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***LOVING THE ALIENS:
OUTSIDERS, FOREIGNERS
AND UPROOTED CHARACTERS
IN SHORT AND EXPERIMENTAL BRITISH FILMS***

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Premise

When my research began, back in 2009, the only thing I knew was that I wanted to investigate an underestimated fragment in the history of British cinema. During the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, the British Film Institute and its ‘independent’ branch, the Experimental Production Committee, funded many short- to mid-length film projects: though praised and deemed influential upon their release, those films are now almost unknown and forgotten.

I moved to London in order to watch these films, many of which are still unreleased but available for viewing at the BFI. I went through all the Free Cinema films and the Experimental Film Fund productions. I knew that I had found my hunting ground, but I still did not know what to go hunting for.

It was only when I came across a copy of Lorenza Mazzetti’s *K* that I found the key to narrow down the scope of my research. *K*, taken from Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, is a radical tale of alienation and loneliness, an existential parable on the theme of the outsider, made by a foreign-born director who felt deranged and isolated from reality. The status of the foreigner, the outsider and the uprooted and its on-screen representation were the right lead to follow. When I met Lorenza Mazzetti in person for the first time, in July 2009, a chat with her confirmed that I was on the right track.

Then, Lorenza mentioned Lindsay Anderson's *The White Bus*, the story of an uprooted and disoriented girl confronting modern urbanisation. I rushed to watch it and decided that *K*, made in 1953, and *The White Bus*, made in 1967, would bracket the span of my investigation.

The first chapter of this thesis defines the social and cultural context in which the films analysed here were conceived. In particular, the birth of the independent film journal, *Sequence*, the role of the Experimental Film Fund and the importance of Free Cinema are discussed as the main elements in the founding of a new film aesthetics.

The second and third chapters are dedicated to Lorenza Mazzetti and to her British films: the aforementioned *K* and Mazzetti's distinctive contribution to Free Cinema, *Together* (1956). As part of my research, I supervised the restoration of *K* (which was funded by the Italian film association Cinit Cineforum Italiano) and edited issue no. 168 of the film journal *Cabiria*, dedicated to Mazzetti's film. The restored version of *K* was released on DVD and is enclosed here; the pages of *Cabiria* I edited are reproduced in Appendix 3. Going through the minutes of the Experimental Film Committee's meetings, I retrieved the original synopsis of *Together*, written by Mazzetti and Denis Horne. *The Glass Marble*, as the film was originally supposed to be called, is radically different from the finished film, which benefited from the intervention of Lindsay Anderson, who gave it an unscripted 'poetic twist'. The synopsis of *The Glass Marble* is reprinted in paragraph 3.1.

The fourth chapter deals with an obscure film, *Alone With the Monsters* (1958), directed by Nazli Nour. Though not a major accomplishment, *Alone With*

the Monsters is an interesting variation on the theme of the outcast. In my interpretation, Nour's treatment of the outcast is extremely pessimistic: the process of rejection which creates the outcast takes place in the outcast's mind, thus implying that the outcast is the primary cause of his/her own condition.

The fifth chapter examines *Refuge England* (1959), the first film of the Hungarian-born Robert Vas. Though this Free Cinema short is quite well-known and renowned, it has seldom been written about at length. *Refuge England* narrates a refugee's first impact with the city of London, his search for a place to stay and his attempts to decipher the English language and to understand the Londoners' habits. *Refuge England* is a captivating essay on the act of observation and on the definition of an individual's identity. During my research, I recovered the film's original synopsis, which was entitled *D.P. [Displaced Person]* and is reprinted in Appendix 4.

The sixth and seventh chapters analyse three of Lindsay Anderson's key films: *O Dreamland* (1953), *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957) and *The White Bus* (1967). The two Free Cinema documentaries contribute to the definition of Anderson's aesthetics, which will be developed in the experimental, surreal and Brechtian *The White Bus*. Anderson's personality and the scope of his oeuvre are far too complex to be fully discussed in a couple of chapters, but the chosen films represent a valid summary of his ideas and ideals. Anderson's care for traditional values, his distaste for reactionary institutions and authorities, his commitment and attention to class struggle, his satirical view of the absurdities of life emerge from

these films in different ways and through the use of radically different film techniques.

The final sequence of *The White Bus*, in which a young girl finds herself alone in a deserted fish-and-chip shop after a failed attempt to reconnect with her roots, is representative of the parable of all the characters in the films analysed here: the search for a place to call home is never over and the outsiders, the foreigners and the outcasts, endowed with an alien gaze that allows them to read reality from an exclusive angle, are destined to wander the world (physically or metaphorically) in a perennial and never ending journey.

1.

British cinema after World War II: realism, commitment and ‘poetic truth’

The future of the cinema is usually an occasion for depressing prophecies.

– *Gavin Lambert*

1.1. Introduction

The films analysed here were all made by filmmakers working in London in the 1950s. Three of them were foreign-born: Lorenza Mazzetti, Robert Vas and Nazli Nour. One of them, Lindsay Anderson, was an outsider of British culture, born in India of Scottish origins. Mazzetti, Vas, Nour and Anderson conceived their films under different circumstances and without being acquainted with one another’s work. The personality of Lindsay Anderson is the *trait d’union* that links these filmmaking experiences (apart from Nazli Nour’s), having intervened in the editing of Mazzetti’s *Together* and having invited Robert Vas to take part in the sixth Free Cinema programme with his debut film, *Refuge England*.

Three major events in the history of British cinema closely concern the films analysed here and are therefore worthy of examination: the rise of the independent film journal, *Sequence*; the foundation of the BFI Experimental Film Fund; the creation of Free Cinema and the elaboration of its aesthetic manifesto.

Free Cinema is a common ground to these films, some of them having been made under the influence of the ideas circulating at the time the Free Cinema manifesto was written. Cinematographer Walter Lassally and his distinctively bleak and *cinema-verité*-like photography hold three of these films together, including Nazli Nour's *Alone With the Monsters*. The fundamental financial support of the BFI Experimental Film Fund made the making of *Together*, *Refuge England* and *Alone With the Monsters* possible and was also crucial in the funding of some other Free Cinema films.

The cornerstone debate on British cinema that took place in the early 1950s on the pages of a small and independent journal called *Sequence* is the basis of the ideas behind the films I have examined, including Anderson's *The White Bus*. Thanks to the contributions of Anderson, Gavin Lambert and Karel Reisz among others, *Sequence* managed to initiate a discussion on the British film industry and on the aesthetic and ideological premises and consequences of such 'class-bound' entertainment.

1.2. British documentaries: social function and aesthetic challenge

During World War II, British cinema displayed two distinct and separate souls: on one side, mainstream fiction cinema, dominated by magnates such as Michael Balcon, Alexander Korda and Filippo Del Giudice; on the other, the documentary movement headed by producer and director John Grierson. These two fronts, the

fictional and the factual, seldom came into contact. The images of Britain delivered by these two opposite types of cinema were of conflicting natures: mainstream cinema was made by middle- and upper-class filmmakers and was therefore reactionary and class-bound, still tied to a tradition and ideology that resisted the social and cultural disarray brought by World War II. In contrast, documentaries explored the lesser-known aspects of British society and were made in the public interest and screened for educational purposes, such as those instructing on the use of anti-raid shelters or, more trivially, on the correct use of telephone.

John Grierson thought of documentary in terms of “sociological rather than aesthetic aims”:¹ what he sought to realise through the documentaries he produced and supervised was an act of civic education.² According to Grierson himself, “the British documentary group began not so much in affection for film *per se* as in affection for national education”.³ Through the production unit he headed (first at the Empire Marketing Board and then as a branch of the General Post Office), Grierson and his protégé directors set up a sort of filmic encyclopaedia of British life with an overtly didactic intent. These films also gained international success, thus establishing the British Documentary Film Movement as one of the most relevant worldwide.

¹ John Grierson, “The Course of Realism”, in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary*, Collins, London 1946, p. 140. Cf. Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, British Film Institute, London 2007, p. 133).

² Bert Hogenkamp defines Grierson as a “young radical with a strong belief in the educational potential of film [...] maintaining that the crisis of capitalism could be overcome by better educating the people regarding their civil responsibility” (Bert Hogenkamp, “Film and the Workers’ Movement in Britain 1929-39”, in *Sight and Sound*, v. 45 n. 2, 1976, p. 72. Quoted in Roy Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema*, Oxford University Press, New York 1978, p. 128. Cf. Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, p. 133).

³ John Grierson quoted in Lindsay Anderson, “Going It Alone”, in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, ed. Paul Ryan, Plexus, London 2004, p. 353.

The Griersonian documentaries were undeniably refined in terms of writing, editing and sound. In those films, two apparently conflicting ideas of cinema coexisted: on the one hand, the spirit of *direct cinema* and, on the other, a thoughtful elaboration of the filmed reality. It was Grierson himself who devised the well-known formula that defined documentaries methodologically as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’.⁴ In his view, realism and artistic manipulation of reality were not at odds.

If Grierson provided the formula, it was Humphrey Jennings who definitively merged the factual and the fictional, the realistic and the poetic, in films such as *Spare Time* (1939), *Fires Were Started* (1943) and *A Diary for Timothy* (1946). Jennings, originally a painter and a poet, also gave British documentaries new social relevance, focussing his attention on the people and on the ordinary events of everyday life. Moreover, Jennings was a visual artist profoundly indebted to surrealism and modernism, which led him to experiment with form and technique. As far as cinema, politics and the standards set by Grierson go, “he was unorthodox, and the unorthodoxy shows”.⁵ No wonder, then, that a similarly unorthodox and innovative director such as Lindsay Anderson defined Jennings “the only real poet the British cinema has yet produced”.⁶ The affinities between the two directors are undeniable, and most of Anderson’s early documentaries are the ideal follow-up to Jennings’ productions.

⁴ Cf. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited*, British Film Institute, London, 1995, pp. 11-14.

⁵ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, “Humphrey Jennings: Surrealist Observer”, in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays*, British Film Institute, London 1986, p. 322.

⁶ Lindsay Anderson “Only Connect: Some Aspects of the Work of Humphrey Jennings”, in *Sight and Sound*, v. 23 n. 4, Spring 1954, reprinted in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 359.

1.3. Sequence

In 1946, Oxford University had just started its own Film Society magazine, which was at the time assembled and edited by two undergraduates, John Boud and Peter Ericsson. After the first issue, the two sought to broaden the magazine's scope into something more elaborate. Lindsay Anderson joined them and began co-editing the journal, which was then published as *Sequence* in December 1946. From its second issue,⁷ *Sequence* became London-based. Gavin Lambert and Penelope Houston stepped in as co-editors and contributors, followed by Karel Reisz. The enriched team of critics, who were soon to be regarded as the Young Turks of British film criticism (and of criticism of British films), established *Sequence* as an independent quarterly. It was non-subsidised and largely funded by its own editors,⁸ by some of their friends willing to invest their money (and prepared not to get it back), and by a few private sponsors Anderson was in charge of recruiting. *Sequence* was a short-lived enterprise: only fourteen issues were published from 1946 to 1953, the last being edited by Anderson and Reisz. Nevertheless it represented quite an achievement in creating a new standard for film criticism and became a reference journal, also retrospectively:

Sequence had a very short life, but it build a reputation over a very few years. [...] The number of people who bought *Sequence* was very small and the circulation was probably no more than a couple of thousand. But it was read by *interested* people, and this was the time when *Sight and Sound*, published by the British Film Institute, was a real dead duck, a terrible paper. So there was room for a little magazine which may

⁷ Lindsay Anderson recalls: "*Sequence* [...] was eventually published but was not very good. [...] The first issue which became recognisable as the *Sequence* people remember was *Sequence 2*" (Lindsay Anderson, "A Child of Empire", in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 39).

⁸ As Gavin Lambert recalls: "As the magazine -was produced on a shoestring, I also helped in typing the copy (more than a half of which we wrote ourselves), designing the layout, calculating the number of words and the size of stills for each page, correcting proofs, and packaging the orders from bookstores, newsagents, and subscribers" (Gavin Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2000, p. 50). Cf. Lindsay Anderson, "*Sequence*. Introduction to a Reprint", in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 48.

not have sold many copies but which was very refreshing in comparison with the dreary *Sight and Sound*.⁹

Sequence was devised to be “a personal, authoritative film magazine”,¹⁰ an amateur but not amateurish endeavour conceived as “determinedly uncompromising, specialist and personal, serious and humorous, enthusiastic and well-informed”.¹¹ *Sequence*’s guidelines resided in its editors’ personal, and sometimes conflicting, tastes.

SEQUENCE

Edited by

JOHN BOUD and PETER ERICSSON

and published by

THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY FILM SOCIETY

CONTENTS

Film among the Arts	- - - -	John Boud
Some French Films—and a Forecast	-	Lindsay Anderson
The Cinema of Marcel Carné	- -	J. F. Lodge
The Czechoslovak Film Industry	- -	Peter Tempest

and

Book Reviews, Stills, Cartoon

⁹ Lindsay Anderson, “A Child of Empire”, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹¹ Lindsay Anderson, “*Sequence*. Introduction to a Reprint”, p. 41.

The journal's stance was both aesthetic and polemical – and the two modes were deeply intertwined. The editorials, articles and reviews seemed to have three major targets: the condition of the British film industry; British cinema's insensitivity towards social problems and marginal situations; the necessary renewal of forms and subjects; and the hoped-for emergence of new authors, as was happening in theatre and literature. What *Sequence* encouraged was a quest for a committed cinema, for a renewed social interest and for a slightly more daring approach to film technique. *Sequence* thus anticipated the later claims of Free Cinema and the British New Wave:

A reverse continuity can be traced from Britain's New Wave of the late fifties, back to Free Cinema (1956 to 1958) and to *Sequence* in the years after the War. The magazine was not particularly pro-British and certainly not political, but later developments were realist in style and implicitly (not explicitly) left-wing.¹²

Film criticism in *Sequence* was far from simply theoretical (“the bloodless theorising of Film Departments”):¹³ through the praxis of reviews, film theory and aesthetic principles were discussed, society was criticised and social changes advocated. The whole discourse on commitment (be it social, political, moral or ethical), which would permeate the Free Cinema years, began in its essence among the pages of *Sequence*.

Sequence's attacks on the British film industry and its major producers and directors were often sharp and unrepentant. The *Sequence* contributors advocated a “radical shake-up”¹⁴ of a cultural system and film culture that, as Karel Reisz

¹² Ibid., p. 43.

¹³ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁴ Karel Reisz quoted in Colin Gardner, *Karel Reisz*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York 2006, p. 18.

pointed out, “seemed to us out of touch with what was going on, and stiflingly class-bound”.¹⁵

1.4. The case of *Chance of a Lifetime*

Sequence comprised articles which became pivotal in the development of Lindsay Anderson’s film aesthetics, including “Angles of Approach” and “Creative Elements”.¹⁶ One of the most relevant, however, is Anderson’s review of Bernard Miles’ film, *Chance of a Lifetime* (1950), which appeared in *Sequence Eleven*.¹⁷ In his review, Anderson enumerates the reasons for “the failure of Britain to achieve, in fifty years of picture making, any considerable tradition of cinema”.¹⁸ According to Anderson, British cinema is stale, middle-class and class-bound, with no attitude to introspection and self-examination. It is therefore unable to sympathise with social levels other than the middle class. Mainstream cinema staged the social and spiritual sufferings of upper classes, completely disregarding the moral and physical misery of the workers. Anderson advocates a ‘new’ British cinema able to emancipate the lower classes from the roles of “comic relief”¹⁹ or patronised stock characters. *Chance of a Lifetime* tackles head-on the issue of “the relationship between

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See also Erik Hedling, “Lindsay Anderson: *Sequence* and the rise of auteurism in 1950s Britain”, in Ian MacKillop – Neil Sinyard (eds.), *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2003, pp. 23-31.

¹⁷ Cf. Lindsay Anderson, “*Chance of a Lifetime*” (review), in *Sequence*, n. 11, Summer 1950, pp. 39-40. Despite its importance in the development of Anderson’s film criticism, the review does not appear in the collection of Anderson’s writings, *Never Apologise*. It is reproduced below, see Appendix 1.

¹⁸ Lindsay Anderson, “*Chance of a Lifetime*”, p. 39.

¹⁹ Ibid.

management and labour in industry”.²⁰ Anderson flags the film as “a forerunner, a pioneer”,²¹ if not on an ideological basis then at least in cinematic terms. In his review, Anderson praises

the liveliness and lifelike-ness of its people and places. Shot on location, at a real factory, its backgrounds are splendidly genuine: the ramshackle works are cramped and littered with the refuse of years; the village pub is attractive without being offensively picturesque; and when one of the workmen comes to London he has the temerity to ride in a real bus. The direction is very craftsmanlike, and the photography admirably achieves the drab tones of everyday without sacrifice of visual interest. Best of all, though, are its people. For once here is a producer who has troubled to look around and pick players of fresh talent instead of efficient stereotypes: [...] the workers play with an unaffected, highly enjoyable spontaneity that comes almost as a revelation.²²

The characteristics of *Chance of a Lifetime* that struck Anderson as groundbreaking were mainly connected to the film’s immediate representation of working-class reality. It is difficult for us today not to see the artificial nature of such representation. In its best moments, though, the plot of *Chance of a Lifetime* is exemplary of a small-scale social revolution and its narrative parable bears the traits of a liberal (and at times para-Marxist) social utopia. *Chance of a Lifetime* has the undeniable merit of giving full-bodied roles and a considerable amount of screen time to working-class characters and of recreating a work environment that rings true. Location shooting, drab photography and a low-contrast black and white palette contribute to the realistic look of the film, somehow anticipating the visual impact of ‘kitchen sink’ films.

However, *Chance of a Lifetime* was considered to have no commercial appeal by distributors:

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 40.

²² Ibid.

When *Chance of a Lifetime* opened at the Leicester Square Cinema on April 27th [1950], a new era dawned: for the first time a commercial cinema had been forced, by Government action, to show a film which would otherwise have been denied a booking by either of the big circuits. In itself, no doubt, this principle of dictation is not a good one; but where unrestricted enterprise has resulted in near-monopoly, and where these monopolies are controlled by business-men who are shortsighted as well as hard-headed, one can only applaud a regulation which gives the worthwhile independent film a chance to pay for itself.²³

To Lindsay Anderson, *Chance of a Lifetime* became the standard-bearer of a personal fight for a different kind of cinema. The film foreshadows the principles of Free Cinema: it is a committed film, conceived outside the film establishment and screened outside the usual screen circuits without the aid of major distribution companies. *Chance of a Lifetime* also represents the ‘chance of a lifetime’ for British cinema: a chance for change and improvement, a chance for the British film establishment to re-discuss and re-assess itself, a chance to devise a new kind of cinema.

British cinema would have to wait at least six years before seeing the seed of committed realism grow into a well-formed and sturdy plant.

²³ “Free Comment”, in *Sequence*, n. 11, Summer 1950, p. 1.

1.5. The BFI Experimental Film Fund

In 1952, the British Film Institute – at the time directed by Denis Forman – set up and administered a fund dedicated to the selection and development of experimental films²⁴ made by young directors, many of them debut filmmakers. In a note dated 1953, Forman writes:

The vicissitudes of the past have led me to believe that the Institute would be well advised to put in motion a well-balanced experimental programme, taking particular care not to allow highbrow or avant-garde subjects to predominate.²⁵

The opening of the Experimental Film Fund (or the Telecinema Production Committee, as it was first named) filled the gap created by the shutting down of the state-funded Crown Film Unit by the Conservative government that same year.²⁶

The dismantlement of the unit meant that documentaries would no more be funded except for strictly informational or propagandist reasons. Such an important field for experimentation with form and technique was at risk of being lost. As Forman said:

I hope it will be possible too for the British Film Institute to sharpen the experimental edge of the film industry which, in the tradition of Len Lye, Cavalcanti and Norman McLaren, has often been associated with documentary achievements in the past.²⁷

The Experimental Film Fund was opened thanks to an initial contribution of £12,500 by the film industry and was governed by a committee (the Experimental

²⁴ “The word ‘experimental’ has been interpreted very broadly; but the emphasis has hitherto been on films whose originality lies rather in their content than in their technique” (“Note on the Experimental Film Production Committee”, BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive, Box 121 [location O/19/1], File 2: Experimental Film Fund). “The sort of experiment that the Committee certainly did not have in mind was, for example, avant-garde cinema” (Christophe Dupin, “Early Days of Short Film Production at the British Film Institute: Origins and Evolution of the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-66)”, *Journal of Media Practice*, v. 4 n. 2, 2003, p. 84).

²⁵ Denis Forman, “Note to the Experimental Production Committee”, 1953. BFI Special Collections, Michael Balcon Collection [location H/45].

²⁶ Cf. Christophe Dupin, “Early Days of Short Film Production at the British Film Institute”, p. 81. See also Colin Gardner, *Karel Reisz*, p. 57.

²⁷ Denis Forman, “Further Notes”, *Sight and Sound*, April-June 1952, p. 180, cited in Christophe Dupin, “Early Days of Short Film Production at the British Film Institute”, p. 81.

Film Production Committee, later Experimental Production Board) chaired by renowned producer Michael Balcon²⁸ and composed of members such as Basil Wright, Thorold Dickinson and Karel Reisz.

The committee evaluated the submitted film treatments and synopses and, once these were approved, allocated money for the films to be shot in their entirety or in part. The British Film Institute gave assistance in the distribution, and the fund and the directors then shared any profits from the film.

The committee operated simultaneously within and outside the institutional frame of the British Film Institute. Though conceived as a branch of the institute, the committee was not sustained directly by the BFI and operated in a fully independent way. In fact, it was so disengaged from the institute that it did not even have its own premises and most of the meetings were held at Balcon's studios.

The fund mainly sponsored short to mid-length documentaries, art documentaries and fiction films. Constantly struggling with budget issues, the committee tried to turn the films into profitable endeavour, submitting them to festivals and contests, distributing them or selling the rights for television broadcasting. Budget deficiency also meant technical deficiency: sometimes the sum granted by the fund was not enough to cover the rental of sufficiently advanced equipment, so some of the films were shot with provisional cameras and unsteady sound gear, not to mention edited with elementary post-production tools.

²⁸ "What brought Balcon to the Institute in 1952 was despair at the myopia of the film industry, whose improvidence never ceased to amaze him. [...] He believed passionately in open opportunity for young talent, not for any indulgent commitment to youth, but for the good businessman's reason that creativity is the beginning of cinema, the vital element of its bloodstream" (Stanley Reed, "Michael Balcon, 1896-1977", in *BFI News*, January 1978. Cf. Christophe Dupin, "Early Days of Short Film Production at the British Film Institute", p. 81).

The committee also funded but did not officially sponsor Free Cinema.²⁹

Nevertheless, Free Cinema films established a quality standard that enhanced the fund's prestige and at the same time became the artistic and economic guiding rubric³⁰ for the selection of the projects that were submitted to the committee:

the inexpensive use of 16mm, black and white film stock, small-scale production and the imaginative use of sound and image juxtaposition not only compensated for the lack of slick production values but also, like Italian neo-realism, generated a certain recognizable style that increasingly became a common standard of excellence.³¹

1.6. Free Cinema

It was unlike anything else then to be seen on the commercial screen.

– *Alexander Walker*

Free Cinema was a revolutionary act in British film culture. Devised by Lindsay Anderson, the Free Cinema manifesto was co-written by Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and Lorenza Mazzetti, and reads as follows:

These film were not made together; nor with the idea of showing them together. But when they came together, we felt they had an attitude in common. Implicit in this attitude is a belief in freedom, in the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday.

As film-makers we believe that

²⁹ “By financing five ‘official’ Free Cinema films between 1956 and 1959, the Experimental Film Fund became de facto the movement’s main sponsor. In return, one can argue that Free Cinema secured the immediate future of the Experimental Film Fund by providing its first public successes. The identification of the two became so strong that Balcon had to clarify the situation in a brochure promoting the films funded by the BFI: ‘although the link between the British Film Institute and Free Cinema is close and friendly, the movement is essentially an independent one. The films have not all been financed by the Experimental Fund; not all the productions of the Fund made in the spirit of Free Cinema’” (Christophe Dupin, “Early Days of Short Film Production at the British Film Institute”, p. 86. Quote from Michael Balcon taken from the introduction to *Experiment in Britain*, BFI, London 1958. See also Colin Gardner, *Karel Reisz*, p. 59).

³⁰ Cf. Colin Gardner, *Karel Reisz*, p. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*

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

Free Cinema was initially planned as a one-off programme showing three short films that were related to each other in terms of technical, aesthetic and sociological innovation. Free Cinema was so successful that it became a six instalment programme and ran in London from 1956 to 1959. Of the six Free Cinema programmes, three were dedicated to British films, not all of them made by British directors.

The first Free Cinema screenings were held at the National Film Theatre in London from 5 to 8 February 1956. The programme included Lindsay Anderson's *O Dreamland*, which had been made in 1953 and then shelved (see chapter 6); Karel Reisz' and Tony Richardson's *Momma Don't Allow*, a survey of suburban jazz clubs and teddy boys; and Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together*, shot in 35mm (see chapter 3).

The third Free Cinema programme bore the title "Look at Britain!", after one of Humphrey Jennings' films. The films, showing the Committee for Free Cinema's "feelings about Britain",³² featured Lindsay Anderson's *Wakefield Express*, about the whole professional, industrial and social process of newspaper production; Claude Goretta's and Alain Tanner's portrait of Piccadilly Circus by night, *Nice Time*; an extract from *The Singing Street*, made in 1952 by the Edinburgh-based Norton Park Film Unit – an ensemble of directors that shared many of the Free Cinema interests and characteristics; and Lindsay Anderson's *Every Day Except*

³² Free Cinema 3 manifesto, May 1957, in *Free Cinema* (booklet, ed. Christophe Dupin), enclosed in *Free Cinema*, DVD boxset, British Film Institute, 2006, p. 17.

Christmas, a major accomplishment recounting the everyday life of the Covent Garden market workers (see chapter 6).

The sixth and final Free Cinema programme screened in March 1959 and included: Robert Vas' *Refuge England*, a parable on the displaced person, which is analysed here (see chapter 4); the first Unit-Five-Seven-produced film, *Enginemen*, directed by Michael Grigsby; and finally Karel Reisz' *We Are the Lambeth Boys*, one of the distinctive Free Cinema inquests on peripheral London's youth.

'Free Cinema' was a label concocted by Anderson and it made its first appearance as the title to an article written by Alan Cook.³³ It was "just a label of convenience"³⁴ (as Anderson put it), a banner created by the directors in order to group and show their films – and for the journalists, so that they might have a common label to refer to when writing about the screenings.³⁵ As Reisz recalls:

We made films and wrote manifestos to provide a little publicity for the movement, but the value of those films, if they have one, lies in the films themselves and not in the movement.³⁶

Free Cinema sprang directly from the ideas nurtured by Anderson, Reisz and the other *Sequence* columnists and was funded in part by the Experimental Film Fund. It comprised a series of films that challenged the forms and methods of traditional cinema and at the same time tried to establish a new and independent tradition in filmmaking. The Free Cinema directors shared

³³ "Free Cinema was not invented for the occasion, but derived from an article in *Sequence* some six years before. This had been an article on the American avant-garde, sent from New York by Alan Cook [...] I had come up with the term 'Free Cinema' to describe the kind of independent work [the article] was dealing with. It seemed to suit our purpose admirably, so we called ourselves 'The Committee for Free Cinema', managed to get four days showings from the National Film Theatre and set about making our 'Manifesto'" (Lindsay Anderson, "Free Cinema 1", in Free Cinema booklet, pp. 5-6).

³⁴ Lindsay Anderson interviewed by Alexander Walker in Alexander Walker, *Hollywood England. The British Film Industry in the Sixties*, Orion Books, London 2005, p. 26.

³⁵ "Without that declamatory title, I honestly believe the Press would have paid us no attention at all... It was a successful piece of cultural packaging" (Ibid., p. 27).

³⁶ Karel Reisz quoted in Alan Lovell, "Free Cinema", in Alan Lovell – Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary*, Viking Press, New York 1972, p. 134.

a belief in the idealistic possibility of *reform* rather than revolution [...] the opportunity to circumvent the all-pervasive middle-class parochialism that was suffocating mainstream British cinema.³⁷

In terms of social analysis, representation of cultural unrest and depiction of everyday life, the Free Cinema group was closely connected to the revolutions happening in British theatre and literature.³⁸ There was aesthetic and ideological continuity to the theatrical and literary output of, among others, John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney, Alan Sillitoe, John Braine and Kingsley Amis. The years between 1956 and 1959 were crucial in terms of social disenchantment, political reform and cultural achievements. Theatre, not cinema, was the first to provide a space for the re-elaboration and expression of social instances at the time. As Alexander Walker writes:

It was an event on the theatrical, not the political front in 1956 that provided a rallying point for people's disaffections and uncertainties: the presentation of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre in May of that year. [...] What the 'Free Cinema' people were attempting, George Devine at the Royal Court was simultaneously achieving. [...] There was only one place that showed no instantaneous awareness of the ferment that was happening around it – and this was the British cinema.³⁹

Free Cinema might then be marked as a cinematic attempt at reading contemporary British society the way theatre and literature were doing. Most Free Cinema films were in fact medium-length social surveys rather than straightforward tales about British life.

The process of applying the methods of socio-anthropology to the study of the British people had begun in the 1930s with the Mass Observation organisation, which had been co-founded by Humphrey Jennings and was

³⁷ Colin Gardner, *Karel Reisz*, p. 56.

³⁸ Cf. Michael Chanan, *Politics of Documentary*, p. 154.

³⁹ Alexander Walker, *Hollywood England*, pp. 41, 43.

therefore closely connected to the British documentary movement.⁴⁰ The studies conducted by Mass Observation were fundamentally catalogues of the daily habits of British citizens and were ideally at the basis of the so-called post-war ‘community studies’ which flourished throughout the 1950s.⁴¹ The sociological studies of the late Fifties and early Sixties were especially focussed on the communities inhabiting East London, which mainly consisted of working-class families. Reportage books such as *Family and Kinship in East London*,⁴² *Education and the Working Class*⁴³ and others (mainly published by Pelican Books) in addition to the well-known *The Uses of Literacy*⁴⁴ were sociological surveys which exposed situations and living conditions which were unknown to the majority of their readers.⁴⁵

The Free Cinema films somehow belong to this category of studies: sociology is incorporated in many of the Free Cinema works: they lean towards a sort of ‘scientific realism’ that derives its material from a close observation of life as it is. It is the filmmakers’ interest in the lesser-known layers of society that makes Free Cinema a unique experience.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Cf. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real*, pp. 135-137.

⁴¹ Cf. Stuart Laing, *Representation of Working Class Life, 1957-64*, Macmillan, London 1986, pp. 31-57. See, for example, Charles Madge – Tom Harrisson, *Mass Observation. Britain*, Faber and Faber, London 2009 (or. ed. 1939).

⁴² Cf. Michael Young – Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1957.

⁴³ Cf. Brian Jackson – Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1962.

⁴⁴ Cf. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy. Aspects of Working-Class Life*, Penguin, London 2009.

⁴⁵ “Necessarily the genre of social exploration relies for its effect on the dramatic, the revelatory, the shocking; it cannot tell us either what we already know or the details of a bland, wholesome life-style” (Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life*, p. 53).

⁴⁶ After expressing a rather critical point of view on Free Cinema, Raymond Durnat writes: “The best Free Cinema films concern margins of society; Guy Brenton and Lindsay Anderson’s *Thursday’s Children* [*sic, not properly a Free Cinema film*], Lorenza Mazzetti’s *Together*, Robert Vas’s *Refuge England*, and *March to Aldermaston*, a ‘collective’ film whose guiding hand is reputedly Lindsay Anderson. They concern, respectively, handicapped children, tramps, refugees and C.N.D. Their common theme is minority groups with problems of communication. They are, in one way or another, sensitive and beautiful films, and with *Every Day Except Christmas* and *We Are the Lambeth Boys* can be welcomed into the Jennings class” (Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England. British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, BFI & Palgrave Macmillan, London 2011, p. 158).

What the sociological reports achieved through scientific clarity, the Free Cinema directors – and Anderson in particular – tried to attain through a ‘poetic’ process, that is, through the inventive use of film. Given the directors’ status of foreigners, outsiders and ‘poetic rebels’, it was inevitable that their work investigate atypical and peripheral subjects:

The group’s isolation manifests itself in subjects like jazz clubs, youth-centres, fun-fairs, flower-and-vegetable market-life, or the interdependence of deaf-mutes, which evoke a responsive sympathy for the lonely or restricted [...] and an implicit envy for those who can be part of a system and retain their individuality.⁴⁷

Where Free Cinema diverges from the social studies and the documentaries preceding it is in the involvement of the filmmaker’s personal gaze. Reality as we see it in the Free Cinema films is consciously filtered through the author’s subjectivity: each film delivers its maker’s personal interpretation of the facts of life. Be it a documentary (the technically radical *O Dreamland*), a fiction film (*Together*) or a hybrid form (*Refuge England*), each Free Cinema short could only have been made by its particular director.

On the technical side, Free Cinema was a pioneering experience: for the first time in British cinema, young and seemingly independent directors were given the chance to use portable equipment to make their films. Using lightweight 16mm cameras and working in small units, the Free Cinema directors could investigate reality more freely. The asynchronous recording of sound opened a new field for experiment, which led to an inventive use of the soundtrack and gave the process of dubbing and mixing a new kind of relevance. As Anderson writes in the introduction to the third Free Cinema programme:

⁴⁷ Alexander Walker, *Hollywood England*, p. 34.

With a 16 millimetre camera, and minimal resources, and no payment for your technicians, you cannot achieve very much in commercial terms. You cannot make a feature film, and your possibilities of experiment are severely restricted. But you can use your eyes and ears. You can give indications. You can make poetry.⁴⁸

The result was the achievement of freedom of expression, which was the movement's real aim.

1.7. A movement of foreigners?

In March 2001, Kevin MacDonalD chaired a panel discussion on Free Cinema which included Lorenza Mazzetti, Karel Reisz, David Robinson and Walter Lassally. Referring to the origins of some Free Cinema directors, MacDonalD asked:

Do you think that it's a coincidence that all three of you, not David, are in some sense, or were in some sense, exiles, émigrés here? Walter, I think you came from Germany in 1939, I'm not sure when you came from Czechoslovakia, Karel, and you had also had an experience of Fascism.⁴⁹

Answering the question, Mazzetti and Lassally speak of a significant (and 'Jungian') coincidence. As we will see, the directors' status of foreigners, émigrés and refugees allowed them to investigate British reality with a new kind of gaze. Exploring a world that was completely new to them, they managed to cast a fresh and original glance on reality. Their position as outsiders of British society and culture allowed them to sympathise with groups and elements which were considered marginal. As aliens in a pre-ordered system, they were able to scrutinise that system, to question

⁴⁸ Free Cinema 3 manifesto, May 1957, in *Free Cinema* (booklet), p. 17.

⁴⁹ *Free Cinema. NFT Interview*, transcript of panel discussion held at the National Film Theatre, London, published on 22 March 2001, <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4e674f2c0cadb>.

it, to exercise sharp critique but also to look at it in awe, finding beauty and poetry where no one else could.

Though undeniably British, also Lindsay Anderson liked to describe himself as a foreigner or a stranger. As he writes:

I was born in Bangalore, a child of Empire. Did these antecedents make for an alienation, long unrecognized?

As Englishness triumphs, I find myself feeling increasingly alien. Whether this is really a matter of racial characteristics I cannot say. But I have learnt to recognize qualities in myself which the English find antipathetic.⁵⁰

Born in India of a military family, raised in traditional and conservative schools like Cheltenham College and Oxford, constantly fighting the turmoil of an unexpressed (homo)sexuality, particularly passionate about class struggle, Lindsay Anderson was an outsider in his own group of friends, fellow students and fellow filmmakers. His origins and his critical but not disrespectful attitude towards the establishment and institutions allowed him to view reality from a different angle. His aim was the re-discussion (in personal, political, aesthetic and cinematic terms) of traditional values, which had to be reassessed in the light of the recent historical changes. As we will see in the two chapters dedicated to Anderson's work (chapters 6 and 7), he simultaneously – but not ambivalently – *loves* and *hates* the objects of his critique. As Gavin Lambert wrote two months after Anderson's death in 1994, "Lindsay came to be the Great Outsider of British films, and yet he remained basically a romantic".⁵¹ His oeuvre is based on what Erik Hedling calls a "dialectic between 'outsider' and 'romantic', between 'Anderson the growler' and 'Anderson the

⁵⁰ Lindsay Anderson, "My Country Right or Wrong?", in *Sunday Telegraph magazine*, 26 June 1988. Reprinted in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, pp. 33-34.

⁵¹ Gavin Lambert, "Lindsay Anderson. Unrequited Lover", in *Sight and Sound*, v. 4 n. 10, October 1994, p. 18.

artist”⁵² – a dialectic which is never resolved. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has recently said to me: “Anderson’s distaste for the things that are destroying the things he loves sometimes overpowers the love for the things he loves”. Anderson is a reformer as much as a preserver, a fighter for freedom who does not forget his cultural roots: he is a critical conscience, always awake and always prodding for a reaction.

⁵² Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker*, Cassell, London 1998, pp. 3-4.

2.

“If I look at the world in horror”: Lorenza Mazzetti’s *K* (1953)

“This getting up so early,” [Gregor Samsa] thought,
“makes anyone a complete idiot.”
– *Franz Kafka*, *The Metamorphosis*

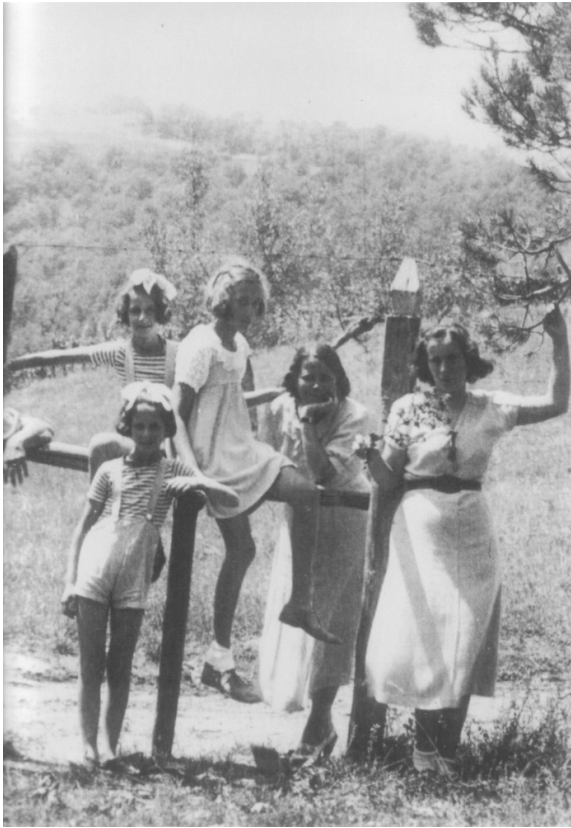
I was simply too miserable to get out of bed.
– *Franz Kafka*, *letter to Felice Bauer*, November 17, 1912.

2.1. From the *Armoire of Shame*

Film director, writer and painter Lorenza Mazzetti was born in Italy in 1928. Her mother, Olga Liberati, passed away soon after childbirth: Lorenza and her twin sister Paola were raised by their father Corrado Mazzetti whose untimely death came a few years later, when his daughters were only four. The twins’ custody was then granted to Corrado’s sister Cesarina ‘Nina’ Mazzetti, who lived in the Tuscan countryside together with her husband Robert Einstein, cousin to Nobel laureate Albert Einstein, and their two daughters Annamaria and Luce.

Since the Einsteins were used to entertaining intellectuals and artists in the family’s villa in Rignano sull’Arno, Lorenza Mazzetti grew up in a prosperous, open-minded and multilingual cultural environment. Among the acquaintances of the Einsteins was Professor Rodolfo Paoli, a lecturer in German literature at the University of Florence. Professor Paoli made regular visits to the villa and used to

discuss Franz Kafka's work over dinner, having translated *The Metamorphosis* into Italian in 1934.¹



Lorenza and Paola Mazzetti
with Ciccì, Cesarina and Luce Einstein.



Cesarina "Nina" Mazzetti and Robert Einstein.

On 3 August 1944 the Einstein family, with the exception of Robert himself, was wiped out by the Schutzstaffel. Nina, Annamaria and Luce were murdered in cold blood by the same German soldiers who had been occupying the top floor of their villa from the previous year. Robert, who had been warned of the impending danger, managed to escape the tragedy but committed suicide one year later on 13 July 1945. Robert Einstein was Jewish by family though he was not an observant Jew – therefore, he thought he was the SS' one and only target. His wife, in fact,

¹ Cf. Franz Kafka, *La Metamorfosi*, tr. Rodolfo Paoli, Vallecchi, Firenze 1934.

came from a Protestant family, so Annamaria and Luce, born of a Christian mother, were not strictly speaking Jewish. The fact that the three women's lives were not spared (even though there was no real religious or racial pretext behind their murders) makes it clear that the killings were an act of indirect revenge towards Albert Einstein, who was seen as being guilty of betraying the Nazi cause by leaving Germany and later giving up his German nationality. The slaughter took place in front of the sixteen-year-old Lorenza and Paola: "Our lives were spared", Lorenza recalls, "only because our name was not Einstein but Mazzetti. [...] I owe my life to the fact that I was 'of another race'".²

In 1951, after a few months spent in France with Paola at Marguerite Duras' house,³ Lorenza (already graduated in Foreign Languages from the University of Florence) decided to leave her past behind and move to London, where she would do the humblest jobs, working as a waitress at Charing Cross and eventually struggling to attend the Slade School of Fine Art – principal William Coldstream having granted her a last-minute enrolment. Mazzetti recalls:

I wanted to escape to forget the horror and the constantly returning nightmares which in fact were less terrifying than the reality which materialized as soon as I woke up. In London I would certainly forget all this.⁴

² Lorenza Mazzetti, afterword to *Il cielo cade*, Sellerio, Palermo 2007, p. 165. All translations are mine, except where indicated.

³ Cf. Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il Free Cinema inglese. Vita cinematografica di Lorenza Mazzetti*, Vicolo del Pavone, Piacenza 2002, pp. 6-8.

⁴ Lorenza Mazzetti, "London Diaries", tr. Jehanne Marchesi, in *A proposito del Free Cinema Movement / Concerning the Free Cinema Movement. Exhibition Catalogue*, Associazione Culturale Voci della Terra, Roma 2010, p. 27.



Lorenza Mazzetti working as a barmaid in London. Photo by Lindsay Anderson.

What happened after Lorenza Mazzetti settled in London is now part of the history of British Cinema. Her involvement in the Free Cinema movement, together with Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson and Karel Reisz, is widely known. What is less well-known is that three years before *Together* (her BFI-funded film launched by the first Free Cinema programme in 1956), Mazzetti directed a short movie backed (‘involuntarily’: Lorenza signed bills and promissory notes without having been authorized) by the Slade.⁵ It was an adaptation of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, which she shot and edited in 1953.

⁵ The Slade eventually opened Britain’s first university film department in 1960. Cf. Henry K. Miller, “The Slade School and Cinema: Part Two”, in *Vertigo*, v. 3 n. 5, Spring 2007, http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-5-spring-2007/the-slade-school-and-cinema-part-two/. See also Henry K. Miller, “From First Principles: A Prehistory of the Slade Film Department”, in *Vertigo*, v. 3 n. 4, Winter 2007, http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-4-winter-2007/from-first-principles-a-prehistory-of-the-slade-film-department/.

2.2. K from 1953 to 2012

Mazzetti's rendition of Kafka's novella goes under the title *K*, though it was also known and referred to in its earlier stages as *[The] Metamorphosis* (when screened in Belgium, it was presented as *K ou La Métamorphose*). Though the film was shot in 1953, it began circulating the following year: for this reason, *K* is usually dated 1954.⁶

Revolutionary in its way of interpreting and updating Kafka's text and themes, Mazzetti's directorial debut was chosen by Ernest Lindgren, curator of the National Film Library and Deputy Director of the British Film Institute, as representative of the upcoming British experimental cinema and shown in Brussels as part of a one-night festival aptly entitled *L'Avenir du Cinéma* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, 2 April 1954).⁷

Apart from some isolated screenings,⁸ *K* has never been properly distributed and has remained unreleased and virtually unknown until recently. Its restoration and release on DVD were made possible in 2010 and 2011 respectively through the direct involvement of Lorenza Mazzetti, who handed a negative and two positive black-and-white 16mm prints of *K* to the Italian film association Cinit

⁶ Cf. Lorenza Mazzetti, "Come divenni scarafaggio", in *Cinema nuovo*, v. 4 n. 69, 25 October 1955, p. 286.

