between the spheres of work and home; Lamont provided a sophisticated dining area beyond a glass partition, but the living and working areas were otherwise combined within a constricted sunken area. Through his use of textures and dressings, Lamont was able to create a space which was modern and impressive, but also just a touch poignant.
Visions of Britain 1: The Modern British Costume Drama

The past is a familiar country for British filmmakers. The most cursory glance at British film history reveals the constancy of historical themes (from the films of Will Barker through to Shakespeare in Love and beyond); this nation’s past has proven to be a durable asset, something which we can sell to ourselves and others. It is customary to refer to modern British costume dramas as heritage films; location-based dramas, drawn from canonical works of literature, which make overt yet thoughtful use of Britain’s architectural heritage. The design logic of the heritage film was summed up by Susan Marling in her appraisal of A Room with a View (1986, p.d. B. Ackland-Snow):

More than a backdrop, the active role of the great house is to provide a touch of class, to represent unassailable standards of taste and correct behaviour, to be the ultimate, elegiac icon of an England worth fighting for.

Pithier assessments of heritage genre were provided by the directors Alan Parker and Derek Jarman. Parker described modern British costume dramas as ‘the Laura Ashley school of film-making’ and lamented their focus on ‘an England long gone’; Jarman condemned British costume films’ ‘England of stately homes, which are the indispensable prop for the English way of life’. But we have to take care when approaching the modern costume film. The heritage genre was established in this country (one can find variants in France, the USA and elsewhere) in the wake of the hugely successful Chariots of Fire (1981, a.d. R. Hall); conspicuously, sets were created on location in ways which extracted greater narrative (and sometimes ideological) value from Britain’s architectural heritage: these films commemorate the lifestyles of the rich and dead. But Britain has latterly created other kinds of costume films, which have taken a more expressive, rather more personalised, approach to historical themes and representation. Tentatively, we can divide modern British costume films into two broad areas: ‘Heritage’ films and ‘Imaginative’ histories. The first group was typified through the 1990s by the films made from the novels of E.M. Forster (most of them by the Merchant-Ivory production team); the second strand can be taken to include The Madness of King George (1994, p.d. K. Adam), Shakespeare in Love (1998, p.d. M. Childs), and one exceptional costume film, The English Patient (1996, p.d. S. Craig).
Visually, *Chariots of Fire* took issue with the Korda approach to screen history. It was filmed cheaply – £5m – entirely on location and Roger Hall’s design team contrived some clever substitutions for places; ingeniously, an old stadium on the Wirral became the Paris Olympic Stadium of 1924, its stands populated with local extras who were lured by a prize raffle. The location settings worked well. More than this, the modest aesthetic of *Chariots of Fire* implied that the past was not colourful and unknowable but recognisable – modern audiences could see themselves in the mirror of history. These emerging lessons of heritage cinema held particular appeal to the production team headed by the two notable ‘insider-outsiders’ of modern British cinema; the American director James Ivory and Indian producer Ismail Merchant.

Since 1963, Merchant Ivory Productions had specialised in making low budget historical films which were pitched somewhere between the art house and the mainstream. Merchant claimed that MIP made ‘films of sensibility and quality ... against the grain of the usual Hollywood movies’ and he was clear that its/their artistic independence depended on keeping budgets in check. During the period 1986–93 – broadly speaking, Merchant Ivory’s ‘E.M. Forster Period’ – MIP was at the peak of its success, but they resisted production excesses. Ivory noted that the huge success of *A Room with a View* (1986, p.d.B. Ackland-Snow) persuaded Hollywood producers to believe that MIP ‘could parlay three and a half million dollars into seventy millions’, but he and Merchant steered clear of the controlling hand of Hollywood. Accordingly, their films were subject to complex financial arrangements – seven organisations had a stake in the £3.5m *A Room with a View* including Goldcrest, Channel 4 and the NFFC – and the budgets were invariably slim; *Maurice* (1987) cost £2.5m and *Howard’s End* (1992) £8m. The costs were kept down in various ways. Merchant was hands-on during shooting (one actor lamented the producer’s habit of ‘running through the set shouting “Shoot, Jim, shoot”’ ) and the regular stars worked for reduced salaries (sometimes happily). Importantly, production design costs were kept down by filming almost exclusively on location.19

Merchant Ivory employed two production designers on their heritage productions during the 1980s and 1990s; Brian Ackland-Snow (*A Room with a View, Maurice*) and Luciana Arrighi (*Howard’s End, Remains of the Day*). Their broad role was to maintain the consistent visual tone that formed a central part of the MIP brand, as described by Merchant/Ivory’s biographer R.E. Long:

The buildings in Ivory’s films ... and the types and moods of the landscapes all create a consciousness of the aesthetic
that complements the refinement of Ivory’s probing of the characters and their world.

In essence, MIP design was subject to three priorities: faithfulness to literary sources; the requirement to film in existing buildings and freedom of actor movement within the mise-en-scène (the team’s regular photographer observed that the films ‘often concern people with lots to say sitting round tables talking’). But, as Long suggested, and many reviews testified, the appeal of the MIP films depended on the audience’s awareness of the delicate bourgeois environments. Furthermore, although the settings of the MIP heritage productions appeared to be inconspicuous, they were very carefully contrived by their designers.

The MIP location ethos posed constant difficulties. The owners of the Florentine hotel (the Cruisiana) used for A Room with a View would not permit shooting in his busy period of May; elsewhere in the city, the crew struggled to keep crowds, graffiti and anachronistic buildings out of the frame. Sometimes, Merchant and Ivory felt bilked by owners and trustees of heritage sites and their shoots were often subject to tight conditions: Unlike Puttnam and Hudson before them, they were permitted to use Trinity and King’s College for Maurice, but they were cautioned by one maverick executor, ‘I hope you didn’t pay through the nose, because they’re multimillionaires at Trinity – and very mean’; invariably, Ivory found that ‘there are off-limits signs everywhere on a location like these [country houses]’. In addition, the MIP designers occasionally found that the scripts demanded more than one central location. Darlington Hall of The Remains of the Day (the one non-Forster MIP film of the period) was a composite location which comprised elements from four separate country houses in Avon, Devon and Gloucestershire. Most of the exteriors were shot at Dryham Park, but the staircase, music room and other interiors derived from Powderham Castle; the library, picture gallery and servants’ quarters were filmed at Corsham House and Badminton House.20