⁷ Lorenza Mazzetti recalls: "I was sent a magazine from Belgium in which there was an article about *The Metamorphosis* [*K*]. The British Film Institute had submitted the film to the Festival of Brussels [*sic*]. Critics from all around Europe had seen it. To my great surprise, they said that *The Metamorphosis* had been one of the most impressive films. René Micha said it was the most accomplished of all the adaptations of Kafka, even of those made for the theatre. In an article on Kafka, which he had written for *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, he spoke of *The Metamorphosis* saying that 'the most striking aspect of the film is the disheartened and obsessive atmosphere surrounding Gregor Samsa, which has been obtained without employing any surrealistic technique. Indeed, if the paradox in Kafka's story is that the beetle lures us into thinking he is a man, in the film the paradox consists in a man who leads us to believe he is a beetle'" (Lorenza Mazzetti, "Come divenni scarafaggio", cit., p. 286. Cf. René Micha, "Kafka à la Scène et à l'Écran", in *La Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française*, y. 2 n. 23, 1 November 1954, pp. 916-917).

⁸ *K* was also screened during a Grasshopper Group meeting, where it was received as too experimental, despite the peculiar tastes in cinema that characterised the Group (cf. Sheila Chalke, "Animated Explorations: The Grasshopper Group 1953-1983", in Ian Craven [ed.], *Movies on Home Ground: Explorations in Amateur Cinema*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge 2009, p. 251).

Cineforum Italiano.⁹ The restoration, which I was given the task of supervising, brought back a well preserved and highly experimental (albeit at times amateurish) film which includes some unusually daring shots and cuts, and an as-crisp-as-possible soundtrack which reveals Mazzetti's peculiar choices in sound editing and dubbing. Apart from a home-made and private DVD made by Mazzetti herself from which a short and silent scene is missing,¹⁰ no other versions of the film are known to exist. The one recently released on DVD runs for 27 minutes and 31 seconds.

K was followed by a further short movie taken from Kafka, *The Country Doctor* (1953-54 circa).¹¹ Though according to Mazzetti the film was completed and screened, no trace of it has been found so far.

⁹ *K* is now available on DVD as enclosed to issue no. 168 of the Italian film journal *Cabiria*, which also features essays dedicated to the film and its director.

¹⁰ I am referring to the scene in which Gregor's mother and sister knock on his door. The sudden silence is due to the unfortunate loss of a small bit of soundtrack. Mazzetti decided to excise the scene because she deemed the absence of sound unjustified – but resolved not to remove it from the restored version of the film for philological reasons.

¹¹ “I went back to Rome where I met Daniele Paris, the young composer who agreed to write the score to the film [*K*]. Some of my friends helped with the dubbing. While I waited [for the score to be completed], I finished shooting another of Kafka's stories, *The Country Doctor*, that I had begun in London” (Lorenza Mazzetti, “Come divenni scarafaggio”, p. 286).

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récemment réalisés en Grande-Bretagne

ANIMATED GENESIS, de Joan and Peter Foldes

Grand Prix de la Couleur au Festival de Cannes 1952.

Peter Foldes est un jeune peintre d'origine hongroise. Sa dernière exposition lui ayant assuré son indépendance matérielle, il a passé un an, avec sa femme, à réaliser son premier film : Genèse animée, dessin animé en couleurs, muet, sur 16 mm. Il ne lui en a coûté rien d'autre que la camera, la pellicule, le celluloid et les tubes de peinture. Cette bande a plu à Sir Alexandre Korda qui a fourni alors aux auteurs les moyens de la reporter sur 35 mm. et de la sonoriser. (...) Le point important est qu'on se trouve là en présence d'une œuvre qui ne doit rien à Walt Disney (pas même à celui de Fantasia) et qui se sert du cinéma avec une gauche originalité dont on n'avait plus eu d'exemple depuis Man Ray et Fernand Léger.

Denis Marion.

PLEASURE GARDEN, de James Broughton

Financée par une souscription publique, The Pleasure Garden est une fantaisie poétique qui a la fraîcheur d'une marguerite et qui mélange agréablement l'insolite, la grâce, la satire et le rire. (Sight and Sound.)

PAINTER AND POET, n^{os} 2 et 3

Au contraire des films sur l'art qui tentent de recréer une époque ou le style d'un peintre, ici les peintres ont spécialement conçu des œuvres destinées à illustrer certains poèmes. Il est évident qu'une telle entreprise ne trouve sa justification que dans la mesure où les images, au lieu de se laisser porter par le poème, l'enrichissent et le mettent en valeur.

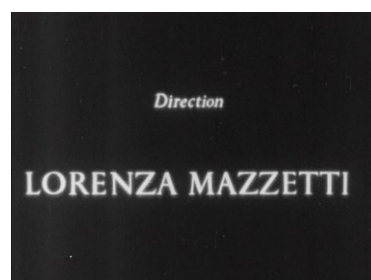
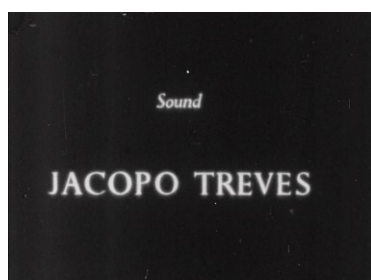
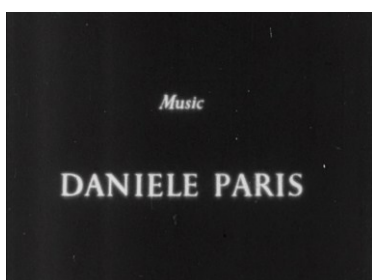
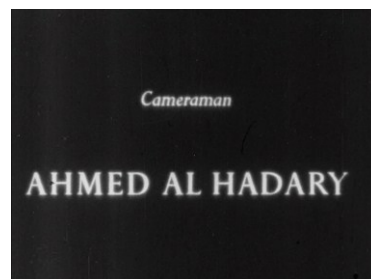
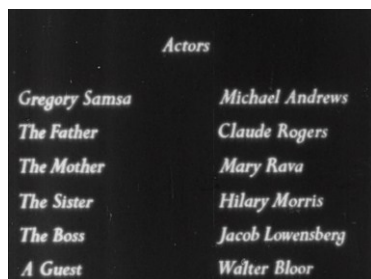
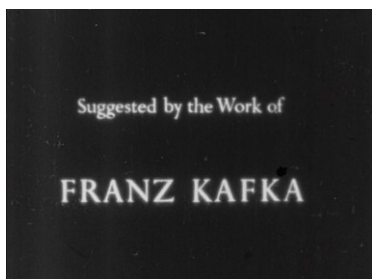
LA METAMORPHOSE, de Lorenza Mazzetti

le premier film adapté d'un roman de Kafka.

Carte de membre obligatoire - Prix des places : 30 francs - Location ouverte au Palais des Beaux-Arts

2.3. K in sequences

Sequence 1. Opening credits (46'')¹²



¹² Though the film was made entirely while Lorenza Mazzetti was a student at the Slade and though the British Film Institute had no active role in the making of the film, the opening credits state first "The British Film Institute presents" and then "The Slade School of Fine Art / University College London presents". The title of the film is clearly *K* (not *The Metamorphosis*) and the film is "Suggested by the Work of Franz Kafka". The list of actors and technical contributors follows.

Sequence 2. Gregor in the city (2' 34'')



A view of London from above.



Gregor sits on a bus crossing the city.



Gregor gets off the bus...



... with a suitcase in his hand and crosses a crowded market.



Gregor walks down a portico and stops at a door – which he opens, entering the building.

Sequence 3. Gregor and his boss (2' 29'')

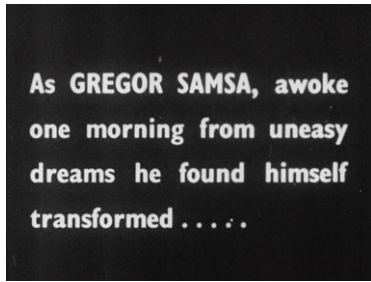


Gregor enters his employer's office. While talking to him, Gregor unveils his family's hardship.



Gregor's voice is not in synch and sounds like it is going on in his head.
His boss keeps walking across the room not listening to him. Fade to black.

Sequence 4. Gregor wakes up from uneasy dreams (4' 48'')



The film's only intertitle
occurs here.



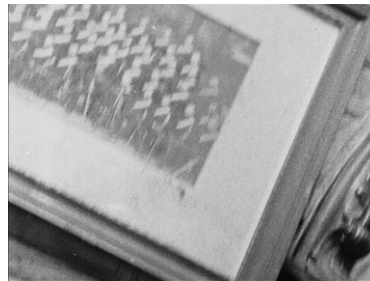
The voice of Gregor's mother:
"Gregor[y] it's very late.
You'll miss the train!"



Gregor's mother, his sister and his
father knock on his bedroom door.



Gregor is on the floor on all fours
and does not answer.



His is a small and dirty room,
full of abandoned objects.



Gregor's employer is called upon...



...and enters Gregor's room
together with his family.



Gregor hides behind his bed until
the others leave the room.



The door closes. Fade to black.

Sequence 5. Gregor walks after his employer and falls (5' 34'')¹³



Gregor follows his boss around the city, carrying two suitcases.



Gregor stumbles and falls.



A brief insertion shows Gregor on all fours in his room.



As the scene resumes, Gregor stands up and runs after his boss.



Gregor and his boss climb the stairs to what might be the boss' place.



Ignored by his employer, Gregor picks the goods from his suitcase.
Fade to black.

¹³ This sequence is analysed in par. 2.13.

Sequence 6. Gregor in his room shows signs of alienation (2' 41'')



The door to Gregor's room opens.



Gregor in a nightgown shows definitive signs of alienation.



His sister brings him food.



Gregor contemplates the rain hitting against his window.



The door opens again:
Gregor's sister finds him standing against the window.



Gregor stares at the rain again.



His sister comes back one last time to feed him.



Gregor hides beneath a heap of abandoned objects.

Sequence 7. Gregor on the roofs (1' 32'')



A dreamlike sequence opening with a view of the outskirts from above.



Gregor jumps and dances on the roofs.



The editing associates him with a strolling player. Fade to black.



Sequence 8. Once again in Gregor's room (13'')



A brief scene with Gregor in his room, peeking from behind the heap of discarded objects.



Sequence 9. Gregor in the air (3' 07'")



Gregor visits a building yard.



There, he is accidentally lifted by a crane.



Views of London's East End from above.

Sequence 10. The final act (3' 58'')



Gregor crawls out of his room.



In the living room, his family is playing music to entertain some guests.



When they see Gregor, the music stops and they all stand up.
From Gregor's POV, they look at him in horror.



Gregor backs off...



...chased by his father holding the infamous apples.



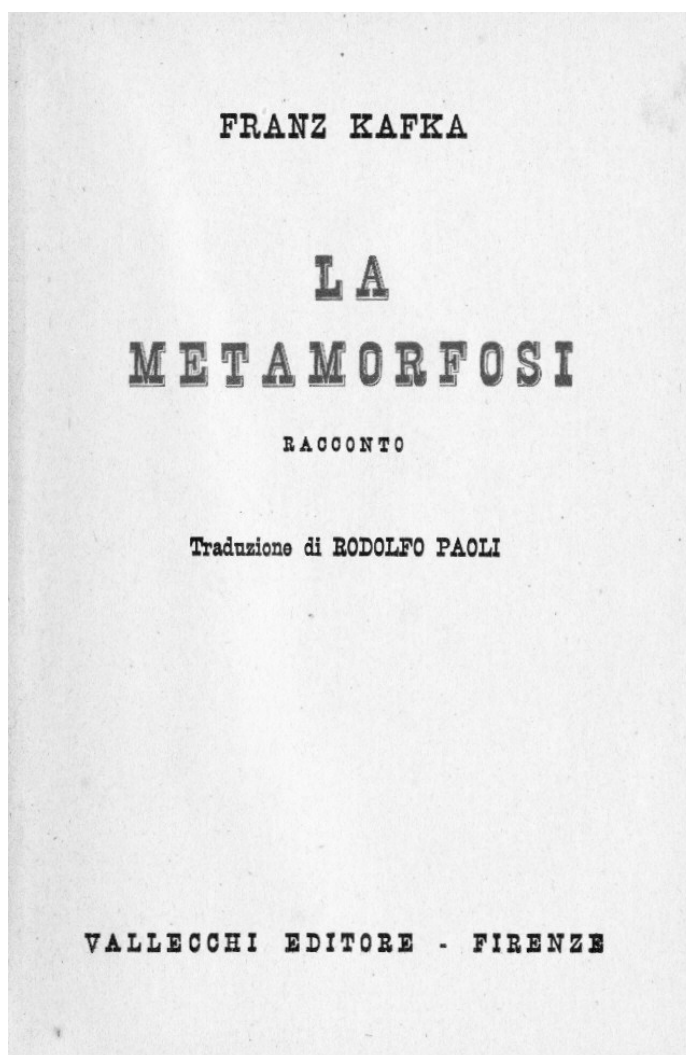
Gregor goes back to his room, lies down and bites on his hand.



His father closes the door. The end.

2.4. Lorenza Mazzetti meets Franz Kafka

Mazzetti's first approach to Kafka's *Metamorphosis* was an early one: in her late childhood she used to overhear the conversations between Robert Einstein and Rodolfo Paoli during which the Italian scholar would praise and debate the writer's work.¹⁴



Front cover of the Italian edition of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, translated by Rodolfo Paoli (Vallecchi Editore, Florence, 1934).

¹⁴ "I knew Kafka because Uncle Robert and Aunt Nina read him and discussed him at meals with Professor Paoli [...] who had brought them the book as soon as it came out. A book which unsettled the whole family. From behind the door I listened to Gregor Samsa's strange story and it remained impressed in my mind" (Lorenza Mazzetti, "London Diaries", pp. 30-31).

Fascinated by the novella and by Kafka's personality as she was, Mazzetti soon bought herself a copy of the book. As she recalls, especially once in London she would go back to Kafka – that is, to *The Metamorphosis* as well as to many other stories – every time she felt the urge to connect with someone who shared her bitter feelings towards life:

In him I saw a fragility in relating to the world, a sense of being different: an outsider, one who can't enter into other peoples' worlds. I was like him: I felt exactly like Kafka who would never be able to enter the castle – I would never connect with others.¹⁵

Though shot with non-professional equipment and at times showing technical deficiencies, *K* displays a quite innovative use of the cinematic medium. Naïve as it may look, the film presents a highly experimental side as far as the shooting, editing, scoring and dubbing are concerned. The framing is often slanting, allusive, significantly 'poetic' – a term that is here employed *à la* Lindsay Anderson; image and sound seldom go together, Mazzetti making extensive use of asynchronous voicing and of the contrasting, disharmonic score composed by Daniele Paris; the editing is far from conventional and is at times non-linear, which makes adjoined sequences clash rather than flow. In order to deliver her own vision of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Mazzetti resolved to manipulate the very technique of film-making so that it would meet her own expressive and artistic needs.

Even the approach to Kafka's text is somehow groundbreaking and unorthodox, above all because Mazzetti's Gregor Samsa does *not* turn into vermin. While drawing on Kafka's novella, Mazzetti stripped it to the bone and singled out those elements which would allow her to develop *her own* discourse on alienation

¹⁵ Lorenza Mazzetti interviewed by Marco Duse. See below, Appendix 2.

and uprooting, injected the film and the character of Gregor with strong autobiographical elements, and included newly conceived scenes of an evanescent and dreamlike quality in order to create a suspended and estranged atmosphere.

The very title of the film *K* makes it clear that Mazzetti is not taking into account only *The Metamorphosis* but its author and his poetics. To Mazzetti, the whole of Kafka's oeuvre served as a sort of literary mirror that reflected her own spiritual odyssey, her feelings of displacement and misplacement and her sense of detachment from ordinary life, which her move to London had not quenched but kindled. Having decided not to share the story of her uncle's family with anyone, Mazzetti bore the tragedy within herself: scarred by the memories of her relatives' murders, she felt she would never be the same again – never an ordinary young lady. Constantly seeking but never finding her own place in society, Mazzetti enriched her reading of Kafka with a subtle but persistent trace of existentialism, derived from her readings of Sartre and Camus, whom she had met during her stay in France.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il Free Cinema inglese*, pp. 7-8.

2.5. Gregor Samsa according to Lorenza Mazzetti

Mazzetti's adaptation of Kafka's novella adheres to the spirit of the text while still being largely experimental. Apart from the general development of the narrative, Mazzetti retains some characteristic traits of Kafka's story such as: the alienating and burdening nature of Gregor's job (though Mazzetti's Gregor seems to enjoy it a bit more than Kafka's)¹⁷ the frequent hitting of raindrops against Gregor's windows;¹⁸ the narrowness of the room in which Gregor isolates himself at night;¹⁹ the detachment of Gregor from the ground;²⁰ the sound of music in Gregor's house leading to the narrative's climax²¹ and the final shutting-off or casting out of Gregor.

The words Kafka uses at the very beginning of *The Metamorphosis* to designate Gregor's new mutant identity are "*ungeheueren Ungeziefer*". Stanley Corngold emphasizes that "'Ungeheuer' [...] connotes the creature who has no place in the family".²² Gregor's exclusion from his own family anticipates and mirrors his marginalisation from society: vetoes and rejection coming from a smaller community such as one's family are extended to larger communities, such as neighbourhood, work environment or the whole of society. Eric Santner maintains that

¹⁷ "I've got the torture of travelling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate" (Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, tr. and ed. Stanley Corngold, W.W. Norton & Company, New York & London 1996, p. 4).

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 33.

¹⁹ "[T]he precaution he had adopted from his business trips, of locking all the doors during the night even at home" (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

²⁰ "He especially liked hanging from the ceiling" (*Ibid.*, p. 23).

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

²² Stanley Corngold quoted in Eric Santner, "Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and the Writing of Abjection", in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, tr. and ed. Stanley Corngold, p. 199.

Gregor's fall into abjection [is to be] understood as a by-product of his encounter with the ultimate *uncertainty* as to his place in the community of which his father is the nominal master.²³

If family is to be regarded as a synecdoche which stands for society, then “*ungeheuer*” becomes a term to designate someone who is or has been cast out, the pariah.

“*Ungeziefer*”, instead, is the term Kafka uses to describe the final stage of Gregor's metamorphosis (which coincides with the novella's inception), the being he has turned into: vermin, an insect or, as is more commonly but less accurately said, a beetle or a cockroach. Kafka's choice of the word *Ungeziefer*, and therefore of the whole system of imagery connected to it, informs a very specific kind of metaphor:

German usage applies the term *Ungeziefer* (vermin) to persons considered low and contemptible, even as our usage of “cockroach” describes a person deemed a spineless and miserable character. The travelling salesman Gregor Samsa [...] is “like a cockroach” [...]. However, Kafka drops the word “like” and has the metaphor become reality when Gregor Samsa wakes up finding himself turned into a giant vermin. With this metamorphosis, Kafka reverses the original act of metamorphosis carried out by thought when it forms a metaphor; for metaphor is always “metamorphosis”. Kafka transforms metaphor back into his fictional reality, and this counter-metamorphosis becomes the starting point of his tale.²⁴

Mazzetti exploits the metaphorical element in *The Metamorphosis* and pushes its significance to extremes. Drawing from her present experience as a foreigner and an outsider in London, Mazzetti turns Gregor Samsa into a young and skinny sales agent, incessantly hanging round an employer who does not seem to care for him – thus representing Mazzetti's seemingly ever-failing attempts to interact with society. While Kafka's Gregor Samsa wakes up on a day like any other completely

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Walter Sokel, *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie, Zur Struktur seiner Kunst*, Fischer Taschenbuch, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 110. Quoted in (and translated by) Stanley Corngold, “Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor”, in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, tr. and ed. by Stanley Corngold, W.W. Norton & Company, New York & London 1996, p. 82.

transformed, in *K* no physical metamorphosis takes place: Mazzetti's Gregor is progressively overcome by destabilising crises of identity which force him to stay in bed, skip his job and eventually close himself off in his small bedroom, an alien to his family and to the world.

It is known that Kafka forbade that his book be illustrated as he did not want Gregor's metamorphosis to be shown. Nevertheless, he authorized cover illustrations of his book that showed the Samsa family in horror and the half-open door to Gregor's room. To Kafka, then, the core of his tale is not Gregor but the Samsas and their horror towards the transformed Gregor. Mazzetti, on the other hand, by showing a Gregor who has undergone an *inner but not outer* metamorphosis, shifts her film's focus onto Gregor himself, on the intimate pain he feels, on his *douleur de vivre*. Mazzetti thus transforms *The Metamorphosis* into a radical tale of alienation – a conscious over-reading of the novella which perhaps betrays but more likely underpins Kafka's own intentions. Not displaying an animal body, Mazzetti's Gregor is not a monster *tout court*, but only in the eye of those who take him as such: his family, his employer and – as some random shots of Gregor looking straight into camera might suggest – (part of) the audience.

2.6. A metaphysical metamorphosis

K begins with Gregor drowned and lost in the smothering urban and human traffic of overcrowded London streets – and ends with Gregor trapped in a stiflingly narrow bedroom, replete with used and forgotten objects (and similar to the one Mazzetti used to live in at the time). Gregor’s ‘transformational arc’ as designed by Mazzetti is inexorable:²⁵ at first he experiences displacement and detachment from daily life; then, tired of the daily routine, he wakes up ‘transformed’ – that is, eager for something which could transcend the ordinary. Finally, Mazzetti’s Gregor does not *die* under the friendly fire of his father throwing apples at him but is condemned to live a life which does not comprehend him.²⁶

The establishing shots of *K* place Gregor in a definite *here and now* (cf. seq. 2): the streets, traffic transport, clothes, common people framed in close-ups, the documentary-like roughness of the shots, the absence of production design and of photographic treatment – all establish that the action takes place in London *as found* at the beginning of the Fifties. *K* implants Kafka’s novella in the filmmaker’s contemporary reality. It is an actualization of *The Metamorphosis*, in which some of the peculiarities of Gregor’s character prove useful to recount the social and spiritual post-war crisis. This is why Gregor’s metamorphosis in *K* is not of a physical but of a *metaphysical* nature: the Second World War had crowded the world with ‘monsters’ (crippled, mutilated, and deformed by radiation) that

²⁵ Giuliano Baioni intends Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* as a *cul-de-sac*, whose development and ending are already inscribed in its inception and are therefore unavoidable. Cf. Giuliano Baioni, *Kafka. Romanzo e parabola*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1997 (1962), pp. 82-83. See also Martin Greenberg, “Gregor Samsa and Modern Spirituality”, in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York & Philadelphia 1988, pp. 19-35.

²⁶ Cf. Martin Greenberg, who claims that Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, while slowly dying throughout the novella, lives “death in life. [...] his life is his death and there is no salvation.” (Martin Greenberg, “Gregor Samsa and Modern Spirituality”, p. 20).

embodied and obliterated even the most daring fantasies, but it had also generated other types of ‘monsters’, not physically but psychologically or emotionally impaired – the veterans and survivors. *K* takes on this diversity, the diversity of those who find themselves mutated not in their bodies but in their spirits. After World War II, on the other side, a social and urban reconstruction began which tended to reinstate a renewed cult of the banality of everyday life (Lindsay Anderson will have his say about this by making *O Dreamland*). It is this scenery which makes Mazzetti turn to existentialism: beholding a society that tries to overwrite memory and memories, man is forced to choose between *being and nothing* – and those who choose to be, to express themselves by affirming the uniqueness of their identity, are destined to clash with a newly-massified society that englobes the average man but rejects the alien.

2.7. Reference a posteriori: Colin Wilson’s *The Outsider*

In 1956 Colin Wilson published his most famous essay, *The Outsider*.²⁷ Since her first reading of Wilson’s book, Mazzetti has acknowledged it as closely related to her English films, even though *K* and *Together* were conceived and made long *before* the release of *The Outsider*.

Wilson’s and Mazzetti’s view of the outsider have many points in common. First of all, according to Wilson, the outsider is constantly seeking his

²⁷ Cf. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, Phoenix, London 2001.

true self, his own true identity. Secondly, the outsider is endowed with a higher sensitivity that allows him to grasp out-of-reach truths though exposing him to inner suffering and torment – that is why the outsider usually expresses himself as an artist, a poet and/or a prophet, often going unheard. The outsider is destined to contemplate and understand the world though he is excluded from it.

Wilson defines the outsider as the “hole-in-corner man”²⁸ who can see deeper into things and feels he is surrounded by “a sense of strangeness, of unreality”.²⁹ The outsider, who can be a real-life person – usually but not necessarily an artist³⁰ – or a fictional character, sees beyond the given and presumed order of bourgeois society, “and what he sees is essentially *chaos*”.³¹ The outsider’s mission is to reveal a concealed truth that “*must be told at all costs*”,³² that is, the world is not orderly and is less rationally organised than it may seem: beyond its apparently geometrical and plain surface there lies disorder, corruption, suffering and uncertainty. The affinities between the outsider and the artist are especially those that regard “the old, familiar aesthetic experience”,³³ the creative act which aims at and is generated through the reduction of chaos to order. Art is meant to uncover and deliver the aforementioned truth which is in turn, once spoken, not recognised as such by the outer world. The outsider’s revelation of chaos through the order of literature, poetry, music or painting is not taken into account, and so the outsider becomes an unacknowledged prophet. Though he is the only one who

²⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “The Outsider may be an artist, but the artist is not necessarily an Outsider” (Ibid.). See also Melvin Rader, “The Artist as Outsider”, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v. 16 n. 3, March 1958, pp. 306-318.

³¹ Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 15. The Outsider is therefore “a man who has awakened to chaos” (Ibid.).

³² Ibid., p. 15.

³³ Ibid., p. 23.

realizes how damaged and corrupt contemporary society is, the outsider ends up with “retreat[ing] into his room, like a spider in a dark corner”,³⁴ his social phobia³⁵ deriving from the existentialist traits of his character.³⁶ The chaotic and somehow elusive conformation of modern cities worsens the outsider’s tendency to self-isolation. Speaking of London, Wilson writes: “the city itself, the confusion of traffic and human beings in Regent Street, can overwhelm a weak personality and make it feel insignificant”.³⁷

Though frustratingly exclusive, the outsider’s dislodged point of view is a privileged one. From the outside he can analyse, re-order and po(i)etically re-organise fragments of reality whose relevance the insiders do not notice, as they regard them as commonplace or ordinary.³⁸ The outsider is somehow placed (or places himself) outside or aside the flow of history and so he can immediately pinpoint the relevance of moments in history which are contemporary to him. Paradoxically, it is through this analytical engagement with reality that the outsider ceases to be an outsider and becomes, albeit momentarily,³⁹ a sort of *enlightened insider*, one who can see the *real* condition humankind is in and try to open someone

³⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

³⁵ “[The Outsider] lives alone, wishes to avoid people” (Ibid.).

³⁶ According to Wilson, the outsider “tends to express himself in Existentialist terms. [...] For him, the only important distinction is between being and nothingness” (Ibid., p. 27). There are obvious overlapping areas between Wilson’s definition of the outsider and existentialist philosophy. In 1958 the American philosopher and scholar, William Barrett, published a survey on Existentialism entitled *Irrational Man* which summed up the origins, development and currents of Existentialism up to the aftermath of World War II. Discussing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as proto-Existentialists, Barrett states that they were “witnesses who suffered for their time what the time itself would not acknowledge as its own secret wound” (William Barret, *Irrational Man. A Study in Existential Philosophy*, Anchor Books, New York 1990, p. 13) – a definition which tallies with that of the outsider given by Wilson. Barrett also maintains that “The [atomic] bomb reveals the dreadful and total contingency of human existence [therefore] Existentialism is the philosophy of the atomic age” (Ibid., p. 65).

³⁷ Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 25.

³⁸ “It is the stranger [...] who finds what is familiar to the group significantly unfamiliar and so is prompted to raise questions for inquiry less apt to be raised at all by Insiders” (Robert K. Merton, “Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, v. 78 n. 1, July 1972, p. 33).

³⁹ The outsider finds himself trapped in a vicious circle: as soon as he tries to place himself into society, to become therefore an insider, he is recognized as an outsider and pushed back to the margins.

else's eyes. It is mainly for this reason, and not by coincidence, that most of the Free Cinema directors were foreign-born: Mazzetti was from Italy, Vas from Hungary, Tanner and Goretta from Switzerland, Reisz from Czechoslovakia... They all shared one peculiar trait, that of coming from outside England, visiting the country for the first time and finding themselves injected in an environment which they had to scrutinise in order to get acquainted with. What *these* outsiders coming from abroad were perhaps less ready to face was the counter effect of their supposedly ethnographic look on the English people: the revelation about oneself that the observation of the other(s) inevitably brings forth.⁴⁰

The outsider's prophecies, his artistic output, his visions and (cinematic) gaze, are not to be mistaken for the outsider's identity, however autobiographical these outputs might be: those are *actions* and *products* performed by the outsider which might carry traces of him but could not stand for his identity. It is *through* his aesthetic activities that the outsider attends to the self-imposed task of finding his real self:⁴¹ "The outsider is not sure who he is. 'He has found an "I", but it is not his true "I".' His main business is to find his way back to himself".⁴² In *K*, Gregor's is a lost identity which needs defining or re-defining. With almost complete pessimism Gregor's job, his family, the city he lives in and the film itself do not provide him with one.

⁴⁰ "The most important [cultural] 'shocks' to be encountered by those who enter another culture or subculture are those of self-discovery. Revelations about oneself may become clear only upon return home; moreover, they may also be engendered by everyday social experiences in one's own cultural setting" (Deirdre A. Meintel, "Strangers, Homecomers and Ordinary Men", in *Anthropological Quarterly*, v. 46 n. 1, January 1973, p. 47).

⁴¹ "The Outsider's first business is self-knowledge" (Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 71).

⁴² Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 145. Cf. Lorenza Mazzetti interviewed by Marco Duse: "I did not have a room of my own. I did not know who I was" (see below, Appendix 2).

The first step towards the definition of the outsider's identity is the realisation that modern identity is caged, imprisoned in social and economic (or 'class') systems that not only shape such identity but also prevent every mutation or evolvment. Like T.S. Eliot's *Hollow Men*, which Wilson refers to in his book,⁴³ modern man is in prison – and quite contented to be. “And the Outsider?”, Wilson asks. “He is in prison too: [...] *but he knows it*”.⁴⁴ The realisation of his imprisonment is followed by a claim for freedom, which in turn cannot be obtained but through self-knowledge. The *claim* for freedom does not necessarily lead to freedom itself: it is the very process of *claiming*, of crying out, that is proper of the outsider. Eventual freedom might not come – it seldom does. When it comes to Kafka's work, Wilson's conclusion is: “Its imperative seems to be: Claim your freedom, *or else...*”.⁴⁵ It is exactly this claiming of freedom that Mazzetti's Samsa enacts – but once such freedom is grasped, Samsa is restrained: once tasted, freedom is lost to the stifling rules of the “comfortable, insulated world of the bourgeois”⁴⁶ and cannot be regained.⁴⁷

⁴³ Cf. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, cit., pp. 154-55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ When Richard Hoggart wrote *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957, he entitled the book's tenth chapter “Unbent Springs: A Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious”. In this chapter, Hoggart depicts the life condition of members of the working class who find themselves endowed with “talent sufficient to separate them from the majority of their working-class contemporaries” (Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 264). Mazzetti's Gregor Samsa might as well be a ‘working-class outsider’. The working-class young man whose skills put him in the position of the outsider (even though Hoggart does not employ this term) finds himself “cut off by his parents as much as by his talent which urges him to break away from his group” (*Ibid.*, p. 265). Detached from his family and from the habits of his class and community, this uprooted figure is in conflict with the world: “He does not wish to accept the world's criterion [...] so he merely dreams of getting-on, but somehow not in the world's way” (*Ibid.*, p. 270). However, Hoggart maintains, this conflict does not lead to rebellion but to self-seclusion and solitude, to a form of radical non-belonging: “He finds it difficult to establish contact even with others in his condition” (*Ibid.*, p. 274). The Hoggartian outsider has crossed the line and taken a definitive step away from his people - but where to, he does not know. “He has gone beyond class” (*Ibid.*, p. 272) and now there is no turning back. No wonder his readings include “the early Aldous Huxley and perhaps Kafka” (*Ibid.*, pp. 273-274).

2.8. Mazzetti's Samsa as an autobiographical character

At the Slade School, Mazzetti got to know the young, talented and bashful painter Michael Andrews, whom she chose to cast as Gregor. By casting an artist in the role of an outsider, Mazzetti postulates the principle of incompatibility of the most sensitive souls with the contemporary surrounding environment.⁴⁸ The artist's inaptness, in both Wilson's and Mazzetti's views, is psychological as much as physical – as Mazzetti says of Michael Andrews: “He had an innate gentleness but I wondered how he would manage to live in the real world without breaking in two like a twig”.⁴⁹ It is a definition which could just as well refer to Mazzetti herself. *K* is then to be regarded as an essay on the outsider which foretells and sums up Wilson's. The theme of the outsider informs most of Mazzetti's work, including *Together* and her novels, in particular *Rage* (*Con rabbia*, 1963) in which Kafka is explicitly mentioned several times and whose main character Penny – an ‘autobiographical transmutation’ of the author herself – says: “Everything is ready for life – except me”.⁵⁰

World War II and the bombing experienced in London in 1940 provided the disruptive element necessary for the disclosure of truth. The moment of crisis, especially if generalized, turns for the outsider into a moment of revelation: the traumatising event generates insight and knowledge – or at least a thirst for them.⁵¹

Though not taking part in the debate on realism and the cinema which was taking

⁴⁸ “[T]he Outsider is *not* a freak, but is only more sensitive than the ‘sanguine and healthy-minded’ type of man” (Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, cit., p. 107).

⁴⁹ Lorenza Mazzetti, “London Diaries”, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Lorenza Mazzetti, *Con rabbia*, Garzanti, Milano 1969, pp. 181-182 (my translation).

⁵¹ “It appears that man is willing to learn about himself only after some disaster; after war, economic crisis, and political upheaval have taught him how flimsy is that human world in which he thought himself so securely grounded. What he learns has always been there [...] But so long as man does not face up to such a truth, he will not do so” (William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, p. 35).

place in Britain at the time, Lorenza Mazzetti embraced the cause of a cinema more focussed on marginalities, in line with Lindsay Anderson's and Gavin Lambert's statements which were then appearing on journals such as *Sequence* and *Sight and Sound* – not to mention the Free Cinema manifesto, which Mazzetti will sign in 1956 together with Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson.

Gregor-Andrews-Mazzetti represent a unity, a cluster of deranged identities, adrift and alone, traumatized by the impact of contemporary society, by the bombings and the horrors of World War II. Though an amateur at her debut, Mazzetti proves capable of using cinema as a means of investigating reality, though it is a psychic and subjective reality she is concerned with. *K*, in fact, is a work of fiction which does *not* embed the aesthetics and techniques derived from documentary which the Free Cinema directors will programmatically employ. What Mazzetti delivers is a theorem on the relativistic perception of reality: World War II has definitively eroded the very idea of a monolithic truth. Therefore, Mazzetti's technique is everything but rigorous: her gaze is unstable, allusive, daring and fragmented – the world as she films it is as ugly and squalid as Gregor's perception of it. What *K* stages is not simply an inquiry into the human condition but the re-discussion of an identity (hers as well as Gregor's) in poetic terms. It is clear, then, that for Lorenza Mazzetti Gregor is sort of a cinematic self-portrait, and that Kafka's novella is used as a pre-text to deliver her own sense of estrangement and displacement, her poetics of self-detachment and of self-removal from history:⁵²

⁵² "In giving up at last all hope of re-entering the human circle, [Kafka's] Gregor finally understands [...that] the truth about his life is his death-in-life by his banishment and self-banishment from the human community. But having finally accepted the truth, having finally bowed to the yoke of the metaphor that he has been trying to shake

2.9. The weight of subjectivity

K cannot be considered, in Bazinian terms, as a window open onto contemporary British reality. The subjective gaze of Mazzetti's Gregor Samsa literally informs the film's imagery both in the scenes shot from Gregor's point of view and in the objective shots. Moreover, it is the very grammar of the film and its structure that are altered so that they may follow the character's deranging subjectivity. Gregor's is an unstable persona, whose increasingly distorted perception of reality *modifies* the way the cinematic medium looks at him and delivers him to the audience. Thanks to her naïve and non-academic approach to the cinematic medium, Mazzetti proves daring in her stylistic and technical choices: the result is a film whose composition and imagery look at times unprecedented, mingling traditional narration, experimental point-of-view shots and images derived from the character's mental process in a system of free association.

Mainly shot with a hand-held camera, *K* shows several trembling and unsteady shots. Some of them, of course, are not intentional – but some distortions of the *cadre* are, and are particularly meaningful. As long as Gregor's condition of alienation worsens, the shots become more and more unstable and the framing definitely discards symmetry and balance. Gregor is often framed in slanting shots, and many of his point-of-view shots are slanted and unbalanced: the world is askew to him – as he is to the world.

off, he begins to sense a possibility that exists for him *only* in his outcast state" (Martin Greenberg, "Gregor Samsa and Modern Spirituality", p. 27).



These are instances that display the oblique and conflictual way in which Gregor relates to reality and are at the same time moments that question the gaze, depriving it of the most common points of reference. A character like Gregor's cannot be contained or comprised in an ordinary and perfectly balanced framing – because he functions as a disturbance, an element of instability whose presence creates chaos.

If Gregor's character – and the whole of Kafka's imagery – informs the development as well as the look of the film, we can therefore infer that the supposedly objective shots in *K* are in fact strongly affected by the character's subjectivity which is in turn a mirror to the author's. Apart from the establishing shots in the opening sequence – and one can argue that even those might not be thoroughly objective – there seems to be no room for 'objective objectivity' in *K*, or rather: objectivity is there somewhere, but it is mediated by Gregor's subjectivity.

Mazzetti's gaze is not crystal clear and her intent is not for a surgical analysis of reality. Her idea of cinema is not transparent (not a window) but somehow blurred by her own distorted vision of reality. The director's identity was at the time on the verge of collapse, so her film bears the marks of an unresolved search for stability. While a personality as strong as Lindsay Anderson's knew how to film reality passionately but straightforwardly, that is, how to subjectively elaborate and comment on an objectively investigated fragment of reality, Mazzetti cannot help but reassert her troubled self in every single shot. In this respect, Mazzetti's work represents a clear step aside from the aesthetics of its time. Paraphrasing the Free Cinema manifesto, *K* is a *way too personal*, if not *utterly subjective*, film.

2.10. A question of point(s) of view

It is through the use of subjective shots that the film establishes its pivotal point, that is, Gregor does not turn into vermin, but is considered as such by his family: it is their judgement that provokes Gregor's final seclusion. While Kafka's *Metamorphosis* has its climax in the very first sentence,⁵³ Mazzetti postpones her *coup de théâtre* till the end. Those who are acquainted with Kafka's story will expect Gregor's actual metamorphosis to happen at least at the end of the film. Through Gregor's eyes, instead, we see his room, the door to the living room and Gregor's family (playing music and entertaining guests) from a very low angle, the camera as

⁵³ Cf. Martin Greenberg, "Gregor Samsa and Modern Spirituality", p. 19.

close to the ground as possible. In turn, each member of the party looks down to the camera (that is, to Gregor), horrified. We might be led to think that the metamorphosis happened during the night. The following reaction shot, though, shows what Gregor's family are scared of: not an insect but Gregor himself, on all fours in his nightshirt, alienated but not mutated. Gregor is *perceived* as a monster whilst still retaining his human traits. In Kafka's novella, Gregor's family at first do not recognize him after the metamorphosis, and in the end provoke his death. In *K*, Gregor is clearly recognized but nevertheless beaten and restrained. Gregor's father throws apples not at a monster that once was his son but at the still-human Gregor. His non-metamorphosis finally deconstructs the metaphor at the core of the literary text. It is not a cockroach Mazzetti wants to show, but a human being – a real human being about to be crushed.⁵⁴ What Mazzetti seems to imply here, in accordance with Wilson's theories on the outsider, is that Gregor is caught in a vicious circle: he is an outcast who, once recognized as such, gets cast out.

As the ending of *K* approaches, Gregor's point of view is employed to re-establish the hierarchy of power: when Gregor's father is about to close the door to his room for one last time, Gregor observes the scene from a very low angle, thus replicating Kafka's description of Gregor seeing only his father's shoes, which look enormous to him.⁵⁵ Gregor is then forced to recognise, even without accepting it, the stateliness of authority. This lowering of Gregor's perspective mirrors the debasement of Gregor's aspirations, the lowering of his horizon(s), the annihilation of his self.

⁵⁴ Cf. Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il Free Cinema inglese*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Cf. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, tr. and ed. Stanley Corngold, p. 28.

Earlier on, Gregor's point-of-view shots were used to develop one of Mazzetti's most brilliant intuitions, the shot of Gregor's hands on the living room's carpet. Right after widening the scopic horizons of her character in the sequences set on the roofs and on the crane (cf. par. 2.11), Mazzetti narrows them down: within the cinematic frame, and within Gregor's own gaze, there is only enough room for his own hands, the very same hands that Gregor bites at the end of the film, in an act of self-feeding, as though he has nothing else to live on. Even Gregor's gaze experiences the aforementioned diminishing 'transformational arc'. By the end of the film, Gregor's point of view is reduced to two angles only: the low angle looking up, which emphasizes the pyramid of hierarchy which overwhelms the character, and the low angle looking further down, which frustrates the gaze and forces it to feed on the images coming from an over-restricted environment (the hands, the carpet, nothing much more).

2.11. Of rain and air

The more Gregor looks at the world, the more he feels distanced from reality and perceives it as devoid of meaning. His gaze wonders restlessly but cannot focus nor linger on anything in particular. Being unable to catch reality, Gregor's gaze can perhaps grasp something *behind or beyond* it.⁵⁶ In at least one sequence of *K* (cf. seq. 6), Gregor proves to be endowed with a *transcendental* gaze. Alone in his room,

⁵⁶ "How can an individual hope to escape the general destiny of futility? Blake's solution was: Go and develop the visionary faculty" (Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 246).

Gregor hears the ticking of rain against his window, his hands moving all over the glass and the window pane. The camera (Gregor's point of view) seeks and follows the suggestions of light and backlight, the frame is sectioned by the perpendicular axes of the window pane, Gregor's solitary hands against the window become a silhouette. It is a highly poetic moment, of that kind of cinematic poetry that Lindsay Anderson would have liked. An interruption of narration in favour of a lyrical sequence, these scenes suspend time and give way to an experiment with light and shadow which reminds us of the films of Kenneth Anger, the most lyrical sections in Humphrey Jennings' documentaries or the early depictions of natural elements made by Joris Ivens (e.g. *Rain [Regen]*, 1929). Gregor is clearly seeking something that is just out of reach but still is there. Time, a pigeon-holing category of modern life, is momentarily suspended via Gregor's mental process, thus giving him a taste of freedom.⁵⁷ The treatment of sound in this sequence supports its transcendental nature: the disharmonies of Daniele Paris' score are now muted, and the only sound is that of falling rain, which suggests the existence of a dimension that lies *beyond* the immediate reality of everyday life.

As in Kafka's novella, where Gregor reaches the utmost happiness when he comes to terms with his insect body and starts exploiting its new potentials (climbing on walls, crawling on the ceiling, etc.), Mazzetti's Gregor experiences his most euphoric moment when he asserts his mutated identity by walking, jumping and dancing on the East End rooftops and detaches himself from the ground when

⁵⁷ "What is important to the mental process sequence in that new, undefined temporal relations are introduced; time is no longer continuous or simultaneous" (Edward R. Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema. A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin – New York – Amsterdam 1984, p. 86).

lifted by a crane.⁵⁸ While Kafka's Gregor can 'enjoy' his monstrous body till his death, Mazzetti's Gregor is given a pessimistic twist, and does *not* climb on the roofs *for real*: the sequence is one of Gregor's mental processes.