The Merchant Ivory approach to history was exemplified by Howard’s End. Merchant thought it the best of MIP’s Forster adaptations; certainly, it was the most successful – it grossed $70m worldwide. Merchant felt that the success of Howard’s End was built on its ‘stark images’, nurtured by the use of new Kodak film stock. The film also benefited greatly from Arrighi’s subtle art direction. Over 60 locations were used in the film, including Admiralty Arch, Simpsons-in-the-Strand, Fortnum and Masons, Magdalen College and the Shropshire countryside. But the major design work occurred within the houses occupied by the two
families who lay at the heart of the story; the materialistic Wilcoxes and the modernist Schlegels. The Schlegels’ London flat was created from a Georgian house in Victoria Square, S.W.1 and it was planned with reference to artists of the period (the early twentieth century); specifically, Arrighi signalled the go-ahead attitude of the Schlegels by painting their rooms in ‘Whistler-like’ light blues. In contrast, the bombastic Wilcox abodes were characterised by traditional burgundies and reds. Naturally, one house stood apart – the eponymous Howard’s End. The Wilcox’s country retreat was made from Peppard Cottage near Henley-on-Thames. The former home of society hostess and Bloomsbury set associate Ottoline Morrell was substantially altered for use in Howard’s End. Wallpaper was stripped, light switches and carpets were removed and some rooms were completely re-decorated. Following the cues of Forster’s novel, Arrighi endeavoured to suggest a meeting between the house and nature; the garden was seen to come into the house via the use of vine fabrics and William Morris-inspired wallpapers.21

Arrighi’s designs made a perfect match with Merchant Ivory’s distinctive vision, somewhat critical but mainly indulgent, of the British class system. The film hinged on the sense of spiritual kinship which was felt between Ruth Wilcox (Vanessa Redgrave) and Meg Schlegel (Emma Thompson). Their friendship was seen as being above class; despite their mutual privilege, the two women were depicted as soul mates who had a profound feeling for the simple things in life. Apparently, Howard’s End was one such simple thing. Arrighi engulfed the house in creeping plants and distressed the walls and window frames to make the place seem decrepit and a fitting object of derision for the materialistic Henry Wilcox (Anthony Hopkins). But the house was a desirable object nonetheless, and an expensive one (Peppard Cottage itself was sold for £700,000 in 1994). In this light, it made for a poor symbol of anti-materialism and Ruth’s dying gesture of bequeathing the house to Meg merely served to suggest the talent of the rich for keeping their goods to themselves. Surveying the ethereal yet exclusive interiors of Howard’s End, it was hard to disagree with the assessment of the Gay Times correspondent who rebuked Merchant Ivory for making ‘films that make white, middle-class audiences feel safe, happy, content and unchallenged’.22

The same might have been said about the one non-MIP Forster adaptation, although David Lean’s A Passage to India (1984) was conceived, inevitably, on a grander scale. For this film, Lean was reunited with John Box and the $17.5m production was visualised along the lines of the great epics of the 1960s (despite Lean’s claim
that this was a ‘non-white telephone film’). The bulk of the shooting was done on location in India, with just a few sets – train carriages, a courtroom and ocean liner exterior – built at Shepperton. As in the old days, the location settings demanded great ingenuity from Box. The Mirabar cave scenes were created at a remote location at Ramanagaram and Savandurga, the entrance blasted out of the pitiless granite rock (the photographer Ernest Day reflected that the holes ‘required a monumental effort to create’). Moreover, Box created much of the fictitious town of Chandrapore within a real maha-raja’s palace in Bangalore. The enclosed complex was conceived, for reasons of cost and crowd control, as a kind of ‘lot from home’ and included bungalows, a street, a mosque, a courtroom and some railway lines. Aziz (Victor Banerjee)’s bungalow was designed to be revamp-able, but it also featured only one floating (moveable) wall. Box and Lean intended the photographer to light the set in the same way that he would a real building.23

Clearly, Passage to India was visually more ambitious than the MIP Forster films; Lean was, to use his own words, a ‘pictures man’ to the end. On the terms of the British cinema of the 1980s, it occupied a position somewhere between the old style historical epic and the modern heritage film. During the 1990s, a group of films emerged which took a more imaginative approach to history than had been evident, in particular, in the MIP films. The English Patient (1996), The Madness of King George (1994) and Shakespeare in Love (1998) went decisively beyond the re-creation of the past to reassert the ability of costume genre to comment upon eternal and present themes. The designs formed a key part of the message. On Madness, Adam found himself, contrary to his best designer’s instincts, working largely on location (only a few sequences were shot at Shepperton) but the whole production was blessed by the designer’s eye. In one memorable sequence, Adam produced a chase scene involving the King (Nigel Hawthorne), the queen (Helen Mirren) and their children across four separate locations. Ostensibly, the pursuit occurred between the royal bed chamber and the roof at Windsor Castle; but, actually, it started at Shepperton (bed chamber), proceeded to a staircase at St Paul’s Cathedral and ended up on the roof at Arundel Castle (where Adam added some tall, twisted chimney pots to match those in situ). Shakespeare in Love took the opposite approach to historical design. The former TV designer Childs created an entire Shakespearean universe, including two large theatres, on Stage K at Shepperton. Unusually, the sets were built from real oak beams; these were used
for cheapness (rather than conventional plywood-encased scaffolding) but they imparted a warm textural quality to the sixteenth century studio interiors and exteriors.²⁴

But the most imaginative costume film of all was *The English Patient*. This was designed by Stuart Craig. As with so many other leading British designers, Craig’s first ambition was to be an artist. He trained at the Norwich art school (whilst also making props and scenery for local theatre) and the Hornsey College of Art. From 1963, Craig went on to study film and television at the RCA, before finding his first film work, as a draughtsman/tea boy, on *Casino Royale* (1967). The art director of that film, Michael Stringer, would become a chief mentor to the young Craig (he was 25 at the time of his first film); over time, he would also acquire valuable lessons from Terry Marsh (his design chief on *Royal Flash* 1975, *Mary Queen of Scots* 1971 and others) and John Barry. Craig was grateful for the thorough grounding that he received as a draughtsman, assistant and art director to Stringer, Marsh and Barry:

> Although I was on a lot of fairly awful films as well as the occasional good one, I got in at an interesting time. People were still spending lots of money on sets that involved incredible elliptical staircases and things like that, strange left-overs from the Hollywood tradition. It was a great preparation for me.²⁵

Stuart Craig’s approach to design combines imagination with simplicity. The latter virtue has not always been easy to maintain. In the case of the £17m super-production of *The Mission*, he was charged with creating the sets for a film that was widely understood to be a make-or-break project for the Goldcrest company; moreover, he had to build the sets within hostile conditions in Colombia and Argentina (Craig was proud of his achievement of creating Gabriel’s Mission from mud and thatch using local labour in a watery, snake-infested region of Colombia). Here as elsewhere, Craig attempted to reach beyond reality wherever possible. He has observed that he adopts a ‘painter’s approach’ to design, conceiving sets in terms of abstract shapes, rather than starting from the basis of key props. Furthermore, he feels that the set artist should strive beyond mere representation. For a time, Craig was known principally for his work on big location pieces – additionally, *Gandhi* (1982) and *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) – but he lamented that ‘reality is too confusing and full of extraneous elements ... Reality’s always disappointing’. Consequently, he has preferred to work in the studio, working from
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scratch to contrive the neo-expressionist environments of the *Harry Potter* films or the 250’ × 120’ faux Elstree jungle of *Greystoke* (which had its own weather system). Working in the studio has also enabled Craig to create a distinctive design style, which is engrossing yet tasteful and which exemplifies the ethos, inherited from Barry, to ‘go for one idea, entertain two, but never three because the whole thing will get watered down’.26

Anthony Mingella’s *The English Patient* could easily have got out of hand. The film had a 120-day shoot in Tunisia and Italy; complex international financing (the greater part of the £33.5m budget came, eventually, from Miramax); a producer, Saul Zaentz, whom the director described as ‘the most parsimonious person imaginable’, and advance ambitions to have the visual sweep of *Lawrence of Arabia*. Nonetheless the film had a strong focus. Craig joined Minghella and Zaentz on the location recces in North Africa and was able to see the potential of places such as a small, disused abattoir in Tunisia; in the film, this became a busy Cairo marketplace of the 1930s, its size doubled by Craig’s careful use of a 40’ × 24’ plate-glass mirror and adjacent extras who stood in two-toned costumes, so as not to betray the illusion. (The real Egypt, as detailed in Michael Ondaatje’s source novel, was not used because of its massive post-war population growth.) The evocative former monastery of Sant’Anna in Camprena, Italy was also an important find; this fifteenth-century building became Craig’s Italian villa, supplemented by studio sequences filmed at the Cinecitta studios in Rome. In essence, *The English Patient* was characterised by its simplicity and the all-embracing sense of production design. Craig used colours carefully to separate the two broad locales; in Italy, beige, green and black predominated; to contrast with the ‘palette of golden hues’ he discovered in the mountain oasis of Tamerza and the endless sands of Chott el Djerid. Moreover, Craig’s sets were thoroughly incorporated into the visual fabric of *The English Patient* in a manner which recalled Junge’s work for *The Archers* (perhaps *Colonel Blimp* or *A Matter of Life and Death*). The theatre-man Minghella was discovering a love of cinema’s all-seeing vision – ‘one shot is full of that place in a woman’s neck and the next shot has 100 miles in it’ – and *The English Patient* was filled with poetic visual moments. Quiet visions such as a jeep buried in a studio sandstorm or a finger drawing on a car window seemed imbued with profound meaning; the more so, as they were combined with Craig’s occasional set pieces. The library in the Villa, with its succession of toppled bookcases, had a rare visual impact; mundanely, the giant bookcases demonstrated the rigours of war (they had fallen during action).
but they also implied the general sacrifices of culture; withal, the villa was a desolate, but hopeful, symbol.\textsuperscript{27}

**Modified Realism: Designing the New British Cinema**

The imaginative histories hinted at some changes that were apparent in British cinema during the 1990s. As I have noted, the costume drama has been an enduring staple of British film culture and it has gone through various phases; but there was something faintly revisionist, even post-modern, about some of the historical films that were made in the final decade of the twentieth century. In their sense of visual bravura, they seemed to reflect something of the spirit of the New British Cinema.

Inevitably, the New British Cinema was an arguable notion. As the decade wore on most things were claimed to be ‘new’ – New Labour, the new deal, new times – as if the adjective itself had alchemical power. This was a familiar trick, of course, but British films did evince a new confidence in the last phases of the century. In 1997, the Venice Film Festival had a ‘British Renaissance’ strand, recognising the sense of momentum gained in the wake of the two huge successes, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994, p.d.M. Gray) and *The Full Monty* (1997, p.d.M. Gottlieb). *Notting Hill* (1999, p.d.S. Craig) would follow shortly to substantiate the sense of a revived British cinema. There was no doubt that British films benefited from more stable finances as the 1990s progressed. In 1997, the New Labour government instituted tax breaks and the Lottery film fund, with the effect that annual investment in films rose to £240m; crucially, money was made available as soon as a project was completed. The lottery money, taken with the increased spending on films (£16m per year) which was allowed by law to Channel 4 from 1998, encouraged domestic film production (albeit on films which frequently failed to find an audience); the tax breaks encouraged a fresh bout of spending on the part of American companies, often in collaboration with British and European concerns. This fresh burst of American spending in Britain had some points of resemblance to the Swinging London era. The success of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* encouraged a renewed, if relatively cautious, interest in presenting simulacra of British culture for world consumption. The critic Richard Combs observed of the seminal RomCom:

> Perhaps it gives us an image of ourselves that’s as superficial as we’d like to keep it. That it has been imported back to us as an American success is even better: we can accept and
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approve of those meanings – while secretly despising them and keeping the real meanings, whatever they are, safe.28

The same might have been said of Working Title’s *The Borrowers*. Working Title had a hand in all of the latter-day swinging London films (a sub-genre that included other Richard Curtis-penned projects such as the 2003 *Love Actually* and the *Bridget Jones* films) and it was the most internationally minded of the British production concerns. But *The Borrowers* was something different. Its production style strongly recalled Gaumont-British’s internationalist films of the 1930s; it had an imported American star (John Goodman) and it attempted to mimic the style of the Hollywood family comedy (some reviewers noted the similarity of *The Borrowers* to the contemporary American comedy, *Mousehunt*). As with the old Gaumont pictures, *The Borrowers* fell short of its aims, but it did have some terrific sets. These were created at Shepperton by the former theatre designer Gemma Jackson and they re-invoked some old design tricks.