The German philosopher, Günther Anders, comments on Kafka's *Metamorphosis* defining Gregor as a *Luftmensch*, one who is more concerned with impractical, intellectual or transcendental things than with concrete everyday matters:

Because Gregor Samsa wants to live as an artist [i.e. as a *Luftmensch* – one who lives on air, lofty and free-floating], in the eyes of the highly respectable, hard-working world he is a 'nasty bug' [*dreckiger Käfer*]: and so in *The Metamorphosis* he wakes up as a beetle whose ideal of happiness is to be sticking to the ceiling.⁵⁹

Mazzetti appropriates the concept of *Luftmensch* and devises the rooftops and crane sequences in order to make of her Gregor an angelic creature of the air.

A hallucinated fragment of freedom, it is shot slightly in slow motion, which gives the sequence an oneiric quality. Gregor's heavy salesman suitcases become weightless props to circus-like acrobatics performed by Michael Andrews himself. The editing associates Gregor with a street musician who carries all the musical instruments he needs on his shoulders: the two images, once matched by the editing, suggest euphoria and vitality but also self-sufficiency. In 'his' world, Gregor is a self-sufficient (and mutant) being who can 'play his own music' and knows the way to happiness. As we have said, his dance on rooftops is but a fantasy, a flight from reality, and the real Gregor is destined to remain constrained.

⁵⁸ "The Outsider [...] is a self-divided man; being self-divided, his chief desire is to be unified. [...] When the Outsider becomes aware of his strength, he is unified and happy" (Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, pp. 58-59).

⁵⁹ Stanley Corngold, "Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor", p. 81. Corngold quotes from Günther Anders, *Kafka – Pro und Contra*, Bech, Munich 1951, pp. 40-41. See also: Veronica Pellicano, "Un viaggio nell'aria: la narrativa ebreo-tedesca e quella Yiddish dopo il 1945", in *Linguae & Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*, n. 2, 2002, p. 37. See also: <http://www.ledonline.it/linguae/allegati/linguae0202pellicano.pdf>.

Through fantasy, Gregor has taken to the sky and taken on the angelic nature that is proper of the outsider – and a trait that Lorenza Mazzetti has singled out as fundamental of Gregor’s character.⁶⁰

2.12. Experiments with sound

In both *K* and *Together*, Mazzetti makes unconventional use of dialogue, sound and music. In *Together*, the alteration of the usual process of sound dubbing is due to the fact that the two main characters are deaf-mutes and is therefore subject to the characters’ *physical* impairment. In *K*, dialogues, music and silence are instead subordinate to Gregor *psychological* inaptness, to his deranged subjectivity.

The film’s most experimental trait, as with the manipulation of sound, is the use of asynchronous voice dubbing. Unable to use direct sound recording, Mazzetti recorded Michael Andrews’ voice during post-production, thus turning a technical deficiency into a creative treatment of sound.

Gregor’s words, so many yet so devoid of meaning, literally cram the sound track. The cues uttered by Andrews are distinguishingly monotonic and monotonous: Gregor only talks about his job and the financial asset of his family – and, as we have seen, his words are never cared for (he asks several times to his employer: “Sir, do you hear me?”). Gregor’s sentences, which do not match Andrews’ lips, are repeated over and over. There is no difference in sound between

⁶⁰ “It was important that Gregor’s family be presented as horrified at someone who was beautiful, in fact angelic. Michael, indeed, looks like an angel!” (Lorenza Mazzetti interviewed by Marco Duse, see Appendix 2).

outdoor and indoor dialogue, or between close-ups and larger shots: Gregor's sentences sound all alike because they are all equally irrelevant. The use of asynchronous dialogue stresses the remoteness of language from the speaker: words are reduced to pure utterance, to talking for talking's sake – they are unfit and unable to grasp and describe reality, let alone to modify it. Moreover, a slight and hardly audible reverb seems to detach Gregor's words not only from his character but from the surface of the screen: those words do not belong to Gregor anymore (he repeats them mechanically, as though they were not coming from him but were instead learnt by heart and repeated or coming from an outer source), do not belong to the narrative (they do not influence the diegesis) and do not belong to the reality surrounding the characters. The transformed Gregor, in fact, will soon stop talking, getting rid of such a useless tool as language, alternating inner silences to musical explosions (of a hallucinatory nature).

2.13. A breach in the 'front': Kafka, Goffman and Laing

At least one of Mazzetti's peculiar editing choices is worth discussing here. During an otherwise ordinary sequence (cf. seq. 5), Gregor's employer is walking on the street with Gregor tagging along. Gregor keeps talking to him and his words go unheard as usual. Trying to catch his employer's attention, Gregor moves closer to him but stumbles and falls to the ground. Here, a sudden cut shows Gregor on all fours in his bedroom, wearing a nightshirt (the insert lasts for just five seconds). A

further cut and we are back to the main sequence, in which Gregor pulls himself together and stands up.



The insert comes unexpected but is significantly revealing: its position suggests that something has happened in the very moment of Gregor's fall, and that the Gregor who rises from the ground *is not the same Gregor as before*. Something has intervened in the very moment of his fall and has changed the nature of the character: Gregor's metamorphosis, already sketched in the previous sequences, hastens its process starting from here. This sudden cut, an actual 'wound' in the flow of the narrative, is to be regarded as a (Freudian) slip, a non-declared flash forward, that uncovers an unavoidable and already present future.

The analysis of this sequence will be made clearer if we refer to the socio-psychological studies developed by Ervin Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*)⁶¹ and Ronald D. Laing (*The Divided Self*)⁶² during the years when *K* was made. While on duty, Gregor wears his everyday mask, that which Goffman calls the front:⁶³ the "expressive equipment"⁶⁴ employed by an individual in order to

⁶¹ Cf. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Penguin, London 1990.

⁶² Cf. Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, Penguin, London 2010.

⁶³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, pp. 32-44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

perform those actions that relate him to society, the front is made up of setting (“insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures”),⁶⁵ appearance (which tells us “of the performer’s social statuses [... and] whether he is engaging in formal social activity, work, or informal recreation”)⁶⁶ and manner (“which warn[s] us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation”).⁶⁷ Wearing an oversized grey suit, a tie and a hat, carrying his suitcase and rehearsing his speech about the goods he is selling, Gregor is setting up his front and then performing his self. The daily Gregor, the untiring worker, the bold salesman, is but a representation (also in theatrical terms) of his self, which is just *a* self. Gregor is a *metteur-en-scene* of a false self (as opposed to a true inner self)⁶⁸ that, as Laing puts it, “arises in compliance with the intentions or expectations of the other”⁶⁹ (family, employer, society) and only serves to “maintain an outer behavioural normality”.⁷⁰

Back to sequence 5, Gregor’s fall momentarily interrupts the acting of his socially accepted self, and Gregor (the ‘actor’) steps for a few instants out of his role. The impact with the ground opens a breach in the ‘front’ which allows Gregor and us to see the soon-to-be *real* Gregor, his inner self: a different and alienated

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶⁸ “The false-self system [...] exists as the complement of an ‘inner’ self which is occupied in maintaining its identity and freedom by being transcendent, unembodied, and thus never to be grasped, pinpointed, trapped, possessed” (Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 94-95).

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 98. Laing also claims that such compliance leaves room for one’s true self only “in imagination or in games or in front of a mirror” (Ibid., pp. 98-99), which is exactly what happens when Gregor imagines himself dancing on rooftops.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 99. Laing calls a ‘false self’ what Goffman describes as “a truer self, the self we would like to be” (Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 30. Goffman quotes from Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture*, The Free Press, Glencoe 1950, p. 250). Despite the differences in terminology, Goffman’s ‘front’ and ‘true self’ and Laing’s ‘false self’ all come down to the same concept. We will define the ‘front’ as a ‘false self’ because it better marks the opposition between the daily and the private Gregor (the ‘inner self’).

being, lonely and detached from the world. Laing discusses Kafka, quoting from Lionel Trilling, in the chapter dedicated to ontological insecurity.⁷¹ There, Laing singles out “three forms of anxiety encountered by the ontologically insecure person”.⁷² One of these, which Laing calls ‘implosion’,⁷³ is derived from “the full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity [...] Any ‘contact’ with reality is then in itself experienced as a dreadful threat”.⁷⁴ Gregor’s fall represents his final contact with reality. His regression begins here, his condition worsening as the fall reveals how unbearable his social mask is: Gregor *wakes up and stands up transformed* and begins the search for his new self. He will soon find out that his true and inner Self does not belong to the world – and all he’s left with is a narrow dark room in which to retreat and start dreaming.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Cf. R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 39-40.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “To prefer the imaginary is not only to prefer a richness, a beauty, an imaginary luxury to the existing mediocrity in spite of their unreal nature. It is also to adopt ‘imaginary’ feelings and actions for the sake of their imaginary nature. [...] it is not only an escape from the content of the real (poverty, frustrated love, failure of one’s enterprise, etc.), but from the form of the real itself, its character of presence, the sort of response it demands of us” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination*, quoted in R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 84-85).

3.

The living impaired: Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together* (1956)

3.1. From K to Together

On 9 March 1954 the BFI Experimental Production Committee met for the fifth time at Ealing Studios, London. Chaired by Michael Balcon, the meeting was attended by Basil Wright and Denis Forman among others. A passage in the minutes of that meeting states that the committee members and their guests were shown “an extract from the Kafka short story THE BEETLE made by a group of Slade students”.¹ *The Beetle* was of course *K* and the group of Slade students was the one led by Lorenza Mazzetti. Forman’s presence at the meeting attested his interest in Mazzetti’s work: the then Director of the BFI was there to support the young filmmaker in submitting a new idea for a short film to the committee. In fact, the screening of *The Beetle* served as a preliminary to the evaluation of a new proposal, penned by Lorenza Mazzetti and Denis Horne, presented to the committee on that very same day. This proposal for a film to be made under the patronage of the Experimental Film Fund was a synopsis in seven sequences titled *The Glass Marble*. Here is an extract from the meeting minutes:

THE GLASS MARBLE.

The synopsis for a film proposed by a group of Slade students was considered. The Director explained that the synopsis possibly gave an inadequate picture of the students’ intentions and he circulated a dialogue script of the first sequence of the

¹ BFI Archive Collection, held in the BFI Special Collections: Box P/2 (location O/25/5). See also Michael Balcon Collection, H/75.

film. After discussion it was agreed to proceed with this proposal along the lines of the budget submitted, authority being given only for the expenditure of £500 necessary to complete a mute assembly. It was agreed, however, that the Committee would earmark 50% of the remaining budget for finishing the film, namely £900 out of £1.800 so that a proportion of the funds needed for the completion of the film would be available, should the mute assembly justify further expenditure.²

The Glass Marble was nothing but *Together* in its embryonic stage. More than that, the synopsis of *The Glass Marble* gives us an idea of what the film as originally fashioned could have been had Mazzetti and Horne not fought during shooting, causing Horne to leave the set and thus seriously compromising the film's production – and what it could have been had Lindsay Anderson not intervened in the film's editing, recommending further shooting and the discarding of the original narrative in favour of a more poetic and elliptical tone. *The Glass Marble* is the straightforward story which lies behind *Together*; it is the first and more complex narrative structure which at times still surfaces in the finished film. A copy of the *Glass Marble* synopsis is preserved in the BFI Archive Collection. Here is its full transcription.

² Minutes of the BFI Experimental Production Committee's fifth meeting, 9 March 1954. BFI Archive Collection, held in the BFI Special Collections: Box P/2 (location O/25/5). See also Michael Balcon Collection, H/75.

THE GLASS MARBLE³

Synopsis.

[1954]

Sequence One.

A ruined church in the Dockland area of London.

A gang of demolition workers have just arrived to clear the site. Working with the gang, two deaf mutes draw attention to their disability. They are the centre of embarrassed attention. The news spreads that two deaf mutes are working with the gang.

On the way to their lodging house, the deaf-mutes are waylaid and tormented by local children who see in the deaf mutes a new amusement and escape from the boredom of the streets.

Sequence Two.

The lodging house of the deaf-mutes, run by Sam Beckett and his wife. They have a small child about three years old. Mrs. Beckett discusses the deaf-mutes with Sam. He is easy going and tolerant. She fears the talk of the neighbours and also has a superstitious fear of the deaf-mutes.

Wally and Patch come in for their evening meal. They are ignored by the Becketts. Sam is embarrassed. Mrs. Beckett hostile. April, a young factory worker who is also staying with the Becketts comes in, and shows dislike for the deaf-mutes. They retire to their room upstairs.

Jim of the demolition gang, arrives in search of April, who at first demurs to his invitation to go out, and then accepts it.

The deaf-mutes, in their room, also make themselves ready to go out.

³ Lorenza Mazzetti – Denis Horne, *The Glass Marble*, synopsis submitted to the BFI Experimental Production Committee, BFI Archive Collection, held in BFI Special Collections: Box P/2 (location O/25/5).

Sequence Three.

The Dockland area at night. The camera explores the narrow, twisting street near the wharves. One of these is scarcely more than a passage between two high brick walls. In the middle of this passage is a single wooden post, hip-high, apparently making it impossible for a vehicle to proceed beyond this point.

The sound of feet running. The sound approaches along the perspective of darkness, until quite close at hand the sobbing intake of breath of the fugitive is heard. A bright beam of light appears along the alleyway, throwing into sharp relief the figure of a man, running towards the camera. He pauses at the post, and leans against it panting, for a moment. The light which appears to come from the headlamp of a car, draws nearer. The man begins walking quickly, looking back over his shoulder. The sound of an engine running in low gear. C.S. of a Jeep driven by a civilian. A policeman jumps out, followed by another. They examine the post. The Jeep is backed and then run at speed against the post which snaps off. The chase continues. C.S. of fugitive as he again hears the pursuers approaching. He again begins to run. The lighted windows of a public-house are seen over the fugitive's shoulder. The camera follows the man to the door, lifts to name of pub: [blank space] Before entering he turns, sees the light of the Jeep approaching at speed. Cut to...

Sequence Four. Interior of public house.

From point of view of Deaf-mutes – the scene is silent.

Camera watches fugitive enter public bar. He is apparently known to some of the men drinking at the bar. He orders a pint of bitter. His hand is bandaged, with a handkerchief. Camera pans bar. Two small wizened old women, sitting at a long deal table drinking stout. They sit in peaceful immobility, occasionally raising a glass to their wrinkled faces.

A piano player, a thin, frenzied man, who plays with a jerky concentrated rhythm. From the corner of his mouth dangles a limp cigarette.

A bearded man, wearing ear-rings, stockily built, about fifty, of slow relentless talk, which covers every topic with a thick, inebriated gloss of personal experience. As he speaks he takes a thick, short pipe from his mouth, and emphasises his remarks with it.

The barman – an enormous man who smokes a cigar and wears his shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows.

The barmaid, a dark pretty girl, who treats the male customers with provocative disdain.

Smoky, the street singer, who occasionally sings accompaniments to the piano, or plays the accordion.

A pin-table.

“The Duchess” An affected, weak-minded woman, about forty-seven, who can never forget the days when she was better off, and who regards her presence in the pub as an act of charity.

Wally and Patch sitting alone. They study the feet of dancers – the barmaid, April, and Jim.

They play a game at the pin-table, which gives rise to an incident in which their disability is advertised to the curious.

The pub closes. The bearded man still tries to converse with the Duchess.

Wally and Patch go home. The camera follows them. Wally is drunk. Cut to...

Interior Room. Patch helps Wally into bed. They sleep.

Sequence Five. Morning.

Wally and Patch wake up. Camera pans scene from window. Wally and Patch descend to have breakfast alone. April brings in the tea. She is more friendly to Patch. They go to work. She watches them from the doorway.

On the job, Wally drives the dredger. Patch directs from the ground by hand signals.

In the lunch-hour break, they see children playing marbles. They are the children who baited them the day before. Wally puts his foot on the biggest marble. He puts it in his pocket and walks away. The children follow shouting and throwing stones. Wally shows the marble with pride to Patch, who is eating his lunch in the bombed building.

The children plan to recover the marble. They make elaborate plans to waylay the deaf-mutes on their way home. They build a booby trap, and set a trail which they hope the deaf-mutes will follow. The deaf-mutes fall into the trap, and Wally almost loses the marble. They are hurt. They go home and attend to each other's injuries.

Patch makes tea, while Wally counts his possessions.

Cut to...

Sequence Six. About nine p.m.

Wally and Patch going to the pub. Their peculiarities are now well known. All eyes are on them, when they enter the bar. Comments are freely passed about their behaviour and characters. Cut to...

Scene in street. April is now walking with a young dock worker. They pass Jim, who nods curtly to April. Cut back to...

Bar. Jim enters and orders pint of bitter. He talks to bearded man in monosyllables. April enter with her new friend. This leads to quarrel between Jim and April. Jim goes out. April drinks too much. She dances. April dances with Patch. Wally's jealousy is roused. Patch and April go out together. Wally follows them and sees April giving Patch a kiss. She sees Jim waiting. He seizes her arm roughly. They go off, she is protesting. Wally in a fit of jealousy refuses to go home with Patch. He wanders alone, and eventually goes to sleep in a barge. Cut to...

Interior room. Patch is lying awake in bed, waiting for Wally to return. The clock strikes 2 a.m.

Sequence seven. Next morning.

Interior room. Patch wakes up. Wally has not returned. Cut to...

Wally in barge, still fast asleep. Cut to...

The job. Jim is looking at his watch. Eventually Patch turns up late. He is dispirited. He makes signs that Wally has gone. Jim puts another man in Wally's place in the crane. Patch is absent-minded and careless. Cut to...

Wally. The news has got to the children that he is in the barge. They creep up on him stealthily and push crates on top of him. He fights his way out.

They pursue him. Cut to...

The job. There has been an accident. Patch is fatally hurt. The ambulance arrives. Cut to...

Wally running. He has escaped the children. He is leaning against the wall panting when he sees the ambulance. A forewarning makes him begin to run towards the church. He arrives in time to see Patch taken away. The rest of the workmen leave him alone. In a state of semi-idiocy he sits down and eats a caramel. Then he gets up and wanders zig-zag across the broken ground towards the lodging house. He is watched with tense curiosity by the neighbours who have heard of the accident to Patch. He goes upstairs to the room, and sits down at the table. Carefully he counts over his possessions, and puts them all together in his handkerchief, takes his hat and coat and goes out into the street. Camera follows him as he walks dangerously, without appearing to know or care where he is going, for he is a man now bereft of all imagination... He walks, indifferent, in a world of increasing sounds... the sounding of a motor car horns, as drivers try to avoid running him down...

3.2. How *The Glass Marble* became *Together*

The Glass Marble is predictably different from *Together* in the way scripts usually differ from finished films. In this case, though, the discrepancies between synopsis and film are drastic and striking. Though the film, once green-lighted by the committee, was supposed to be made in a form as close as possible to the original treatment on the basis of which it was granted a fund, *Together* diverges radically from *The Glass Marble* both in its narrative and in its tone. While *Together* benefits from a meditative pace and an almost non-narrative patchwork of vignettes, *The Glass Marble* is replete of action and presents a rather articulated structure, including a sub-plot of unrequited love, that between Jim and April, which is completely excluded from the finished film, and survives only in Michael Andrews' character's passion for the dancer at the funfair.⁴

Shooting began in the summer of 1954 and the film was shot entirely in 35mm. Daily fights between Horne and Mazzetti led to the former's dismissal from the set and to the end of the couple's affair. As Mazzetti recalls:

I met Denis Horne, who'd been at Oxford where he'd known Lindsay Anderson and Tony Richardson, and I immediately fell in love with him. I asked him to co-direct the film but the script he wrote had lots of dialogue and what I really wanted was silence. We argued a lot and he wanted to direct the film on his own, but [Eduardo] Paolozzi said, "Either Lorenza directs it or I'm off." So I finished the film alone.⁵

Horne's sacking saw Mazzetti working on the film by herself and having several problems finishing it. However, it also led to a radical shift in the film's tone, namely to a film more silent and richer in allusions. Though Horne and Mazzetti are credited as co-directors of the film and Horne as the sole scriptwriter, it is

⁴ The two deaf-mutes in *Together* go without a name. I will refer to the deaf-mutes in *The Glass Marble* as Patch and Wally and to the deaf-mutes in *Together* by the names of the actors, Andrews and Paolozzi respectively.

⁵ Lorenza Mazzetti interviewed by Christophe Dupin in Bryony Dixon – Christophe Dupin, "Soup Dreams", in *Sight and Sound*, v. 11 n. 3, March 2001, p. 30.

common knowledge that this was done in order to settle the argument and find a suitable legal (and personal) agreement. From a certain point on, Lorenza Mazzetti became the only person in charge of the film, directing it and even starting to edit it by herself.



Lorenza Mazzetti and Denis Horne.

After completing the first mute assembly of *The Glass Marble*, Mazzetti was forced to go back to Italy because of problems related to her visa. When the committee met for the sixth time on 12 January 1955, a 30-minute silent rough cut of *The Glass Marble* was screened. Somehow displeased with the work done by Mazzetti thus far, the committee delegated a sub-committee to view all the rushes of the film and prepare a specific report which would state whether or not there were the conditions for the films to be completed. In the meantime, the possibility to bring the director back to London to finish her work was considered. When the committee met again on 3 March 1955, Ernest Lindgren and Basil Wright, having seen the complete rushes of *The Glass Marble*, insisted that the committee take every step necessary to ensure the completion of the film:

Mr. Lindgren reported that Mr. Basil Wright had, together with the officers, viewed the full assembly of this film [*The Glass Marble*] running for some 90 minutes and that Mr. Wright enthusiastically held the view that the Committee should finish this film, preferably with the assistance of Miss Mazzetti, and if this proved impossible, alone. The Secretary reported that he had received a message from Miss Mazzetti that she would be prepared to complete the film in Italy if she could be sent the cutting copy and after discussion the Committee agreed that, provided proper safeguards could be obtained, the cutting copy should be sent to Italy for Miss Mazzetti to work on.⁶

Lorenza Mazzetti eventually returned to England and resumed her work in the cutting room. It was during the troubled editing of the film that Mazzetti first met Lindsay Anderson, who had been called upon by the BFI – by Denis Forman in person according to Mazzetti, though it was more probably someone from the committee who made such suggestion – to help her. As we will see, the influence of Lindsay Anderson in the film is evident. Mazzetti recalls his involvement in the project thus:

I started to cut the film in a cutting room owned by the BFI in the middle of the countryside. As I was experiencing many difficulties, [Denis] Forman asked Lindsay Anderson to give me a hand. Lindsay saw the film, liked it and decided to help me to edit it and work on the soundtrack with John Fletcher. Daniele Paris came all the way from Rome to compose some of the music and we added a few traditional English songs. By then Lindsay had become a good friend.⁷

Apparently, Mazzetti had not shot enough material to cover the sequences as they were intended to be. While suggesting additional shooting, Anderson also advised that the film take on a more poetic tone, exploiting the silences, the long shots and the unfinished sequences that Mazzetti had already shot. Slowly, under Anderson's chiselling supervision, *The Glass Marble* evolved into *Together*. It was Anderson who set out with Walter Lassally and John Fletcher to shoot the barges crossing the Thames that mark the beginning and the end of the film and give it its peculiar and

⁶ Minutes of the BFI Experimental Production Committee's seventh meeting, 3 March 1955. BFI Archive Collection, held in the BFI Special Collections: Box P/2 (location O/25/5). See also Michael Balcon Collection, H/75.

⁷ Lorenza Mazzetti interviewed in Bryony Dixon – Christophe Dupin, "Soup Dreams", p. 30.

highly significant quasi-circular structure. Anderson restrained from keeping a diary of the Free Cinema years⁸ but the aforementioned circumstances are confirmed by Walter Lassally in his autobiography:

On *Together* [John Fletcher] and I provided what is known as ‘additional photography’, which in this case formed part of the transformation of Lorenza Mazzetti’s film undertaken by Lindsay, who had discovered Lorenza one day in the basement of the BFI’s original premises in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, sticking bits of film on the wall with Scotch tape, as the facilities there were a bit primitive. *Together* had started out as a straight narrative story, ‘The Glass Marble’ [...] Unfortunately, the narrative had been so badly undercovered as to be virtually incomprehensible, and Lindsay, recognising the distinctive quality of much of the material, helped Lorenza turn the film into a poetic evocation of the principals’ lives, played out in the grey but visually striking setting of London’s semi-abandoned dockland, with its canals, bridges and vast empty spaces. It was to heighten this atmosphere that the said ‘additional photography’ was needed, followed by an intensive editing period, just as on *Every Day Except Christmas*.

Both these films are prime examples of films shaped largely in the cutting room, which is not to denigrate the quality of their original material, but to point out that, in contrast to most productions, both feature and documentary, the original script – such as it was – had little to do with the finished film. This is a luxury not often permitted within the framework of the industry, with its ever-tightening schedules, which call for the pre-planning of every detail in the name of efficiency, but which are ill-adapted to the realisation of a poetic evocation.⁹

Anderson, who had recently won an Academy Award for Best Documentary with *Thursday’s Children* (co-directed with Guy Brenton), suggested that Mazzetti summon Daniele Paris to compose the score.¹⁰ In June 1955, a further amount of £800 circa was granted for the addition of sound and the completion of the whole production.¹¹ By mid-January 1956 the film, now entitled *Together*, was complete to a total cost of £2088 and shown to the BFI’s director James Quinn and to Thorold Dickinson. In a letter to Michael Balcon, Quinn stated that the film “had been pulled together largely successfully, thanks to Lindsay Anderson’s intervention”,

⁸ Cf. Lindsay Anderson, *The Daries*, ed. Paul Sutton, Methuen, London 2005, pp. 64-65.

⁹ Walter Lassally, *Itinerant Cameraman*, John Murray, London 1987, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰ Cf. Maria Francesca Agresta, *Il suono dell’interiorità. Daniele Paris per il cinema di Liliana Cavani, Luigi di Gianni e Lorenza Mazzetti*, Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca 2010, p. 9.

¹¹ Budget plan for the addition of sound and completion of the production of *The Glass Marble* [*Together*], paper attached to the minutes of the 8th Experimental Production Committee meeting, 30 June 1955 (BFI Special Collections, Michael Balcon Collection, location H/75a).

although “the [quality of the] sound track, which is particularly important, is not as good as it should be”.¹²



Lindsay Anderson, John Fletcher, Lorenza Mazzetti and Daniele Paris.

In February *Together* was screened at the National Film Theatre as part of the first Free Cinema programme, alongside Lindsay Anderson’s *O Dreamland* and Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson’s *Momma Don’t Allow*. *Together* was selected as one of the British entries at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the *Mention au film de recherche*. It was also screened at the Cork and Edinburgh Festivals the same year. The film was then given a five-week run at the Academy cinema in London.¹³

After visiting Cannes to collect her award, Lorenza Mazzetti went back to Italy to call on her twin sister Paola, who had just given birth to a baby girl.

¹² Letter to Michael Balcon from James Quinn, 12 January, 1956. Michael Balcon Collection I/54.

¹³ Cf. Christophe Dupin, “*Together* (1956)”, entry in *BFI Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/439078/index.html>.

Despite her plans for a brief stay in her home country, she would never return to England. Having met Cesare Zavattini during the Cannes Film Festival, once in Italy Lorenza teamed up with him on a few film projects (*Le Italiane e l'amore*, 1961; *I misteri di Roma*, 1963) that kept her in Rome. Mazzetti returned to London only in 2001, for a celebration of Free Cinema organised by the BFI.¹⁴ Her return to London is narrated in a documentary directed by Giulio Latini, *Lorenza Mazzetti: In the World of Silence* (2001).

¹⁴ A transcription of the discussion held at the National Film Theatre, London, can be found on the BFI website: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/interviews/freecinema.html>. The panel included Lorenza Mazzetti, Karel Reisz, David Robinson and Walter Lassally and was chaired by Kevin MacDonal.

3.3. Together in sequences

Sequence 1. Opening credits (1' 20'')

THE
BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE
presents

A FILM BY
LORENZA MAZZETTI
AND
DENIS HORNE

TOGETHER

Made with the support of the British Film Institute's
Experimental Production Fund

with
MICHAEL ANDREWS
EDUARDO PAOLOZZI
and
VALY
DENIS RICHARDSON
CECILIA MAY

Story and Scenario
by
DENIS HORNE

Photography
HAMED HADARI

Additional Photography
GEOFFREY SIMPSON
WALTER LASSALLY
JOHN FLETCHER

Production Facilities
LEON CLORE STUDIO TWENTY TWO
NATIONAL FILM THEATRE
REALIST FILMS EALING STUDIOS

Music by
DANIELE PARIS

Played by
SINFONIA of LONDON

Supervising Editor
LINDSAY ANDERSON

Editor and Recordist
JOHN FLETCHER

Directed by
LORENZA MAZZETTI
In collaboration with DENIS HORNE

To the people of London's
East End, amongst whom
it was made, this tale is
dedicated —

Sequence 2. Introducing the East End and the characters (4' 52'')



Views of the still desolate bombsites of the East End...



...which children have taken over and turned into their playground.



A barge crosses the Thames.



Cranes at work: this is the industrious side of London.



The two deaf-mutes leave their workplace.



As the two deaf-mutes approach the camera, the ambient noises are loud.



The sounds cut off.
The two speak to each other using the sign language.



The deaf-mutes are pestered by the children...



...and looked at suspiciously by the East Enders.

Sequence 3. Dinner at home (4' 18'')



At home: the two share a small room in a boarding house.



An insertion shows a caricature of the deaf-mutes drawn on the sidewalk...



...probably done by the landlord's younger daughter, as the editing suggests.



They dine with their landlords...



...and Andrews stares romantically at the landlord's elder daughter.
Fade to black.



Sequence 4. The children, the market and community life (4' 15'')



In the street, kids play with marbles.



It's market day: the film assumes a documentary-like tone...



...and delivers a heartfelt portrayal of the East Enders' community life.



The two deaf-mutes visit the market...



...then walk away, pestered by the kids as usual.



Paolozzi plays with one of them.

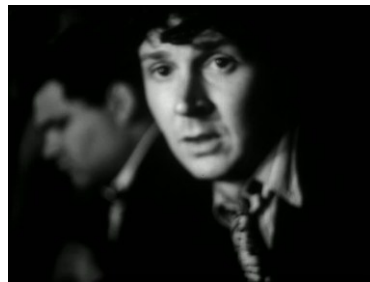
Sequence 5. A night at the pub (3' 19'')



Later on, the two enter a pub crowded with people. Jazz music plays.



The deaf-mutes are sitting, sort of embarrassed.



The sound cuts off completely, and Andrews engages in an impossible conversation with a customer.



When Andrew's pov is abandoned, music sets in again.



The two deaf-mutes leave the pub as night approaches.



Street lights are lit. Fade to black.

Sequence 6. The two deaf-mutes blocking a van (2' 50'')



Morning. The deaf-mutes go to work.



Walking down an alley, they do not realise they are blocking a van that is running behind them.



They are told off by the driver.



As they look at him, silence falls.
Fade to black.

Sequence 7. The deaf-mutes' work and the children's playground (3' 10'')



The two deaf-mutes are shown at work on barges and buildings by the wharf.



Their scenes are intercut with those of kids playing and singing children's rhymes.

Sequence 8. Stealing the kids' marbles (1' 18'')



On their way home, the two deaf-mutes stop by the playground and Paolozzi steals the kids' marbles.



They are bullied by the kids and chase them away.

Sequence 9. At home, an embarrassed dinner (3' 57'')



At home, the deaf-mutes help each other get comfortable.



Paolozzi empties his pockets and counts the marbles he has stolen.



The landlord calls for them.



Dinner is ready: we hear the sound of cutlery on plates but not the words the landlady utters.

Sequence 10. To the funfair (4' 29'')



On a wall down the street, the kids draw a caricature of the deaf-mutes.



Andrews leaves home by himself and goes to a funfair.



There, he stops at a dancer's show. He looks at the dancer cravingly.

Sequence 11. Meeting by the bridge (1' 08'')



A brief sequence showing the two deaf-mutes meeting by a bridge

Sequence 12 One more night at the pub (3' 36'')



Later on, the deaf-mutes enter a pub with people dancing to jazz music and drinking.



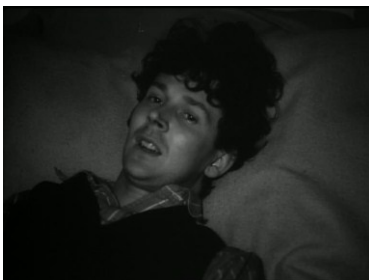
Paolozzi counts the kids' marbles again.



A girl is dancing near their table. Paolozzi leaves, and Andrews is approached by the girl, once again engaging in an impossible conversation.



Sequence 13. Daydreaming (2' 28'')



At home in bed, Andrews daydreams of coming home with the funfair dancer and kissing her. Fade to black.

Sequence 14. The final accident (7' 21'')



The following morning, the two deaf-mutes get ready for work.



On their way, they stop by the bridge.



Paolozzi leaves Andrews alone for a few minutes.



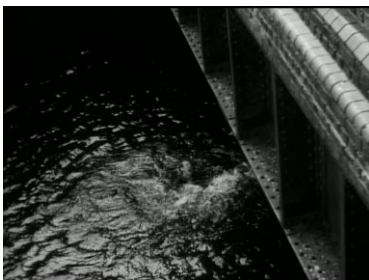
Andrews sits on the bridge and stares at the water...



...while kids pull faces at him.



Trying to knock his hat off, the kids accidentally provoke Andrews' fall into the river before running away.



Andrews cries for help, but Paolozzi, now back, cannot hear him.



A barge crosses the Thames leaving the two to their separate destinies.

3.4. From Beckett to Neorealism

Both *The Glass Marble* and *Together* are set in the Docklands area of London, a derelict landscape which still looked like a bombsite more than ten years after the end of World War II. The bleak surroundings with bombed-out buildings and heavy industrial machinery are the proper background to a story which is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd. In fact the playwright is explicitly referred to in the film's original treatment by the name of one of the secondary characters, Sam Beckett. Though the finished film drops this allusion, *Together* bears traces of Beckett's theatre, while *The Glass Marble* does not. Through its silences, its slow pace, the many instances of non-communication and the ruins of East London, which are a representative of existential devastation, *Together* poses questions on human existence in a post-war scenario, which are resolved pessimistically with the death of one of the characters rather than unresolved as in Beckett's theatre. Though Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* premiered in Paris only in 1953 and in London in 1955, the play also seems to be called forth by the character's duality and by their physicality: Andrews and Paolozzi share some traits with Vladimir and Estragon and are also coupled in the way circus clowns usually are, that is, in a correspondence of slim and fat build and of happy and sad faces – all of this mingled with an undeniable touch of Laurel and Hardy.

Notably, *The Glass Marble* is *less* centred on the two deaf-mutes than *Together*. The title itself directs our attention to Wally's stealing of the children's marbles (an explicit reference to Ferenc Molnár's novel, *The Paul Street Boys*, which Mazzetti has acknowledged as a source of inspiration), while the title *Together*, which

Lindsay Anderson came up with, points to the unique relationship between the two deaf-mutes.

The *Glass Marble* synopsis follows the law of cause and effect, thus resulting in a traditional narrative, while *Together* is an allusive and almost circular film whose sequences are not strictly linked to one another. *The Glass Marble* lingers on the world surrounding the two deaf-mutes, while *Together* is a tale of their solitude in that world. The two approaches to the same material are completely different: *The Glass Marble* might be more dynamic and more action-oriented but the characters of the two deaf-mutes are not fully developed and do not function as symbols of displacement and marginalisation. *The Glass Marble* is not – or not *yet* – that neorealist and poetic film which *Together* proved to be.

This difference in approach also influenced the film's finale, which in the *Glass Marble* story saw Patch killed by an accident due to his distress on the job. The ending of *Together* is instead related to the character's physical and existential condition: Andrews drowns in the Thames after having been chased by the kids and momentarily left alone by Paolozzi. He might have been saved had he been able to cry out. It is not immanent fate or destiny that regulates the deaf-mutes' lives, but their condition of being different. The two live in a world where not even mutual help between them is possible. Andrews and Paolozzi's characters are not simply hearing impaired: they are *living* impaired.

3.5. The casting of Eduardo Paolozzi and London 'As Found'

As with her first film, *K*, Lorenza Mazzetti cast two non-professional actors as the main characters of *Together*: Michael Andrews, who had starred as Gregor Samsa in *K*, and Eduardo Paolozzi. The choice of the two actors is primarily a question of physicality: Andrews was slim and nervy while Paolozzi was stout and shy. The looks of the two are poles apart but in this great difference they comprise the whole of mankind. The Andrews/Paolozzi duality (sustained by Daniele Paris' score, played on violin and oboe) might parallel not only Mazzetti's sense of displacement but also her being part of a temporarily disjoined couple:

I couldn't really understand what this story meant, except that the situation of two people immersed in a world they ignored [...] filled me with emotion. After all I too felt an outsider, and being a twin I felt I was a double.¹⁵

The casting of Andrews and Paolozzi calls forth ideas about the exclusive-inclusive relationship between the artist and society. The casting of Paolozzi in particular, at the time a well-established artist, pushes these ideas even further. At the time he was cast, Eduardo Paolozzi had already exhibited his work at the Festival of Britain in 1951 and at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1952. He had also taken part in and co-organised the ICA exhibition, *Parallel of Life and Art*, in 1953. Paolozzi and his fellow artists operated within an aesthetic frame which was later defined as 'As Found',¹⁶ a non-organic artistic and cultural movement interested in discovering the pre-existing, in attributing a quality to things which *were already there*. The creative act in As Found art does not lie in creation itself but in the

¹⁵ Lorenza Mazzetti, "London Diaries", p. 33.

¹⁶ Cf. Claude Lichtenstein – Thomas Schreggenberger (eds.), *As Found. The Discovery of the Ordinary*, Lars Müller Publishers, Zurich 2001.

foregrounding of the *here and now* through the assignation of a value to already extant things which are taken for granted, considered useless or ignored:

The As Found attitude is antiutopian, and the properties of the things it brings to light are those of directness, immediacy, rawness, and material presence. As Found is a concern with the here and now, with the real and the ordinary, with the tangible and the real. [...] It] means the autonomous discovery of what is supposedly unimportant and the gift of making something important for oneself from it.¹⁷

As Found, an umbrella label which overlaps with literature (the Angry Young Men), visual arts (Brutalist Art), architecture and also Free Cinema¹⁸, is at the root of the many cultural changes that Great Britain went through after World War II. Through an anti-traditional, unorthodox and non-deferential look at the present, dismissing Britishness and tradition that had gradually been eroded, As Found managed to render the actual, desolate and yet somehow vital image of Great Britain after the conflict. Eduardo Paolozzi embodied the aesthetic principles of As Found, and his presence in *Together* inevitably brings these principles into the film. *Together* presents London ‘as found’: its East End of poverty and hard work, its bombsites, its damaged houses still in ruins, its unbelievable drabness compared to monumental central London. The unadulterated London of *Together* displays its distance from the centres of power, from the institutions, from progress: tragic historical events have left their heavy, indelible mark. The East End itself has been pushed aside and marginalised – a real war relic still awaiting reconstruction.

¹⁷ Claude Lichtenstein – Thomas Schrengenberg, “As Found. A Radical Way of Taking Note of Things”, in Id., *As Found*, pp. 9, 12.

¹⁸ “For the exponents of As Found movement [...] the reality of images was a central prerequisite for their work. Taking up and reworking something that existed previously promised them a higher obligation than evoking an abstract ideal did, whether in art, architecture, city planning, literature, or cinema. Are spots of flaking paint, graffiti, puddles on the ground, or patches of rust on a flat surface just faults or deficiencies in reality? [...] So-called deficiencies are integrated, accepted into the image; they are accepted as part of the whole. They are ingredients to the ‘image’ that they helped create. The Free Cinema movement slogan ‘Perfection is not an aim’ should be understood in this sense” (Ibid., p. 10).

The presence of Paolozzi incorporates the aesthetic, sociological and political stance of *As Found* into the film: through his character, the spectator becomes a first-hand witness of the actual state of affairs in post-war London, which in turn is elevated by the director's subjectivity to a metaphor for existential unrelatedness, thus combining documentary and fiction, actuality and poetry.

3.6. Lindsay Anderson's intervention and the film's poetic twist

I remember how Lorenza Mazzetti used to insist, when we were editing *Together*, that she wanted it to be the most *boring* film ever made. Of course she meant she wanted it to be a film whose beauty and significance would be expressed precisely in those elements of style (extreme slowness and austerity) which the desensitised, conventionalised audience would fail to understand – and therefore be bored by.¹⁹

When Lindsay Anderson intervened in the editing of *Together*, in accordance with Mazzetti he tried to create a kind of “lingering, poetic concentration”²⁰ which derived from the slowness and apparent torpor of the film. Mazzetti's intent was personal and poetic, while Anderson's, as usual, was also didactic: the hypnotic pace of the film was devised as a means to address the audience directly. The spectators might reject the film as being boring and vague, or could interrogate themselves about its alienating visuals and therefore about the nature of the story narrated on the screen. *Together* is set in motion by a circular – rather than linear – narrative: until the final accident disrupts their lives, the two deaf-mutes are shown repeating the same actions day after day. On the technical side, the long takes and

¹⁹ Lindsay Anderson, “Vital Theatre”, in *Encore*, November-December 1957, reprinted in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 283.

²⁰ Ibid. It can be argued that *Together* provided Anderson with his first chance to experiment with Brechtian devices on the screen.

the travelling shots sustain the idea of continuous but idle movement and of huge amounts of time spent doing nothing of relevance.

None of the accidents that happen in *Together* really disturbs the repetitiveness of the two deaf-mute's lives,²¹ which are so isolated and marginal as to not be involved in the common mechanisms of narration. The two are caged in a circle of repetitive movements and habits that leads to substantial immobility. They are apparently unable to push forward the flow of the narrative. Were it not for the children that prod them and in the end provoke the film's final tragedy, nothing would interrupt the monotonous flow of the deaf-mutes' lives. Failing to have a grip on the world that surrounds them, they slip over the surface of things so that the events cannot affect them. Their distinctive feature is their inefficiency in influencing reality: the two deaf-mutes are uninfluential.

Within this frame, a conventional narrative arc with twists and sub-plots (as in *The Glass Marble*) would have felt artificial. Instead, Mazzetti opted for a neorealist approach at the film's narrative – an approach *a posteriori*, of course, since much of the film's structure must have been devised during the editing. Of neorealism, Mazzetti retains those traits that André Bazin postulated, namely the way neorealism depicted reality, that is through a fictional but naturalistic and virtually non-mediated *mise-en-scene* of phenomena. From its direct-cinema looks to its finale *à la* Zavattini, *Together* conveys a sense of reality, of being there, of witnessing a genuine moment in the characters' lives, of watching a phenomenon as it takes place.

²¹ Cf. Gavin Lambert, "Free Cinema", in *Sight and Sound*, v. 25 n. 4, Spring 1956, p. 174.

The two deaf-mutes do not exactly act – and here lies the greatest difference in characterisation between *Together* and *The Glass Marble*: they are spectators and victims of the events that happen around them. If acting means inserting oneself in the flow of history – or of the narrative – and breaking the chain of events thus creating a diversion – a plot twist – then the protagonists of *Together* are not agents but observers of occurrences they do not relate to. The fact that they cannot speak or hear sustains both their unrelatedness and their role of passive observers, since sight is the only cinematically relevant sense that they can properly use. Their inability to alter the chain of events is reflected, as we have seen, in the dilation of the scenes' duration, in the insistent use of long takes and in the redundant narrative structure. *Together* therefore conforms to Gilles Deleuze's definition of 'time-image', which the critic associates to the new conception of cinematic time that arose with neorealism:²²

neorealism registers the collapse of sensory-motor schemes: characters no longer "know" how to react to situations that are beyond them, too awful, or too beautiful, or insoluble [...] So [...] the possibility appears of temporalizing the cinematic image: pure time, a little bit of time in its pure form, rather than motion.²³

'Time in its pure form' is achieved through a substantial disposal of editing: scene cutting is avoided in favour of dilated shot length. Deleuze, who theorised on time-image, converges here with Bazin, who saw editing as a trick and long takes and depth of field as the proper generators of meaning in cinema. In his "Defence of Rossellini", Bazin states that neorealism "considers reality as a bloc, not

²² The time-image "appears for the first time in the deep crisis of the European post-war order, when Italian Neorealism suspended the links between action and perception and transformed characters from agents into observers" (Gilles Deleuze, "On 'The Time-Image'", in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, tr. Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York 1995, p. 59. Quoted in Thomas Elsaesser – Malte Hagener, *Film Theory. An Introduction Through the Senses*, Routledge, London 2010, p. 159).