*The Borrowers* was based on the 1950s children’s books by Mary Norton, which concern a group of tiny people who dwell under the floorboards of suburban houses. For the film, Jackson made the adult actors appear diminutive by building the sets to 1:14 scale; the effect was enhanced by outsized props including 15’ high cotton reels, a 10’ Action Man and a 6’ light bulb. Jackson also incorporated some subtle touches into her sets. Cleverly, she disrupted the sense of period by using old props (long-gone domestic brands, numerous Morris Minor cars) and a brown/green palette that evoked the Britain of the austerity years. By these means, Jackson established a coherent design universe which appeared very much of the moment, but which also paid obeisance to the period of the novels.29

Clearly, and as *The Borrowers* suggested, the New British Cinema felt little duty to represent anything. In 1998, the Labour government’s Film Policy Review Group stressed that in Britain ‘we have a real talent in this unique area [filmmaking] where commerce and culture meet’. By the end of the millennium – and taking as evidence the confections of Richard Curtis, British-American films (real and aped) and the ongoing heritage productions – it seemed obvious that ‘commerce’ was winning out; producer Sally Hibbin lamented that the new times for British cinema had yielded just ‘endless Mr Beans and Mr Bonds’. But this begged a very fundamental question, to do with the kinds of culture that British cinema should be honouring – and the methods used to honour it. The leading social realists of the modern era have called...
for British cinema to make honest representation of class-based themes: Ken Loach suggests that British films ‘should move our audience to new conclusions and insights about society and their lives, to make films which are clear and true and correspond to their experience’; Mike Leigh argues that British film talent should be ‘making films about real life, uncluttered and unfettered and uninterfered with by the kind of disease that you can – broadly speaking – diagnose as Hollywood’. But the nouns and adjectives are scarcely neutral: Whose ‘audience’? Whose ‘insights’? (Moreover) Whose ‘real life’? Forever and a day, British cinema has been cursed by its own peculiar burden of representation. In the modern era, as before, we have struggled to find our own subjects to film and our own way to film them.30

This was where *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting* came in. These two films were both recognisably British, but they also drew elements from the dominant film culture of Hollywood; the first was a thriller, the second (the more remarkable work) expressed influence from the 1980s generation of independent American film auteurs. But the director-producer-writer team of Danny Boyle, Andrew Macdonald and John Hodge – together, Figment Films – remoulded their influences to make films which had an invigoratingly fresh, actually new, sensibility. Macdonald believed Britain had no chance of emulating American genres; consequently, ‘our [Britain’s] best chance of success is to make unique films that only the British could make’. In the event, the team used small budgets (£1,043,000 for *Shallow Grave* and £1.7m for *Trainspotting*), small crews and improvised studio facilities to make a duo of films that were not so much mid-atlantic as fashionably personal.31

Figment’s production designer was Kave Quinn. Like Gemma Jackson, she was a graduate of St Martin’s. Quinn studied fashion and textiles there, before further studies at the Chelsea School of Art (in drafting) and film school. Quinn’s first design work came in television. She produced the sets for ads, promos and a number of dramas; most importantly, she met Macdonald whilst working in TV. This led ultimately to Quinn’s first full production design credit, on *Shallow Grave*. Very quickly, she developed a distinctive approach to film design. Quinn has expansive tastes in film design – she has listed the sets of *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950, a.d.H. Dreier) as being amongst her personal favourites – and she has demonstrated great versatility in her career to date. Danny Boyle values Quinn for her organisational skills (‘it doesn’t matter what I decide to do at the last minute’) and all of her work is characterised by an acute feeling for space and colour. Quinn has suggested that she tries to ‘add another dimension’
to her projects, to make the viewer ‘see things differently’ and she regards colour as a principal stock in trade. She goes to great lengths to find the right shades; in the case of *Shallow Grave*, the ghastly walls of the Edinburgh flat were daubed in a colour suggested by a visit to a mortuary.32

The first Figment film established the design formula. *Shallow Grave* was shot in a converted warehouse in order to keep costs down. All of the key settings were built in the one place, in line with Boyle’s maxim that, ‘if you keep it in the studio, then you keep it under control’. The warehouse base allowed for quick shooting (30 days) and it also enabled Quinn to control space and colour; in one sequence of *Shallow Grave*, Quinn used sickly blue walls to suggest the deathly atmosphere within the bedroom of the dead man. *Trainspotting* was a more ambitious production – it had 30 sets and a slightly greater range of locations – but it used the same concentrated design style. The studio was established at a disused Wills cigarette factory in central Glasgow, the sets created and filmed by the same crew. Again, the design ethos was based on a psychological approach to colour. The photographer Brian Tufano used filters to characterise the sets (Renton’s room was bathed in yellow, the kitchen in red), but, typically, Quinn incorporated strong shades into her sets. Following his usual practice, Boyle compiled a weighty scrapbook of visual references for his collaborators. For *Trainspotting* these included images culled from trendy youth magazines, music and fashion mags, but Quinn was most influenced by the reproductions of Francis Bacon’s paintings; to Quinn, Bacon’s colours and imagery suggested ‘a sort of in-between land – part reality, part fantasy – which seemed very *Trainspotting*’.33

And that was the visual key to *Trainspotting*: the edgy balance which was struck between reality and fantasy. The Figment triumvirate and Quinn were clear about their desire to avoid social realism. Boyle noted that ‘British cinematic culture has a very strong tradition of dogged realism ... We don’t want this to be the kind of drug film that has a lot of bleak shots of housing estates as its context.’ (Conspicuously, when council flats were seen in *Trainspotting*, they had the symmetry and strong colours of a Mondrian painting.) Quinn also observed that ‘The look of *Trainspotting* is drawn from real life but very much exaggerated ... and quite stylised.’ She put a great deal of effort into finding authentic ‘cheap junk’ of the 1980s to dress the sets, but the settings were not pedantic. Rather, they expressed the life stories of the characters and they were filled with witty design flourishes. The drugs den had holes knocked into the walls – the product, one imagined of
some half-recollected attempt at interior design – and there were some improvised murals; for seating, there were plastic bucket seats and pub stools, all lifted, palpably, from some public house or other. The locations of Trainspotting were also integrated perfectly into the visual fabric. Extraordinary moments such as the ‘cool Britannia’ montage of stereotypical London scenes (pearly Kings, Trafalgar pigeons and red coated doormen) worked because of the general spirit of stylisation.34

The whole thing was like a dream – appropriately so. Trainspotting was framed by the material dreams of the 1990s and the pre-current Thatcher era (the overblown map in the London estate agents provided a memorable symbol of yuppiedom); but it was also devoted to the language of surrealism. Boyle said that he and Hodge responded to the ‘surreal stuff’ in Irvine Welsh’s source novel: so did Quinn. The toilet set was intended to signal an absolute break with social realism and its combination of absolute squalor and underwater beauty (sea shots à la Jacques Cousteau) took the film into the language of dreams. The advantage was secured in subsequent scenes at the Volcano nightclub. These were filmed using an anamorphic lens and they strongly recalled the Korova milk bar sets of A Clockwork Orange (the walls carried nonsense Nasdat words written in Barry script). As in the Kubrick film, the sets portrayed the drugged-out, walking dream states of the characters; only here, and this was the thrill of it, Quinn’s sets additionally did their bit to suggest the residual verve of the Trainspotting underclass.

Channel Four’s Head of Films, David Aukin, said that Trainspotting was a new kind of British film. It appealed to a savvy young audience who was ‘just not interested in the traditional heritage movie’. For once, this wasn’t just sales talk. The Figment films really did establish new ground for British films and they did this by forcing a fundamental break with the norms of representation. In the case of Trainspotting, the time frame was knowingly and confidently skewed: It was a film of the moment, about the 1980s; the characters were also unapologetically brash (more Clement and La Frenais than Loach). Quinn’s sets worked because they were filled with the received spirit of the times. But, inevitably, neither they nor the other trappings of the Figment films could do much to alter British cinema’s chronic unease over the business of representation: again, what to film and how to film it. Boyle remarked at the time of Trainspotting:

The confidence is the key. Hollywood has it because eight decades of dominance makes you confident. Audiences know it
too. A Hollywood movie is, while the European movie is usually about something. (Emphasis in original.)

As we have seen, British films are also about, have always been about, trying to appeal to American audiences and film financiers. In most respects, to the Western mind, films are Hollywood and it is this, by now, irrevocable fact of world film culture that makes truly designed moments such as Trainspotting all the more precious.35
chapter 10

Surveying the Scene

This account of British film production design does not require a standard conclusion. For one thing, this is a story without an ending; there again, the separate parts of that story have, hopefully, been told in full. To recap, the history of British film design to date goes broadly like this: The role of the art director developed slowly throughout the silent period, but standards were raised by the foreign artists who came to Britain during the 1930s. Thereafter, some executive talents found rare opportunities to express themselves through the largesse of J. Arthur Rank in the 1940s; subsequent periods of economic hardship encouraged the development of more pragmatic design standards (as seen in the ‘Carry Ons’ and Hammer Horror films). The 1960s evinced the development of two, highly contrasting design aesthetics; social realism (the films of the New Wave) and swinging style (swinging London films and the Bonds). Thereafter, the most interesting British design occurred in the work of the ‘pictorialist’ directors, but by the end of the 1970s some British designers were becoming involved in the new phenomenon of global blockbuster design. Latterly, British film design has played an important role in debates concerning the representation of British-ness on screen, pursuant to the great, intractable question of British film culture – what is a British film, anyway?

Throughout the research and writing of this book, I have been guided by the memory of a quote from the producer David Puttnam: ‘Sooner or later, people will come to realise that the film industry is an industrial process. It contains few, if any, geniuses.’ In my Introduction, I spoke of production design as an applied art form and I hope that we have seen many instances where the designer has turned his or her hand to the demands of a particular project, trend or personality. But this begs one final, important question to do with the actual influence of the British...
film designer through the ages. It is, I think, futile to think in terms of
design ‘auteurs’. Certainly, some names suggest themselves – leading
candidates would include Alfred Junge, John Bryan, John Box, Ken Adam
and Bernard Robinson – but two points have to be considered when
contemplating design authorship. First, the famous designers tend to
become famous because of their association with well-known or cultish
films; it is no coincidence that Adam and Robinson have been written
about more than any other British film designers. (We should also recall
Robinson’s dismay at being over-associated with the Hammer Horrors.)
Second, and more importantly, we need to remember that, in every
instance, the stellar design names have applied their talents to projects
that have, in various ways, been pre-visualised; by one person or, more
usually, by a group of talents. If anything, deliberating over designer
values will tend, ultimately, to lead one to question the all-pervading
influence of the director.¹

Edward Carrick summed up the relationship between director and
designer thus: ‘You get on board a ship. The Captain’s the Captain and
the Chief Engineer’s the Chief Engineer.’ But this still begs the ques-
tion as to the actual influence that has been exerted, over time, by the
designers of the British film (those ‘Chief Engineers’). Pulling together
the many strands of this book, we can see that designer influence has
been filtered – and at times attenuated – by a range of imperatives. Five
stand out:

1. National imperatives;
2. Producer imperatives;
3. Director imperatives;
4. Aesthetic imperatives;
5. Technological imperatives.

Taking these one by one, we should be in a position to assess the influ-
ence exerted by the British designer.²

**National Imperatives**

British cinema is profoundly affected by the sense of its non-Hollywood-
ness and, at the same time, its near-Hollywood-ness. The shared lan-
guage of English has encouraged the feeling that Britain can compete
on equal terms with Hollywood (often with disastrous consequences).
It has also permitted American companies to periodically speculate on
British production. Polygram’s former managing director Michael Kuhn
lamented in 1996 that Britain was a ‘vassal state’ to Hollywood. This
understanding, fair as it seems, has had important implications for British film designers. Some notable talents have benefited greatly from the occasional influxes of American money, among them: Lawrence P. Williams, Alfred Junge, Ken Adam and Asheton Gorton. Others, such as Peter Murton, Norman Garwood, Allan Cameron and Richard MacDonald, have developed transatlantic careers. (Murton observed in 1991 that ‘I don’t regard myself as purely an English designer. I just happen to be English.’)³

This is probably not a huge matter in itself – British studios have not suffered from a design talent-drain to America – but there are larger issues to do with film design and the regeneration of British culture. We have seen that British designers have often been put to work creating fanciful visions of British life. In 1940, Edward Carrick urged his colleagues to ‘build dramas around our own country and our people’ but these have rarely been fashionable. Consequently, British designers have tended to re-version British life for consumption by American audiences and also domestic viewers who have grown accustomed to forgetting who they are.