²³ Ibid.

incomprehensible but indivisible”.²⁴ Indivisibility is expressed through the lack of fragmentation of sequences into clusters of scenes brought forth by the predilection of long takes – but also through the impossibility to separate character and setting: the film syntax of neorealism, which is also the film syntax of *Together*, allows for a contextualisation of the film’s characters who are indissolubly related to their environment (*Together* could not but be set in London) and for a passionate contemplation of reality²⁵ through its representation, with a lingering attitude – precisely the one Anderson aimed to achieve – which is made possible by the expanded length of each single take.

Together is *not* a politically or ideologically charged documentary like *O Dreamland* nor a socio-romantic one like *Every Day Except Christmas* – neither is it a skilfully crafted fiction: its substance is the lives of its characters, photographed *while living* – and dying.²⁶ The intentionally ‘boring’ structure of *Together* makes the repetition of actions (work/pub/home) correspond to the repetition of concepts (incommunicability/alienation/loneliness) so that they can be better assimilated by the audience. Repetition allows for the entrails of the film’s reality to be grasped, for an emotional *liaison* with the audience to be engaged, for a poetic and not merely intellectual form of knowledge to be achieved.

²⁴ André Bazin, “Defence of Rossellini (1955)”, tr. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in David Forgacs – Sarah Lutton – Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (eds.), *Roberto Rossellini, Magician of the Real*, British Film Institute, London 2000, p. 159.

²⁵ Cf. Mark Le Fanu, “Metaphysics of the ‘Long Take’: Some Post-Bazinian Reflections”, in *P.O.V.*, n. 4, December 1997, http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_04/section_1/artc1A.html: “What [Bazin] found missing [from contemporary cinema] – what he felt had been lost – was the sense of passionate contemplation (contemplation here being only another word for reality: an unmediated openness to the world) that had been a governing aspect – a spiritual aspect almost – of the finest examples of early primitive cinema”.

²⁶ Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener clarify that, in Bazinian terms, “The smallest unit of filmic construction is [...] not the shot or the scene [...] but the ‘fact’, a given and pre-existing element which overrides technique and technology. For Bazin [...] the meaning of a film does not arise from a collision and cohesion of elements but from the ontological presence of the things themselves [...] filtered through the film-maker’s sensibility” (Thomas Elsaesser – Malte Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 30).

When Gavin Lambert defined *Together* “a poet’s film”²⁷ endowed with a “secret, intuitive, visionary”²⁸ method, he was foregrounding the film’s lyricism, which singles it out from the other Free Cinema films. The ‘lingering effect’ obtained through the rarefaction of the action ends up separating *Together* from the psycho-social attitude of many other Free Cinema films.²⁹ Instead, it assigns the film to the realm of pure, self-sufficient art which conveys “an existentialist take [...] on the sublime”,³⁰ expressing “the fragility of the characters’ existence”,³¹ dwarfed by the immanence of the urban landscape.

3.7. In the world of silence

Despite its neorealism-influenced aesthetics, *Together* still works on a metaphoric level. It combines the realistic depiction of East London and its people with the autobiographical elements that Mazzetti injects in the film through the symbolic value of its deaf-mute characters. As we have seen, Mazzetti’s reflections on the theme of the outsider that permeated her first film, *K*, are developed here through the protagonists and their being unrelated and uninfluential. While *K* is a tale of personal solitude and self-isolation, the two deaf-mutes of *Together* try to relate to the community around them. If *K* represents Mazzetti’s sense of inadequacy

²⁷ Gavin Lambert, “Free Cinema”, p. 174.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Cf. Christopher Wagstaff, “È possibile che De Sica non porti da nessuna parte? Il neorealismo italiano e il Free Cinema inglese”, unpublished paper written for the 15th ‘Convegno internazionale di studi cinematografici’, Rome, 13-16 December 2009.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

³¹ Ibid.

towards the whole of life, *Together* has a narrower scope, reflecting as it does her own inability to communicate with her social environment. *Together* poses a linguistic problem in itself symbolic: the two deaf-mutes are destined to communicate through an artificial language, which instead of integrating/including them in the community ends up *isolating* them. Theirs is a non-relational language that is hardly understood outside the niche in which it is spoken.³² No matter how loved and cared for by the community (and they are not, judging from the expressions on the Eastenders' faces), the two deaf-mutes will always be like strangers among men. Likewise Mazzetti, an outsider in London, felt that she would always *speak a different language*.

Furthermore, *Together* is a sound film whose sounds the characters cannot hear. The film keenly records the rich and textured soundscape of the docks, mapping the area's noises and voices³³ which define its peculiar identity. The outskirts of London are mapped through the sounds of machinery and barges in the morning and of people and music at night in the pub. Sounds are as important as visuals in the identification of the city and in the depiction of life in the dockland community. The sounds from the docks are a sort of primordial music score, a piece of concrete music to accompany the film.³⁴ Being unable to hear the aural pattern through which East End life expresses itself, the two deaf-mutes are isolated from a relevant part of the experience of living and, as *Together* seems to suggest, are missing something important and vital. Furthermore, the deaf-mutes

³² It is quite clear that not even Andrews and Paolozzi knew the sign language and put virtually no effort into researching it: their gestures in the film are purely conventional and fictional.

³³ Cf. Jez Winship, "Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together*", <http://sparksinelectricaljelly.blogspot.com/2010/07/lorenza-mazzettis-together.html> (posted on 19 July 2010).

³⁴ Cf. Maria Francesca Agresta, *Il suono dell'interiorità*, p. 11.

live in a world full of noises but are unable to make any noise, which makes them go through life unnoticed. *Together* is antithetical to Anderson and Brenton's *Thursday's Children* – a film that Mazzetti had *not* seen prior to the making of *Together*. In *Thursday's Children*, young pupils of the Royal School for the Deaf in Margate learn how to speak and how to make themselves understood in a world of sounds, noises and words that they cannot hear. As the voice-over says: “These children are being saved from the worst enemy of the deaf: from being alone, cut off in silence”. The two deaf-mutes of *Together* were not so lucky: their inability to speak worsens their condition and makes interaction impossible, and the two are trapped in a world of silence.

When the sound cuts off, a thing which happens often and abruptly throughout the film, we enter the deaf-mutes' world as if from their aural point of view – their *point of hearing*. At the very beginning of the film, for example, the soundtrack is crammed with the voices of children singing and with the heavy industrial noises coming from the docks. When the point of view shifts to the two deaf-mutes, the ambient sound is cut abruptly and we enter their aural environment, which is devoid of diegetic sounds (no noises, no voices) and commented by Daniele Paris' score. The two talk to each other via the sign language, a means of communication which does not rely on the transmission of sounds.

In the silent sequences (and in those without dialogue or diegetic sounds), the visual experience – deprived of its aural counterpart – is boosted, and the spectators' attention concentrates on what is visible, momentarily disposing of

the audible. However, the separation of the images from their corresponding sounds engenders a sense of isolation and incompleteness: the deaf-mutes' lives are a film from which something vital is missing. As Rudolf Arnheim writes,

In the days of silent film, Chaplin in *City Lights* used blindness to make human solitude and isolation visible. It is fitting that a sound film should symbolize the same theme by deafness and muteness.³⁵

If Andrews and Paolozzi's characters cannot enjoy the pleasures of environmental sound, they are given an aural 'objective correlative' elsewhere, that is, in the score composed by Daniele Paris.



Daniele Paris recording the music score of *Together*, 1955.

The Italian composer, who had already worked with Mazzetti on *K*, was called upon by Anderson to enrich the film with his compositions. Paris devised a main theme for violin and oboe that mirrored the Andrews-Paolozzi duality: the high-pitched sound of the violin stands for lanky Andrews, whereas the rounder and much more solid timbre of the oboe is associated to stout Paolozzi. Like the film,

³⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, "Free Cinema II", in *Film Culture*, v. 4 n. 2, February 1958, p. 11.

Paris' music does not rely on a traditional structure, reminiscent as it is of jazz and improvisation. Moreover, Paris' predilection for *musique concrète* and for the music experimentations of the twentieth century influenced him into constructing an avant-garde score, which with its timbres and a peculiar use of woodwind instruments mimicked the noisy soundscape of the Docklands.³⁶ Fascinated by traditional children's songs that Anderson played during their meetings, Paris incorporated those themes in the score in different orchestral variations. Not only are the pestering children thus given their own counterpart in the film's soundtrack (where they also perform songs and rhymes such as "Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo" and "Michael Finnegan"), but Paris' 'children's music' seems to imply that the two main protagonists are still living a sort of perennial infancy,³⁷ that their inability to communicate has resulted in the impossibility to grow up – and the scene of Paolozzi stealing the children's marbles could confirm this.

The final sequence of *Together* is highly reminiscent of the endings that seal the neorealist films written by Cesare Zavattini, in particular those directed by Vittorio De Sica. The film's final long shot is a last, poetic statement following the death of Michael Andrews' character. A barge crosses the Thames heading towards the horizon, suggesting that reality and the lives of the film's characters – including Paolozzi's, now on his own – proceed well beyond the margins of the film. As Gavin Lambert wrote:

the barge passing along the Thames at the end, carries tragedy with it: a symbol of time, indifference and oblivion that seems unforced and deeply sad. [...] The river

³⁶ Cf. Maria Francesca Agresta, *Il suono dell'interiorità*, p. 13.

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il Free Cinema inglese*, p. 20. This is also suggested in sequence 7, where the scenes of the deaf-mutes at work are intercut with scenes of the kids playing and singing, implying a correspondence between the two activities and reinforcing the idea of the deaf-mutes as childish or immature characters.

flows on, the dredgers roar, a barge passes; someone has died – and this too is part of the significant obscurity of everyday.³⁸

Together can then be defined as an ‘open film’, an open form whose scope is larger than what is contained in the frame.³⁹ The narrative does not come to a close: we see Paolozzi going his way without even knowing or suspecting his partner might be dead. The film’s narrative is not perfectly tailored: so much is left loose, so much is left to the audience’s imagination, that we cannot even define the film’s margins as a proper *beginning* and a proper *ending*: *Together* is a window momentarily open onto the two deaf-mutes’ lives. The director decides, poetically and not rationally, when to start recording the events and when to stop, following intuition and artistic pregnancy instead of well-organised narratological schemes – scrutinising reality instead of creating it. The film proceeds through accumulation of vignettes and a condensation of meaning until it comes to a climax that seals it with no denouement. Andrews’ character dies because of the pestering kids who, albeit innocently, provoke his fall into the Thames. His condition prevents him from crying out loud, so his muted invocations become one final statement of the character’s loneliness: the two deaf-mutes have been living their daily life *together* as a two-member community but, as Mazzetti seems to suggest here, in the moment of need everyone, especially the ‘alien’, is alone.

³⁸ Gavin Lambert, “Free Cinema”, pp. 174-175.

³⁹ Cf. Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame. What We See in Films*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, p. 49. See also Thomas Elsaesser – Malte Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 17.

4.

The fear of being laughed at: Nazli Nour's *Alone With the Monsters* (1958)

4.1. *Desperately seeking Nazli*

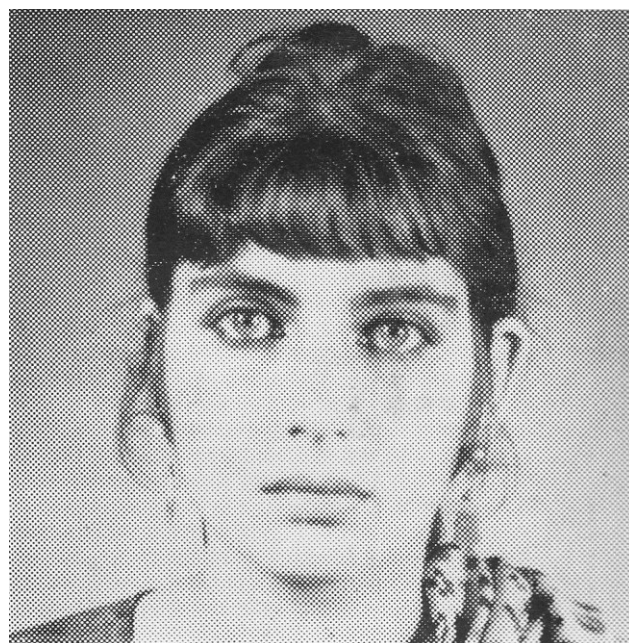
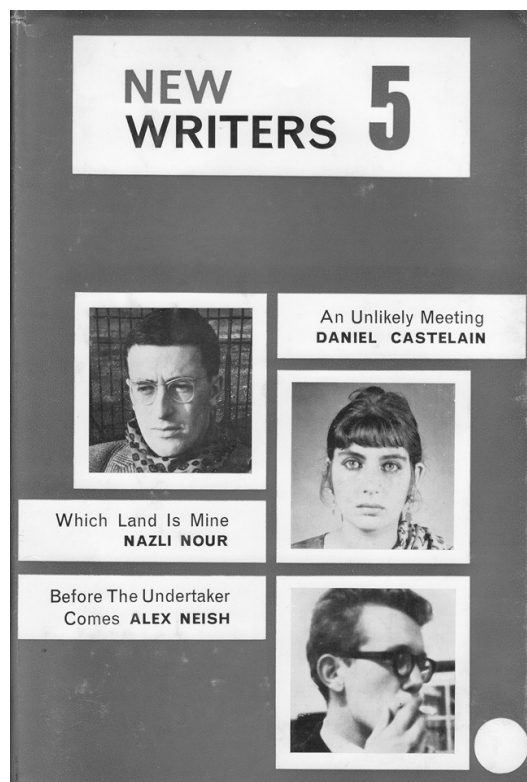
Nazli Nour's *Alone With the Monsters* is probably the most obscure of the films analysed here. Written and directed by Nour, the film is one of the Experimental Film Fund's least accomplished enterprises, mainly due to its director's lack of expertise.

Little is known about Nazli Nour's biography and my attempts to locate her were not successful. One of my sources, artist Liliane Lijn, currently collaborates with Nazli Nour creating installations based on Nour's poems. However Lijn does not know where Nour lives and, though suggesting that Nour might be based in Brooklyn, has not been able to help me track her down. It is my knowledge that Nour is married to Dharma Publishing's founder Tarthang Tulku, but my requests to the publishing company for further information never went through.

Though some biographical notes report Nour as having been born in Egypt, Lijn claims that Nour was born in Britain of an Egyptian father. Elsewhere, she is described as "a young girl of French-Egyptian parentage".¹ The minutes of the thirteenth Experimental Production Committee meeting, held in 1957, refer to

¹ "Alone With the Monsters", in *The British Film Institute Presents: Experiment in Britain*, programme of screenings held at the National Film Theatre, London, 4th – 7th October 1959 (BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box 121 [location O/19/1], File 2: Experimental Film Fund).

her as an actress and drama student of seventeen, which implies that Nour was born in or around 1940.²



A rare picture of Nazli Nour, on the cover of the book *New Writers V*, 1966.

Nazli Nour submitted her proposal for *Alone With the Monsters* to the committee in May 1957. The original treatment is quite long for a two-reel film and replete with camera directions, which were closely followed during the shooting. When the treatment was presented, it came with the alleged availability of Walter Lassally as director of photography. This was at first unconfirmed, but then Lassally went on to become the film's cinematographer.

Nour and Lassally were granted £100 for the shooting of the visuals and a further £250 were allocated for the completion of the film. On 23 October 1957,

² Minutes of the 13th Experimental Production Committee meeting, 8 May 1957 (BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive, Box 121 [location O/19/1], file 2: Experimental Film Fund).

a test screening of the sole visuals was held during the committee's fourteenth meeting. The material was deemed disappointing but £164 (of the £250 previously allocated) were granted for the completion of the soundtrack and the clearance of music rights. The 16-minute black-and-white film was ready by February 1958. It was then screened as part of the "Experiment in Britain" programme at the National Film Theatre in London, on 4 to 7 October 1959. Curiously, in his memoir *Itinerant Cameraman*, Walter Lassally recalls just a few marginal details of the making of *Alone With the Monsters*, the title of which he does not even mention:

before film schools existed, I shot a short for a girl of seventeen, Nazli Nour, and what intrigued me here was the idea of just supplying the technical know-how to enable Nazli to make this film without interposing myself more than minimally, so that her ideas could reach the screen in as unadulterated a form as possible. I think we succeeded in this, but although the film enjoyed a brief release, the negative got thrown into the Thames one day, during a quarrel that Nazli unfortunately chose to have in the middle of Hungerford Bridge.³

Alone With the Monsters tells the story of a crippled old woman who is pursued by a disquieting bunch of people. They make fun of her, laugh at her and follow her to her house, where she imagines being young again and 'free'. It is clear that these people, the *monsters* from the title, are all in the old lady's mind, and represent her discomfort at her present condition.

A copy of *Alone With The Monsters* is preserved at the BFI National Film Archive and is available for viewing purposes only. Since it was not possible to extract stills from the film, I am reprinting the original treatment that Nazli Nour submitted to the committee.

³ Walter Lassally, *Itinerant Cameraman*, p. 133.

4.2. Alone With the Monsters. *A treatment*⁴

ALONE WITH THE MONSTERS

A proposal by Miss Nazli Nour

Treatment.

The film begins with a great crowd of people seen walking in haste across the Park. As we come closer and enter the crowd, we see a little crippled woman surrounded by all these people who point out and deride her crippled body.

As the crippled woman struggles through the crowd with embarrassment and difficulty, she looks from side to side for a way to escape.

Seeing the crippled woman, the crowd begin to stare down at her deformed body with mockery and disgust as she fights her way through to the front.

The crippled woman, who has been edging her way through the crowd, having succeeded, now hobbles in front of them as quickly as she can, with her head bent down looking now and then from side to side, expressing her disgrace and fear as she bears the cruel laughter, the jokes and the mockery coming from the crowd who follow on her heels.

The crowd, who follow the crippled woman mischievously, are seen nudging each other as they laugh... some pointing their fingers with mockery, others mimicking her and pulling horrible faces behind her back.

Side view of the crowd is seen diminishing in the distance, with the crippled woman still hobbling in front of them.

From the opposite side of the street, we see the crippled woman coming up the road keeping very close to the railings of each house, for she is tired and lonely... A few seconds later, the crowd are seen swooping round the corner with a mischievous joy as they find her and intend to follow her.

The crippled woman is now seen in her room (it is a big dark room full of odd bits of ordinary furniture). She paces up and down for a few seconds,

⁴ The text is taken from the original treatment written by Nazli Nour. Cf. paper n. 6 attached to the minutes of the 13th Experimental Production Committee meeting, 8 May 1957 (BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive, Box 121 [location O/19/1], file 2: Experimental Film Fund).

then walks towards an old armchair; she sinks into it, giving a sign of relief.

The crowd has diminished but we still see a few of them walking along a dark passage. They seem to be getting up to some sort of mischief, as they wink mysteriously at one another... They advance quickly on tiptoe and stop outside the crippled woman's room. We see there is a huge hole in the wall which allows each one to see what goes on in her room... They all place themselves comfortably so that each one may have a good view of her.

One of the people in the crowd switches on the radio, and winks meaningly at the one next to him.

Crowd to be seen from the front as they approach the hole, but when they sit down to watch they are filmed from behind, so that we also will see through the hole. The camera slowly goes through the hole into the crippled woman's room... then takes a close-up.

The crippled woman does not know that she is being watched, for from her position, the hole is invisible. Sitting in her armchair, still with sunk head, she gradually becomes aware of the music. Slowly her head lifts; then she raises her stiff body from the chair; an expression of agony crosses her face. She stands listening, her feelings roused by the music, then begins to turn in a slow circle, revolving faster and faster until she is spinning round.

We superimpose for a few seconds a shot of whirling clothes in a washing machine, spinning round and round, with the crippled woman seen in the background; gradually she becomes a young woman...

The crippled woman becomes a completely different person, young and beautiful, eyes sparkling with happiness, intoxicated with joy and freedom. She dances round the room, throwing open the curtains, letting in brilliant light - throwing open everything - windows, cupboards, books - flinging up her arms in the air, singing and dancing joyously as the music goes on.

Then we turn back through the hole and film the watching crowd, who look with malicious joy at the young woman. They laugh and whisper with a certain wickedness as they rub their hands exultantly.

Returning to the young woman, we see her still dancing with happiness and complete abandon. Suddenly she becomes aware of the voices whispering and laughing. Panic-stricken, she rushes towards the door; then opens it a crack,, very slowly. She looks, but sees nobody. She slowly shuts the door and stops to listen anxiously, full of fear of being seen as a young woman.. She still hears the laughing and we leave her for a few seconds to turn towards the crowd, viciously laughing).

Then we return to the young girl who still stands listening with horror and fear and begins to moan and cry... She then suddenly dashes around her room, closing up all that had been opened a few moments before, still moaning and crying as she does all this. Then, weary with discouragement, hesitantly walks back to her chair, stops, and begins to spin around once more. Again is seen the superimposed whirl of the clothes in the washing machine, and in the background the young woman returning once more to the crippled woman (at the same time, the room becomes darker and darker). The crippled woman, now exhausted, drops into her armchair.

We leave her and return to the crowd, seen quitting their places, leaving the hole empty (they walk down the corridor and we watch their retreating backs as they fade in the distance)...

The crippled woman is now sitting in her armchair, with her head deep in a newspaper, peering as she tries to decipher it. We leave her for a moment and turn towards the hole, where we see the crowd coming back to their places. They seem more excited than ever this time, as they rush, jostling each other, to get the best places... eating peanuts, smoking cigarettes, waiting impatiently to watch the crippled woman's transformation. One of them switches on the radio. The all look at each other clapping their hands softly with excitement.

We look back to the crippled woman, whose transformation begins once more. Hearing the music, she gets up slowly and begins to whirl round as before (whirling clothes superimposed as before; her crippled body, transforming to a young woman's body, is seen in the background). Now young, as before, she dances with the greatest joy, flinging the curtains wide apart, letting the light enter, and caressing them – picking up her shawl, dancing with it in front of the mirror, admiring her unknown beauty.

We return through the hole to see the crowd, laughing and clapping their hands hysterically, watching every movement with excitement. Some of them try to persuade the other not to make so much noise but they too are overcome with laughter.

We turn back to the young woman, who is still dancing. Suddenly she hears the laughter again and rushes round the room in a panic, closing the curtains, flinging down her shawl – then begins to search for the source of the laughter – but in vain. Then, as her pain at the laughter grows, she clenches her hands and begins to tear down the pictures and hangings, clawing at the walls as if to destroy them, beating against them with her fists moaning and weeping desperately for the voices to stop laughing. Exhausted, she comes back close to the chair; stops and slowly begins to whirl back into her old form (again, the spinning clothes are superimposed on the transformation)... then drops into her chair and sits sobbing with her face hidden in her hands.

The crowd is seen once more, nearly weeping with laughter – they then leave their places and saunter down the passage. They fade into the distance.

Back to the crippled woman, who is still crying. She then slowly begins to look down her room with agony and pain as the tears stream down her cheeks. She raises her tired body and hobbles towards the gas fire. Bending down with difficulty she stoops to the gas pipes, grasping both firmly, tugging at them with all the energy she has left. Her hands tremble as she struggles frenziedly to break the pipe. It breaks with a snap and she collapses, twisting herself beneath the pipe, holding it to her mouth and

nostrils, clasping it to her breast as if it were a rose, a flower of death. She gasps as the gas runs up her nostrils, breathing it in desperately, though her body jerks and trembles as the gas seeps into her lungs. The sense of suffocation grows stronger and stronger, until death invades her body, leaving it quiet and still. She lies tranquilly, with the pip still held on her breast. We leave her in the darkened room.

Back through the hole, we see the crows returning, skipping with anticipation. Excitedly, they take their places... switching on the radio and wait [sic] for their entertainment to begin. (They do not know the crippled woman is dead and that gas still flows from the pipes). They wait as though nothing had occurred.

Moving back into the crippled woman's room (but this time looking at the waiting crowd), we see the heads poking all around the hole, gazing expectantly into the dark room. (But now we notice something strange and horrible in their physical appearance. Their faces have become those of monsters while at the same time on each one's head horns are pricking up. Then slowly, one by one, these terrifying horned monsters fall shrieking from the hole, as the unnoticed gas begins to stupefy and kill them. Each one, falling, leaves behind traces of fire which soon merge into one great fire where all the monsters, the watchers, have perished.

Slowly turning towards the crippled woman's body, we see, as we get closer, the body of a young and beautiful woman, on her face an expression of profound peace and happiness as she lies in her room, now filled with light. The pipes lie still against her breast.

We draw back slowly.

4.3. A tale of self-rejection

Despite its technical deficiencies and the overall shallowness of the final result, *Alone With the Monsters* shows some interesting aspects when contextualised and seen against the backdrop of the films analysed so far. Nour describes her film as “a plea for the outcast, for the mentally and physically deformed”,⁵ claiming that “the cinema can become like a church and achieve a communion of thought between people”.⁶ Despite the director’s optimistic statements, though, the film is a dark and pessimistic take on the condition of the outcast.

Conceived as an easy-to-read parable on senility, *Alone With the Monsters* is a much deeper film than it may appear. Through the image of the laughed-at crippled old woman (played by Molly Terry), *Alone With the Monsters* represents the dismissal of the alien from the community. In a rather radical twist of the usual parable of the outcast, though, the film seems to imply that it is the outcast who carries the elements of rejection within him/herself. This is a really disruptive element which singles this film out when compared to the others discussed here. Moreover, as in Lorenza Mazzetti’s *K*, the outcast’s dismissal is a *self*-dismissal which in *Alone With the Monsters* takes on an even more uncompromising form.

At the beginning of the film, we see the old woman surrounded by people as she walks in a park. Those people are literally all around her but do not interact with her. She is, as the film’s title suggests, *alone in a crowd*. This is an effective image of isolation and alienation, but its implications are drastic.

⁵ “Alone With the Monsters”, in *The British Film Institute Presents: Experiment in Britain*, programme of screenings at the National Film Theatre, London, 4 – 7 October 1959. BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box 121 [location O/19/1], File 2: Experimental Film Fund.

⁶ Ibid.

Evaluated *a posteriori*, this image is disturbing since it crudely presents the film's main trope: the woman is haunted by presences that she herself makes up – she is literally dragging her own ghosts and monsters home with her. Probably the old woman was pestered 'for real' in a time preceding her life on the screen – so the monsters might be the hallucinated result of a past trauma. However, it is clear that now her persecutors are *only* in her head and she cannot get rid of them – even worse, she *generates* them.

A few seconds into the film, a scene shows the typical trope of the buildings dwarfing the film's protagonist, which Robert Vas' *Refuge England* fully develops (see chapter 5). The old woman walks unsteadily and all hunched up, in a posture that diminishes her height; at the same time, the buildings in the background look menacingly tall, thus configuring the old woman's identity as belittled, marginal or irrelevant.

At first the film treats the monsters ambiguously: in the first sequences, there is no clear distinction between the physical world of the old woman and the imaginary one of the monsters. While the monsters follow the woman through the park and along the street, they seem to be physically there, surrounding her like a haunting presence. It is only when the woman retires to her room that the film draws a distinction between the realm of reality (which is inhabited only by the protagonist) and the realm of imagination (inhabited by the monsters and by the woman's inner self). However, the two realms are interdependent and not separated: the woman can perceive the presence of the monsters and the monsters can see the woman.

Music puts the different ontological layers into communication: the monsters turn the radio on in order to make the inner self spring out of the old woman (who can clearly hear such music *in her head*). This can happen only because both the inner self and the monsters belong to the same body, that is, to the old woman's. All the characters in the film (the protagonist, the antagonists and the deuteragonist) share the same point of origin: the old woman herself. This is a crucial point: the woman *contains* both her intimate transfiguration and her own persecutors. Because of her fear of being laughed at and judged, she is her own worst enemy.

4.4. Peeking through the hole in the wall

At home, the old woman sits in her armchair, the monsters gazing at her through a hole in the wall. That of the hole is an eloquent image of the obtrusiveness of society in a person's private life. At first, the woman does not know that the monsters are there (the hole in the wall cannot be seen from her point of view, and is obtained through superimposition), but she can perceive their presence as soon as one of them turns the radio on. When the music plays, the woman can clearly hear it, though she does not know where it is coming from. She stands up and starts spinning: her inner self emerges and dances gracefully. The visual device that stresses the transformation of the old woman into her inner self is a superimposed image of whirling clothes in a washing machine. Far from being evocative or

visually enticing, the effect is ludicrous and naïve, but it manages to convey the idea of a radical change in the woman's character. An overwhelming revolution is happening within herself which she cannot control. Her inner self, though, does not arise according to the old woman's will: it is the monsters that turn the music on – music which then plays in the old woman's head.

The sequence of the inner self's dance is intercut with shots of the monsters watching through the hole and laughing. In the "Experiment in Britain" catalogue, *Alone With the Monsters* is described as a "strange and fascinating study in cruelty. Not conscious, sadistic cruelty, but the everyday wrongs committed by one man on another, sometimes without even being aware of the pain inflicted".⁷ The actions of the monsters are radically cynical: they provoke the emergence of the old woman's inner self *just to make fun of her*. They lay bare her most intimate hopes and dreams just to vilify them. The inner self hears the laughter (but cannot see the monsters) and stops dancing. As the monsters draw back, she retreats to her bed and starts crying as she is turned again into the old woman.

The film brilliantly represents the fear – which evolves into an obsession – experienced by an outcast who believes she is being targeted, pointed at and laughed at by people. The hole in the wall, through which the monsters observe the woman, stands for the uncontrollable obtrusiveness of the people's judgement (and of the woman's fear of it). The image is a perfect rendition of the condition of paranoia, the belief of always being watched and followed which strips the individual of every form of spontaneity and personal freedom. While Lorenza

⁷ "Experiment in Britain" catalogue, British Film Institute, Spring 1958, p. 16. BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive, Box 121 [location O/19/1], File 2: Experimental Film Fund.

Mazzetti's Gregor Samsa finds refuge in his own room, where the process of his social metamorphosis comes to a close, the old woman cannot even count on a private haven where to feel free and let her inner self take over. It is not important, at this point, whether the monsters are 'real' or not: they are a presence the old woman *feels as something real* – in the street or on her doorstep, they are (like) real and mean people to her.

The woman's old age is in itself an element of ostracism: old people are marginal in a society which evolves quickly and has lost the importance of heritage and tradition. At the same time, the old lady is a metaphor for *every* condition of marginality and might as well mirror the director's sense of otherness and 'foreignness'. The fact that Nazli Nour performs in the film as the inner self allows for such reading: the old woman *is in fact Nazli Nour* (her inner self being her *real* self), but when she is looked at she is seen as something different. The old woman hides within herself a young ballerina that aspires to something higher than the average – but she is constrained into a condition of social irrelevance. The old woman thus become a universal symbol of exclusion: old, poor and foreign people are all represented by this character that hides the best part of herself and is ashamed of showing it to the others, for fear of being judged. Hers, like Gregor Samsa's, is a *metaphysical* diversity, not a physical one. There seems to be no escape from the old woman's parable except for suicide – which, as we will see, must be read as a political act, not a physical one.

4.5. *The suicide: liberation or final defeat?*

A relevant thing happens during the inner self's second apparition. While dancing, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, the inner self opens the living room windows to let light and fresh air in. The inner self thus illuminates the darkness of the old woman's 'outer' life, but only for a brief moment. When she hears the monsters' laughter, the inner self rushes to shut the windows and drawers, restoring the house to its initial drabness and darkness. The fact that the action of seclusion is performed by the inner self is highly significant: it is not the old woman who rationally puts an end to her dreams and aspirations, but her irrational part. It is the inner self who renounces to express herself in order to avoid the people's judgement. What we see on the screen is an act of self-mutilation, an act of violence on oneself that comes from within. The monster's cruelty is cynical and unbearable, but the inner self's gesture of closure and self-censorship is even more radical, because it leads directly to the suppression of the main character's fantasies. The old woman is a defeated character that cannot find redemption because she incorporates the cause of her own defeat. The monster's judgement is ultimately her own judgement towards herself.

Under this light, the film's ending is worth considering. Knowing or feeling that the monsters are coming back to haunt her for the third time, the old woman takes her own life by inhaling gas. When the monsters arrive to peek through the hole, she is lying on the floor, unconscious. As she dies, a fire burns the monsters, who die screaming. The camera pans in on the dead woman and her image cross-dissolves into that of her inner self detaching from her body.

The old lady's suicide might be read as an act of liberation. In the film, her suicide is physical and concrete: she does get rid of her own life and, by doing so, she definitely escapes the monsters' judgement. Her suicide, though, can also be read as the suppression not of her outer self – her body – but of her inner self – her soul. Her inner self is also the place where the monsters live: the woman's aspirations and her demons share the same internal space, and in order to suppress the latter it is inevitable to repress the former. In a pessimistic reading, the old lady renounces her inner life, gives up expressing herself (her *true* self) and succumbs to the mediocrity of life. At the same time, though, she finds an escape into freedom – a kind of freedom that the others (the monster, society, the average people) cannot touch. The film's ending differs from the one in the treatment. After the old woman commits suicide, we see her inner self detaching from her body and running on the street among the bodies of the dead monsters. This might be taken as a final affirmation of freedom, whereas what the scene conveys is a sense of ultimate defeat: the inner self is free, but at the expense of her body, that is, her outer and social life. She is free at last, but only in death. There is no way out of the condition of the outcast: it is a condition which implies being excluded from life, be it *social* death (as in Mazzetti's *K*) or *physical* death. The inner self dances freely among the corpses of the dead monsters, but the scene comes with a bitter morale: the inner self has gained an eternal life which, individually and socially, amounts to nothing.

5.

A stranger estranged: Robert Vas' *Refuge England* (1959)

In London, the men and women of many nations were waiting to register as foreigners. A hundred thousand people from other lands. They're part of London, part of its broad culture, its tolerance. Some are without a homeland when war comes passing by.

– from the film *The First Days*, directed by Humphrey Jennings, Harry Watt, Pat Jackson (1939)

5.1. Robert Vas, displaced director

On 24 July 1958 the BFI Experimental Production Committee gathered for the sixteenth time. Among the new proposals to be evaluated by the committee was the synopsis of a film entitled *D.P.* [*Displaced Person*].¹ The project was given the go-ahead and a budget of £250 for the shooting of the visuals. A few months later, on 3 February 1959, an inter-office memo sent to James Quinn by John Huntley reads as follows:

Robert Vas has completely finished his budget on his film “D.P.” and in fact has slightly overspent. He has finished the visuals and needs to go ahead with the sound track in order that the film should be ready for the N.F.T. shows.²

¹ The original synopsis of *D.P.* is reprinted below, see Appendix 4.

² John Huntley, memo sent to James Quinn, 3 February 1959, held at BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box P/1 [location O/25/5].

Though not yet completed, the film had already been chosen, probably by committee member Karel Reisz, to become a part of the sixth and last Free Cinema programme, “Look at Britain”, to be screened at the National Film Theatre in London on 18 March 1959. In a typewritten note dated 23 March 1959 the film is listed as finished and the title has been corrected by hand from *D.P.* to *Refuge England*.³ The film, a 27-minute long black-and-white odyssey of an Eastern European refugee through London, is the directorial debut of the Hungarian-born Robert Vas. *Refuge England*, co-written by László Márton and Robert Vas and photographed by Walter Lassally, was the fourth film produced by the Experimental Film Fund and the third directed by a foreign director (following Mazzetti’s *Together* and Alain Tanner’s and Claude Goretta’s *Nice Time*).

Robert Vas was born in Budapest in 1931 and grew up in a Jewish ghetto. Following the failure of the Hungarian uprising against the Soviets in 1956, Vas escaped his home country and fled to England with his wife and child. Through his presence in Britain, Vas embodied the disastrous results of the revolt in Hungary that had disillusioned many British affiliates of the Communist Party and had contributed to the birth of the New Left.⁴ *Refuge England* revives Vas’ experience as a refugee in London: the main character, simply referred to in the end credits as Young Man (played by Tibor Molnar, an actual Hungarian refugee), arrives at Waterloo Station early in the morning and finds his refuge (a private

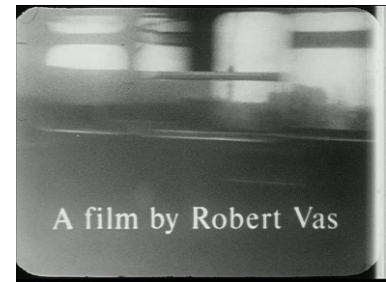
³ Cf. BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box P/1 [location O/25/5]. See also Box 139 [location O/21/4].

⁴ Cf. Bert Hogenkamp, *Film, Television and the Left in Britain. 1950 to 1970*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 2000, pp. 52-101. See also Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs. The Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties*, Pimlico, London 1992, pp. 123-124. Incidentally, the Hungarian uprising served as a model for the students’ revolt in Lindsay Anderson’s *If...* (cf. Charles Drazin, “If... Before If...”, in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, v. 5 n. 2, 2008, pp. 322-323).

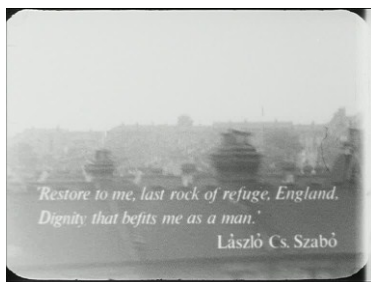
house where he is taken in) late at night. During his search for somewhere to stay, he crosses the city and sees it with curious, enthusiastic, perplexed or weary eyes. *Refuge England* thus becomes a portrait of London and its people as seen from an outsider's point of view.

5.2. Refuge England in sequences

Sequence 1. Opening credits (1' 22'')



The opening credits are superimposed on the shots of a train crossing the screen.



Views of South London are accompanied by a quotation from a László Cs. Szabó poem as the train approaches the station.

Sequence 2. The Young Man arrives in London (5' 20'')



At Waterloo Station, people get off the train.



The Young Man is the last to leave the platform.



The platform gate closes behind him.



At rush hour, the station is crowded. The Young Man makes his way through the crowd.



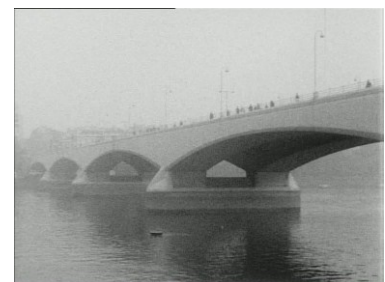
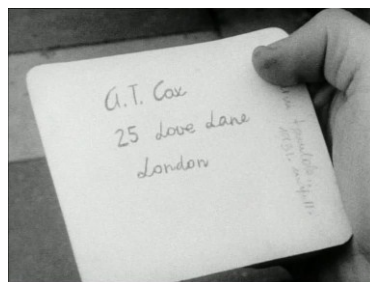
The Young Man sees a poster portraying a refugee...



...and women singing to raise money for the refugees.



He looks up the address of the house where he will be taken in...



...and crosses the bridge to Central London.

Sequence 3. The Young Man takes a first look at London (5' 27'')



Views of central London from above.



The Young Man walks across London, down the Strand



He observes people working...



...and gazes at the most peculiar characters populating the city.



He notices the Strand...



...and a puppet that tells the future.



He looks up the term "future" in his dictionary.

Sequence 4. The Young Man helps a foreigner and asks for directions (1' 10")



The Young Man meets a foreigner who is looking for the Strand.



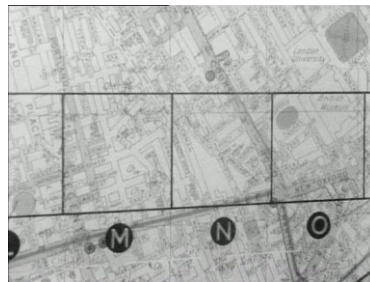
Having been there, the Young Man gives the foreigner directions.



“For a moment,
I felt myself at home.”



The Young Man then asks for directions to reach Love Lane...



...which he is given in many different ways.

Sequence 5. The Young Man reaches the wrong Love Lane (3' 13'')



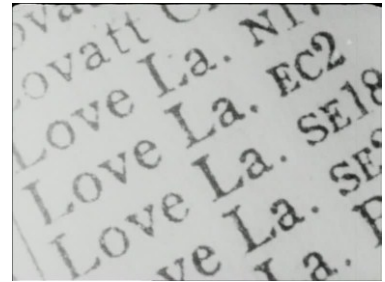
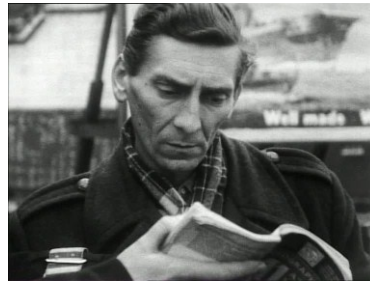
The Young Man reaches his supposed destination.



He meets the landlord who explains that it is not the right house.



A policeman shows the Young Man that there are several Love Lanes in London.



Sequence 6. The Young Man crosses London again (2' 27'')



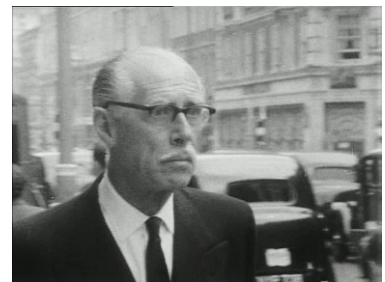
The Young Man sets off to cross London again.



He feels dwarfed by the city and its buildings.



He observes the Londoners again, this time with a feeling of non-belonging.



Sequence 7. The street artist (30'')



The Young Man runs into a street artist trying to break free from chains.

Sequence 8. Another wrong Love Lane (1' 42'')



Caught in the rain, the Young Man walks to another wrong Love Lane.

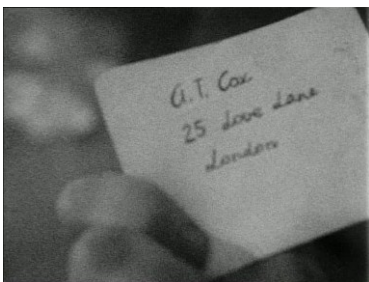
He is given a coin for the Tube.

Sequence 9. The Young Man reaches his destination (4' 59'')



The Young Man takes the Tube...

...and is overwhelmed by Piccadilly at night.



He checks the address again and walks towards another Love Lane.



This time, it is the right address.
The Young Man is welcomed and a table is laid. End credits.

5.3. Fragments of freedom

Of all the Free Cinema films, *Refuge England* is one of the closest to Humphrey Jennings' idea of cinema. Balancing fact and fiction and relying on a sympathetic and deeply emotional first-person voice-over, the film explores reality and current affairs through the subjective introjection of autobiographical details. Vas himself claimed to be strongly indebted to Jennings,⁵ through whose work he had learnt to understand England:

The Jennings films were a kind of initiation not only to England, but into the idea of a particular sort of subjective poetic documentary.

As a new citizen of this country it was essential to me to understand what England was all about; and it was these films which gave me the understanding, mainly through the language which Jennings used, through the imagery, through sounds, through the juxtapositions.⁶

It is not clear if the film's protagonist is Hungarian: he might have arrived from any Eastern European country. His condition as a displaced person was common at the time, so common that he can be considered something of a universal character: "He is a phenomenon of our century", Vas said.⁷ The first-person voice-over and the Young Man's estranged gaze make *Refuge England* a subjective work – where the author's subjectivity and the character's tend to merge (as Vas put it: "this is not a factual documentary [...] Its aim is poetic, subjective").⁸ It is an 'I' that takes us around the city, through both the best known spots in London and the less popular areas – with a taste for the unknown and the unexplored that makes *Refuge England*

⁵ "[Vas] invented a kind of subjective, personal documentary which has no parallel. He would himself have said that he hoped to follow in the tradition of Humphrey Jennings. Yet in my opinion he did not simply follow that tradition, but expanded it and developed it into something altogether richer, more varied and broader in its range of human understanding and compassion" (Gavin Barrie – Alan Rosenthal, "Witness: In Memoriam Robert Vas", in *Sight and Sound*, v. 47 n. 3, Summer 1978, p. 186).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187. See also Alan Rosenthal, *The Documentary Conscience. A Casebook in Film Making*, University of California Press, Berkley – Los Angeles – London 1980, p. 256.

⁷ Robert Vas, original programme note accompanying the screenings of *Refuge England* (BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box 121 [location O/19/1], File 2: Experimental Film Fund).

⁸ *Ibid.*

a radical Free Cinema act. Diverging from mere documentary praxis, Vas puts his character's 'I' in a central position: it is the 'I' that, through a combination of visuals, asynchronous sound and voice-over, creates a narrative from the sparse fragments of the Young Man's journey through London.

The Young Man's voice-over is in English and mainly told in the past tense, which means that *Refuge England* is a recollection of his first day in London made after settling down and gaining confidence with the language. Sequence by sequence, *Refuge England* displays an apparently episodic chain of symbols and vignettes which the Young Man 'collects' along the way. Such sketches of city life represent and inform the idea of Englishness which takes shape in the Young Man's mind. The Young Man is experiencing London – and inferring his idea of 'Londonness' – through the representatives of culture and society that the city itself projects onto him. He is indexing the city's qualities in order to obtain a complex – but never complete – catalogue of London. The eyes of the Young Man pick up pieces of experience which are glued together through the film's editing but do *not* become a whole. The practice of film editing and of stitching together heterogeneous fragments of reality is the real autobiographical trait of *Refuge England*, whose bumpy flow represents Vas' perception of reality (and self-perception) at the time:

My life has been broken like a piece of film and all my attempts now are an enlarged version of this small act of joining it all together. One piece is the past. Another piece is the present. Another piece is the future. One part is communism. One the East, the certainty of the dogma. Another is the West, with its schisms and confusions.⁹

⁹ Vas interviewed in Alan Rosenthal, *The Documentary Conscience*, pp. 262-263. Cf. Barrie Gavin – Alan Rosenthal, "Witness: In Memoriam Robert Vas", p. 187.

In the film, the wanderer tries to read the signs through which the city discloses itself to its inhabitants and, less clearly, to its visitors, the language divide making things more difficult for him. London becomes a treasure hunt map the Young Man needs to cross step by step, wrong turn after wrong turn, in order to achieve his goal, which is to reach the *right* Love Lane and be taken into Mr Cox's house.

The film presents a series of recurring tropes: these are the instances of definition of the Young Man's identity; the mirror images, through which the Young Man's identity evolves; and the Young Man's cognitive map of London, which renders the city unfamiliar even to Londoners.¹⁰

5.4. László Cs. Szabó and the 'impenetrability' of England

The film's title comes from a poem by the Hungarian poet László Cs. Szabó (1905 – 1984), himself an émigré who moved to Italy in 1948 and then settled in London in 1951 (ironically, though still living in London he died during a visit to Budapest).¹¹ Originally an economics historian, Cs. Szabó became a prominent intellectual in exile and defined himself as someone “with an English passport but with Hungarian pride”.¹² Vas and Cs. Szabó shared the same hostility towards the political situation in Hungary, which was the reason why both of them had decided

¹⁰ Chanan, Michael, “On William Raban's *Thames Film*”, in *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, March 2007, <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2007/chanan.html>.

¹¹ Cf. Sandor Hites, “Losing Touch, Keeping in Touch, Out of Touch: The Reintegration of Hungarian Literary Exile after 1989”, in John Neubauer – Borbála Zsuzsanna Török (eds.), *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York 2009, p. 521.

¹² Cf. Tibor Klaniczay – József Szauder, *History of Hungarian Literature*, Corvina Press, Budapest 1964, p. 248.

not to return to their native country. Two lines from Cs. Szabó's poem are quoted at the beginning of the film:

Restore to me, last rock of refuge, England
Dignity that befits me as a man.¹³

These lines serve as a colophon asserting the two main trajectories of the film. First of all, England is seen as a rock, a refuge, a new homeland with sort of a *sacred* trait, the image of the rock a clear religious influence, a mystical view of a promised land. Secondly, England is viewed as the restorer of human dignity, a land where the displaced person can become a whole again, individually and socially. László Cs. Szabó also embodied the spirit of the Hungarian 'nostalgic wanderers'¹⁴ who considered themselves to be "Magyars and Europeans at the same time":¹⁵ two different national and cultural identities *can* coexist within the same person – and the Young Man has just begun to acquire his English side. The evocated presence of László Cs. Szabó in the film also refers to his activity as an Anglophile essayist,¹⁶ who was enchanted by London but defined the English way of thinking as "impenetrable".¹⁷ What Vas (and subsequently the Young Man) does in the film is to put the English impenetrability to the test: is English culture really non-understandable? Is the English way of life an undecipherable and apparently contradictory blend of tradition and innovation? Can the monolith of London, its

¹³ In the original film synopsis, the lines ("by a fine Hungarian author in exile") are quoted in a different translation: "England, my last fortress on the rocks, / Oh give me back my dignity!"

¹⁴ Cf. Péter Sárközy, "Ungheresi in Italia da Jenő Péterfy a László Cs. Szabó", in Id. (ed.), *Italia e Ungheria dagli anni Trenta agli anni Ottanta. (Atti del VIII Convegno italo-ungherese dell'Accademia Ungherese delle Scienze e della Fondazione G. Cini di Venezia)*, Universitas, Budapest 1998, p. 145.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 145.

¹⁶ Cf. András D. Ban, "Friends of England – Cultural and Political Sympathies on the Eve of the War", in *Hungarian Quarterly*, now available here: <http://patrickleighfermor.wordpress.com/2010/10/16/friends-of-england-cultural-and-political-sympathies-on-the-eve-of-the-war/>.

¹⁷ László Cs. Szabó, *Doveri átkelés* [l.t. *Dover Crossing*], quoted *Ibid.* Ban thus summarizes László Cs. Szabó's judgement: "It was typical not only of Churchill and other British statesmen like the Earl of Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, but of the English in general that they sought to adjust their ideas to circumstances and never vice versa. Abroad, they called this hypocrisy, and spoke of perfide Albion" (*ibid.*).

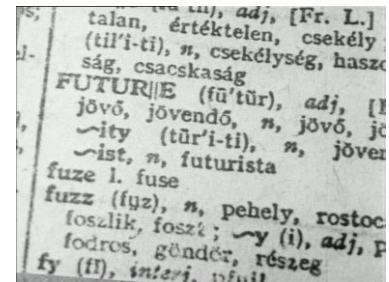
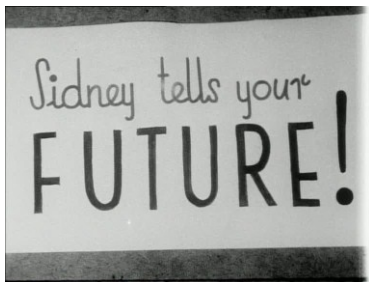
life and habits, be breached? Can Londoners be approached and can they welcome a displaced foreigner?

5.5. Entering a new epistemological environment

Refuge England's opening credits are displayed over images of a train crossing London's peripheral areas and approaching a train station. The audience accustomed with the city of London might recognize the train's final destination as Waterloo station. A crowd of people step off the train and rush to work, while the Young Man, on his own, is the last to leave the platform, the gate closing behind him. A sense of non-belonging is suggested when the Young Man is shown moving slowly during rush hour, looking around in search for something familiar and walking against the current of human traffic, as does Gregor Samsa in Mazzetti's *K*. The film thus begins in a twice estranging place: the station is a proverbial *non-lieu* in which identities are *not* fixed; furthermore, Waterloo station is located on the south bank of the Thames, making it mandatory for the Young Man to cross the river in order to access the 'proper' city. *Refuge England*, despite its fragmentary structure which loosely follows that of a fairy tale, is a story of self-defining, recounting as it does the Young Man's quest for a new or adapted (or additional) identity. The film's inception in a brand new realm, whose internal laws are unknown to the character, is followed by the crossing of the Thames – a threshold

moment which introduces the protagonist to the environment in which he will struggle to belong.

To the Young Man, making contact with the Londoners and reaching the right Love Lane is like cracking a secret code, his gaze being the main sensorial receptor of the signs and symbols on display all around him. Some of the signs in this new system are at first indecipherable, mainly because of the language divide. Entering a new linguistic and epistemological environment leads to a continuous contextualising and re-contextualising of signs. The dictionary the Young Man carries is an instrument of knowledge and of discerning (the first word he looks up is, quite didactically, “future”), of distinguishing between two different contexts – a primary instrument to access the ‘new world’ and to avoid the trap of words which are either obscure or misleadingly similar to his native language.¹⁸



¹⁸ While walking down the Strand, the Young Man says: “How funny! In my language ‘strand’ means an open and public bus”.

5.6. Towards the definition of the Young Man's identity (and the image of the city)

Before the Young Man leaves the station, a first instance of fixation of his identity takes place, coming from a poster plastered to the wall. The poster displays a sketch of a refugee, which the Young Man stares at. Shot and counter-shot are lined as to suggest identification of the gazer with the object of his gaze.



Functioning as a mirror, the poster collocates the Young Man in a precise category, that of the displaced. Immediately after this are shots of women singing to raise money for the refugees: the Young Man has come to a place that lavishes assistance on the foreigner and the exile.¹⁹ *Refuge England* represents the ‘transformational arc’ of its character from the initial position of displaced person to the final – albeit unstable and temporary – one of welcomed refugee.

The views of London as seen from above or from below, such as the view following the Young Man's crossing of Waterloo Bridge, give an idea of the monumentality and intricacy of London's streets, thus dwarfing the Young Man and somehow ‘complicating’ his journey.

¹⁹ The film's original synopsis reads as follows: “A woman's choir sings a carol: they are collecting money for the Hungarian refugees. A smiling girl jingles her money box also before the young man, but he shows with a clumsy gesture that he hasn't got a penny” (Robert Vas, *D.P.* [original synopsis of *Refuge England*], Paper no. 6 attached to the minutes of the Experimental Production Committee's 16th meeting, London, 24 July 1958. Held at BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive Collection, Box P/2 [Location O/25/5]; Experimental Film Fund).

The Young Man walks through the industrious life of London. It is an ordinary day for the Londoners, but not for him. The people of London are shown taking care of the city (cleaning windows, painting lamp posts...) and of one another (the barber shop...) as well as rushing to work. It is not only the visuals that contribute to the Young Man's cataloguing of London: the sounds, used asynchronously, create a noisy cloud that surrounds the protagonist and sometimes are so loud as to render his voice-over barely audible. The city thus expresses itself through its types and locations, and through the aural elements whose noisy intricacy heightens the Young Man's bewilderment and sense of displacement.

5.7. The other foreigner and the mirror

Like a new breed living through its imprinting phase, the Young Man learns from previous experience and each episode pushes him a step further into the process of integration. On his way, the Young Man meets a foreigner, probably Indian, who needs information on how to reach the Strand (cf. seq. 4).

Having already seen the street's name, the Young Man is able to explain to the foreigner where the Strand is through non-verbal communication (while in the film's original synopsis the Young Man cannot help the other foreigner). Their dialogue, in which each of them speaks his own language, is overwhelmed by the noise of the stifling London traffic. What remains, to the audience as well as to the two men, is the language of signs and gestures, through which the Young Man can

express himself and his instructions can be understood. The more rudimental the communication, the more effective: in the end, it is the simplest means of communication, those that guarantee decipherability, that lead the Young Man to the right Love Lane. The foreigner is the second mirror image the Young Man finds along the way. This time, the identification is rendered through the direct relation with another human being who does not belong in the community, though judging from the way he is dressed the foreigner has already begun the process of integration. Cinematically, the two are kept together in the frame throughout the whole sequence:



Confrontation arises from symmetry and from the exchange and correspondence of glances in semi-subjective shots. The foreigner represents a possible step in the Young Man's transformational arc: someone who is experiencing the first instances of integration but still does not fully comprehend the new environment he is living in.

Immediately afterwards the process of definition of the Young Man's identity continues. The Young Man looks in a mirror – an actual looking glass, this time – while his voice-over says: “For a moment I felt myself at home. I even took

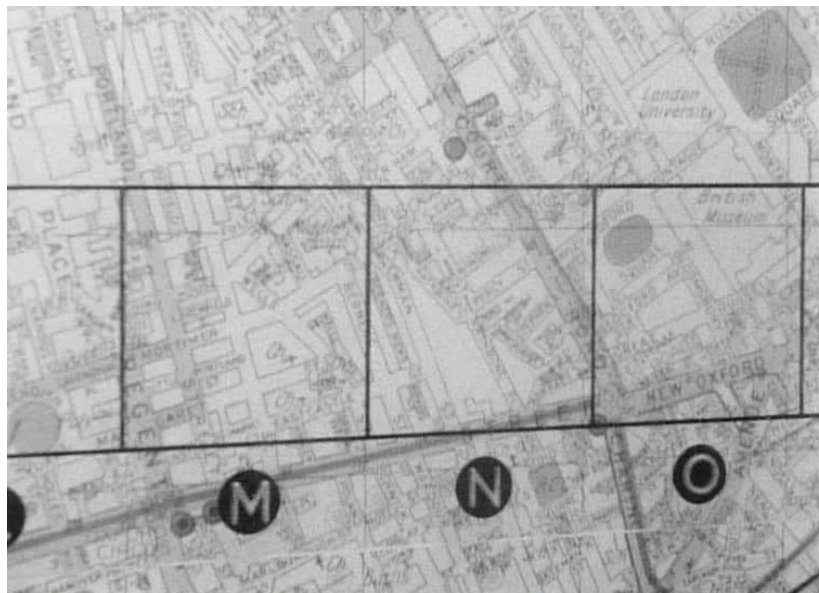
the courage to go and ask the people”. Apparently, the Young Man is gaining confidence and the confrontation with himself in the mirror is a way of defining the first *here and now* that he can consider stable. So far, the three mirror images we have analysed lead to a *personalization* of the Young Man’s one-day odyssey: first, a poster defining his social and historical condition; then the relation to a human being in a similar state and of a similar status; finally, the self-reflecting look upon himself which also stands for the (momentary) acquisition of a ‘new self’, a declination of the Young Man’s self on British soil.

5.8. Mapping the city

The immersion of the Young Man in a milieu made of signs he cannot understand is shown in the scene by the newsstand (cf. seq. 4): the newsagent gives him directions with drawings and even with his feet (“Perhaps you don’t know, but these are the ways and instruments for showing the way to a foreigner”). The sequence is followed by a series of shots showing people giving directions to the Young Man while the voice-off of the newsstand man continues his monologue. The people’s mouths and lips are the prominent part of their faces in the frame. Here, one of the film’s main concerns is put on display: the purely linguistic issue of communication not properly reaching its addressee. The very address that should lead the Young Man to Love Lane is incomplete: bearing no postcode, it does not clearly indicate the area of the city where Love Lane is located – and at

least half a dozen Love Lanes seem to exist. The Young Man is then involved in a series of communicational processes that do not work properly, mainly because of his inevitable ineptitude. Displacement and estrangement are also due to the isolation the Young Man feels as the addressee and sometimes addresser of acts of communication that prove to be *not* biunique. The aforementioned scenes where passers-by provide him with directions are matched by counter-shots showing the Young Man as a non-interacting recipient.

While the Young Man is shown his way to (the wrong) Love Lane, a map of London appears on the screen with a graphic grid superimposed. This brief insertion effectively displays the process of mapping London which is in progress in the Young Man's mind: to the Young Man, London is a cognitive experience which still has to be rationalised.

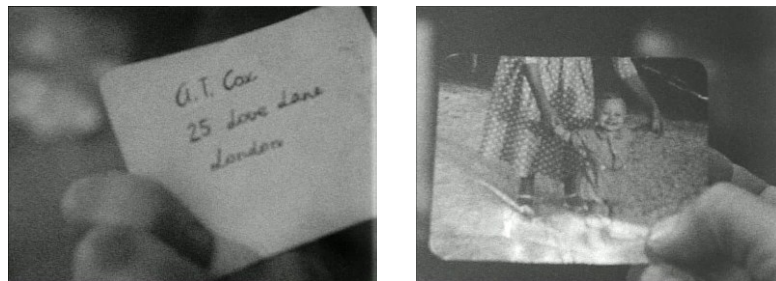


5.9. Integration and fracture

The Young Man wavers between moments of inclusion and exclusion from the English community. After visiting the first *wrong* house the Young Man is dumped back into his status of outsider, voiding the small amount of self-confidence he had just acquired. While crossing the city for the umpteenth time, he says: “Suddenly [London] had grown monstrously big around me. All the stones and walls made me feel more and more that I’m a stranger here”. The configuration of the city – which he had optimistically greeted saying “Well, good morning then” at the beginning of his journey – changes according to the Young Man’s mood and state of mind. London reveals an impenetrable and hostile side when the Young Man’s attempt to ‘infiltrate’ the community fails. The city, lively and industrious at first, becomes stifling and uninterested in his human tragedy. Discouraged and disenchanted, the Young Man takes a further look at the Londoners: this time, sustained by an inconsolable voice-over, his act of observation is detached, and the Young Man is overlooked with indifference by the passers-by.

This new act of sampling the London people and their habits is now performed by someone who is in search of “a small gesture of human contact” but feels he will never integrate in the community. The Young Man’s idea of the process of integration is to become as “simple and average as them”. Reverting Wilson’s theories on the outsider (cf. par. 2.7), the Young Man sees the levelling agglomeration as necessary in order to become an insider. If, in order to become a (quasi-)Londoner, one has to resign his language and part of his background and personal history, then so be it. The historical events that made him a refugee

represent a fracture in the flow of his personal history and in the development of his identity. The cause of his displacement cannot be removed or forgotten, but the Young Man looks forward to a re-placement or rather a new placement – he has no intention of going back and, as a political refugee, he *cannot* – which could re-set his life and allow him to start from scratch. This point is effectively transposed on the screen: the Young Man has taken note of his London address on the back of a photograph of him as a kid with his mother.



His past, present and future are therefore antithetical: there is no continuity between the two, which are so separated that in order to see one it is necessary to flip and hide the other. The Young Man's past and present are *not* seamlessly united but severed by a traumatic historical event – and the Young Man's new life in London is literally a turn of the page (or, of the picture).²⁰

²⁰ Refugees perceive their present as neatly severed from their past, a sort of 'alternate reality' in which to live a new kind of existence. Homecoming is seen as reconnecting with the past as though the years as émigrés had not passed: "For [the Hungarian exiles], going home meant resuming what had been interrupted, even if some of them admitted that Hungary had become different from what the émigrés once knew" (Sandor Hites, "Losing Touch, Keeping in Touch, Out of Touch: The Reintegration of Hungarian Literary Exile after 1989", p. 521).

5.10. The street artist

Of the mirror images the Young Man runs into along the way, the most significant is perhaps that of the street artist trying to break free from his chains (cf. seq. 7). Not only is the artist an iconic representation of the Young Man's status, of his being unable to express himself, of his quest for freedom (both personal and political) – the scene is also powerful because the street artist is someone who is put on display in front of an audience.



The artist is *looked at* the way the Young Man is looked at: as an object of fun, a different being belonging to an alternate environment who is struggling to achieve a seemingly impossible task. Trying to break free from chains and restrictions, the street artist functions as both a mirror image and an instance of identity fixation: the chained entertainer epitomizes the Young Man's parable in the film. The chained artist is wrapped in a blanket, so that his features cannot be distinguished. The Young Man's identity, as well as the artist's, is *trapped and unexpressed*, waiting to be unveiled. Significantly, the sequence is cut *before* the artist's release from chains. We can only assume that in the end the Young Man will get rid of his chains, the

film itself being the cinematic demonstration and recollection of his acquired freedom.

5.11. London as place and space

In *Refuge England*, London is featured both as a historical *place* and as a metaphorical *space*. The fictional elements in the film, combined with the documentary attitude with which it was scripted and shot, allow both readings of the city's role in the film's narrative. Having 'survived' World War II and in particular the 1940 Blitz, London is a symbol for rebirth, a city which has overcome death and destruction. It is therefore a place where a derelict's life can be pulled back together. London is explicitly identified by the Young Man ("So this is it, what they call London. Well, good morning then!") and is the actual place of refuge displaced persons fled to in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The autobiographical elements in the film, which allow us to identify the Young Man with director Robert Vas, thus configure London as a *place*. The film's London adheres to the *real* London Vas found upon his arrival in England. On the other hand, Vas' aim was to render his character universal by partly fictionalizing him and detaching him from mere autobiography, which means that the environment surrounding the Young Man has also undergone manipulation in order to respond to his mood and feelings or to inform them. Thus, London also becomes a *space*, an open range in which, as we have seen, symbolic and metaphoric

events take place that build the imagery and structure of the film itself and shape the character's personal, moral and social parable. Writing about the image of the city in kitchen sink films, Andrew Higson has said that

Narratively, such films are about an individual's efforts to fulfil a wish or a series of wishes. Morally however, the significance of the film is not much its story as the *reality* of its events. This emphasis on *place* in – or against – the narrative historicises the narrative, shifting it away from the particular, to a more general level of concern. But at the same time, place is used up by the narrative at a metaphorical level, as a 'geography of the mind'. [...] the narrative always returns to make a *particular* sense of this multiplication of detail, to *psychologise* rather than *historicise* the space, to marshal it into a representation of a state of mind.²¹

As we have seen, in several scenes London becomes the 'objective correlative' of the Young Man's state of mind. Chaotic and fragmentary as he perceives it, the city is a puzzle of sensations the protagonist is unable to put together.

Apart from the examples already given, let us see how the area of Piccadilly Circus, where the last turning point takes place, is treated in the film. *Refuge England's* Piccadilly Circus by night is radically different, for example, from the one in the aforementioned *Nice Time* by Tanner and Goretta. Their view of the city by night is a wild, noisy montage of scenes that capture the funniest and wildest sides of city life whereas *Vas* makes use of Piccadilly Circus as the location for his character's final descent into the abyss of anonymity. The 'state of mind' the Young Man is in is one of rejection, he is but a pariah among men, maybe a pariah among pariahs. Piccadilly Circus is just the *right* place to stage a man's feeling of loss and disorientation in a vortex of anonymous and endlessly wandering people. The Young Man knows that his destiny is in the hands of fate and that there is no responsibility to be claimed for what has happened to him ("We were fighting, we

²¹ Andrew Higson, "Place, Space, Spectacle", in *Screen*, v. 25 n. 4–5, July–October 1984, p. 8.

had lost – I *had* to come, that’s all. It wasn’t my fault. Whose fault is it?”) – but at the same time he knows that there is nowhere else he would want to live. When the time for realisation comes, the city discloses the location of the *right* Love Lane as if it were an act of magic. When the Young Man makes up his mind (he says: “I want to live here”, and it occurs to him like a sort of epiphany) then the city abandons every form of resistance: late at night, the Young Man is taken in by Mr. Cox. A table is laid and food is served. London’s secret code has been cracked and the film’s setting changes from the unfamiliar city to the familiarity of a home (incidentally, the ending is the only indoor scene in the whole film).

5.12. A note on The Vanishing Street

In 1962, Robert Vas directed a 20-minute documentary, sponsored by the BFI Experimental Film Fund and the Jewish Chronicle, dedicated to the eradication of a whole Jewish community from its area. Set in the East End of London, *The Vanishing Street* records the last days of the Jewish market of Hessel Street, near Whitechapel. Regarding the choice of the subject, Vas said:

As I had no English experience, I chose subjects in which I was, in a sense, at home. A refugee’s first day in London. A Jewish street in London [...]. In other words I was trying to work out a language for myself, but using the places and experiences I felt at home in. I’ve brought with me from the other side a “baggage”, a great many things to talk about. I see myself as a self-appointed professional survivor.²²

²² Robert Vas interviewed in Alan Rosenthal, *The Documentary Conscience*, p. 265. Cf. Gavin Barrie – Alan Rosenthal, “Witness: In Memoriam Robert Vas”, p. 187.

Though made after the Free Cinema experience had come to a close, *The Vanishing Street* has always been considered a Free Cinema-inspired documentary. Avoiding the use of voice over, the film portrays the Jewish community at work at the market and in the shops, butchers preparing kosher food and the religious side of the community's life at the synagogue. These sketches of Jewish life in London are juxtaposed through the sole use of editing: composition mainly concerns the visuals, since the soundtrack is based on traditional and religious Yiddish chanting that sustains the whole film.

Through the insertion of old photographs and the insistence on the founding dates of the shops, Vas conveys the idea of roots and of the perpetuation of tradition, which is now menaced by redevelopment and a relocation plan. It is thanks to the dialogues caught as if by chance at the market that we come to learn about the imminent disappearance of the area and therefore of the whole community – a disintegration which has been going on for a while and which started with the decreasing number of people going to the market (an aspect which reminds us of Anderson's *Every Day Except Christmas*).

The demolition of the area fills the film's final scenes, with no further comment other than the visuals. Excavators and bulldozers tear down buildings while a sense of loss and helplessness sets in. *The Vanishing Street* is a visual poem about the creation of displacement, about the uprooting of a whole community. Eradication, Robert Vas' films suggest, can happen for political reasons (*Refugee England*) or for reasons that merely concern town planning schemes, but the result is the same: people find themselves scattered and dispersed, personal and

communitarian identities are indelibly compromised, points of reference are lost, the bonds with tradition severed. There is no rest for the uprooted (and for the Jewish people in particular): the search continues for a place to call home.

6.

Cinema as a personal statement: Lindsay Anderson's *O Dreamland* (1953) and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957)

A documentary film is a portrait of the person who makes it.

– Lindsay Anderson

6.1. Introduction

Lindsay Anderson is one of the key figures in the history of British cinema. His influence on film criticism and his importance in the development of British film aesthetics are undeniable. At the beginning of his 45-year-long career as a film director, Anderson shot several seminal documentaries: some of them revived and reinterpreted the British documentary tradition (*Wakefield Express*, *Thursday's Children*, *Every Day Except Christmas*...) through the romantic rediscovery of Humphrey Jennings' oeuvre, whereas others were more experimental, both technically and stylistically (*O Dreamland*, *The Singing Lesson*). Anderson moved to feature-length films in 1963, directing the adaptation of David Storey's *This Sporting Life*. Some consider it a late 'kitchen sink' film but it is much more daring than it may look.

In this chapter, I will focus on two of Anderson's documentaries, equally significant in his career: *O Dreamland* (1953) and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957). In terms of both themes and technique, these two films present some aspects that would resurface and be developed in *The White Bus* (1967), Anderson's almost-forgotten mid-length film that will be examined in the next chapter.

6.2. Welcome to Dreamland

Lindsay Anderson shot *O Dreamland* in 1953 as an entirely personal enterprise. A truly independent film, it was made at Anderson's own expense, using film stock left over from the shooting of *Wakefield Express* (1952). As Anderson recalls:

At the time of *Thursday's Children* I paid a visit to Dreamland, a fun-fair in Margate. It had a strange waxwork exhibition showing 'Torture Through the Ages', featuring effigies of the Rosenbergs being electrocuted. [...] I was very struck with this image and thought that it should be put on film. So I went back to Dreamland with John Fletcher and we just shot a ten-minute film entirely from my own resources.¹

O Dreamland is a 12-minute-long experimental documentary which Anderson shot on black-and-white 16mm, using an Arriflex camera with no synchronous sound. The short film was shelved for three years and then screened as part of the first Free Cinema programme in 1956. Though it was made long before the idea of Free Cinema came to exist, *O Dreamland* contains the seeds of the 'movement'² and provides the main axes of its aesthetic manifesto: the relevance of the director's

¹ Lindsay Anderson, "Finding a Style. Commentary, 1994", in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 59.

² Cf. Alberto Crespi, *Lindsay Anderson*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1988, p. 32.

subjectivity, the observation of the English people, the discussion about the underclass and the instances of social critique.

The film depicts the workers and their families during their free time as they arrive at Dreamland on designated buses, enter the funfair, gaze at the attractions, play games and then leave the park at night. The opening credits state that *O Dreamland* is “A *Sequence* film”: at the time, *Sequence* was no longer published, so this can be read as Anderson’s tribute to a much-loved enterprise. Somehow *O Dreamland* develops the aesthetic and socio-political claims made by Anderson in his articles for the film journal (see paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4).



O Dreamland, though, begins *outside* the funfair, with a scene that might look disconnected from the rest of the film: it shows a chauffeur polishing a Bentley.



Despite being a film about the workers' free time, *O Dreamland* opens significantly with a representative of the working class *at work*. The act of polishing the Bentley effectively epitomises the worker's subordinate position in the social pyramid – a position that, as we will see, the working-class maintains firmly even during leisure time. After these first shots, the camera pans right: the long take connecting the cleaning chauffeur to his fellow workers marching towards Dreamland suggests the actual continuity of the two supposedly different moments in a worker's life: work and leisure.



As Anderson seems to imply, there is no way out of the social role imposed on people by a strictly class-bound system.

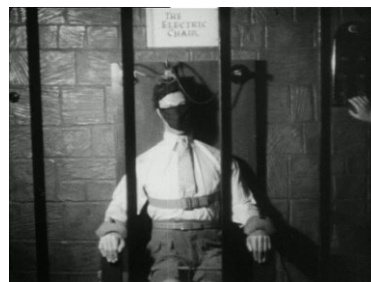
6.3. Experimental polemics in *O Dreamland*

On the one hand, *O Dreamland* resembles a visual sketchbook³ whose main picture is made up of the many fragments collected by Anderson through the candid camera technique. Apparently, Anderson's method is that of an anthropologist, and

³ Cf. Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, p. 159.

the final result might be considered a Mass Observation report (cf. par. 1.6) made for the big screen. On the other hand, the film's apparent objectivity soon gives way to an utterly subjective 'treatment of actuality': the portrait of the people at Dreamland is heavily biased and Anderson imposes his own personal view on the filmed material ("No film can be *too* personal", states the Free Cinema manifesto), commenting on it through a masterfully witty manipulation of the language and technique of cinema. *O Dreamland* is the film that marks the birth of Anderson as an *auteur*, since it can be considered his first overtly personal and critical film.⁴

Entering the funfair, the people are mainly attracted to a series of booths and stalls exhibiting the re-enactment of infamous deaths by torture.



Because of the hidden camera, the people are not aware that they are being filmed. This allows Anderson to record the audience's reaction to the horrors on display at Dreamland and to register that they are received with a catatonic stare,⁵ which reveals the gazers' passivity (and in the few scenes in which the spectators look amused, they are amused by the most gruesome of horrors).

The framing and the editing are the two instruments through which Anderson injects *O Dreamland* with a strong polemical charge. Instead of creating a

⁴ Cf. Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, Twayne Publishers, Boston 1981, p.46.

⁵ Cf. Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, Studio Vista, London 1969, p. 25.

proper narrative, the editing in *O Dreamland* generates disruptive associations of identity. The mechanical puppets seen from the point of view of the public are framed behind bars. The reverse shot showing the gazers is taken *from behind those same bars*. The same happens in the scenes showing the animals: the point-of-view shots show them inside their cages and the following reverse shots are taken from inside the cage, so that the observers also look caged.



These newly-established associations identify the observers with the objects observed, rendering the spectators indistinguishable from the spectacle:⁶ the working-class people of Dreamland *are like* (or better, *are*) mechanical puppets and caged animals. As Allison Graham suggests, *O Dreamland* is a film of (social) immobility and imprisonment.⁷

O Dreamland thus sheds new light on some of Anderson's ideas and ideological positions regarding the working class. Through his writings and his very first documentaries, Anderson fought a battle (in political and in aesthetic terms) for the *visibility* of the working class, for the restoration of dignity (also artistic dignity) to the world of the underclass. However, *O Dreamland* shows how Anderson's political thought is more complex than is usually considered. His is a position of *double critique*: on the one side, towards the industrial (and cultural) establishment that controls every aspect of the workers' lives;⁸ on the other side, towards the workers, who let themselves be controlled, who give up reacting, who stand acritically and passively in front of the *mise-en-scene* of ugliness. There is an aesthetic degradation in the life of the working class that makes them grow accustomed to ugliness instead of beauty.⁹

Even though some critics maintain the opposite, *O Dreamland* shows a subtle but clear trace of judgement: it is not 'simply' a documentary, it is a *film*

⁶ Cf. Alberto Crespi, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 33.

⁷ Cf. Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 50.

⁸ *O Dreamland* and the 'institutionalised nature' of the workers' leisure are also referred to in *The White Bus* (see chapter 7), when the Mayor says: "Science has liberated the worker and given him more leisure. But, he needs to be educated for that leisure. Oh yes, indeed. And we are justifiably proud of the steps that we have taken to help solve this problem".

⁹ As Paul K. Cornelius writes: "Implicit in this criticism is also the question of what type of society it is that reduces people to looking for facile entertainment amidst such ugly and demeaning surroundings" (Paul K. Cornelius, *Images of Social Disjunction in Films of Lindsay Anderson*, UMI, Ann Arbor / University of Texas, Dallas 1987, p. 26).

discourse of social critique whose target is the very object it depicts: the people. As Elizabeth Sussex writes: “Can there be any doubt that Anderson hates, not just the entertainment, but the people – hates them for not fighting, for opting out of the battle that is life?”¹⁰

6.4. Leisure for dummies

Once put into film and taken as an exemplum, the name of the funfair, Dreamland, reveals its own self-annihilating bitter irony: Dreamland is not a ‘place for dreams’, it is the worst of all possible nightmares, a place where leisure and entertainment are turned into an automated and soulless mechanism. The funfair thus becomes a powerful social metaphor. As Gavin Lambert asks: “If this is Dreamland, what kind of nightmare is everyday life?”¹¹

The exhibition of torture at the funfair mirrors the ‘tortures’ the working class undergoes every single day. The mechanical mannequins and the caged animals are on-site metaphors of their social condition. Nevertheless, the working class (including the children) gazes at this truculent idea of fun and does not recognise it as a mirror image (as the insistence on the audience’s blank faces clearly shows). As Allison Graham provocatively suggests, the people’s state is even *worse* than that of the dummies and animals: at least the attractions move and exhibit

¹⁰ Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 25.

¹¹ Gavin Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, p. 73. Anderson himself writes: “*O Dreamland* is a consistently satirical film, almost a ‘hate film’” (Lindsay Anderson, “Finding a Style”, p. 59).

(mechanical) signs of life, and the animals show uneasiness with their caged condition – whereas the people do not.¹²

The absence of critical judgement leads to the absence of an urge to fight, to the lack of desire for emancipation. The working class seems to be confined to a life whose public *and private* aspects are regulated from above.

However, I believe that Anderson's scope was larger, and that the working class portrayed in *O Dreamland* is just a segment to represent the whole of society (except, of course, the upper classes). As Gavin Lambert says, *O Dreamland* is Anderson's "first declaration of love-hate for the English, predict[ing] the shape of films to come".¹³ *O Dreamland* is a parable on the rise of mass culture,¹⁴ which stages life (*everybody's* life) as a mechanical system, an automatised trap with no escape. What we see happening in the film is the direct consequence of the uncontested rise of materialism in the age of affluence: "The listless trippers are the oppressed, exploited victims of a spiritually nihilistic system".¹⁵

One of the main concerns of the film is one of Anderson's typical issues: the individual and collective relationship with tradition. What *O Dreamland* shows and denounces is the reduction of history ("This is history portrayed by life-size working models") to a puppet show.

¹² Cf. Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, pp. 50-51.

¹³ Gavin Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, p. 73.

¹⁴ As Richard Hoggart writes in 1956: "We are moving towards the creation of a mass culture; [...] the remnants of what was at least in parts an urban culture 'of the people' are being destroyed; [...] the new mass culture is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing" (Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 13).

¹⁵ Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 25.



From Joan of Arc to the Rosenbergs with hints at the colonial history of Britain, history and cultural heritage are popularised and marketed, rendered ineffective and innocuous, deprived of their social and political values and turned into iconic pretexts for gory entertainment.

6.5 The treatment of sound in *O Dreamland*

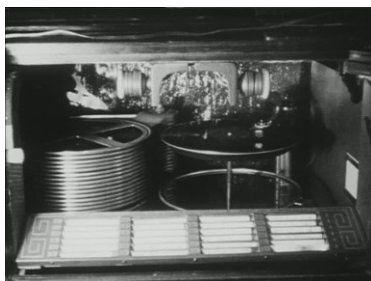
Many of Anderson's documentaries rely on an omnipresent voice-over guiding the understanding and feelings of the audience, sometimes performed by the director himself. *O Dreamland* does not contain a voice-over narration but Anderson's subjectivity is nevertheless present. The sound pattern of *O Dreamland* is made of environmental noises and voices, mainly coming from Dreamland's mechanical puppets. A recorded creepy laughter surfaces several times throughout the film, with a clear derisive purpose. As Hallam and Marshment write, discussing a sequence of Tony Richardson's *A Taste of Honey* (1961):

When Jo accompanies her mother and her new boyfriend on a trip to the seaside, the couple dance to the sounds of a popular tune. The shots of obvious pleasure on the faces of the couple are intercut with a close-up of the laughing face of a clown (used in an earlier documentary on Southend and Margate, *Oh Dreamland [sic]*) that seems to

mock their enjoyment, critiquing the commercial culture that is the source of their delight.¹⁶

Anderson turns the unavailability of synchronous sound into an aesthetic act. Apart from the voices of the sellers and the monotonous calling out of bingo numbers, there is no other trace of human voice in the film. The people in *O Dreamland* are deprived of their voice(s): in the film as well as in real life, the people are robbed of what characterises them as social beings. The only ‘voice’ the film provides them with is the pattern of sounds and noises in the soundtrack: the people are endowed with a voice that comes automatically from *somewhere else* but at the same time *from within themselves*. They are similar, in this, to the mechanical dummies of Dreamland,¹⁷ and the use of sound reinforces this similarity.

In the automatised context of Dreamland, even music is part of a mechanical process: it comes from a juke-box (and also from some of the puppets), which we see as it is activated, and seems to repeat the same two songs (*I believe* and *Hold Me Thrill Me Kiss Me*) over and over, with a group of young women singing along.



¹⁶ Julia Hallam – Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, Manchester University Press, Manchester – New York 2000, pp. 49-50.

¹⁷ Cf., on a similar position, Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp. 231-235.

The entertainment industry is based on the reiteration of items, which do not become popular because they correspond to actual popular taste, but which are *made* popular through repetition (here being popular does not mean ‘for the people’ or coming ‘from the people’, but just common, usual, average).

In the same way, the calling out of bingo numbers, as captured and edited by Anderson, sounds like a heathen mantra.



Apart from being a losing game on which the people ‘invest’ their hard-earned money, the ritual of bingo is meant to hypnotise the people. As much as the visuals, the treatment of sound testifies to the social phenomenon then at play, that is, the dulling of the masses by turning people into unstimulated beings.

Thus, *O Dreamland* denounces the levelling of personal taste, the vulgarisation of history and tradition, the reduction of life to a mechanism and the eventual subjugation of the people obtained through the industrial invasion of leisure time, which becomes not a private (or collective) moment to be enjoyed but a product to be sold and bought.

6.6. An introduction to Every Day Except Christmas

O Dreamland and *Every Day Except Christmas* might seem poles apart, and under many aspects they are. While the former satirises the habits of the working class with a touch of cynicism, *Every Day Except Christmas* portrays the workers at work and emphasises their dignity and the importance of their role within society.

In 1956, Anderson was invited by Karel Reisz to make a film using funds coming from the Ford Motor Company. Reisz had just begun to work with Ford as a maker and supervisor of advertisement films, and had obtained the right to divert some of the allocated money to projects not directly involving advertising, vehicles or transport. With just a few ideas, no proper script, a 35mm camera (with Walter Lassally as director of photography) and a sound recorder (operated by John Fletcher), Anderson began to pay regular visits to the workers of Covent Garden market during two weeks. He collected hours of filmed material which then took five months to edit.¹⁸



¹⁸ Cf. Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 34.

The 38-minute-long finished film covers the span of a day in the life of the Covent Garden market workers, from the moment at night when the goods are collected, stocked and delivered, to the late afternoon when the market is dismantled.

Every Day Except Christmas represented England at the 57th Venice Film Festival. The British Ambassador tried to have the film withdrawn because it gave “a poor view of British life”,¹⁹ privileging the working class without including representatives of the upper classes (or ‘Top People’, in Anderson’s terms). The film went on to win Grand Prix for Best Documentary and was also screened as part of the third Free Cinema programme (“Look at Britain!”) at the National Film Theatre in London, 25 to 29 November 1957.

6.7. Behind the scenes of everyday life

Every Day Except Christmas carries out one of Anderson’s concerns as a film critic: to give screen time to the previously unportrayed lower classes. As he writes, “*Every Day* was very much a portrait of people who, until then, had not appeared in British films except as comic relief”.²⁰ The film offers a romanticised view of labour that foregrounds the individual effort, the sense of community and the idea that everyday work is the cornerstone of society.

¹⁹ Gavin Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, p. 102.

²⁰ Lindsay Anderson, “*Every Day Except Christmas*. Commentary, 1994”, in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 72.

Every Day Except Christmas opens with an on-screen dedication to the market workers, who are mentioned by their names.



Unlike the workers visiting Dreamland, the Covent Garden workers are given a precise identity. Moreover, even if the workers do not speak directly facing the camera, their voices were recorded (albeit asynchronously) live at the market and can be heard during the documentary along with their whistling and singing.²¹ Instead of being sketchy and fragmentary, *Every Day Except Christmas* lingers on its protagonists: it captures their features, their movements, the passion and precision they put in their work, the way they relate to each other... Through these scenes, the film “achieves an ethnographic montage in which each face contributes to the

²¹ Cf. John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism. British Cinema 1956-1963*, British Film Institute, London 1986, p. 133.

sociological effect”:²² *Every Day Except Christmas* creates the portrait of a community by focussing on some of its members.



These men operate behind the curtain of everyday life. They work when other people sleep and arrange the market so that in the morning life can resume as usual. With a high sense of duty, commitment and involvement, the Covent Garden workers govern the making of society in its simplest form, that is, daily life.

The actions depicted in the first half of the film resemble the ‘behind-the-scenes’ of an upcoming show. The loading of the goods, the delivery, the unloading and the setting up for sale are part of a process whose final result is the market.

²² John S. Hassard, “Researching Work and Institutions Through Ethnographic Documentaries”, in Alan Bryman - David Buchanan (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, London 2009, p. 276.

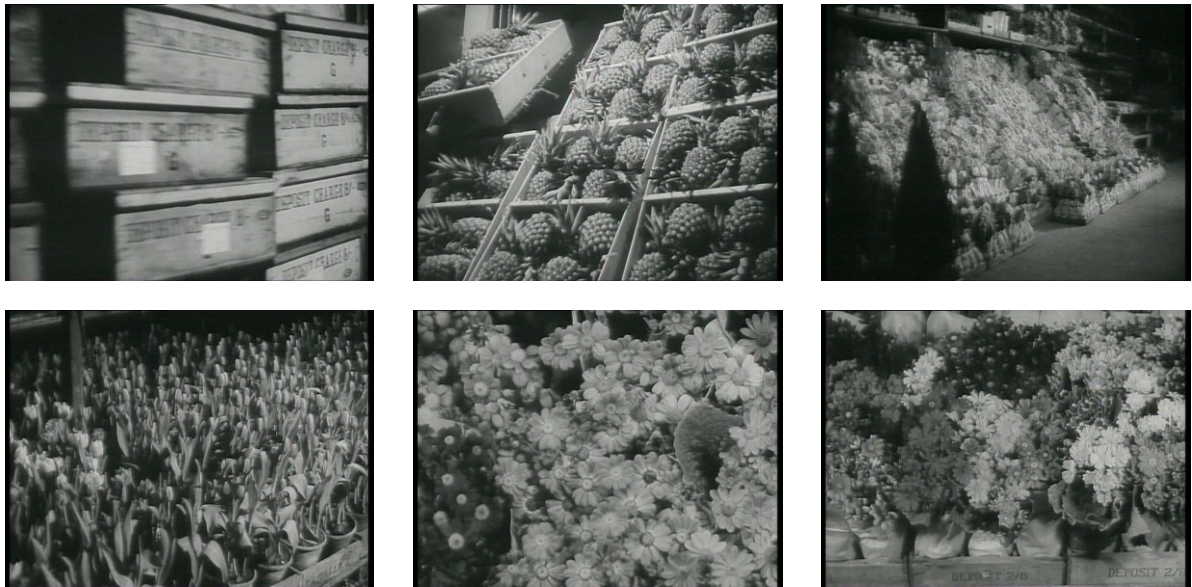
6.8. The making of a nation

The film commences in Sussex in the middle of the night. Flowers are boxed and loaded on lorries heading to London. BBC radio wishes its listeners goodnight and the National Anthem plays at the end of the last programme of the day.