**Producer Imperatives**

In terms of national imperatives, British designers have been required to apply their art to providing saleable visions of domestic culture(s). Of course, they have been entreated to do so by British producers. Overall, six producers have exerted particular influence over British film design: in their different ways, J. Arthur Rank, Alexander Korda and Cubby Broccoli facilitated the designer; in contrast, James Carreras, Peter Rogers and (the Ealing period) Michael Balcon directed production design along prescribed lines.

As we have seen, Rank was laisser-faire in all creative matters; a rare example of a film financier who recognised his limitations. During the Independent Producers era, Rank’s munificence allowed his directors to create their own kinds of pictures; the participation in IPL of design aficionados Michael Powell and David Lean led directly to the magnificent sets of *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes* and *Oliver Twist*. Korda and Broccoli were more directly encouraging of the designer. Both men saw powerful production design as a valuable commodity; Korda admitted that his brother Vincent’s extravagant creations were intended to ‘make sure the Americans do not beat us here [in set design]’. Over time, Broccoli also developed the idea that Ken Adam’s sets could star in the James Bond films. As Adam recalled, during the best times, he had the
rewarding (if ulcer-inducing) task of building sets ‘comparable to an historical epic like Cleopatra or Ben Hur but slightly ahead of time’.4

Carreras, Rogers and Balcon defined the design styles of their movies in various ways. At Ealing, sobered by his experiences at Gaumont-British, Balcon sought to replace visual ‘tinsel’ with ‘realism’; as Roger Manvell noted, his designers (such as the Morahan brothers, Jim and Tom, and Duncan Sutherland) were consequently ‘constrained by realism’. Carreras and Rogers had more pragmatic concerns. Rogers saw the Carry On films as the anti-Bonds; cheap films for mass audiences, with sets assembled by old Pinewood hands from old Pinewood items (Vetchinsky, Dillon and Davey made full use of the burgeoning props stores at Iver Heath). To Carreras, commercial filmmaking was a matter of ‘a provocative box-office title ... well-endowed actresses ... and eye-catching production values’. The latter were partly the province of Bernard Robinson and it said everything for his powers of application that he was able to create something fresh from his cheap horror sets.5

**Director Imperatives**

British cinema is not conspicuously a cinema of auteur directors (one can think of perhaps twenty candidates, starting with George Pearson and ending with Shane Meadows). However, in Britain as elsewhere, the designer’s task has been shaped, routinely, by the director’s requirements: As Anton Furst summarised, ‘your [the designer’s] job is to give a director as many variations on views as you can’. On occasion, the British designer has been blessed to work with/for directors of mise-en-scène, the ‘pictorialists’, as described in Chapter Eight. One of the key features of this loosely aligned group was the general sense of respect felt for the designer. Terry Gilliam maintained a production ethos wherein ‘everybody starts thinking and comes up [with] ideas’ and Ken Russell saw the designer as a prime collaborator in his campaign to shock the ‘jaded ... virtually blind’ audience from their slumber. But the best appraisal of the pictorialist approach came from the nonchalantly eloquent Derek Jarman. During the shooting of Caravaggio, he wrote: ‘Since we are in sets, nothing need destroy our vision.’6

As we have seen, some other directors, notably Powell, Lean and Danny Boyle, have encouraged their designers, but the films of the pictorialists were notable for their foregrounding of design values within their traditionally auteurist projects; these directors of mise-en-scène really promoted the work of the designer.
Aesthetic Imperatives

Ken Loach once spoke of his desire to ‘make films which are clear and true and correspond to their [the audience’s] experience’. In similar vein, Mike Leigh diagnosed the need for British filmmakers to ‘make films of real life, uncluttered and unfettered and un-interfered with by the kind of disease that you can ... diagnose as Hollywood’. It’s easy – and unfair – to lump together the leading voices of British social realism in this way, but there is a clear correspondence in the assumption that there is an objective reality that can, and should, be captured on film; that hegemony is best countered by somehow standing apart from it.

To be fair, Loach, Leigh and many of the prior flame-keepers for British cinema’s Lumières tradition have conceded that screen realism involves editorial choices (Loach would see decisions over script, editing and mise-en-scène as being dialectically informed); nonetheless, British screen ciné-vérité has made particular demands of the designer – more than anyone, they have been called upon to both maintain and disavow an illusion (this is the real world and we didn’t put it there). The design efforts of Ralph Brinton, Alan Withy and latter designers-of-realism such as Eve Stewart, Fergus Clegg and Martin Johnson provoke one into reconsidering the nature of screen verisimilitude. Broadly, the memorable creations of British screen realism – Jo’s improvised flat of A Taste of Honey or Vera Drake’s living room – also suggest the differences between ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’. In daily life, people often use the words inter-changeably; properly, the former means ‘trustworthy’, and the misapplication of the word, in films and elsewhere, tells us something about this world of mirrors that we inhabit (as constructed, partly, by cinema).

Technically, the leading realist vein of British cinema – the New Wave – has exerted most influence in its use of real locations. Films such as Saturday Night and Sunday Morning used real places as a central element of the visual fabric. Today, it is customary for actors to refer to a location as a ‘set’, so accustomed have they become to finding the dramatic environment away from the studio; revealingly, in 1977, the Methuselah-like Alexander Vetchinsky characterised the designer’s role as being ‘primarily to visualise the background and atmosphere and then search for suitable locations’ (this from the one-time leading designer of the ‘hothouse’ film). Importantly, the New Wave also did much to reconfigure the studio itself. Tony Richardson’s use of improvised buildings to serve as the studios of Honey initiated a trend that runs to this day; its
echo can be perceived in *A Clockwork Orange*, *Trainspotting* and scores of other British productions.\(^7\)

**Technological Imperatives**

This final category necessarily demands that we project forwards. In the Introduction, I characterised the *Harry Potter* films as being ‘the end of the line’. Of course, on the technologically deterministic lines of the modern event film, that end point is never reached; there must never be an end, for cinema must offer up new, technology-driven sensations (more so, in this age of computer gaming). To date, the technological innovations have not impacted seriously on the traditional role of the designer, but we may have reached a decisive point in design history.