The travelling lorry connects different areas of England thus mapping the region. The National Anthem is the soundtrack to this ‘process of unification’ and is carried across the roads of the country as a symbol of social and political cohesion. Flowers arrive at the market from Sussex together with “apples from Kent and Evesham, potatoes from Norfolk, oranges and lemons from the Western ports”. Covent Garden is the place where products from different areas of England converge: the market contains and represents England and therefore Britain, which is depicted as a vast and self-sufficient orchard or garden.

When the setting up of the market is almost complete, the visuals linger on the orderly display of crates and boxes, full of fruit and flowers. This perfect geometry gives the film a shade of formalism. Its pace slows down and the camera pans elegantly across the stalls.



The editing merges the images with an effortless cross-dissolve. The noise of the crates being moved and piled up gives way to Daniele Paris' score, which intervenes to bring back harmony and peace. The puzzle of boxes and products coming from all over England is complete, which results in the market eventually opening.

Covent Garden represents a matrix, the place where British imagery and social life are generated and displayed. The market becomes a moment when national identity is defined. As well as the Anthem, *Every Day Except Christmas* is a song about a country which delivers its very own idea of patriotism: being patriotic means building the nation from its basis. *Every Day Except Christmas* shows the effort people put into providing a 'basic' service that might be taken for granted. In spirit and intentions, *Every Day Except Christmas* is similar to documentaries such as Harry Watt and Basil Wright's *Night Mail* (1936),²³ about the British postal service, and to the myth-making *Listen to Britain* (dir. Humphrey Jennings and Stewart

²³ Cf. Scott Anthony, *Night Mail*, British Film Institute, London 2007, pp. 22-25 *et passim*.

McAllister, 1942). As Dave Saunders writes: “The lifeblood of the nation, according to Free Cinema, remains its vital base of (mostly older) workers”.²⁴

6.9. Images of tradition

In *Every Day Except Christmas*, Anderson makes use of a linear and simple film syntax: the framing is rigorous and vital, the scenes are seamlessly adjoined through the editing and tracking shots are used to follow the workers along the indoor market corridors, giving an idea of constant movement and dynamic effort.

Unlike *O Dreamland*, *Every Day Except Christmas* follows a straightforward narrative which, after the sequences I have just examined, builds up to the opening of the market. When the market opens, at five in the morning, the film’s focus shifts from the motif of national identity to that of tradition.

As the first customers flock in, the film sets up a discourse regarding tradition as a mediator of the past, present and possibly the future. One of the first customers we are introduced to is a West End dealer, Mr. Bayliss, who has been going to the market every day for 30 years.



²⁴ Dave Saunders, *Documentary*, Routledge, London 2010, p. 61.

When buyers like Mr. Bayliss select the products, these are carried and loaded on trucks by porters. Here, we make the acquaintance of another key figure in the documentary: Alice, the last female porter of the market. She has been a porter for 35 years and, the voice-over says, “when she goes, that’s the end of it”.



Mr. Bayliss and Alice complement two views of tradition.. Mr. Bayliss, typically dressed in an overcoat and a bowler hat, walks with confidence through the corridors and alleys of the market. He represents the perpetuation of a habit which becomes a recognisable trait of a nation’s culture.

Alice, on the other hand, is a sign of continuity which will soon be discontinued. Her role as a female porter has been gradually abandoned, and the documentary clearly shows that Alice is surrounded only by younger male colleagues. She represents an evolving tradition that has changed its features, giving way to a new and ‘modern’ generation.

A third figure representing tradition is that of Jenny.



As the voice-over says:

Late in the day, when prices have fallen, the old ladies come around who sell their flowers in the London streets. But things aren't what they were. [...] When Jenny started selling flowers on street corners, Victoria was Queen and every gentleman wore a buttonhole. But that was a long time ago.

Jenny represents an image of England that has now been ceased. She is a depository of history which resists modernity and is therefore destined to fade. There is, in Anderson's intentions, nostalgia for that certain 'touch' (represented by the buttonhole flower) that made the British *look* British and therefore *be* British. However, Anderson believes the perpetuation of tradition is possible only through renovation. The images of Jenny are followed by those of the workers dismantling the market while the supplies for the following day are coming in, in a continuous fashion (that stops only for Christmas). The film is a portrait of the present which summons the past while it is clearly oriented towards the future.

The final image of the film is the close-up of a young worker with a superimposed text reading: "London 1957". As CATALÀ and CERDÀ suggest,²⁵ the final frame of *Every Day Except Christmas* might be seen as an answer to the ending

²⁵ Josep Maria CATALÀ – Josetxo Cerdà, "La mirada y la ira", in Carlos F. Heredero – José Enrique Monterde (eds.), *En torno al Free Cinema. La tradición realista en el cine británico*, Institut Valencià de Cinematografia, Valencia 2001, p. 63.

of Humphrey Jennings' *A Diary for Timothy* (1945). In Jennings' film, the narrator asks the new-born baby how he will handle his life. The final close-up of *Every Day Except Christmas* shows how the generation born right before or during the war would take care of the community, perpetuate tradition and inject it with new vitality.



Against its director's will, *Every Day Except Christmas* has come to represent a lost tradition. A few years after the film was made, the 300-years-old Covent Garden market relocated. Thus, the film has changed from a snapshot of the present to a picture of the past, where tradition gives way to modernisation. Now the film indirectly denounces the dismantling of a peculiar area of London, the selling off of the city's identity, the dismissal of an entire community. Writing in 1994, Anderson declares:

Every Day Except Christmas is very much a portrait of the English, of a certain group of Londoners, as they were. There was something almost Dickensian about the people in this film, and that has all gone now. [...] There is a very strong evocation in the film of a vanished past.²⁶

²⁶ Lindsay Anderson, "Every Day Except Christmas. Commentary, 1994", p. 72.

7.

Satire and disillusionment: Lindsay Anderson's *The White Bus* (1967)

Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures or sensations.

– George Orwell

7.1. Red, White and Zero: *the wreck of a project*

In 1964, Oscar Lewenstein, a founder of the English Stage Company in 1956 and a frequent stage producer and collaborator of Lindsay Anderson's, was appointed by Woodfall Films as producer of a compendium film made of three episodes taken from three short stories by Shelagh Delaney. Lewenstein – who was at the time attached to the British branch of Universal Artists – at first arranged that each episode would be directed by a different director with the intention of reviving the Free Cinema group ten years after the screening of the first Free Cinema programme. Inevitably, Lewenstein's choice fell on Lindsay Anderson, on Woodfall co-founder Tony Richardson and on Karel Reisz. Anderson took on a story by Shelagh Delaney, *The White Bus*, which sealed her 1963 collection *Sweetly Sings the*

Donkey.¹ Soon after the collective project was given the go-ahead, Tony Richardson started developing his own episode, *Red and Blue*, based on an original story he had reverted to after dumping one of Delaney's subjects, *Pavane for a Dead Prince*.² Karel Reisz withdrew after a short while, having realized that his episode – *not* taken from Delaney's work – deserved to be blown up to a full-length feature, which was eventually made and released as *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966). Reisz was then replaced by Peter Brook, the choice of whom voided the idea of reviving the Free Cinema group. Brook stepped in with an unfitting 15-minute-long black & white slapstick comedy, *Ride of the Valkyrie*, starring Zero Mostel – hence the title *Red, White and Zero*, which Anderson concocted for the ensemble of films.

After seeing the complete compendium for the first time, Anderson noted:

6 January 1967. [...] the long awaited screening of the TRILOGY [...] my view of the recut of Peter Brook's Ride of Valkyries [*sic*] and first glimpse of Tony's Red & Blue. The first remains amateurish and confused; the second has Tony's usual virtuosity, combined with a very flashy, commercial-style colour, and a phoney, masturbatory sensuality, exploiting to an uncomfortable degree the monstrous narcissism of Vanessa [Redgrave].³

The final result lacking cohesion and unity, *Red, White and Zero* was shelved by Woodfall and Universal. By mid-1967, the film was all but forgotten and virtually unknown to the public. *The White Bus* was shown in Prague in April 1966, then in London in June and in Venice in September during three private screenings set up by Anderson himself.⁴

¹ Cf. Shelagh Delaney, "The White Bus", in Shelagh Delaney, *Sweetly Sings the Donkey*, Methuen, London 1964, pp. 123-140.

² Cf. Charles L.P. Silet, *Lindsay Anderson. A Guide to References and Resources*, G.K. Hall & Co., Boston 1979, p. 51.

³ Unpublished entry from the Lindsay Anderson Diaries, 6 January 1967 (Lindsay Anderson Collection, University of Stirling, location LA 6/1/54). Also quoted in John Izod, "A Bumpy Ride on *The White Bus*", <http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/libraries/collections/anderson/documents/IZODABUMPYRIIZ.pdf>, p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Anderson's episode went on to have a minor distribution in England: in 1968 it was coupled with an experimental surrealist Czech film, Věra Chytilová's *Daisies*, and the two had a short run in London. 1968 saw the release of Anderson's second feature film, the iconic *If....*, to which *The White Bus* is an introduction and a compendium. Due to conflicting distribution companies, *The White Bus* and *If....* (marketed by Universal and Paramount respectively) were never screened alongside each other.

Of the few copies of the film still available today, one is held at the British Film Institute National Archive, but is not in a satisfying condition. Viewers willing to watch the film at the BFI premises are usually given a time-coded VHS tape to view. A fairer copy has been televised by MGM lately: though the screen is watermarked with the MGM logo, the image is crisp, the shades of grey deep and defined, the colours well balanced and the sound track neat. This is why I have chosen the latest TV broadcast of *The White Bus* as a source for the stills that illustrate this chapter.

7.2. Road to The White Bus

The entries in Lindsay Anderson's diaries help us draw a timeline of the making of *The White Bus* as precise as possible.⁵ Anderson was attached to the project in early 1964, though for at least one year *The White Bus* did not become his main concern.

⁵ Many of the diary entries strictly regarding *The White Bus* were left out of Anderson's published diaries as edited by Paul Sutton. Cf. Lindsay Anderson, *The Diaries*, ed. Paul Sutton, Methuen, London 2005.

After discarding a film version of *Wuthering Heights* scripted by David Storey and starring Richard Harris, in 1965 Anderson began to collaborate closely with Shelagh Delaney on the development of the *White Bus* script:

13 March 1965. Shelagh [Delaney] arrives with a bad cold [...] we talk about the project [*The White Bus*]. She is sympathetic, direct, and I feel creative. [...] We agree to do it.⁶

By July 1965, Anderson was completely into the project (“I long just ‘to do it’”).⁷

Problems began to surface in a month’s time: Lewenstein, mainly a man of theatre, was clearly unfit for the task of producing a film – and of all films, one with *three* directors. Associate producer Michael Deeley, whose involvement Anderson seemed to reject, was not aware of the nature of the project and, according to Anderson, had not read Delaney’s story.⁸ Meanwhile, Shelagh Delaney proved a bit slow in delivering her script drafts.

Since the early stages of production, Delaney and Anderson worked together on drafts and revisions of the screenplay, which followed only in part the original short story.⁹ During the months preceding the shooting, the screenplay underwent several alterations which were mostly suggested by Anderson himself. Though Anderson and Delaney worked side by side for a long time and despite Anderson’s frequent interventions on the screenplay, Delaney was credited as the sole screenwriter of *The White Bus*. The writer also became a regular on-set presence during the shooting, as shown in John Fletcher’s inestimable documentary *About “The White Bus”*.

⁶ Lindsay Anderson, *The Diaries*, cit., p. 105.

⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 127.

⁹ Cf. John Izod, “A Bumpy Ride on *The White Bus*”, p. 2.

By September 1965, the list of technical contributors to the film was ready. Lindsay Anderson chose the Polish Miroslav Ondricek as director of photography. The two had met on the occasion of Anderson's visit to director Miloš Forman in Prague. Ondricek had just finished photographing Forman's *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Loves of a Blonde*, 1965), a Czech New Wave film Anderson wrote enthusiastically about:

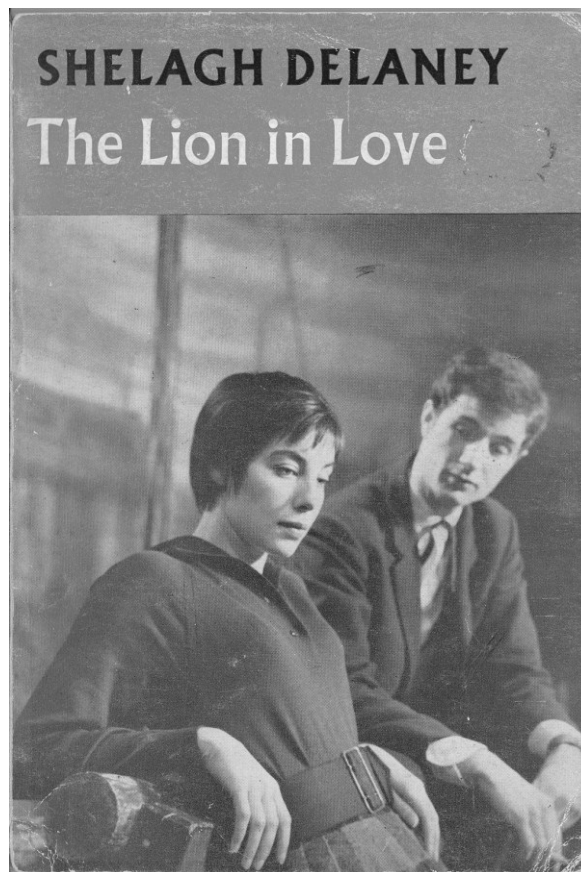
13 April 1965. To Barrandov to see the cut of Forman's film *Loves of a Blonde*. Full of superb and delicate poetic things; the reminiscence of Free Cinema is extraordinary: the drinkers, the National Anthem – but with of course a great 'something more'.¹⁰

Ondricek could not speak English and Anderson did not understand Polish, so an interpreter was needed during pre-production and on the set. Both the language divide and visa issues put Ondricek's recruitment in jeopardy, but in the end *The White Bus* greatly benefited from Ondricek's young and avant-gardist gaze. The experiments with colour and cinematography devised for *The White Bus* were further developed by Anderson and Ondricek in Anderson's following films, *If...* and *O Lucky Man!*.

The leading role was given to the young actress Patricia Healey, who was a close friend of Shelagh Delaney's and who, according to many, bore a resemblance to the writer.¹¹ Healey had already pursued a rewarding career as a stage actress and had starred as Peg in Delaney's much-criticised second play, *The Lion in Love*, during 1960 and 1961.

¹⁰ Lindsay Anderson, *The Diaries*, p. 107.

¹¹ Lindsay Anderson recalls: "At one point I suggested that [Shelagh Delaney] should play the central role of the girl but she didn't want to, and I am sure she was right to decline. She's quite self-conscious and not an actress" (Lindsay Anderson, "The White Bus. Commentary, 1994", in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise*, p. 106).



Patricia Healey as Peg and Peter Fraser as Loll
on the cover of Shelagh Delaney's *The Lion in Love*.

Arthur Lowe, who had starred as Mr. Slomer in Anderson's *This Sporting Life*, was cast as the Mayor. Lowe's collaboration with Anderson continued throughout the following years, up to *Britannia Hospital* (1982), always embodying, with the exception of the latter film, roles of power and authority.

The White Bus also sees Anthony Hopkins making his on-screen debut in a brief scene, singing Brecht's *Resolution der Kommunarden*.

Filming began on 19 October 1965 and took place in London, Salford and Manchester. Editing began in December 1965, with Kevin Brownlow as chief editor and John Fletcher as his assistant. Brownlow insisted in employing

Eisenstein's techniques of 'intellectual montage',¹² a thing which Anderson dismissed as "a meaningless wreck".¹³ Anderson then took advantage of Brownlow's leave to the USA to get Fletcher to work on a re-editing of the film, which was then polished by Brownlow after his return to London.



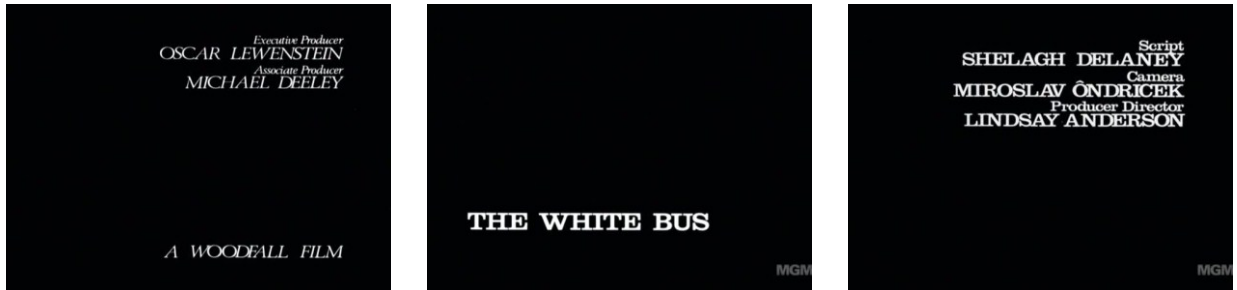
Lindsay Anderson on the set of *The White Bus*.

¹² Cf. John Izod, "A Bumpy Ride on *The White Bus*", p. 6.

¹³ Lindsay Anderson, unpublished diary entry dated 29 August 1965, quoted Ibid.

7.3. The White Bus in sequences

Sequence 1. Opening credits (28'')



[Note: in some versions of the film, the title is accompanied by a number, 2, *The White Bus* being the second episode in the *Red, White and Zero* trilogy.]

Sequence 2. Entering the Shell Building (1' 58'')



The establishing sequence of the film is composed of three main shots accompanied by the elegiac sound of horns: a view of the House of Parliament, the shot of a boy on a barge petting a dove and a view of the Shell Building.



Inside the building, a young typewriter is still working while the office is being cleaned.



While typing, she hallucinates a version of herself hanging from the ceiling.



Her work day is over, and she exits the building.

Sequence 3. On the street (1' 58'')



Outside the building, the Girl observes a man who is listening to the football match on the radio.



When his team loses, the man smashes the radio on the pavement.

Sequence 4. At the station (1' 56'')



At the station, the Girl is joined by a young man in a bowler hat, who follows her to the platform.



When the girl leaves, he kneels down and bursts into song

Sequence 5. On the train to Salford (4' 05'')



Aboard the train, supporters of the team that has just lost the match chant and sing, involving the Girl.



Once they arrive in Salford, the Girl is left alone on the platform.



She stares at a procession of people carrying someone in an iron lung.

Seq. 6. Strange occurrences on the streets of Salford (2' 24'')



Crossing the deserted town, the Girl observes its statues and monuments.



Odd things happen all around her: a woman is kidnapped...



...and a lonely long-distance runner passes by.



A woman is cleaning her shop before the opening; the scene is unexpectedly full-coloured.

Sequence 7. On board the white bus (2' 58'')



A white tour bus approaches.



The Girl gets on the bus, which is full of upper-class, picturesque and politically connotated passengers.



She is welcomed on board by the Mayor, who offers her candies, and by the tour conductress.



The bus stops in order to let school kids cross the street. The scene is in colour.

Sequence 8. Visiting the factory (6' 20'')



The bus crosses the town's outskirts to the factory.

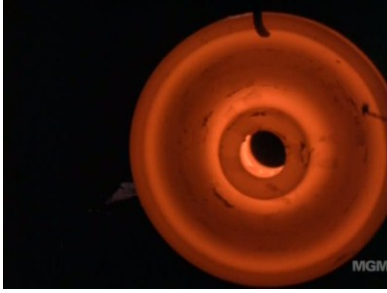
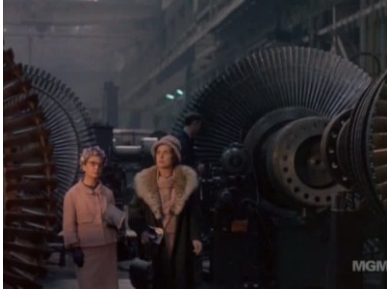


The passengers are given walkie-talkies for the tour of the factory.



The tour begins with a colour scene.

A rather compelling sequence begins in which no word is spoken. Among the foundry workers and the machinery the tourists look misplaced. The sudden bursts of colour add to the captivating and somehow mystic look of the sequence:



Sequence 9. On the road again (1' 12'')



The white bus sets off again.



On the upper deck, the Mayor recalls his childhood, while feeling the Girl's leg.



The Girl then moves towards the Mace-bearer, who says: "Money is the root of all progress".

Sequence 10. The social centre (2' 58'')



The bus reaches the town's social and recreational centre.



The Mayor addresses the tourists with a speech about the industrial revolution and working-class leisure time.



The tourists visit labs of pottery...



...bakery...



...and embroidery.



They attend a play where a young actor sings Brecht's *Song of Resolution*.

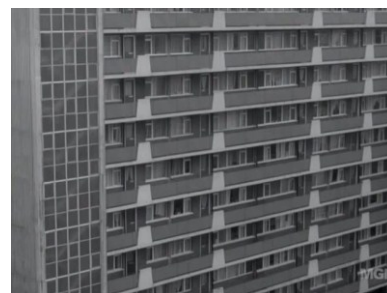


They also take part in a demonstration of martial arts...



...and one of the tourists steps in.

Sequence 11. The built-up areas and the blocks of flats (1' 11'')



The bus crosses a residential area with newly-built tower blocks. The conductress praises the rehousing of citizens.

Sequence 12. The countryside and the park (1' 20'')



The bus takes the tourists through the countryside.

Visiting the



We are shown the re-enactment of three famous paintings: Francisco Goya's *El peleele...*



Édouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe...*



...and Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *L'escarpolette.*

Sequence 13. The hothouse and Armington Hall (53'')



The tourists make a brief visit to a hothouse and the Lord Mayor stops to confer with the gardener.



Then they approach Armington Hall, now a school for girls.

Sequence 14. The Armington Hall choir (1' 50'')



Inside the school, a small student orchestra is rehearsing.



At the presence of the tourists, the school choir sings.



The Girl imagines herself singing in the choir.

Sequence 15. The central library, art gallery and museum (6' 50'')



The tourists visit the public library, art gallery and museum.



The Mayor reads an inscription taken from the Book of Proverbs.



Visiting the library shelves, he gives a speech against 'dirty books'.



Inside the art gallery, Mr. Wombe follows the Girl. He talks about tribal culture but the Girl does not listen.



On their way to the museum, the tourists enter a lift that does not work.



Inside the museum, the visitors look at the stuffed animals as if in a mirror image.



Sequence 16. The Civil Defence demonstration (2' 52'')

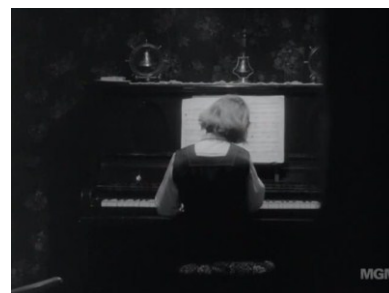


The tourists attend a Civil Defence demonstration, shot in the style of a Humphrey Jennings documentary.



By the end of the show, the tourists have turned into dummies. The Girl leaves.

Sequence 17. The town (4' 50'')



In the evening, the Girl crosses the town of Salford and gazes at vignettes of simple everyday life.



She has fish and chips while the owners are closing the chip shop.
Fade to black.

Sequence 18. End credits (1' 24'')

7.4. The relevance of The White Bus

The White Bus represents an enormous step ahead in the filmmaking career of Lindsay Anderson. The five years that passed between *This Sporting Life* and *The White Bus* saw Anderson directing theatre plays and commercials but were also years of further maturation and sharpening of his idea of a poetic cinema. The influence of Bertolt Brecht played a major role in a further definition of Anderson's aesthetics and *The White Bus* was a major improvement in his film technique. *The White Bus* might also be considered as an experiment with film genre, resulting in a newly-defined form we might call 'satirical film' which Anderson would fully develop with *If...* and *O Lucky Man!*.

As we have said before, *The White Bus* is also a film which prepares the way for *If...* and serves as a bridge between two films that look like worlds apart. From a purely visual point of view, *This Sporting Life* is a black and white film, *If...* a colour film with black and white inserts, while *The White Bus* levels out the transition from one to the other being a black and white film with colour inserts. Anderson is gradually evolving from monochrome to colour, that is, from a cinema that owes much to the social-realist tradition of 'kitchen sink' films to an all-new type of cinema, both socially committed and visually and technically experimental, which draws on the French Nouvelle Vague (and on Godard in particular) but is declined in thoroughly British and 'Andersonian' terms.

The White Bus also looks back on Anderson's virtual mentor, Humphrey Jennings. Some of the sequences in *The White Bus* reveal Anderson's continuity with Jennings, whose dramatic form of documentation is honoured and paraphrased in

the film. The hybrid structure of documentary and fiction, the surrealistic aspects of the visuals and the heartfelt approach at the sparse humanity that still populates Salford are a clear token of Jennings' legacy.¹⁴

Moreover, *The White Bus* presents a dense pattern of intertextuality, which connects this film to Anderson's early documentaries, both in terms of themes and in visual terms. It is in *The White Bus*, and not in *This Sporting Life*, that the influence of Free Cinema can be clearly seen – and it is in this film that some of the concerns of Free Cinema are re-discussed and re-elaborated. *The White Bus* is then both a sum of Anderson's influences and a prospect for a future development of his film aesthetics.

7.5. Flashback: about Shelagh Delaney and A Taste of Honey

The chain of events that led to the making of Lindsay Anderson's *The White Bus* began in 1958, when a young aspiring playwright, Shelagh Delaney, wrote a letter to stage director Joan Littlewood. The letter accompanied the typescript of Delaney's first attempt at playwright, a drama called *A Taste of Honey*. When Littlewood read it, she found it naive, neglectful of the basic conventions of stage writing and closer to a film script than to a play.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the provocative plot and its display of seemingly unfiltered reality attracted Littlewood's attention and the play went into production in 1958.

¹⁴ Cf. Daniel Millar, "The White Bus" (review), in *Sight and Sound*, v. 37 n. 4, Autumn 1968, p. 206.

¹⁵ As Littlewood recalls: "It needed a film unit" (Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book. Joan Littlewood's Peculiar Story as She Tells It*, Methuen, London 1994, p. 515).

As usual with Littlewood's company, the avant-garde Theatre Workshop, the text of the play was reworked by the director and her cast. They took the "higgledy-piggledy"¹⁶ play and reinstated it into theatre conventions, which were then fiddled with by Littlewood's peculiar and para-Brechtian approach to staging. Theatre Workshop's conscious breaking of theatrical conventions corresponded to the breaking of social conventions staged in the play. What Delaney handed to Joan Littlewood was a play with many disjointed scenes and with characters slightly out of focus: the company compensated for the author's lack of experience in writing by making "short work of the long-winded speeches"¹⁷ and by boosting its weakest scenes "with snatches of popular song".¹⁸

A Taste of Honey premiered at the Theatre Royal in Stratford, East London, on 27 May 1958. There, the first, virtual encounter between Lindsay Anderson and Shelagh Delaney took place: Anderson attended the premiere of Delaney's debut pièce and, impressed by the play and by its "real, contemporary poetry",¹⁹ penned a review which appeared in the July–August 1958 issue of *Encore*.²⁰

A Taste of Honey is set in contemporary Manchester and opens with showing a "comfortless flat and the street outside".²¹ A relationship between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the characters and the city is then

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 517.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lindsay Anderson, "A Taste of Honey" (review), in *Encore*, v. 5 n. 2, July–August 1958, p. 42.

²⁰ Anderson's review was *not* included in the collection of Anderson's writing edited by Paul Ryan, *Never Apologise* but was reprinted in Charles Marowitz – Tom Milne – Owen Hale (eds.), *The Encore Reader*, Methuen, London 1970, pp. 78–80. It is also reproduced below, see Appendix 5.

²¹ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*, Methuen, London 1959, p. 1.

established: the play could not but be set there,²² the social environment of Manchester informing the lives and ethics of the characters. Jazz music plays throughout the beginning of the first scene where we are introduced to the main characters: Helen, “a semi-whore”²³ and her daughter Jo. Jo’s very first words are “And I don’t like it”:²⁴ she refers to the comfortless flat, of course, but we cannot help reading this line as a statement of purpose, a credo. Jo does not like the present situation at all. In the span of the play, which is relatively short but covers several months (Jo’s pregnancy marking the passing of time), Jo breaks all the conventions – social and theatrical – that used to inform British society and culture at the time. A uniquely rebel character in the British theatre of the time, Jo quits living with her mother (the severing of family bonds); has an affair with a black sailor (thus trespassing social prejudice); gets pregnant of his baby (the issues of single motherhood and teen pregnancy); and shares a flat with a young homosexual art student, Geoffrey (one of the first non-indulgent gay characters in British theatre).²⁵

Delaney does not look for nor provide us with a solution to the social disarray she shows. The only possible solution is that which Jo enacts: she carries on, careless of the people’s judgements, of moral restrictions, of men and of the rules of patriarchal society (including proper marriage).²⁶

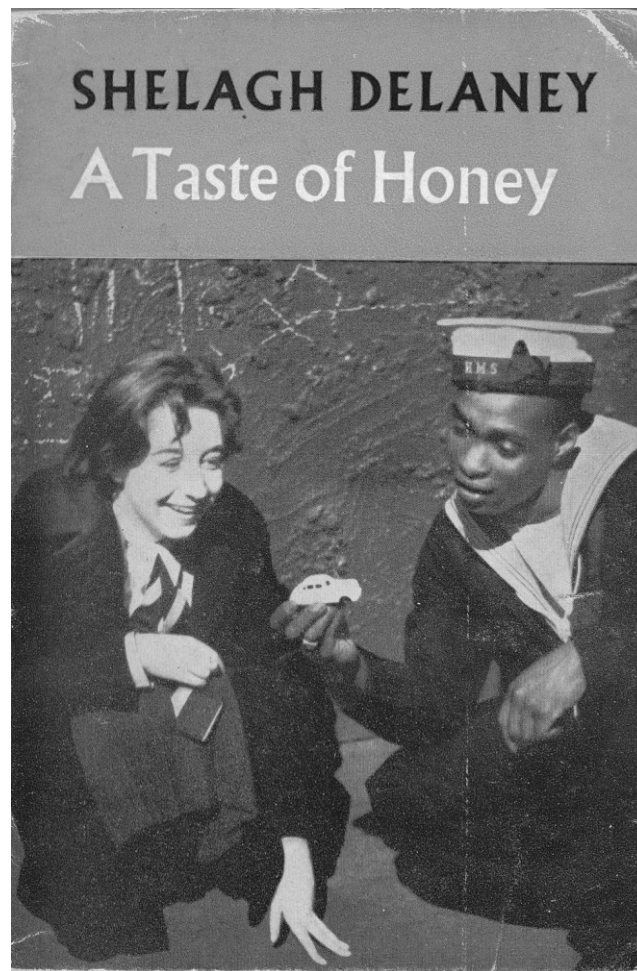
²² Significantly, Tony Richardson’s 1961 film adaptation of the play, which was co-scripted by Delaney, was the first British film shot entirely on location.

²³ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*, Routledge, London 1986, pp. 143-144.

²⁶ Her mother seems to agree with her on at least one point when she says: “Enjoy your life. Don’t get trapped. Marriage can be hell for a kid” (Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*, p. 41).



Frances Cuka as Jo and Jimmy Moore as the Boy
on the cover of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*

Delaney's 'revolution' consisted in *staging what was already there* and had not been represented yet. Realism in theatre and cinema at the time meant exactly this, that is, breaking established restrictions and showing on a stage or on the big screen what was really going on in the poorer and neglected areas of the country. *A Taste of Honey* represents a political and aesthetic battle in which social, sexual, racial and class issues were represented and therefore rendered recognizable.²⁷

²⁷ Colin MacInnes valued the play for its daring and naturalistic descriptions of social types usually ignored by the English theatre: "Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* is the first English play I've seen in which a coloured man, and a queer boy, are presented as natural characters, factually, without a nudge or shudder. It is also the first play I can remember about working-class people that entirely escapes being a 'working-class play': no patronage, no dogma, just the thing as it is, taken straight" (Colin MacInnes, "A Taste of Reality", in *Encounter*, April 1959. Reprinted in Colin MacInnes, *England, Half English*, The Hogarth Press, London 1986, p. 205).

7.6. About Lindsay Anderson's review of *A Taste of Honey*

According to Lindsay Anderson, the first novelty in *A Taste of Honey* was that it was a novelty in itself. He advocated a popular theatre whose characters and stories were based on everyday life, a theatre which addressed mainly working-class audiences: in *A Taste of Honey*, Anderson found the realization of this apparently out-of-reach wish (“such theatre [is] finally here, sprung up under our feet!”).²⁸ Anderson's remarks, though, did not concern only the themes and content of the play, but also its style and technique: *A Taste of Honey* was “written in vivid, salty language and presented without regard for conventions of dramatic shape”.²⁹

It is now widely agreed that the ‘Angry Young Characters’ protagonists of the novels and plays of the late 50s were not actual rebels. They were angry, of course, and through their anger they helped uncover social injustice and class divide but they did nothing to revolt against what forced them to their lower condition. One of the novelties in *A Taste of Honey* lies in its being led by a character who is

tougher, with a commonsense, Lancashire working-class resilience that will always pull her through. And this makes her different [...] from the middle-class angry young man, the egocentric rebel. Josephine is not a rebel; she is a revolutionary.³⁰

Jo goes from stating: “I don't like it” to *doing* something to escape her unwanted condition. She is closer to *This Sporting Life's* Arthur Machin (renamed Frank in Anderson's film) than to *Look Back in Anger's* Arthur Seaton – and that is probably why she deserved Anderson's praise. In *O Dreamland*, Anderson clearly despises the working class for not reacting to their condition, for letting themselves being

²⁸ Lindsay Anderson, “*A Taste of Honey*” (review), p. 42.

²⁹ Ibid. According to Joan Littlewood: “All the characters spoke in pedantic Salford style” (Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book*, p. 516).

³⁰ Lindsay Anderson, “*A Taste of Honey*” (review), p. 43.

fooled, for compromising with the system that controls not only their daily life but also their leisure time and entertainment. Jo, instead, says it out loud: “I’m not having anybody running my life for me”.³¹

In his review, Anderson praises the slightly over-the-edge acting, one of the ‘mild’ Brechtian devices employed by Joan Littlewood, which kept the actors detached from their characters though infusing them with a touch of realism.³² He also approves of the theatrical inventions which avoided the emotional participation of the audience and therefore eluded sentimentalism, thus allowing the public to see through the performance itself and catch the flickers of reality that surfaced during the play:

This quality was emphasised by Joan Littlewood’s production, which seemed to me quite brilliant. Driving the play along at breakneck pace, stuffing it with wry and humorous invention, she made sentimentalism impossible. The abandoning of the fourth wall, the sudden patches of pure music hall, panto-style, were daring, but completely justified by their success. No soppy “identification” here; just the ludicrous, bitter-sweet truth, a shared story.³³

Delaney writes with autobiographical involvement but also with sardonic analytical detachment: her approach, boosted by Joan Littlewood’s methods of production, is at the same time realistic and anti-naturalistic. She is less interested in telling than in analysing and criticising the aspects of working-class society. So many were the affinities between Delaney and Anderson that the two eventually teamed on the *White Bus* film project which, as we have said, became the unluckiest and yet one of the most significant in Anderson’s career.

³¹ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*, p. 60. “Shelagh Delaney, a nineteen-year-old working-class girl from Lancashire, is the antithesis of London’s ‘Angry Young Men’: she knows what to be angry about and what to laugh at” (Unsigned foreword to Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*, p. i).

³² “Surely this was real Brechtian playing” (Lindsay Anderson, “*A Taste of Honey*” (review), p. 43).

³³ *Ibid.*

7.7. *A taste of vinegar: The White Bus short story*

The *White Bus* short story was written by Shelagh Delaney as an act of literary revenge on the town of Salford, where her debut play *A Taste of Honey* had been bitterly criticised by local critics. Delaney had found herself rejected by her own people when her criticism towards northern English society was mistaken for a raging vent against her hometown.³⁴

The protagonist, a young writer who speaks in the first person, goes without a name but is clearly Delaney herself. The Girl (as she is referred to in the film script) is found guilty of having foregrounded the less presentable aspects of life in Salford, compromising the town's respectability. Misunderstanding and mis-reception of her work led not to an act of self-criticism by the town's authorities but to the marginalization of the young writer ("You're very unpopular with some people in this city, you know")³⁵ and to consequent attempts to restore the town's credibility through embarrassingly self-laudatory bus tours (which took place for real in Manchester). In the Lord Mayor's words:

"Recent publicity [...] has dwelt on the less savoury aspects of life here. We all know that slums exist here. We all know that there are some unhappy and unfortunate people here. We know we have a certain amount of prostitution and so on and so forth. [...] We heads of local government therefore have decided to throw the city open to the public. You are invited to see your city as it really is – a decent place inhabited by decent people."³⁶

The story begins with the Girl bumping into a young man who smashes his portable radio after hearing of his favourite football team's defeat. In the boy's words, (the team representing) England has become "the laughing stock of the

³⁴ Cf. Cecil Wilson, "Salford Revisited, With a Taste of Vinegar", *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1968. See also Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker*, p. 62.

³⁵ Shelagh Delaney, "The White Bus", p. 130.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

world”³⁷. Indirectly addressing the loss of national and cultural identity (a motif which would be pivotal in the film), the young man says: “I think they’re in the pay of foreign power”³⁸ – then later he states: “Mediocrity. That’s what we’re exporting. Mediocrity”.³⁹ English national politics are depicted as ‘sold’ to the international market and subject to the influence of foreign countries. Moreover, the dialogue states the downgrading of cultural inheritance and the marketing of the average instead of the excellence.

The same happens in the following paragraph, where the Girl meets the team supporters at the train station. One of them is dressed “from head to foot in Red, White and Blue”:⁴⁰ the ‘Union Jack lady’ accompanies the “dead-march”,⁴¹ a funeral to the football match which forebodes the funeral to the entire country. The vinegar-tasting satire devised by Shelagh Delaney contemplates the degradation of the Union Jack which is here used as a dress or a prop in pantomime. The film trilogy’s title, *Red White and Zero*, which Anderson came up with, is a final take on the British flag: the substitution of one of the three colours for a nought stands for the annihilation of the whole kingdom.

When the Girl reaches her destination, a special train to Lourdes is about to leave from a nearby platform.⁴² The scene might allude to an anachronistic faith in miracles which gathers and guides the masses more than politics or culture, but also hints to the fact that only a miracle could save England (the man in the iron lung?) from its present situation.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cf. Ibid., p. 127.

7.8. *The old and the new*

The imagery of the *White Bus* story insists on the demolishing of buildings and the dismantling of entire portions of the ‘old’ town of Manchester which is to be replaced by a new city made of high towers and skyscrapers.⁴³ Even the traditional chip-shop is accompanied by “a poster announcing its imminent demolition”.⁴⁴

The clash of the old town and the new buildings also informs the very first sequence of Anderson’s film, in which the ‘old’ monumental London is made to contrast with the ‘new’ architecture of the Shell Centre. The first sequence of *The White Bus* is made of three adjoined scenes:



After the credits, we see the Houses of Parliament and Westminster – then the film cuts to a boy stroking a dove on a barge down the Thames; then we are shown the Shell Centre in Lambeth, along the south bank of the Thames. That the two buildings are at odds is corroborated by Misha Donat’s score, which makes use of elegiac horns when Westminster is shown and becomes harshly electronic when the Shell Centre appears.

⁴³ “To get to where I lived I had to walk through a part of the city that was being demolished. [...] It was like a ghost town in a cowboy picture. [...] All round this deserted place the new city sheered up higher than before. Not so far away I saw the top half of the tallest building ever raised in England.” (Ibid., p. 139).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

Transposing on the screen the imagery of dismantlement in the *White Bus* short story, this first sequence attests the film's interest in the transition from tradition to modernity and its consequences.⁴⁵ Modernity is represented by the Shell Centre, which was built in 1961 and became the highest tower in London, thus outclassing the Victoria Tower of Westminster. Though, as we have seen, Anderson had criticised Kevin Brownlow's predilection for Eisenstein's 'intellectual editing', the way these scenes were adjoined follows that kind of procedure: the two buildings and the boy are put in a relation by the very act of editing, though such relation remains covert, not explicit and not narrativised. These instances of relational editing also indicate that the film will follow Anderson's idea of a poetic cinema: the film will suggest rather than say, it will illustrate through juxtapositions and will not follow a traditional diegesis.

The image of the boy stroking the dove becomes particularly relevant from a poetic point of view: the boy, whom we will not see again throughout the film, is petting the animal, thus implying that *The White Bus* will not be *against* something (against modernity or massified society, for example) but rather *pro* a care for traditional values. Like most of Anderson's film, even *The White Bus* is made out of *love* for something, not hatred or resentment.

⁴⁵ Though intimately related to the short story, these shots did not appear in Delaney's first version of the script and were added by Anderson who penned them directly on the flipside of the script pages during one of his revisions.

7.9. Personal and sensory unrelatedness

Like the other films we are analysing here, *The White Bus* is a tale of alienation. Unlike those films' characters, though, the Girl *was not* but *has become* an outsider in a cultural frame she used to know (the same happened to Delaney, who found herself ostracised from her own community).

Going back home from her workplace in London, the Girl cannot find her place in the town she comes from. Boarding the bus which is supposed to re-join her to her hometown, she is offered artificial and 'staged' examples of community. The Girl and the passengers are fed pre-determined artefacts: the city the tour shows (and the way in which it is shown) is pure and simple propaganda. The bus tour is a *mise-en-scene*, and so *The White Bus* is the *mise-en-scene* of a *mise-en-scene*: this is where the self-conscious artificiality of the film comes from. Only through the overt staging of something which is being staged can the film depict the cultural sterility of the tour, which is as stiff and solemn (in a laughable and embarrassing way) as the soviet and fascist propaganda newsreels.

Captained by the Lord Mayor and by the Mace Bearer, the tour is an institutional show-off of the town's alleged qualities, a tour of the town's hot-spots (the factory, the library, the museum...) which does not say much about the town itself⁴⁶ and almost forgets to put the tourists in touch with the town's real 'soul': the people. The people of Salford are shown 'at work' at the social centre (seq. 10) but their activities seem to be staged for the sake of the tourists and do not convey that sense of community that can be found in *Every Day Except Christmas*. Moreover, in

⁴⁶ *The White Bus* is also a satirical take on what we learn about cities through school books or tourist guides. The information about Manchester the tourists are given does not catch the essence of the town and dangerously presents its surface as if it were its core.

the Mayor's words, the social centre was created to 'educate' the worker to leisure – that is, through the social centre the authorities exercise control over the workers and their spare time, exactly as in *O Dreamland*.

Not only are the tourists kept at safe distance from the town's inhabitants: they also experience no exchange among themselves. Though representing different ethnics and cultures, they do not seem to be interested in one another. Between the Girl and the other passengers in the bus, between the Girl and the town and between the passengers and Salford there is no real and humane connection:

loneliness is one of the central aspects of the film [...] the obvious irony being that with all the paeans sung to "community" ("Meet the people of the city noted for their friendliness," boasts the hostess), with all the hearty good cheer on the bus, no one ever makes contact with anyone else.⁴⁷

The tourists' is a system of non-related people; outside this enclosed circle is the Girl. *The White Bus* is ultimately a tale of loneliness, the Girl's isolation from everyone and everything being the pivotal element in the film.

Only through the eyes of a young girl set adrift can the discrepancies in culture and society be seen and criticised.⁴⁸ The film insists on the act of seeing, especially through the scenes where the Girl puts on and takes off her glasses. The bus displays a "See Your City" sign on the side, which raises the question: what do we see when someone is (literally) *guiding* your sight? What do we really see when there is someone telling us where to look? *The White Bus* explicitly implies that *what*

⁴⁷ Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 87.

⁴⁸ According to Daniel Millar, the film is "a statement about the quality of modern life in the English industrial conurbations, as seen through alienated eyes" (Daniel Millar, "*The White Bus*", p. 206).

we see is what we are shown and that only a liberated gaze, free of preconceived superstructures, can *see what is really there* (as Delaney did with *A Taste of Honey*).



The White Bus might be read as the adventures of an unrelated young woman who experiences different forms of community but in the end has to cope with her own intrinsic non-belonging.⁴⁹ Much of the film's surreal and disorienting imagery can be ascribed to the Girl's perception, as if *The White Bus* were poured out of the Girl's subjectivity, even in its objective scenes. Through the Girl's loneliness and alienation, *The White Bus* displays how individual identity can find itself deranged in a contemporary post-capitalist society which has overwritten memory and cultural roots.

A few seconds into the film, we see the Girl at work, sitting at her desk and typing. The act of typing, apart from suggesting monotonousness and

⁴⁹ Cf. Elizabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 59.

repetitiveness, can also be seen as a degeneration of the act of writing: the Girl is a degraded version of Delaney, a playwright turned into a hack writer.



During the sequence, the Girl imagines herself hanging from the ceiling: her suicide is an act of escape which happens only in her fantasy but is visually not distinguished or distinguishable from ‘reality’. It is a signal, the first and one of the strongest in the whole film, of the Girl’s urge to detach herself from her daily routine – or from life as she is experiencing it.

The Girl’s personal unrelatedness is translated into cinematic terms through “sensory unrelatedness”:⁵⁰ as in Lorenza Mazzetti’s *K* and *Together*, sounds and visuals in *The White Bus* are often disengaged, and so is the Girl from the world. In the film, the visuals seldom match the aural elements, and the film presents an unconventional interaction of images and sounds:

I wanted to create the unreality through small particulars like sound – or even the lack of sounds when you would normally expect to hear them. This would take the film away from naturalisation without making it look bizarre.⁵¹

Transitions from one aural environment to another are often abrupt and the treatment of sound is at times anti-naturalistic; voices are sustained by exaggerated echoes or reverbs, while dialogues and sound effects are mixed using awkward

⁵⁰ Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, p. 87.

⁵¹ *The White Bus* fact sheet quoted in Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker*, p. 72.

volume levels. On the visual side, the shifts from monochrome to colour do not obey to narrative logic (see par. 7.8), while space is treated with a taste for the surreal, which privileges emptiness (empty train platforms, empty town squares, desolated outskirts...) to verisimilarly populated settings. These are devices meant to sustain the character's instability and to disorient the spectators so that they can feel as lost as the Girl. Many of Anderson's aesthetic choices are accompanied by a sense of *inexplicability* which leaves the audience wondering. It is the same feeling of impotence and bewilderment which pervades the Girl when she confronts a world which used to be familiar but now seems unfathomable.

There is only one sequence in the whole film where the Girl seems to feel at place. While visiting Armington Hall (seq. 14), the boarding school she presumably attended, she listens to the school choir singing. As in sequence 2, when she imagines herself hanging from the ceiling, now she sees herself in the choir and singing along with the pupils.



The same process that, in sequence 2, suggested a suicidal sense of estrangement, is employed here to convey a sense of belonging: the Girl seems to have found, albeit momentarily and only in her fantasy, a way to relate to a community which is

located simultaneously in the past (the choir might have triggered a childhood memory in the Girl) and in the present. However, the shot immediately following shows the bus on the road again. The Girl is on board: her journey of non-belonging continues.

7.10. Black, white and colour

In several occasions, referring to *If...*, Anderson explained that the sudden transitions from colour to black-and-white were done for economic and technical reasons, thus trying to defy any possible interpretation of the tint shifts in his film.⁵²

Richard Misek has discussed the role and function of colour in the development of film aesthetics, also giving a political and counter-cultural reading of some choices of colour (or non-colour) in experimental directors, most of them European, in the 60s and 70s. Here is a fundamental passage from his book *Chromatic Cinema*, which will help us contextualise the tint shifts in *The White Bus*:

[in classical cinema] chromatic hybridity conventionally required explanation. [...] But] in films including Claude Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme* (1966), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968), Oshima's *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1968), and Lindsay Anderson's *If...* (1968), black-and-white and color sequences alternate apparently at random. [...] not only do the above films reject the various oppositional meanings conventionally given to black-and-white and color, they also reject the opposition itself. [...]

Given the political climate of the late 1960s, it is possible also to see the counter-paradigm of unmotivated chromatic hybridity in counter-cultural terms. It is surely no coincidence that the film-makers who used this technique the most – Anderson, Pasolini, Oshima, as well as Alexander Kluge and the Straub-Huillets – were all political as well as stylistic radicals. Unmotivated chromatic hybridity was one of an arsenal of techniques with which they assaulted bourgeois cinema.⁵³

⁵² See, for example, Lindsay Anderson, "If... The Colour of Monochrome", Reprinted in Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise. The Collected Writings*, ed. Paul Ryan, Plexus Publishing, London 2004, pp. 116-119.

⁵³ Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden-Oxford-Chichester 2010, pp. 69-71.

The tint transitions in *The White Bus* are not motivated by narrative or diegetic reasons: there is no apparent logic in the film's shifting from black-and-white to colour. The alternation of colour and non-colour scenes does not distinguish between two worlds (London and Salford, for example) or two states of mind (hallucination and reality). Rather, the shifts in tint follow the rules of taste and intuition, with no set pattern to regulate the emersion of colour during the film. Having no clear function *within* the film, the tint shifts operate *outside* the film, on a metatextual level and on the audience's reception. Colour hybridity in *The White Bus* mirrors the stylistic hybridity of the film. The colour shifts mimic the alterations of register and come abruptly, shaking the film's structure (and the audience's attention) and reconfiguring it:

the only reason I can give for [the switches from black-and-white into colour] is that I felt that they gave the right emphasis at those particular moments; the right, unpredictable accent.⁵⁴

The transitions from monochrome to colour put emphasis also on the medium of cinema itself: the film as a device becomes obtrusive, the presence of the cinematic medium is foregrounded, *seen* and *felt* by the spectators, who become aware they are watching a representation. In this sense, the colour alterations in the film are one of Anderson's renditions of the Brechtian devices.⁵⁵

As Anderson writes in the introduction to the published screenplay of

If....:

⁵⁴ *The White Bus* fact sheet, quoted in Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson. Maverick Film-Maker*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Gorgon Gow has argued that Anderson's use of colour is of a 'spiritual' nature. The distinctive colour palette contributes to the creation of a 'mystic' element in the film which turns the colour shifts into something transcendental: "something approaching a mystique is conjured from the red-hot steel, but the sustaining element is the visual displacement of the girl [who] is repeatedly seen at a spiritual remove from the people around her" (Gordon Gow, "The White Bus" (review), in *Films and Filming*, v. 14 n. 12, September 1968, p. 43).

When Shelagh Delaney and I were working on the script of *The White Bus*, which was also a poetic film, moving freely between naturalism and fantasy, I remember suggesting that it would be nice to have shots here and there, or short sequences, in colour. [...]

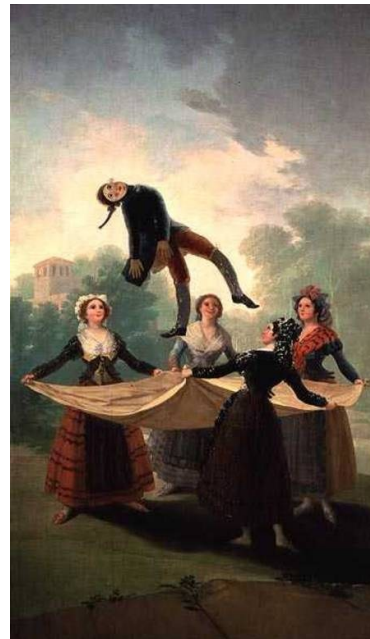
We felt that variation in the visual surface of the film [*If*...] would help create the necessary atmosphere of poetic license, while preserving a ‘straight’, quite classic shooting style, without tricks or finger-pointing.

I also think that, in a film dedicated to ‘understanding’, the jog to consciousness provided by such colour change may well work a kind of healthy *Verfremdungseffect*, an incitement to *thought*, which was part of our aim.

And finally: Why not? Doesn’t colour become more expressive, more remarked if drawn attention to in this way? The important thing is to realise that there is no symbolism involved in the choice of sequences filmed in black and white, nothing expressionist or schematic. Only such factors as intuition, pattern and convenience.⁵⁶

7.11. Tableaux vivants

In a visually compelling sequence, the bus approaches a park where we can see three famous paintings re-enacted in full colour: Francisco Goya’s *El pelele*, Édouard Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* and Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s *L’escarpolette*.



⁵⁶ Lindsay, Anderson, “Notes for a Preface”, in Lindsay Anderson – David Sherwin, *If*... (screenplay), Lorrimer Publishing, London 1969.



The sequence is a slip into fantasy: fragments of collective cultural memory pop out of nowhere and become alive and visible. However, it is not clear whether or not the bus passengers can see the *tableaux vivants* during their walk through the park. The sequence is a moment of pastoral suspension: the film's narrative is interrupted in favour of a few seconds of pure, essential cinema, of film for film's sake.

Through the choice of those particular paintings, Anderson activates a net of metatextual references that Erik Hedling summarises as follows:

All three paintings paraphrased by Anderson suggest a kind of aesthetic rashness, since art history has connected Goya as well as Fragonard and Manet to the aesthetic upheaval and aspiring modernity which eventually led to the breakthrough of impressionism. [...] The paintings, and in consequence their cinematic reproductions, all deal with ways of seeing colours, things and actions in a 'new way'.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker*, pp. 69-70.

Through this sequence, Anderson comments on the power of art, and of cinema in particular, to trespass cultural boundaries and disclose new ways of interpreting reality. Anderson believes in art as a means of cultural and social advance. Cinema, Anderson seems to imply, has the power to revive tradition, to make the past live again, to revitalise tradition and to assist in the transmission of knowledge. However, the tourists seem to pass by the tableaux without noticing them, which voids Anderson's effort and turns the painting into fragments of almost forgotten memories.

7.12. Anderson's Brechtian formula

Since the release of *If...*, Anderson has been pinpointed as one of the relevant European filmmakers who made use of distancing and estranging devices in the *mise-en-scene* derived from Bertolt Brecht's theatre practice (other Brechtian directors being, for example, Jean-Luc Godard and Rainer Werner Fassbinder).⁵⁸ *The White Bus* is the first of Anderson's films made under the undeniable influence of Brecht.⁵⁹

Brecht's affirmation in Britain dates back to the mid-50s. The playwright died in 1956, so most of his plays were staged in Britain after his death. In June

⁵⁸ Anderson's use of Brechtian devices is discussed in Carl David Ferraro, *Toward a Brechtian Film Aesthetic. With an Investigation Into the Films of Lindsay Anderson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Luis Buñuel*, UMI, Ann Arbor / Wayne State University, Detroit 1988, pp. 80-177. See also John Izod *et al.*, "'What Is There to Smile At?' Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man!*", in Paul Newland (ed.), *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*, Intellect Books, Bristol 2010, pp. 215-227.

⁵⁹ Lindsay Anderson had already experimented with Brechtian devices in his stage productions of *The Lily White Boys* and *Billy Liar* in 1960 (cf. Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker*, p. 65).

1955, Joan Littlewood directed and starred in the first British production of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* with Theatre Workshop at the Barnstaple Festival. The staging of the play was advised by Brecht's assistant and Berliner Ensemble member Carl Weber.⁶⁰ In 1956, the Royal Court Theatre presented an adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera*, directed by Sam Wanamaker and produced by Oscar Lewenstein. Short after Brecht's death, the Berliner Ensemble toured Europe and stationed at the Palace Theatre in London for three weeks presenting a season of Brecht's plays (*Mother Courage*, *Trumpets and Drums*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*).⁶¹ Anderson enthusiastically attended several shows, discussing the plays and their author's method with the actors and with Anthony Hopkins, who used to accompany Anderson to theatre.

By the mid-60s, the critical debate on Brecht had been going on for years. In the same issue of *Encore* where Anderson's review of *A Taste of Honey* appeared, Ernest Bornemann criticised Brecht's theatre which in the English-speaking world had been received as unintelligible, elitist and in the end self-defeating, a formal(ist) experiment which failed to achieve its cultural and social goal.⁶²

In Britain, far away from the epistemological environment where Brecht's oeuvre was conceived, such theatre made an impact mainly because of its innovations in technique, not so much because of its political content.⁶³ The

⁶⁰ Cf. John Willett, "Ups and Downs of British Brecht", in Pia Kleber – Colin Visser (eds.), *Re-interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, p. 78. See also John Elsom, *Post-war British Theatre*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1979, pp. 112-125.

⁶¹ Cf. Philip Barnes, *A Companion to Post-War British Theatre*, Croom Helm, Beckenham 1986, pp. 4, 46.

⁶² Cf. Ernest Bornemann, "The Real Brecht", in *Encore*, n. 15, July-August 1959, reprinted in Charles Marowitz – Tom Milne – Owen Hale (eds.), *The Encore Reader*, Methuen, London 1970, pp. 136-152.

⁶³ Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in Its Context 1956-1965*, Routledge, London 1995, p. 156.

'British Brecht' was mainly a question of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the 'distancing devices' that would prevent the audience from becoming too involved in – that is, anesthetized by – the flow of the play. The sense of aloofness created by the *V-effect* conjures up a *thinking atmosphere* the purpose of which is the audience's knowledge and self-knowledge.⁶⁴

What Anderson did, or was *accused of doing* by his detractors, was stripping Brechtian practices of their socio-political implications and employing them mainly for the sense of estrangement that the distancing devices produce, in order to lure the audience into a connotative reading of the play or film.⁶⁵ Thus, Anderson's *Verfremdungseffekt* is somehow 'un-Brechted'. In Anderson's own words:

'Alienation' is the Brechtian term – a translation of his *Verfremdungseffekt* – usually applied to such a style, but I have always thought this a heavy word and not a very accurate one. The real purpose of such devices, which can include songs, titles between scenes, etc., is not to alienate the audience from the drama, but rather to *focus* their attention on its essential – not its superficial or naturalistic – import.⁶⁶

Deeply influenced by surrealism as well as by Brecht, Anderson domesticates them both in a formula which comprises emotional detachment, weird imagery, direct addressing of the audience and a typically Andersonian and intellectual sense of humour. When incongruous elements appear on the screen or when theatrical stylization takes over the *mise-en-scene*, Anderson is exploiting both the potentialities of the *V-effect* and those of surrealism. Producing a shift from a realistically

⁶⁴ Cf. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, Verso, London & New York 2000. Cf. Werner Hecht, "The Development of Brecht's Theory of Epic Theatre", *Tulane Drama Review*, v. 6, 1961, p. 50, quoted in Carl David Ferraro, *Toward a Brechtian Film Aesthetic. With an Investigation Into the Films of Lindsay Anderson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Luis Buñuel*, UMI, Ann Arbor / Wayne State University, Detroit 1988, p. 125.

⁶⁵ Cf. Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-maker*, p. 65. Colin MacCabe accuses Anderson of turning "the techniques for the production of alienation effects into pure narcissistic signals of an 'intellectual' work of 'art'" (Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses", *Screen*, v. 15 n. 2, Summer 1974, p. 26).

⁶⁶ Lindsay Anderson, "An Introduction [to Alan Bennett's *The Old Crowd*]", in Alan Bennett, *The Writer in Disguise*, Faber and Faber, London 1985, p. 164.

regulated representation of reality to a pro-filmic suddenly altered with discrepancies, Anderson gets hold of the audience's critical attention and centres it on the discrepant element in the frame. By doing so, he generates not only the already mentioned alienating effect but also a direct critique of the distorted and exaggerated object on the screen, thus engendering a particularly sharp form of film satire, which we will discuss in the following paragraph.

7.13. On film satire in *The White Bus*: the 'Anderson effect'

In *The White Bus*, Anderson makes use of the modes of film satire to create a relationship between the audience and the film itself.⁶⁷ Satire consists mainly in the exaggeration of characteristic traits of reality or of a character. Exaggeration makes those traits dissonant, allowing for a critical reading. Therefore, satire is a question of defining and then breaking the limits of verisimilitude, thus drawing attention on those elements that appear distorted or weird. Satire can be considered a distancing device, since the modifications of the profilmic are an obvious intrusion of the film's author in the film itself – an intrusion which reveals the film to be a fictional representation. In Anderson's film(s), the editing, the treatment of sound and colour, Brechtian practices and film satire converge, thus creating a distinctive aesthetic mode that is witty, enticing, disorienting and thought-provoking – a mode we we may call 'the Anderson effect'.

⁶⁷ Our discussion of satire in *The White Bus* is based on the definition of film satire given by Leo Braudy (despite Braudy's sharp criticism of Anderson's aesthetics). Cf. Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, pp. 57-65.

In *The White Bus*, the limits within which the ordinary representation of reality operates are set effectively in the film's inception, and then broken all of a sudden just a few seconds into the film. The opening and the scenes with the Girl typing define the boundaries of the film's supposedly ordinary register, which are then broken by an insertion that shows the Girl hanging from the ceiling. The film boundaries are then re-established when the ordinary register is resumed. The Girl's hallucinated suicide sheds a grinning light over her professional life, which the insert reveals as something alienating and de-personalising.

Further into the film, a genre slip occurs when the young man at the station bursts into song (sustained by a full orchestra) thus temporarily turning *The White Bus* into a musical (cf. seq. 4). The young man is an idealist and at the same time someone who is proud of not being committed to anything in particular ("I'm definitely not class conscious. It simply never occurs to me, this business about class", he says – which makes of him a nemesis to Anderson). He seems to live in a world of his own made of great ideals whereas he is trapped in a specific social role (he wears a suit and a bowler hat). When he bursts into song, he trespasses briefly into a different film genre, the musical, which is in itself a utopian genre, where the intervention of music momentarily suspends the laws of verisimilitude and where, in many cases, song lyrics are an expression of unrealisable dreams. The distance between the young man's beliefs and his actual social position is represented by the change of register which, like the young man's aspirations, is sudden, unfitting and only momentary.

7.14. The self-annihilating power of language

The White Bus also satirises what we learn (and think we know) about cities and countries through the educational system and the books we read at school. The characteristics of Manchester and Salford shown to the bus tourists by the Mayor and by the tour guide are the same as those commonly found in learning books or in tourist guides: the information given does not catch the soul of the city but present its surface as if it were its core. The aspects of Salford that are illustrated by the conductress and eulogised by the Mayor might be the town's pride but are not distinctive: they are in fact quite common to every other town. While studying Robert Vas' *Refuge England*, we have seen how the mapping of the city by the film's protagonist leads directly to the heart of the city itself, and turns London into an existential experience. The bus tourists, instead, stroll around Salford and look at it as if they were in a permanent open-air museum, the town being a dead and unmovable entity. Here, Anderson picks up his discourse on the loss of tradition by showing the transmission of knowledge as a faulty process: we learn the wrong things because we are *shown and taught* the wrong things. The traditional values that deserve to be passed on are all but forgotten.

Satire can be found also in the use of language and in the way the characters' cues are written and delivered. Anderson is particularly keen on foregrounding the farcical and grotesque element latent in his characters' speeches. For example, many of the cues spoken by the Lord Mayor in *The White Bus* were taken from actual political statements made by Members of Parliament. Those statements already contained a self-destructive farcical element which is made

evident in Arthur Lowe's acting (his Mayor is a pompous, arrogant and preposterous man); in the character's clothes and props (a cocked hat and a priest-like ceremonial gown);⁶⁸ and in the camerawork (which often frames the Mayor from below, establishing and at the same time mocking his authority).

Anderson's aim is to uncover the latent self-annihilating element in political language. Political speeches are contradictory and self-belying and can be satirized without even being reversed, distorted or exaggerated (if not in tone): satire uncovers reality's intimate absurdity. The medium of cinema functions as a magnifying glass: the Lord Mayor in his speeches unveils his own intolerance, the "bigotry, philistinism, and boosterism of a municipal politician".⁶⁹ While visiting the public library, he pronounces anathema against "disgusting books [...] containing homosexual practices disguised as literature" whose author "maintains that public revulsion at perversion is middle-class prejudice". All this is said right after reading a motto taken from the Book of Proverbs (4:7-9) inscribed on the library's wall:

Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom. And with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

This is a motto which, once uttered, reveals the Mayor's inadequacy and hypocrisy (clearly, he does not *want* or *wish* to promote any kind of wisdom).⁷⁰

The library itself is sort of profaned by the tourists: as they enter its spacious central hall, they all begin to chant and make noises in order to test its resonance, as if the public library were a playground for kids. If these are the

⁶⁸ Cf. Leonard Quart, "The White Bus" (review), in *Cineaste*, v. 37, n. 2, 2012, <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/from-the-archives-emthe-white-busem>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ This motto is also cited in the opening credits of Lindsay Anderson's *If....*, thus confirming the continuity between the two films.

keepers of tradition, Anderson seems to say – if these are the criteria by which culture is defined, then no wonder we are tripping down a ‘descending spiral’.⁷¹

7.15. Of stuffed animals and dummies

Anderson achieves satire also through the use of editing. In *The White Bus*, the tourists are taken to the museum, in a sequence which – according to Anderson – was improvised during the shooting.⁷² There, two of the women passengers confront a group of stuffed animals. The scene foreshadows the one in which the whole party of tourists is reduced to dummies (see below) and also represents an intertextual reference to Anderson’s *O Dreamland* (cf. par. 6.3). As well as in *O Dreamland*, the use of shot and counter-shot and of associative editing puts the animals and their observers in a relation of identity, as though the stuffed animals were a mirror to their gazers, reflecting their unanimated selves. The puppets in *O Dreamland*, the stuffed animals and the dummies in *The White Bus* as well as the iconic foetus in a jar in *If...* are rhyming images that represent the “stultifying effects of [...] conformity”.⁷³

⁷¹ The following statement by Danny Powell about *If...* might as well be referred to *The White Bus*: “*If...* examines not only a system which imposes rules but also the suitability of those who make them” (Danny Powell, *Studying British Cinema: The 1960s*, Auteur, Leighton Buzzard 2009, p. 204).

⁷² “A lot of *The White Bus* was not scripted [...as for example] the scene in the museum of the stuffed animals confronting the human beings: for some reason, Shelagh wouldn’t go into the museum, so she never saw the animals or put them in the script. But I saw them when we were going around the museum, and decided to improvise the scene” (Lindsay Anderson, “*The White Bus*. Commentary, 1994”, p. 106).

⁷³ Carl David Ferraro, *Toward a Brechtian Film Aesthetic. With an Investigation Into the Films of Lindsay Anderson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Luis Buñuel*, UMI, Ann Arbor / Wayne State University, Detroit 1988, p. 162.

Towards the end of the film, the Girl leaves her fellow travellers after a Civil Defence demonstration but she does not have a chance to say goodbye: as soon as the demonstration finishes, the Mayor, the Mace Bearer and all the other representatives have turned into dummies.

This is the most radical trick in the whole film. Its disorienting impact is heightened by the sudden silence that falls on the scene. The expedient gives a final statement on the ruling class: those who are supposed to be in a leading role are bloodless, lifeless dummies, incapable of action. The Mayor and his fellows attend the Civil Defence drill but are by no means touched by the civil and social relevance of the demonstration. Now that the tour of the town, an itinerant form of propaganda, is complete, their *function* is over. The touring politicians are now useless: they do not have an active role in society, they are socially, politically and ideologically stale – or dead. The party of dummies thus expresses social critique but also a sardonic sense of closure, the idea of a fantastic elimination of a whole political and ruling class.

Moreover, the expedient of having the tourists turned into dummies leaves the Girl even more alone than before: she is the only human being left, and she continues her journey on her own. Free from the deceiving promises of the bus tour, she can now enter the heart of the town, where common people live and everyday actions are performed.

The film's closing bears a different tone and a completely different system of references. Now that the Girl has detached herself from the bus and the tourists, the filmic environment changes. We are no more inside a surreal and

Brechtian satire, but in a sequence which looks like a late Free Cinema act – or like the re-enactment of Humphrey Jennings’ visual universe.

As the Girl walks through the town in the evening, she confronts vignettes that reference directly to past experiences in the British cinema. A boy is hitting on a girl who rejects him, in a scene which has the same drabness and straightforwardness of *A Taste of Honey*. A window shows a girl playing the piano; a nearby window, a woman shaving her husband. Streets and shops are populated – but not crowded. These sketches, these micro-documentaries embedded in the film’s last sequence, are portraits of everyday life in the town, and are collected and shot with the same heartfelt accuracy that Humphrey Jennings used to employ. They are a final *look at Britain*, a return to the origins of British life, a look at how life is lived far away from the industrial centres. As David Millar noted, these scenes “relate to Jennings in spirit, not in parody”.⁷⁴ These are the streets of old Salford where, as Shelagh Delaney said to Ken Russell, “you can almost feel the heart of the city beating”.⁷⁵

In the closing scene of *The White Bus*, the Girl enters a fish-and-chip shop which is about to close. As she eats, the proprietors start to tidy up. The man would prefer to postpone the cleaning till the following day, but the woman replies:

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

⁷⁴ Daniel Millar, “*The White Bus*” (review), p. 206.

⁷⁵ Shelagh Delaney interviewed by Ken Russell in *Shelagh Delaney’s Salford*, dir. Ken Russell, BBC Four, 1960. See also <http://www.thespectraldimension.com/2011/01/down-here-you-can-almost-hear-heart-of.html>.

It is a very down-to-earth, working-class and utterly effective statement on the importance of *commitment*: commitment to one's own life, job, and role in the community. This, and not money as the Mace Bearer says, is '*the root of all progress*'.

At the end of the film, the Girl is alone once again. As Gavin Lambert puts it: "First seen surrounded by empty desks in a typing pool, last seen surrounded by upended chairs in a fish-and-chips shop, she's Miss Alienation of 1965".⁷⁶ The film's final shot is neither a closure nor a conclusion. As David Millar writes: "The final fade-out on Patricia Healey is a filmic question-mark".⁷⁷ Has the girl found a place to call home? Is her return to her town definitive or only momentary? Will she go back to work tomorrow, to imagine herself hanging from the ceiling? Was the bus tour reality or fantasy? All this is left unanswered and, as far as we know, the process of alienation continues.

⁷⁶ Gavin Lambert, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, p. 155.

⁷⁷ Daniel Millar, "The White Bus" (review), p. 206.

Conclusions

I believe that the films I have chosen and examined should be made available to everyone and should be screened and watched more often. Their compelling stories, problematic characters and enticing visuals deliver a complex and unparalleled portrait of their makers and of post-war British society. Conceived and shot during the age of welfare and affluence, they reveal how, in a supposedly solid social context, personal identities were going astray.

These films work on different levels: they are personal statements, universal parables, precious documents and also attempts to create new cinematic forms. Each of them relates a *personal* experience, overtly or covertly autobiographical: the characters of *K* and *Together* are crystal-clear projections of Lorenza Mazzetti's identity; Nazli Nour herself stars in her own film, allowing for an autobiographical reading; Robert Vas' *Refuge England* is a reconstruction (a '*documentary a posteriori*') of his arrival in London; the Girl in *The White Bus* synthesises the personalities of Shelagh Delaney and Lindsay Anderson. These films cannot be separated from their authors, and sustain the quest for an independent and subjective cinema.

At the same time, each story works on a metaphorical level, thus becoming universal. People that find themselves at the margins of society, those who are targeted for their 'otherness' (be it ethnical, sexual, social, political or

‘simply’ existential), those who struggle to affirm their ideals but go unheard, have more than one trait in common with *K*’s Gregor Samsa, with the deaf-mutes of *Together*, with a disoriented young refugee or a derided old woman.

They are also important as documents, since they were shot on location, using non-professional actors and involving common people: they are valuable portraits of British life and society in the 50s and 60s, and bear witness for the scars left by the war and those left by hasty social and urban reconstruction.

Last but not least, these films demonstrate how vital and ground-breaking examples of cinema can be found (and made, and supported) outside the usual mainstream circuits. Lorenza Mazzetti, Nazli Nour, Robert Vas and Lindsay Anderson were endowed with a wandering and questioning gaze. The Slade School (albeit involuntarily), the BFI, the Experimental Production Committee and the aesthetic frame of Free Cinema provided the means for such gaze to wander freely. The result was a bunch of films that depict loneliness and alienation (but also ‘togetherness’) with unprecedented grace, strength, originality and poetic sensibility – an achievement to be proud of, which should not be overlooked.

Appendix 1

Lindsay Anderson's review of *Chance of a Lifetime*

Lindsay Anderson, "Chance of a Lifetime" (review)
Sequence, n. 11, Summer 1950, pp. 39-40.

For the failure of Britain to achieve, in fifty years of picture making, any considerable tradition of cinema – at least as far as fictional films go – many and various reasons have been suggested. One, seldom stressed but surely among the most relevant, is the influence of Class. The British commercial cinema has been a bourgeois rather than a revolutionary growth; and it is not a middle-class trait to examine oneself with the strictest objectivity, or to be able to represent higher or lower levels of society with sympathy and respect – limitations which account for the ultimate failure of even so exceptional an attempt as *Brief Encounter*. Whether from lack of ability amongst our film-makers, or from fear of provoking controversy, it has been the function of the working-classes to provide "comic relief" to the sufferings of their social superiors, or to nip in here and there with Dramatic Cameos; at any rate, to support self-consciously rather than spontaneously to pre-figure.

To this mournful rule there have been certain valiant exceptions, of which *Chance of a Lifetime* is the latest and amongst the brightest. It is exceptional, too, in presuming to tackle a contemporary theme of the most urgent interest: the relationship of management and labour in industry. The simple story is set in a small provincial engineering works, the owner-director of which has designed a new type of plough. The prototype of this is giving trouble, and the men are becoming disgruntled at the owner's refusal to listen to their suggestions. Then a serious dispute blows up: one of the workmen is precipitately dismissed for insolence (not wholly unprovoked), and in protest the men come out on strike. In fury, the owner addresses them, accusing them of irresponsibility and unwisely challenging them to "have a go at my job". To his amazement and dismay they accept, and, unwilling to go back on his word, he agrees and leaves. The rest of the film shows the men's effort to run the works on their own, their varying reactions, fundamental disagreements and the opposition from neighbouring industrial combines. When, finally, a stroke of bad luck jeopardises the venture, the owner comes to the rescue, puts through some crucial telephone calls, and saves the day. The end is a compromise: the owner returns, on equal terms with the young, enterprising works manager who has proved his worth.

It can hardly be claimed (or charged) that the film is a call for social revolution. In fact, before praising its achievement it is as well to establish clearly its level – not to crush it with inappropriate superlatives. *Chance of a Lifetime* is a sentimental comedy, an affable little sermon on the virtues of tolerance, co-operation and mutual goodwill. Its approach is liberal. We all have our uses: even the vermin have skill and experience which can and should be made use of. No one section of the community can afford not to give a Tinker's Cuss for another.

The revolutionary qualities of *Chance of a Lifetime* lie less in its message, than in the liveliness and lifelike-ness of its people and its places. Shot on location, at a real factory, its backgrounds are splendidly genuine: the ramshackle works are cramped and littered with the refuse of years; the village pub is attractive without being offensively picturesque; and when one of the workmen comes to London he has the temerity to ride in a real bus. The direction is very craftsmanlike, and the photography admirably achieves the drab tones of everyday without sacrifice of visual interest. Best of all, though, are its people. For once here is a producer who has troubled to look around and pick players of fresh talent instead of efficient stereotypes: the speaking parts are excellently cast, with actors who merge naturally with the non-professionals who fill out the backgrounds. Furnished with some good, racy lines and observed with a humour

that never even threatens to patronise, the workers play with an unaffected, highly enjoyable spontaneity that comes almost as a revelation; particularly notable are Geoffrey Keen, the incorrigible though not vicious grumbler; Hattie Jacques, as the young works manager; and Julien Mitchell and Bernard Miles himself as the men's representatives, two beautifully solid characterisations.

Intentionally a sketch rather than a document, *Chance of a Lifetime* does not penetrate deep into character and situation. It is none the less an entertaining comedy, an achievement of originality and promise. The last, perhaps, is the word to be stressed. It is strongly to be hoped that this film proves not only a success in itself, but also a forerunner, a pioneer.

Appendix 2

“If I look at the world in horror”: an interview with Lorenza Mazzetti

Transcript of an interview given by Lorenza Mazzetti in Porretta Terme (Bologna, Italy) on 16 August 2010. Translated by Marco Duse, revised by Frank Burke.

Taken from the Italian version as featured in *Cabiria*, n. 168, September 2011, pp. 4-10.

On August 3, 1944 the family of Robert Einstein, cousin to Nobel laureate Albert Einstein, was wiped out by the Schutzstaffel in their Villa in Rignano sull'Arno, in the Tuscan countryside. Robert's wife Cesarina "Nina" Mazzetti and their daughters Annamaria and Luce were murdered in cold blood by the same Nazi soldiers who had been occupying the top floor of the villa since the previous year. Robert, who had been warned of the impending danger, managed to escape the tragedy but committed suicide one year later on July 13, 1945.

Robert Einstein was a German intellectual, Jewish by family but not an observant Jew; Nina came from a Christian Protestant family. It is probable that the killings were an act of indirect revenge on Albert Einstein, guilty of betraying of the Nazi cause and of giving up his German nationality.

The slaughter of the Einstein family took place in front of the Einsteins' two nieces, the sixteen-year-old twins Lorenza and Paola, daughters of Nina's brother, the late Corrado Mazzetti (their mother, Olga Liberati, had died during childbirth).

In 1951, after a few months spent in France with Paola at Marguerite Duras's, Lorenza decided to leave her past behind and moved to London, where she would struggle attending the Slade School of Fine Art.

Lorenza Mazzetti: I went to London because I wanted to run away from Tuscany and from Florence, where the slaughter had happened. I needed to get away, and I hoped that, far from my uncle's house and from Tuscany, my nightmares would cease. That's because every night I used to see the Nazis in my sleep. So I thought: "Maybe, if I run to a different place, I will finally be able to sleep."

The villa in Tuscany had been burnt down, but the house in Florence was still there. There was a beautiful window, with a view over San Miniato, on Lungarno delle Grazie. It was wonderful, but its beauty brought back the memories of Tuscany and of what had happened there.

London, on the contrary, was awful in comparison with Florence, full of fog and black with smoke. To me, it was a radical change. It was like hell to me – and I must say that at the time hell became me.

When I saw the East End that no English director had ever filmed, made of streets and houses blackened by the fog, with bridges and cranes everywhere, and all those streets levelled by Hitler's bombs, and all those kids, swarming everywhere, like mosquitos... It all had such a strong impact on me, that it cleared away my memories of the Nazis. I had managed to remove myself from the tragedy. The strange thing was: I was supposed to have become "normal", but instead I kept on acting quite strange.

Until then, I had been under the tutelage of a distant relation, who took care of what I had received by inheritance: an estate, some villas... Two months after I had moved to London, I was told that my guardian had lost all his money in bad investments, and there was not a penny left for me! I was down and out! I was penniless, and could not pay the boarding house I was staying at. What can a young woman do when she has no money? She can be a waitress. A whore or a waitress – I chose to be a waitress.

At a certain point, endlessly washing cups, I realised I could not live like that, in such a narrow world. I would close myself off in my small bedroom: there was just a small bed and a device in

which you had to insert a coin in order to have gas. I did not have a room of my own. I did not know who I was.

Once in London, Lorenza found a city still shattered by the bombs. The English, though, seemed to have forgotten the spirit of solidarity that had kept them together during the war. The British society was once again divided into classes and a reactionary 'process of Restoration' was taking place.

L.M.: I had survived – we all had survived the war. The English had survived the German bombs, and also the Italians had survived the Germans and the bombs. Everyone could be said to have been a survivor.

A society which had just made it through war and mass slaughter could not just go back to laughing and joking. All those victims and the end of the war itself were meant to provide the survivors with a deeper meaning.

I believe this is what I had in common with Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson: we wanted to cast a different eye at the world. After the horrors of war, one couldn't simply restore life as it was.

In Italy, a revolution took place. Let's just think about *Bicycle Thieves*, De Sica, Rossellini... There was newfound love among people, solidarity towards the poor and the destitute – and the Italian cinema was showing all this. The same was happening in London: after the victory over Hitler, England was alive and had survived through solidarity. Gone were the sharp distinctions between upper and lower class. There was no point in restoring the supremacy of Cambridge and Oxford. And in fact it was from the graduates of Cambridge and Oxford that emerged the struggle against caste supremacy.

What characterised Lindsay Anderson's films on the workers at the market was the love he had for those people – love, and lack of snobbery. He wasn't analysing them, he wasn't studying the way they talk. He loved them. Documentaries can be made in many different ways: one can remain an observing eye that studies the poor as if they were ants, or one can love the people being filmed.

In October 1951 Lorenza Mazzetti decided to pursue her studies and to attend the Slade School of Fine Art, where she would study drawing and painting. She soon got acquainted with young and talented artists such as Michael Andrews (whom she cast as Gregor Samsa in her debut short film K) and Eduardo Paolozzi (who would star in Mazzetti's most famous film, Together, alongside Andrews).

L.M.: I introduced myself and said I wanted to attend the School. The secretary chased me away because the classes were scheduled to start the following day and I hadn't filled out the application forms, taken the required exam, or done anything to qualify for entrance – so it was absurd that I should expect to enrol. So I began to shout that I wanted to meet the school director. I thought the director would understand. So she raised her voice, I raised mine over hers, people gathered to see...

Then someone came, a very thin man with a wise demeanour.

He said: "Why all this noise?"

I said: "I'd like to meet the principal, I'd like to show him my drawings."

He said: "Can I take a look?"

I replied: "Of course, go ahead."

He looked at my drawings and said: "Well, they are interesting! Fine, starting tomorrow, you are a student here. Please, fill out this form."

I said. "Fine, but I'd like to speak to the principal."

"Well, I am the principal", he said.

“You are?”

“Yes, I am. Be here tomorrow at 9.30 sharp!”

There I met some extraordinary people. Everybody had a unique aspect about them. In particular, a young man called Michael Andrews. He was so delicate, fragile but sharp and interesting. But I wasn’t yet thinking of him as an actor.

It happened when I went walking through the corridors of the university and found one with many narrow doors, reading “Tennis club”, “Swimming club”, “Check club”, “Ping Pong club”... Many different clubs. And then I read “Film club”. I opened the door and I found a sparkling treasure. A camera, film stock, lights... Long story short, I stole the whole lot, bit by bit, along with Michael Andrews, this handsome young man.

Then I met a very pretty girl, to whom I said: “Will you act as Franz Kafka’s sister?”

“Who’s Kafka”, she said.

“Oh, don’t worry about it, he’s just a writer”.

“What will I have to do?”

“You will have to play the violin.”

“But I can’t play!”

“No matter, you’ll just pretend.”

A young man asked: “What can I do?”

“You can play the guest. You will sit in an armchair and smoke. I will cast the remaining actors and then we’ll meet.”

I walked down Portobello Road, and there I found a small storeroom packed with stuff – that will be Gregor Samsa’s place. Then I started looking for a man to play Gregor’s employer. I ran into a gentleman with a bowler hat. I asked: “Sir, I’d like you to act for me.”

“It sounds funny. Sure I will”, he said. “My name is Lowensberg”. He gave me his phone number.

I knocked at many doors till I met a lady who let me use her living room, with a carpet and a piano. I asked her if she would play the piano in the film, and she said yes, happily.

Once I cast all the actors, I had to convince Michael he was not supposed to play Shakespeare – he was not supposed to act and speak at all...

I have to say that, in order to make *K*, I signed requisitions without permission. When the School received the bills, the principal refused to pay for them. He realised I was the one who had signed all those invoices in order to have the film developed. He called for me and asked me if I would pay. He did not know I was broke. I said I could not pay, so he said: “Here we send people to prison”.

So I said: “Well then, send me to prison.” There was nothing more I could say.

Being a meritocratic Englishman, he said: “First let’s see the film. If it’s good, we will produce it.”

He asked Denis Forman, head of BFI, to attend the screening. Forman then asked me: “Would you like to make a film without going to prison?”

I said: “Sure!”

“Then come to the BFI tomorrow for tea at 5 pm, and bring me the subject for a film, not longer than a page.”

The one-page subject Lorenza submitted to the BFI was a short story entitled The Glass Marble, which would grow to become a major achievement, Together. The film was released in 1956 and was included in the first Free Cinema programme, alongside O Dreamland by Lindsay Anderson and Momma Don’t Allow by Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson. While Together is a meditation on incommunicability set among the East London ruins of the Docks, K is Mazzetti’s autobiographical (albeit Kafka-based) rendition of the figure of the outsider. Kafka’s Metamorphosis is used as a pre-text to deliver a highly personal story of alienation.

L.M.: I had heard about Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* at my uncle’s. I heard them discussing this story, written by an extraordinary writer, when Professor Paoli, who taught German literature at the

University of Florence, came to lunch from a villa nearby. He brought this book, which he had translated into Italian, saying it was extraordinary.

I heard the story when I was a child, and then when I bought the book and saw Kafka's face... In him I saw a fragility in relating to the world, a sense of being different: an outsider, one who can't enter into other peoples' worlds. I was like him: I felt exactly like Kafka who would never be able to enter the castle – I would never connect with others.

Kafka helped me out. In his eyes I saw terror, a feeling of estrangement from the world – and that was how I felt: a stranger. I was in a city I'd never seen before, and I felt I was a stranger to the world because I bore that tragedy within me. Although I had seemed to put it aside, that very act seemed to have a lingering effect on my subconscious... An absolute need to understand who I was and what had happened.

What I wanted to convey through *K* was: if I look at the world in horror, the world will look in horror at me. So, if I want to recount my horror for the world, I have to do the opposite: I have to recount the horror the world has for me. If I talk about the way Gregor's family look at Gregor in horror, I will achieve what Kafka achieved so mysteriously, so implicitly. Because the beauty of Kafka is that he doesn't come out and say it, but, in fact, Gregor is an outsider. Not a monster, though – quite the opposite. That is why I felt close to him, that is why Gregor could not be a monster – and that's why so many have erred in seeing him as a monster.

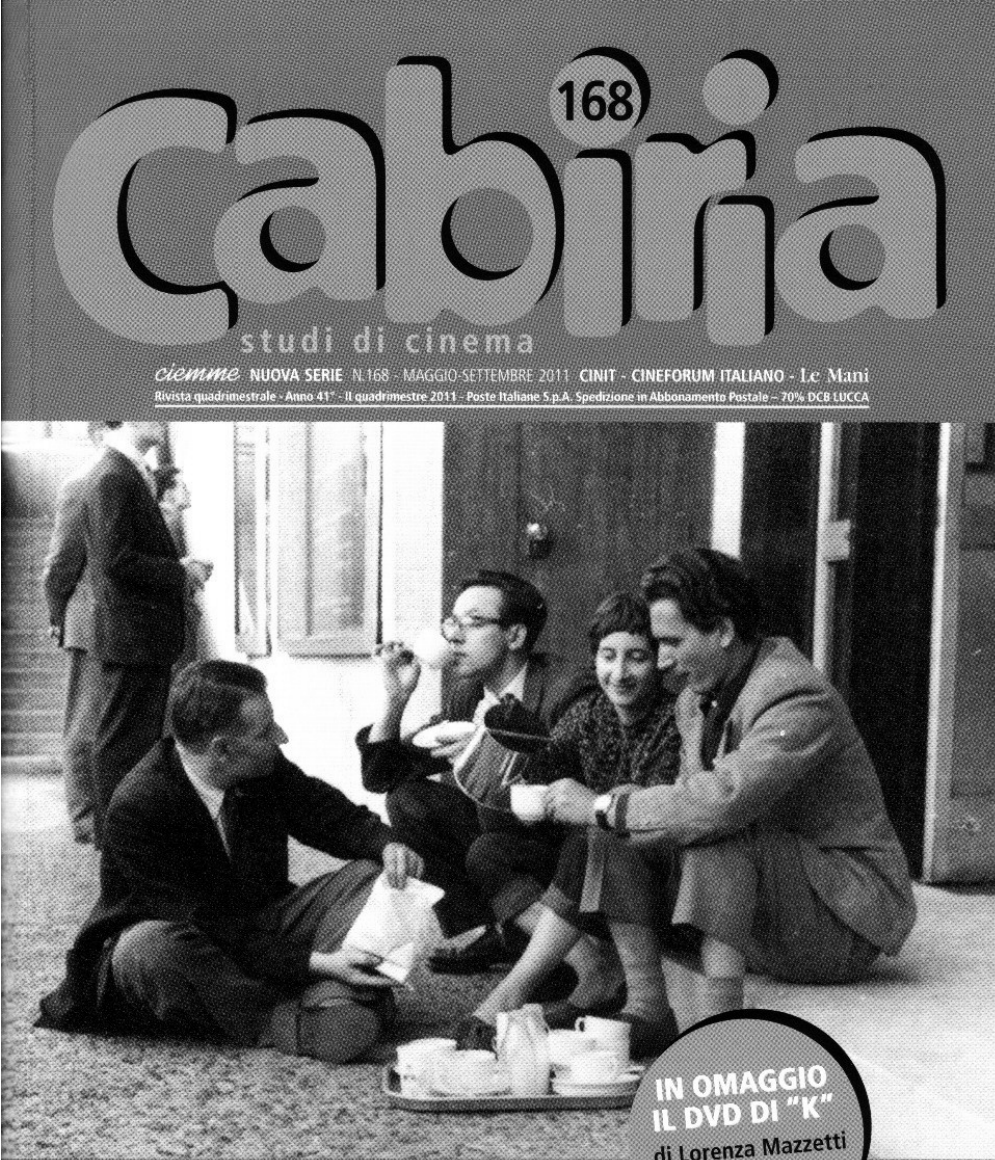
I once read that Kafka was asked permission to publish an illustrated edition of the *Metamorphosis*. He replied: "Absolutely not!" If they had made the cockroach visible, it would have lent credence to the point of view that he was horrible. It was important that Gregor's family be presented as horrified at someone who was beautiful, in fact angelic. Michael, indeed, looks like an angel.