In 1985, Philip Strick suggested that blockbusters such as *Superman* and *Star Wars* had rendered production design more than a ‘wallpaper art’ – in the lineage of Bond, the sets assumed a starring role. But now the status of the production designer is being challenged by new forms of pre-visualisation. In essence, filmmaking has always pursued a three-phase method: pre-production (including set design), shooting (on stage and location) and post-production (including image and sound editing, post-production effects). Developments in imaging technologies, including special/virtual effects and Rawnsley’s notion of ‘blended’ design using back and front projection, have been controllable by the production designer because of his/her ownership of the original conception of the scene; of late, this principal has enabled Stuart Craig to keep order on the Harry Potter series amidst the ‘constant interweaving of the disciplines’ entailed by the huge productions. However, this prerogative is threatened by the increasing prevalence of computer ‘pre-viz’. Software such as XSI and, in particular, Maya allows the designer to create three-dimensional, ‘immersive’ environments directly onto the computer screen; importantly, such softwares can be networked, leading to the possibility of sets being designed by conference. The leading proponent of immersive design, American designer Alex McDowell enthuses that Maya, ‘uses digital tools to design immersively in virtual space, creating a collaborative workspace that effectively pre-visions and visualizes the final product for the immersive experience’.\(^8\)

That ‘immersive experience’ is intended to appeal to the gaming generation and, in its very method of manufacture, it threatens to revise the designer’s work task in ways which are unparalleled. To date, the
veterans of British design appear to be untroubled: Adam refers to computer technology as (merely) ‘a wonderful tool’; John Beard suggests that digital effects ‘can’t do everything’; Assheton Gorton claims that ‘the old-fashioned way ... never goes out of style’, Christopher Hobbs observes that ‘you get the most out of CGI by combining it with old tricks’. But these voices really perceive digital effects along the old lines; as visual accessories which dress the image, and occasionally spoil it, but which don’t fundamentally undermine the production designer’s ability to command the physical elements within the frame. Undoubtedly, networked, direct-to-screen programmes threaten designer autonomy and the designer’s role may have to be re-conceptualised. McDowell argues (and Craig agrees) that modern production designers should be trained to regard the computer, and not the pencil, as their primary medium; at the same time, Craig takes pains to teach his assistants ‘classical proportion, detail, ornament and perspective ... so they can build beautiful concepts’.9

In effect, the contemporary debates over the film designer’s role are centred on his/her ability to influence the first two phases of the production process. Back in 1950, in the wake of the Independent Frame fiasco, Carrick wrote of the possibility of designer-drawn ‘picture scripts’ which would be ‘the score to guide all those artists interested in making a film as it was visualised’. Clearly, the discussions over pre-visualisation have moved on considerably. But the production designer continues to prevail where built environments are concerned. Cinema still relies on the play of light on built surfaces and also, crucially, on the relationship between actor and environment; repeatedly, actors speak of their preference for working in sets, rather than against blue and green screens. At the same time, traditional built sets focus the mind of the director. The remarks made in 1977 (during the shooting of Star Wars) by the ILM effects guru John Dykstra still stand today, irrespective of subsequent technological developments:

It’s hard to explain [to a director] that a concept won’t work because of some technological thing and this becomes a bone of contention. When a director shoots an exterior, he can see the lighting and the setup.10

I didn’t want to end this, surprisingly complex, survey of British film design with a facile remark to the effect that ‘art directors have rolled with the punches before and they’ll do so again’. But I can argue against the mythologies of technological determinism as they relate to filmmaking. For all of the changes that have been experienced throughout
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the 110 years-plus of British filmmaking, some things remain remarkably constant. The basic idea of film design has remained unchanged and it is encapsulated in a 1928 quote from a long forgotten critic, Eric Elliott:

In a walk through the street we see only a small part of all what is actually there ... If this is so in everyday existence, it is even more so in the cinema theatre ... As soon as the creator of a film forgets to discriminate between the essential and the technical, to forget that a picture is intrinsically different from a scene, he is a little farther away from cinematography and a little nearer to the stage.11

Film production design serves to guide the eye and concentrate the mind. Film worlds relate to real worlds – the illusion depends upon them looking similar – but the designer seeks always to distil the essential elements. The skill and wonder of it all can be assessed if we consider one verity of film culture: that before the designer goes an unseen street, an inconspicuous building or an empty stage.
Academy Awards for Design: British Winners

1947  
*Great Expectations* (black and white)  
*Black Narcissus* (colour)  
John Bryan  
Alfred Junge

1948  
*Hamlet* (black and white)  
*The Red Shoes* (colour)  
Roger Furse  
Hein Heckroth

1962  
*Lawrence of Arabia* (colour)  
John Box, John Stoll

1965  
*Doctor Zhivago* (colour)  
John Box, Terence Marsh  
John Box, Terence Marsh  
John Box, Ernest Archer, Jack Maxsted

1968  
*Oliver!*

1971  
*Nicholas and Alexandra*

1975  
*Barry Lyndon*

1977  
*Star Wars*

1982  
*Gandhi*

1986  
*A Room with a View*

1989  
*Batman*

1992  
*Howard's End*

1994  
*The Madness of King George*

1996  
*The English Patient*

1998  
*Shakespeare in Love*  
Stuart Craig  
Brian Ackland-Snow  
Anton Furst  
Luciana Arrighi  
Ken Adam  
Stuart Craig  
Martin Childs
Notes

I  Setting the Scene


2 Early Stages: British Design in the Silent Era

7. J.B. Rathbun, op cit, p.50.
NOTES

17. G. Pearson, ibid.
20. M. Sabine, ‘The Growth of British Studio Equipment’, Supplement to The Bioscope, 1 July 1920: p.ix. Sabine was Technical Director for George Clark Productions. See also G. Pearson, Flashback, op cit, p.27 and C.M. Hepworth, Came the Dawn, op cit, p.120.
23. N. Arnold, ibid., p.171.

3 The Foreign Touch: Émigré Design of the 1930s


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6. For further details see J. May ‘A German Film-Maker in England’, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 31 August 1933: p.4. Joe May was a famous German producer and director.


8. See PRO LAB 8/75. Internal memo, from Board of Trade to the Ministry of Labour, in PRO LAB 8/76. S. Cole quoted in PRO LAB 8/75.


11. Extract from the shooting script for *Piccadilly* held at the BFI library, London. Legal clause contained in the script for *Cape Forlorn* as held at the BFI Library, London.


NOTES


29. Further details of the sets of *Things to Come* can be found in *The Scotsman*, 16 April 1935: p.15 and the *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1935: p.7.


4 Prestige Design: Working for Rank in the 1940s


3. See PRO BT64/114. Powell was paid £2,000. However, some notes from a BoT official in this file suggest that it was suspicious that British National inflated the technical salaries on *Contraband* in order to qualify for extra quota.

5. A. Junge, ‘The Art Director’s Task’, *Film & TV Technician*, October 1958: p.364. *The Silver Fleet* was produced by The Archers but directed by Vernon Sewell. Junge also worked on *The Volunteer* (1943), a government short which was shot mainly against existing sets at Denham.


7. Further details of ‘Ethel’ can be found in *Film Industry*, July 1946: p.2 and *Kineweekly*, 10 January 1946: p.31.


16. H. Heckroth quoted in E. Carrick, *op cit*, p.64.


20. Details of the buffet set drawn from the press materials for *Brief Encounter*, held at the BFI library, London.

NOTES

22. Quote on *Great Expectations* drawn from the press materials for the film, held at the BFI library, London.
24. See F. Del Giudice, ‘Memorandum: Resume of Ideas and Opinions by “DEL” on the Film Business’, November 1948. A copy of this document may be found in the Bernard Miles Collection held at the BFI Library, London.
29. R. Furse quoted in the publicity materials for *Hamlet* held at the BFI Library, London.
31. Furse and Dillon received Oscars for the sets of *Hamlet* (for art direction and set decoration).
35. E. Carrick, telephone conversation with the author, 2 July 1993.
5 Cheap Laughs and Cheap Thrills


6. This incident is reported in Kinematograph Weekly, 27 May 1967: p.13.


8. Details of the Cleopatra sets can be found in Kinematograph Weekly, 1 December 1960: p.1; 13 December 1962: p.111 and 24 January 1963: p.16. See also the fiche on the film held at the BFI library.
NOTES


15. Production cost figures for Dracula, Prince of Darkness drawn from Item 8 in the Hammer Film Productions Special Collection held at the BFI Library in London. For a detailed analysis of Hammer’s American links see C. Koetting, ‘Hands Across the Water: The Hammer-Seven Arts Alliance’, Little Shoppe of Horrors #12 (April 1994).


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22. Production costs for *Dracula* taken from Item 3 in the Hammer Film Productions Special Collection at the BFI library, London. The art department salaries totaled £2,457. The quote from Carreras is drawn from Item 1 in the same collection. The details of setting arrangements are taken from Meikle, *op cit*, p.62 and Kinsey, *op cit*, p.99.

23. Two quotes drawn from the press release for *Dracula* and a review by Paul Dehn in the *News Chronicle*, 23 May 1958: p.17.

24. The story of Robinson’s near sacking is recounted by his wife, the Hammer sculptress Margaret, in Kinsey, *op cit*, p.99.


27. See C. Koetting, *op cit*, p.44. See also *Kinematograph Weekly*, 30 November 1968: p.5.


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33. Quote taken from the publicity materials for Dracula A.D.1972 held at the BFI library, London. Details of costs are taken from Item 11 in the Hammer Film Productions Special Collection at the BFI library.

6 No Sets Please ... We’re British. Polemical Realism via the New Wave

17. T. Richardson in Financial Times, 1 June 1959: p.5.


22. T. Richardson, *Long-Distance Runner*, op cit, p.121.


28. Shooting script of *Billy Liar* held at the BFI library, London.

29. Quotes drawn from the shooting script for *Billy Liar*.

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18. K. Adam quote and details of gadgets are drawn from the publicity materials for Pennies from Heaven. In addition, see the press materials for Goldfinger (also held at the BFI Library, London). Details of the Disco Volante power yacht can be found in Frayling, op cit, p.151.


22. Quotes drawn from the press materials for Anne of a Thousand Days, Isadora and Charge of the Light Brigade held at the BFI library, London. The metaphors of A Lion in Winter are explained in D. Robinson, op cit, p.37. See also Grand Amusements, March 1965: p.18.

23. Details of the cost and ambition of these films can be found in Sight and Sound, May 1992: p.24 (Charge ...), Films and Filming, July 1969: p.4 (Alfred) and D. Robinson, ibid., p.37. See also the publicity materials for Zulu held at the BFI library, London.


26. J. Bryan quotes drawn from the press book for Becket. This is held at the BFI library, London. Further details of the sets can be found in Daily Cinema special supplement of 10 April 1964.

NOTES


32. These production details are drawn from *Film Review*, January 2000: p.76, S. Silverman, *op cit*, p.155 and the publicity materials for *Doctor Zhivago*, held at the BFI library, London.


54. Losey’s annotations drawn from the January 1963 revised script for The Servant. A copy of this can be viewed at the BFI library, London.


8 Pictorial Design


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8. J. Barry quoted in T. St John Marner, ibid., p.128 and 35–36. The quote concerning the time framing of the film is drawn from the film’s pressbook, held at the BFI library, London.


10. K. Russell quoted in unmarked item from his personal fiche held at the BFI library, London and K. Russell, Directing Film. The Director’s Art
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18. Production note drawn from the Anne Skinner Papers, BFI Special Collection, Box 6. Ms Skinner was the continuity woman on The Devils.
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19. M. Plowright, review of Just Like a Woman, Films and Filming, November 1966: p.51


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9 Do We Mean Us?
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3. Production details drawn from D.M. Petrou, ibid., pp.161–162. See also the publicity materials for Superman held at the BFI library, London.


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13. K. Adam quoted in *Screen International*, 12 February 1977: p.10 and J. Delson, *ibid.*., p.40. Other details of the *Moonraker* sets are drawn from *Film Review Special #25* (December 1998); p.84. See also L. Bouzereau, *The Art of Bond* (London: Boxtree, 2006): p.75. Details of the 007 stage can be found in the *Screen International* article and also *Film Monthly*, June 1981: p.15.


17. P. Lamont quoted in Hibbin, *ibid.*., p.58. Other details drawn from L. Bouzereau, *op cit*, p.82.


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10 Surveying the Scene

5. E. Carrick, ‘Film, Theatre and Ballet in the United States’, *Studio*, September 1940: p.82.
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