At the time, I was not aware of all. At the time, I was the outsider, I was a poor lost girl. Suicidal, I'd say. On the brink of suicide.

Appendix 3

Extracts from *Cabiria*

Extracts taken from the Italian film journal *Cabiria* (v. 41 n. 168, September 2011), edited by Marco Duse and dedicated to Lorenza Mazzetti and to the analysis of *K*.



Cabiria 168
studi di cinema

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IN OMAGGIO
IL DVD DI "K"
di Lorenza Mazzetti

LABORATORIO
«Dopo sogni inquieti». Lorenza Mazzetti l'outsider del Free Cinema
Intervista a Lorenza Mazzetti
Duse: Metamorfosi di una *Metamorfosi*
Agresta: Daniele Paris e la musica del Free Cinema

ANALISI
Totò, Musco e la malafemmina
Ritratto di Vincenzo Lucci-Chiarissi

CINEFORUM
Io sono con te e Il ragazzo con la bicicletta

editoriale

K come Kafka

- Hai presente quando ti svegli la mattina e ti senti una specie di scarafaggio?
- Kafka!
- Sì, quando ti senti una specie di kafka...

Questo è un passaggio del dialogo scoppiettante tra la scatenata prostituta interpretata da Barbra Streisand e il compassato intellettuale George Segal in *Il gufo e la gattina* (1970). Mi è tornato alla mente dato che in questo fascicolo ci occupiamo proprio del rapporto tra Kafka e il cinema e in modo particolare de *La metamorfosi*. E la battuta si rivela poi non così peregrina visto che il grande scrittore praghese ha messo molto di sé, dei suoi incubi personali, delle sue ossessioni nei personaggi dei suoi capolavori.

Il cinema se ne è occupato a più riprese, sia con dei film direttamente tratti dalle sue opere, sia con quelli che possono essere definiti "kafkiani". Questi ultimi sono talmente tanti e variegati che non merita qui menzionarli. Dei primi, invece, è d'obbligo ricordare *Il processo* (1962) di Orson Welles; oppure *Delitti e segreti* (1991) di Steven Soderbergh, un film ingiustamente bistrattato, ispirato a *Il castello*; ma anche *Intervista* (1987) di Fellini dove il regista finge di essere impegnato a realizzare una trasposizione di *America* (e chissà cosa sarebbe stato se l'avesse fatto davvero...).

E poi ci sono i racconti, il più importante dei quali è appunto *La metamorfosi*. Anche qui i titoli non mancano: per esempio il divertente *Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life* (1995), di Peter Capaldi, premiato con l'Oscar per il miglior cortometraggio (lo si può vedere su YouTube). Ma il primo e più importante dei film ispirati a Kafka e alla *Metamorfosi* è *K* (1953) di Lorenza Mazzetti, l'italiana che fondò il Free Cinema. Si tratta di un'opera di eccezionale importanza storica, realizzata in modo rocambolesco (leggete oltre...) dalla poliedrica Lori, forte della sua ispirazione e di una sana sfrontataggine giovanile. Quel film, di cui si parla nelle Storie del cinema ma che ben pochi oggi possono dire di aver visto, vi è offerto in omaggio con «Cabiria», grazie alla disponibilità di Lorenza Mazzetti che ci ha dato i negativi da lei conservati e all'impegno del Cinit e dell'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia che lo hanno restaurato.

Così oggi voi avete un Dvd unico, prezioso, che vi permetterà di apprezzare fino in fondo l'omaggio che facciamo a colei che è stata protagonista di una stagione che ha rivoluzionato il modo di fare cinema e non solo.

Buona lettura e buona visione.
Marco Vanelli

«DOPO SOGNI INQUIETI»
LORENZA MAZZETTI, L'OUTSIDER
DEL FREE CINEMA

A CURA DI MARCO DUSE



Se guardo con orrore il mondo. Intervista a Lorenza Mazzetti

K in sequenze

Metamorfosi di una *Metamorfosi*

Daniele Paris, Lorenza Mazzetti e il Free Cinema

Dal *Diario londinese*

Se guardo con orrore il mondo

Intervista a Lorenza Mazzetti

a cura di Marco Duse

Anno 1944. Lorenza Mazzetti e la sorella gemella Paola, rimaste orfane, vivono a Rignano sull'Arno, nella villa dello zio Robert Einstein, cugino dello scienziato premio Nobel Albert. Robert Einstein è sposato con Cesarina "Nina" Mazzetti (sorella del defunto Corrado, padre delle gemelle): la coppia ha due figlie, Annamaria e Luce. Il 3 agosto, soldati tedeschi di stanza nelle vicinanze massacrano Nina e le due figlie, sotto gli occhi di Lorenza e di Paola. Robert Einstein, che era stato avvertito del pericolo imminente, si era allontanato da casa credendo, in quanto unico ebreo della famiglia, di essere il solo obiettivo della spedizione omicida. Sopraffatto dal dolore, Robert si suicida circa un anno dopo, il 13 luglio 1945. Lo sterminio apparentemente immotivato della famiglia Einstein fu, con ogni probabilità, concepito come atto di vendetta trasversale nei confronti di Albert Einstein, reo di aver abbandonato la Germania (e di aver rinunciato alla cittadinanza tedesca) trasferendosi negli Stati Uniti. All'inizio degli anni '50, Lorenza

Mazzetti si rifugia a Londra per allontanarsi dai luoghi e dai traumatici ricordi di questa tragedia.

Lorenza Mazzetti: Mi sono trasferita a Londra perché volevo fuggire dalla Toscana, fuggire da Firenze dove era successa la tragedia che aveva annientato la mia famiglia. Avevo bisogno di fuggire e speravo che, allontanandomi dalla Toscana e dalla villa dove si era compiuto il massacro, non avrei più avuto incubi la notte, dato che io tutte le notti sognavo i Nazisti. Dentro di me pensavo: forse fuggendo in un altro posto, potrò ricominciare a dormire serenamente!

In Toscana, la villa dove ero vissuta con gli zii era bruciata, ma avevamo ancora una casa a Firenze. Quella casa aveva un finestra bellissima che guardava San Miniato, sul Lungarno alle Grazie. La vista era mozzafiato, ma tutta quella bellezza acuiva il ricordo della campagna fiorentina e di quello che era avvenuto.

Invece Londra, che era orribile rispetto a Firenze, piena di nebbia, tutta fumo-

sa, tutta nera, ha significato per me un cambiamento totale. Londra per me era come l'inferno, e in quel periodo della mia vita l'inferno mi si addiceva. Quando ho visto l'East End, che nessuno degli Inglesi aveva mai fotografato, con le sue strade deserte, le case nere per la fog, i ponteggi, le gru, le spianate lasciate dalle bombe di Hitler, i bambini liberi di girare e andare ovunque, come moscerini... Tutto questo ha avuto su di me un impatto così forte da cancellare, momentaneamente, il ricordo dei Nazisti. Avevo ottenuto la rimozione di una tragedia.

Fino ad allora, ero stata sotto la tutela legale di un lontano parente che si occupava dei beni che lo zio aveva lasciato a me e a mia sorella Paola. Due mesi dopo il mio arrivo a Londra, mi giunse la notizia che il nostro tutore aveva perso tutto in affari, e non gli era rimasta più una lira per continuare a provvedere a noi: ero proprio sul lastrico!

Così, mi sono ritrovata all'improvviso senza soldi e senza la possibilità di

pagare la pensione dove alloggiavo. Ero una giovane ragazza senza una lira nella Londra di inizio anni '50: che scelte mi restavano? Potevo fare o la puttana o la cameriera: scelsi di fare la cameriera. Vivevo in una stanza piccolissima, nella quale c'era spazio solo per il letto e per una stufetta a gas che si azionava inserendo un penny. Non sentivo quella stanza come *mia*, non c'era spazio per le mie cose e ad un certo punto, stanca di lavare tazzine al bar, ho capito che non potevo vivere così, in quel mondo limitato nel quale non sapevo più chi ero...

Lorenza Mazzetti si ritrova a vivere in una Londra ancora ferita dai bombardamenti della seconda guerra mondiale. Memore del proverbiale spirito di solidarietà inglese, Lorenza si stupisce nello scoprire che, a pochi anni dal termine del conflitto, la società inglese si è nuovamente irrigidita ed ha ricominciato a pensarsi divisa per classi sociali. Questa constatazione, presto condivisa con Lindsay Anderson, Tony



Richardson, Karel Reisz ed altri artisti e pensatori dell'epoca, è alla base di quella riflessione sulla società che porterà alla nascita di movimenti culturali quali il Free Cinema e gli Angry Young Men.

Lorenza Mazzetti: Sapevo di essere una sopravvissuta e sapevo di non essere l'unica. Nessuno poteva non dirsi sopravvissuto, e la guerra ci aveva cambiati profondamente. Una società che usciva da una tale ecatombe non poteva più vivere a cuor leggero, ridere e scherzare. Il conflitto, i morti e la fine della guerra avevano dato alle esistenze di chi era rimasto un senso, un significato diverso. Credo che sia stato proprio questo ad unirmi, pochi anni dopo, a Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz e Tony Richardson: sentivamo tutti la necessità di gettare uno sguardo nuovo sulla realtà che ci circondava. La guerra aveva reso impossibile ripristinare lo *status quo*, anche in ambito culturale. Pensiamo all'Italia, dove stava avvenendo una vera rivoluzione: dopo la guerra, e come conseguenza del conflitto, erano nati *Ladri di biciclette*, il cinema di De Sica, di Rossellini... Raccontavano le difficoltà di ricominciare a vivere, ma anche l'amore che univa gli uomini, la solidarietà umana nei confronti degli umili e dei poveri...

A Londra, invece, sembrava fosse in atto una sorta di restaurazione: era da poco finita la guerra, e quello spirito di solidarietà che aveva abbattuto le divisioni fra le classi sociali (e che era stato raccontato nei documentari dell'epoca, specialmente in quelli girati da Humphrey Jennings) sembrava, dopo

pochi anni, già essersi perduto. Era passato poco tempo dalla vittoria su Hitler, ottenuta grazie ad una solidarietà totale tra gli Inglesi, e già si ricominciava a distinguere fra *upper class* e *lower class*, tra chi aveva studiato a Cambridge e Oxford e chi non aveva ricevuto un'educazione!

Proprio a partire da alcuni laureati di Cambridge e Oxford è iniziata la lotta a questa supremazia di casta. Per primo, Lindsay Anderson si è interessato alle classi lavoratrici, girando documentari che riprendevano gli operai e i lavoratori del mercato. Nel suo sguardo c'era l'amore che lui provava per queste persone, la sua totale mancanza di altezzosità. Il documentario può essere fatto in mille modi: può essere un occhio che osserva, che studia i poveri come fossero formiche, o invece uno sguardo che ama le persone che fotografa. Nei suoi lavori, Anderson non studia i soggetti che ritrae: li ama proprio!

Nell'ottobre del 1951, Lorenza Mazzetti si iscrive alla Slade School of Fine Art, dove studia disegno e pittura e dove si avvicina al mondo del cinema. Lì conosce i giovani artisti Michael Andrews (che Lorenza Mazzetti sceglierà come protagonista del suo film K) e Eduardo Paolozzi (che, assieme ad Andrews, interpreterà Together, film col quale Lorenza prenderà parte al primo programma del Free Cinema).

Lorenza Mazzetti: Mi sono presentata alla Slade School chiedendo di potermi iscrivere, perché volevo frequentare i corsi. Sono stata cacciata via dalla segretaria, che non voleva che entras-

si perché l'università cominciava il giorno dopo e io non avevo riempito tutti i moduli, non avevo fatto l'esame, non avevo le carte in regola per potermi iscrivere. Dal suo punto di vista, era totalmente assurdo che io pretendessi di entrare. Allora ho cominciato a urlare dicendo che volevo parlare col direttore, perché avevo alcuni disegni da mostrargli che secondo me mi avrebbero garantito l'ingresso alla Scuola; lei non ne voleva sapere ed ha alzato la voce; io ho alzato la voce più di lei, mentre un sacco di gente si affacciava per vedere cosa stesse succedendo. Ad un certo punto, è arrivato un uomo magrissimo, dal viso arguto: «Ma cosa c'è, cos'è questo chiasso?». Io gli rispondo: «Voglio parlare col direttore, voglio fargli vedere questi disegni che ho fatto». Lui mi convince a mostrarglieli, e poi dice: «Sono interessanti! Va bene, da domani lei è una nostra alunna. Riempia questo modulo». Io insisto: «Grazie, ma mi faccia comunque parlare col direttore per favore». E lui: «Ma, sono io il direttore! La aspetto alle nove e mezza domani mattina, puntualissima!».

Alla Slade ho incontrato tante persone straordinarie. Tutti avevano un aspetto particolare. Mi colpì soprattutto un giovane, Michael Andrews, che era così delicato, dall'aria fragile ma interessante...

Un giorno, esplorando l'edificio, mi sono imbattuta in un corridoio con tante porticine, su cui c'era scritto *Tennis Club*, *Swimming Club*, *Check Club*... Ma ciò che catturò la mia attenzione fu il *Film Club*. Apro quella porta e vedo quello che per me era un tesoro: mi sembrava addirittura che lucci-

casse. C'erano una macchina da presa, un sacco di "pizze", le luci... Insomma, per farla breve ho rubato tutto, pian piano, portando via un pezzo alla volta con l'aiuto di Michael Andrews.

Avevo già intenzione di girare un film tratto dalla *Metamorfosi* di Kafka e ora, finalmente, avevo anche i mezzi! Mi sono messa dunque alla ricerca degli attori. Ho incontrato una ragazza molto carina, alla quale ho detto: «Tu dovresti fare la sorella di Franz Kafka»¹. «E chi è Kafka?», risponde lei. «È uno scrittore, ma tu non ti devi preoccupare. Dovrai soltanto suonare il violino». Lei, nervosa nonostante le mie raccomandazioni, aggiunge: «Ma io non so suonare!». La tranquillizzo nuovamente: «Non importa, farai finta».

Individuo anche un altro giovane, al quale chiedo di interpretare uno degli ospiti: dovrà fumare, seduto su una poltrona.

Girando per Portobello Road trovo uno sgabuzzino pieno di roba: sarà la stanza in cui metterò Kafka, cioè Gregor Samsa. Poi cerco un uomo che interpreti il datore di lavoro, e per strada fermo un signore con la bombetta. Mi dice di chiamarsi Lowensberg e mi lascia il suo numero di telefono. Busso ancora a parecchie porte e incontro una signora che mi presta il suo salotto, con un pianoforte e un tappeto. Le chiedo se sa recitare e se può interpretare la madre di Gregor. Lei accetta volentieri.

Trovati tutti i protagonisti, decido che Michael Andrews è la persona giusta per il ruolo di Gregor. Devo però convincerlo che non deve recitare Shake-

speare, anzi che non deve recitare affatto, non deve nemmeno parlare!

Inizio a girare il film e, per sviluppare la pellicola, metto firme false sulle fatture del laboratorio fotografico: faccio finta che sia un lavoro autorizzato dalla Slade, mentre è un'iniziativa del tutto mia, personale. Quando è arrivato il conto all'università, il direttore si è rifiutato di pagarlo. Quando ha capito che la persona che aveva autorizzato tutte quelle spese a carico dell'università ero io, mi ha convocato e mi ha chiesto se ero in grado di pagare. Ovviamente non sapeva che io ero sul lastrico. Gli ho detto: «No, io non posso pagare». E lui: «Non so come funzioni in Italia, ma qui se non si può pagare si va in prigione». Allora io ho detto: «Bene, mi mandi in prigione!». Non sapevo come difendermi, non avevo altro da dire.

Lui però, da vero inglese meritocratico, mi diede un'ultima possibilità: «Prima vediamo il film che hai girato: se ci piace lo produciamo noi».

Chiamò alla proiezione Denis Forman, il direttore del British Film Institute, il quale, dopo aver visto *K*, mi chiese: «*Would you like to make a film without going to prison?*» (Vorrebbe fare un film senza andare in prigione?). Ho risposto: «Certamente!». E lui: «Allora domani, alle cinque venga a prendere il tè al BFI e porti un'idea su un foglio, non più lunga di una cartella».

L'idea che Lorenza presenta al British Film Institute è il nucleo del suo successivo progetto cinematografico intitolato Together, che uscirà nel 1956 e che farà parte del primo programma del Free Cinema, assieme a O Dream-

land di Lindsay Anderson e a Momma Don't Allow di Karel Reisz e Tony Richardson.

Se Together è un'appassionata meditazione sull'incomunicabilità, resa tramite il racconto della vita quotidiana di due sordomuti nell'East End londinese, è in K che si ritrovano le radici del pensiero e della poetica di Lorenza Mazzetti nonché i primi sviluppi della sua riflessione sulla figura (notoriamente autobiografica) dell'outsider, del diverso, di chi si sente o si ritrova ai margini della società. Come racconta lei stessa, Lorenza Mazzetti trova nella Metamorfosi di Franz Kafka il pre-testo ideale per raccontare la sua personissima storia di alienazione.

Lorenza Mazzetti: Avevo sentito parlare della *Metamorfosi* in casa di mio zio Robert. La novella e il suo autore erano argomento di discussione quando veniva in visita alla villa il professor Rodolfo Paoli, che era docente di Letteratura Tedesca all'Università di Firenze². Parlavano di questo libro come di un qualcosa di unico, di straordinario. Da bambina sentii raccontare questa storia e poi, quando da grande mi comprai il libro e vidi per la prima volta il viso di Kafka, vidi in lui una grande fragilità, la difficoltà di relazionarsi con il mondo, il suo sentirsi così diverso, il suo essere un *outsider* che non riesce ad entrare nel mondo degli altri. E io mi sentivo proprio come lui, mi sentivo come Kafka che non entrerà mai nel castello; sentivo che non avrei mai avuto un rapporto sereno con gli altri.

Mentre ero a Londra, Kafka mi ha aiutato molto, perché nei suoi occhi ritro-

vavo il terrore di sentirsi estraneo al mondo che lo circondava – e io mi sentivo decisamente estranea, lontana da tutto. Innanzitutto ero in una città nuova, mai vista; ma soprattutto portavo dentro di me la tragedia di Firenze. Forse l'avevo rimossa, ma rimaneva nel mio inconscio, e cercava strade insolite per tornare a galla... lo cercavo la normalità, ma continuavo ad essere molto strana nel modo in cui mi comportavo: avevo ancora bisogno di capire chi ero, cos'era successo.

Con *K* volevo raccontare questo: se io guardo con orrore il mondo, il mondo guarda con orrore me. Quindi, se io voglio raccontare al mondo il mio orrore per il mondo, devo raccontare l'orrore che il mondo ha per me. E se io racconto l'orrore che la famiglia prova nei confronti di Gregor, otterrò quello che Kafka ha ottenuto così misteriosamente, sfruttando il non-detto: sarò in

grado di ritrarre Gregor come un *outsider*. Non come un mostro però: semmai il contrario.

Sapevo bene, infatti, che Kafka aveva proibito di illustrare la *Metamorfosi* perché non voleva che si vedesse Gregor trasformato in un insetto. Secondo me, mostrare al mondo lo scarafaggio avrebbe dato ragione a chi aveva orrore di lui. Bisognava invece che la famiglia di Gregor provasse ribrezzo per qualcosa che era sì diverso, ma nel senso di *altro*, di bellissimo, di angelico addirittura. Ed è per questo che ho scelto Michael Andrews come protagonista: con quel suo viso dolce, Michael è come un angelo.

Di queste cose mi rendo conto soltanto oggi. Solo a distanza di molti anni mi è stato possibile razionalizzare: io in quel momento ero l'*outsider*, ero veramente una povera ragazzina persa, suicida direi. Sull'orlo del suicidio.

Intervista raccolta il 18 luglio 2010 a Porretta Terme (Bologna)

Note

1. Significativamente, nell'arco di questa intervista e di altre interviste rilasciate sull'argomento, Lorenza Mazzetti "confonde" lo scrittore Franz Kafka con il suo personaggio, Gregor Samsa. Dato che Lorenza dichiara spesso di identificarsi con Kafka, e data la "confusione" (ma sarebbe meglio dire l'identità) fra Kafka e Samsa, viene automatico, per una sorta di "proprietà transitiva della/delle identità", individuare nel Gregor Samsa protagonista di *K* un alter ego fortemente autobiografico della stessa Mazzetti. Si veda in proposito il saggio di Marco Duse qui di seguito.
2. A Rodolfo Paoli si deve la traduzione della *Metamorfosi* datata 1934 e pubblicata da Vallecchi.

K in sequenze

di Marco Duse

K, della durata di 27 minuti e 31 secondi nell'edizione che presentiamo ai lettori di «Cabiria», è articolato in undici sequenze, inclusi i titoli di testa e di coda.

1. (33")

Titoli di testa, nei quali *K* risulta presentato dalla Slade School of Fine Art ed ispirato («*suggested*», ma non *tratto*) dall'opera di Franz Kafka («*the Work*», non esclusivamente *La metamorfosi*).

2. (2'33")

Alcune riprese dall'alto ci introducono nel traffico cittadino londinese, nel quale è immerso il personaggio di Gregor Samsa, che dapprima siede sul tram e poi percorre una strada, attraversando il mercato. Significativamente, Gregor cammina tra la folla "contromano", controcorrente.

3. (2'29")

Gregor incontra il suo datore di lavoro nell'ufficio di questi. Chiedendo scusa per il ritardo, gli parla di sé, della situazione familiare e della sua professione senza, apparentemente, essere ascoltato.

4. (4'47")

La sequenza si apre con un cartello che recita: «Un mattino Gregor Samsa, svegliatosi dopo sogni inquieti, si ritrovò trasformato». La madre, la sorella, il padre e il datore di lavoro di Gregor (che li raggiunge di lì a poco) bussano alla porta della sua stanza. Gregor fatica ad alzarsi dal letto. I quattro entrano nella stanza e guardano Gregor inorriditi. Indietreggiando, chiudono la porta.

5. (5'33")

Gregor segue il suo datore di lavoro in giro per la città, continuando incessantemente a parlare. Lungo il percorso, Gregor inciampa e cade. Si verifica in questo punto un intervento di montaggio (analizzato a pagina 23) che ci mostra Gregor in pigiama e a quattro zampe sul pavimento di camera sua. Rialzatosi, Gregor segue il datore in un interno, forse la casa di quest'ultimo. Continuando a parlare inascoltato, gli mostra la merce come ad un cliente (tessuti, cappelli...).

6. (2'40")

Gregor, in camicia da notte nella sua stanza, dà definitivi segni di alienazione (va a rifugiarsi in cima ad una pila di oggetti, rimane in piedi schiacciato contro il muro...). La sorella gli porta del cibo mentre lui contempla la pioggia che batte sulla finestra.

7. (1'32")

Gregor, in una sequenza di probabile natura onirica, si trova sui tetti delle case circostanti, dove saltella e danza. Il montaggio lo accosta ad un suonatore di strada.

8. (13")

Una brevissima sequenza che vede di nuovo Gregor nella sua stanza, mentre sbircia da dietro una catasta di oggetti.

9. (3'07")

Gregor, nel corso di un'improbabile visita di lavoro ad un cantiere edile, viene sollevato da una gru e si libra nell'aria.

10. (3'57")

Gregor, ancora chiuso nella sua stanza, è attirato dalla musica proveniente dal salotto. Camminando a quattro zampe esce dalla sua camera, provoca l'interruzione del concertino e suscita l'orrore dei suoi familiari e degli ospiti. Suo padre si erge minaccioso e lo ricaccia nella sua stanza colpendolo con alcune mele. Gregor indietreggia e si rifugia fra gli oggetti accatastati nella sua stanza; il padre chiude per l'ultima volta la porta, lasciando Gregor solo e al buio.

11. (7')

Titoli di coda.

K

Regia e sceneggiatura: Lorenza Mazzetti; **soggetto:** ispirato all'Opera di Franz Kafka; **fotografia:** Ahmed Al Hadary; **musica:** Daniele Paris; **suono:** Jacopo Treves; **interpreti:** Michael Andrews (Gregory Samsa), Claude Rogers (il padre), Mary Rava (la madre), Hilary Morris (la sorella), Jacob Lowesberg (il datore di lavoro), Walter Bloor (un ospite); **produzione:** Lorenza Mazzetti per Slade School of Fine Art; **origine:** Gran Bretagna, 1953; **formato:** 1:1,33 (16mm.); **durata:** 27'31".

Metamorfosi di una *Metamorfosi*: Gregor Samsa da Franz Kafka a Lorenza Mazzetti

di Marco Duse

1.

Lorenza Mazzetti si avvicina alla *Metamorfosi* di Franz Kafka giovanissima. Già all'inizio degli anni '40, sente parlare del racconto dallo zio Robert Einstein e da un amico di famiglia, quel professor Rodolfo Paoli (docente di letteratura tedesca all'Università di Firenze) responsabile della traduzione italiana della *Metamorfosi* pubblicata nel 1934 dall'editore Vallecchi.

Gli anni che conducono alla realizzazione del mediometraggio *K* sono, per Lorenza Mazzetti, anni di grande dolore e di sradicamento: oltre agli sconvolgimenti causati dalla seconda guerra mondiale, Lorenza (assieme alla sorella Paola) assiste allo sterminio della famiglia Einstein¹ per mano nazista; si allontana dunque dall'Italia facendo tappa dapprima in Francia, dove alloggia presso l'abitazione parigina di Marguerite Duras², e poi a Londra.

L'arrivo nel cuore del Regno Unito è rocambolesco, ma la vita di Lorenza sembra stabilizzarsi quando riesce ad iscriversi, per diretto interessamento del direttore William Coldstream, alla Slade School of Fine Art. È qui, tra i fermenti culturali delle Belle Arti londinesi, che la Mazzetti decide di tornare a Kafka per raccontare la propria personalissima odissea spirituale, il senso di

spaesamento (non ancora placato) provato nel trasferirsi a Londra, il suo sentirsi distante dall'ordinarietà quotidiana per via dei traumi subiti (e tenuti nascosti ad amici e colleghi) nonché di un'emergente sensibilità estetica.

2.

L'approccio mazzettiano alla *Metamorfosi*, sebbene avvenga in un contesto poco più che amatoriale, è altamente sperimentale sia nell'uso delle tecniche di ripresa, montaggio e sonorizzazione, sia nell'adattamento del testo e delle tematiche kafkiane. *K* viene girato nel 1953 in 16mm e montato dalla stessa Mazzetti senza l'utilizzo di apparecchiature professionali. Generalmente, il film viene datato 1954 perché solo allora si tennero le prime proiezioni pubbliche, tra cui alcune particolarmente fortunate in Belgio, dove *K* fu selezionato da Ernest Lindgren per "illustrare" una serata dedicata al cinema d'essai e sperimentale intitolata, significativamente, *L'Avenir du Cinéma* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles, 2 aprile 1954).

K si distingue per l'arditezza di alcune inquadrature (allusive, altamente significanti); per l'inedito rapporto tra il sonoro e l'immagine (scollegati l'uno

dall'altra, viaggiano paralleli suggerendo un senso di dislocazione); per alcune scelte di montaggio non convenzionali; per l'uso avanguardistico delle musiche, firmate da Daniele Paris (talvolta ironiche e beffarde, altre volte drammaticamente atonali e concrete)³. Anche la rilettura del testo kafkiano è, a suo modo, rivoluzionaria. Innanzitutto perché *K* non prevede la trasformazione di Gregor Samsa in un insetto: in questa "*Metamorfosi* secondo Lorenza Mazzetti" non avviene nessuna metamorfosi, almeno non in senso stretto. Inoltre, l'autrice preleva dal testo soltanto quegli elementi che si confanno alle sue esigenze espressive, scarnifica il racconto kafkiano e amplifica la tematica dell'esclusione e dello sradicamento; attribuisce al film, e al personaggio di Gregor in particolare, forti caratteristiche autobiografiche; aggiunge infine momenti inediti, di natura evanescente e onirica, che creano un clima di sospensione e di definitivo straniamento. *La metamorfosi* serve a Lorenza Mazzetti da palinsesto sul quale sviluppare una personalissima visione dei temi kafkiani, una visione che tiene conto anche di altre opere dell'autore⁴ e che è imbevuta di una tendenza all'esistenzialismo probabilmente assorbita durante il soggiorno in Francia (dove la Mazzetti entrò in contatto, fra gli altri, con Sartre e Camus).

3.

Il Gregor kafkiano si risveglia, un mattino qualsiasi, completamente trasformato. In *K*, invece, vediamo un Gregor Samsa in preda a progressive crisi (di identità?) che gli rendono sempre più

difficile alzarsi dal letto. Dovrà passare qualche giorno prima che la sua alienazione divenga totale e che Gregor rimanga barricato nella sua stanza – prima cioè che i suoi tentativi di conciliazione con il mondo esterno falliscano definitivamente.

A ridosso della pubblicazione, è Kafka stesso a proibire illustrazioni del suo libro che rendano *visibile* la metamorfosi. Autorizza però eventuali disegni in cui appaiano la famiglia Samsa inorridita e la porta socchiusa della camera di Gregor. Per Kafka, dunque, il fulcro del racconto sono la famiglia e la sua reazione all'orrore della metamorfosi. Lorenza Mazzetti, invece, mostrandoci un Gregor *cambiato ma non metamorfizzato*, sposta l'asse proprio su Gregor, sul suo dolore, sul suo male di vivere.

La Mazzetti trasforma il materiale kafkiano in un radicale racconto di alienazione, anche a costo di tradire o di sovrainterpretare la poetica dell'autore. Privato del suo corpo animale, il Gregor Samsa di *K* non è un mostro a tutti gli effetti, ma solo agli occhi di coloro che così lo intendono: i familiari, il datore di lavoro, il mondo esterno e – sembrano suggerire alcuni sguardi in macchina del protagonista – anche il pubblico o parte di esso.

4.

Gli intenti di Lorenza Mazzetti sono chiari: all'inizio del film, cala il suo Gregor in un traffico urbano e umano soffocante – e alla fine lo chiude (per sempre?) in uno stanzino angusto (simile a quello in cui viveva, al tempo, la stessa Mazzetti), ingombro di oggetti usati e destinati all'oblio. La traietto-

ria che la Mazzetti ha disegnato per Gregor è inesorabile: dapprima sperimenta lo spaesamento e lo scollamento dalla realtà quotidiana; quindi, stanco dell'ossessiva spirale del ciclo casa-lavoro-casa, si risveglia "trasformato" perché desideroso di abbracciare qualcosa che trascenda l'ordinario⁵; infine, il Gregor di *K* non muore colpito dal padre, ma è condannato a vivere una vita che non lo comprende.

Le prime inquadrature di *K* collocano Gregor in un preciso *qui e ora*: le strade, i mezzi di trasporto, gli abiti delle comparse, i primi piani insistiti sui volti della gente comune, la ruvidezza quasi documentaristica delle riprese, l'assenza di interventi scenografici e fotografici stabiliscono che l'azione si svolge nella Londra dei primi anni '50, "as found". *K* dunque trasla il testo kafkiano e lo innesta nella realtà contemporanea alla regista, ponendosi così come un'attualizzazione della *Metamorfosi* in cui alcuni tratti salienti del personaggio di Gregor si rivelano utili per raccontare la crisi, precipuamente spirituale, del secondo dopoguerra. Ecco spiegato perché, innanzitutto, la metamorfosi di Gregor in *K* non è fisica ma metafisica: la Seconda guerra

mondiale, oltre ad aver popolato la terra di "mostri" che incarnavano e rendevano obsoleta qualsiasi fantasia (invalidi, mutilati, deformati dalle radiazioni), ha generato altri "mostri" meno appariscenti ma ancora più "diversi", vale a dire i reduci, i sopravvissuti. *K* indaga questa seconda diversità, la diversità di chi si ritrova mutato nello spirito ma non nel corpo, di chi ha subito una mutazione non manifesta. Nel dopoguerra, d'altro canto, inizia una ricostruzione (non solo urbana, ma anche civile e sociale) che tende a restaurare una rinnovata e rigida "banalità del quotidiano". È di fronte a questo scenario che la Mazzetti si appropria del pensiero esistenzialista: dinanzi a una società che vuole sovrascrivere la memoria, l'uomo è costretto a scegliere fra l'"essere e il nulla" – e chi sceglie di "essere", di esprimere se stesso affermando l'unicità della propria identità, è destinato a scontrarsi con una società ormai massificata che ingloba l'*average man* ma respinge l'"alieno".

5.

Nel 1956 Colin Wilson pubblica il suo saggio sulla figura dell'*outsider* nella



cultura occidentale⁶: Lorenza Mazzetti, che nel frattempo ha già girato *Together*, legge il libro e si trova perfettamente in sintonia con l'analisi di Wilson, rispecchiandosi nel complesso ritratto dell'*outsider* offerto dal giovane saggista. Da allora Lorenza Mazzetti cita sempre il lavoro di Wilson in relazione ai suoi film londinesi, sebbene questi siano stati concepiti e girati prima della pubblicazione di *The Outsider*.

Cosa c'è, in *The Outsider*, di sovrapponibile alle posizioni mazzettiane sull'alienazione? Innanzitutto, l'*outsider* è in perenne ricerca del proprio io, della propria (vera) identità⁷. In secondo luogo, è dotato di una sensibilità superiore, che gli permette di cogliere verità inafferrabili (ragione per cui l'*outsider* si esprime come artista, poeta e profeta – spesso inascoltato), ma che al contempo lo espone al dolore e al tormento interiori. Il destino dell'*outsider* è quello di contemplare e comprendere il mondo, restandone però escluso. Ecco perché, nonostante sia l'unico a rendersi conto del male che affligge la società a lui contemporanea, l'*outsider* finisce col «rinchiudersi nella sua stanza, come un ragno in un antro oscuro»⁸. La conformazione caotica della città moderna acuisce la tendenza all'isolamento. Parlando di Londra, la stessa Londra in cui viveva Lorenza Mazzetti, Wilson scrive: «la città in sé, la confusione creata dal traffico e dagli esseri umani in Regent Street, possono sopraffare una personalità debole e farla sentire insignificante»⁹. L'*outsider*, inoltre, si ritrova intrappolato in un circolo vizioso: qualora cercasse di inserirsi nel mondo e nella società, di

divenire cioè un *insider*, verrebbe riconosciuto come un *outsider* e nuovamente spinto fuori, ai margini¹⁰.

Alla Slade School, Lorenza Mazzetti conosce il giovane e talentuoso Michael Andrews, promettente pittore, al quale affida il ruolo di Gregor. Scegliendo un artista per interpretare la parte di un *outsider*, la Mazzetti postula il principio di incompatibilità tra l'artista e il mondo. L'inadeguatezza è connaturata all'artista ed è di carattere sia psicologico sia fisico. Lo dichiara la stessa Mazzetti parlando di Andrews (e, indirettamente, di sé): «Ha una gentilezza innata, mi domando come farà a vivere nel mondo reale senza spezzarsi in due come un fucello»¹¹.

K è dunque un saggio sull'*outsider* che precede e sintetizza quello di Wilson e che dimostra come Lorenza Mazzetti possedesse l'intuito della grande anticipatrice¹². Un intuito grazie al quale, pur rimanendo fuori dal dibattito sul realismo cinematografico in atto in quegli anni in Gran Bretagna, Lorenza Mazzetti sposa (a suo modo) già con *K* la causa di un cinema maggiormente concentrato sulle marginalità, in linea con le posizioni di Lindsay Anderson e Gavin Lambert, di riviste quali «Sequence» e «Sight and Sound» nonché del futuro manifesto del Free Cinema (che la Mazzetti firmerà nel 1956 assieme ad Anderson, Karel Reisz e Tony Richardson).

6.

Per raccontare la sua parabola sull'alienazione e sulla marginalità, Lorenza Mazzetti si appropria del linguaggio cinematografico e lo piega alle proprie

esigenze espressive, compiendo scelte stilistiche e tecniche ardite.

Le inquadrature, sia soggettive sia oggettive, sono spesso sbilencate, sghembe; una in particolare arriva, con fare quasi espressionista, a collocare Gregor lungo la diagonale dello schermo. Sono momenti che dichiarano il rapporto inclinato, obliquo, conflittuale, fra Gregor e la realtà – momenti che interrogano lo sguardo, sbilanciandolo e privandolo dei basilari punti di riferimento: un personaggio come Gregor non può essere contenuto o compreso nell'ordinarietà di un'inquadratura perfettamente bilanciata, non tanto perché Gregor sia un essere superiore e *altro*, quanto perché si comporta da elemento di disturbo, di squilibrio, la cui presenza crea disordine. D'altra parte, quand'è Gregor ad osservare il mondo assistiamo ad una simile distorsione del quadro: più avanza il processo di alienazione, meno la realtà gli appare dotata di senso. La sua soggettiva dunque vaga spesso senza meta in cerca di un punto di appoggio, di un punto di stabilità sempre negato. Sul finale del film, alla soggettiva di Gregor è riservato il compito di ristabilire i rapporti di potere: quando il padre chiude la porta per l'ultima volta, Gregor lo osserva dal basso, rispettando l'intuizione kafkiana per cui Gregor coglie, del padre, solo le scarpe (che gli paiono enormi). Gregor è dunque costretto a riconoscere, pur senza accettarla, l'imponenza dell'autorità. Questo schiacciamento della prospettiva corrisponde ad uno svilimento delle aspirazioni, ad un abbassamento degli orizzonti, ad un annullamento di sé.

Poco prima, la soggettiva si era fatta

altrettanto caratterizzante, sviluppando la trovata tutta mazzettiana dell'inquadratura delle mani di Gregor che scivolano sul tappeto del salotto. Dopo aver allargato gli orizzonti scopici del suo personaggio nelle sequenze sui tetti e sulla gru (che discuteremo a breve), Lorenza Mazzetti riduce drasticamente e drammaticamente tali orizzonti¹³: nel quadro, nello sguardo di Gregor, c'è spazio solo per le sue mani, mani che Gregor morde negli ultimi fotogrammi del film, come per appropriarsene (per fare sue almeno quelle: non gli è rimasto altro). Lo sguardo di Gregor viene ridotto a sole due angolature: quella dal basso verso l'alto, che enfatizza la piramide delle gerarchie dalla quale il personaggio è schiacciato, e quella *dal basso verso il bassissimo*, che frustra lo sguardo e lo costringe ad alimentarsi delle immagini che provengono da un micromondo ristrettissimo.

7.

Entrambi i lavori londinesi di Lorenza Mazzetti, *K* e *Together*, si distinguono per un uso anticonvenzionale del sonoro. Se in *Together* l'alterazione del suono è un atto "dovuto", essendo i protagonisti due sordomuti, in *K* il trattamento del parlato, delle musiche nonché dei silenzi è altamente significativa. Il tratto maggiormente sperimentale, in questo senso, consiste nell'uso del doppiaggio non sincrono. Non potendo registrare il suono in presa diretta, la Mazzetti incide la voce di Michael Andrews in fase di post-produzione. La regista riesce però a trasformare un limite tecnico in un'occasione di manipolazione del suono in senso

creativo. Le frasi pronunciate da Andrews si distinguono per il loro tono monocorde e la loro monotematicità: Gregor parla solo del proprio lavoro e della condizione finanziaria della famiglia – e il suo parlare resta inascoltato (è lui stesso a chiedere più volte: «Sir, do you hear me?»). Le frasi, completamente scollate dal labiale dell'attore, vengono pronunciate e ripetute senza sosta. Non c'è differenza, nella resa sonora di queste battute, fra interni ed esterni, fra primi piani e piani più larghi: le frasi di Gregor suonano tutte uguali perché sono tutte ugualmente ininfluenti. In più, un leggero riverbero sembra sollevarle dalla superficie dello schermo, dislocandole: le parole non appartengono né a Gregor (che le ripete meccanicamente, come non fossero genuinamente sue) né al racconto (sono trascurabili dal punto di vista della diegesi) né alla realtà che circonda i personaggi (sono parole che non “catturano” il reale). Il Gregor trasformato, infatti, smetterà di parlare, sbarazzandosi di un linguaggio inutile, alternando i silenzi interiori alle esplosioni musicali (di natura allucinatoria), al contrario del suo corrispettivo kafkiano che inizia il suo racconto monologante proprio a partire dalla sua metamorfosi.

8.

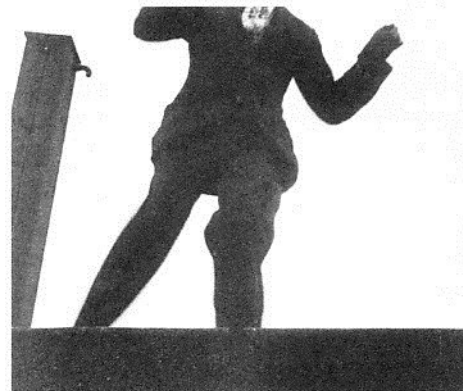
Il punto in cui le musiche di Daniele Paris abbandonano la disarmonia e si avvicinano, per quanto possibile, a ciò che può essere considerato un tema coincide con il momento di massimo distacco di Gregor dalla realtà. Se le dissonanze caratterizzavano la sfera del reale, la fuga da esso è accompa-

gnata da un motivo più regolare e ritmato, dotato di una parvenza melodica. Così come nel racconto kafkiano Gregor diviene massimamente felice quando prende coscienza del suo corpo d'insetto, lo accetta e ne sfrutta le potenzialità (si arrampica sui muri, cammina sul soffitto...), il momento di maggior euforia del Gregor mazzettiano coincide con l'affermazione della propria identità *altra*, resa attraverso le scene in cui Gregor saltella sui tetti e sui cornicioni delle case dell'East End londinese e si “sgancia” dalla realtà terrena lasciandosi sollevare da una gru. Mentre però il Samsa di Kafka può godere del suo corpo mostruoso almeno fino alla morte, al Gregor mazzettiano (in una svolta intimamente pessimista) non è consentito salire *realmente* sui tetti né librarsi nell'aria appeso ad una gru. Secondo la nostra interpretazione, infatti, la sequenza in questione rappresenta un'allucinazione, un sogno: è infatti girata leggermente in slow motion, per accentuarne il carattere di irrealtà e la continuità con il regime onirico. Le pesanti valigie da lavoro di Gregor si fanno qui leggerissime e diventano oggetti di scena per un equilibrismo di stampo circense. Il montaggio associa a Gregor l'immagine di un suonatore di strada, che porta sulle spalle tutti i propri strumenti: è un accostamento che suggerisce euforia e vitalità ma anche autosussistenza. Nel “suo” mondo, Gregor può bastare a se stesso, “suonare la propria musica”, trovare in sé la chiave per la sopravvivenza. Purtroppo, la danza sui tetti non è che una fuga fantastica, e il Gregor reale è destinato e costretto a rimanere inespresso.

La sequenza è preceduta da un momento altamente poetico (di quella poesia per immagini che piaceva a Humphrey Jennings e ad Anderson) in cui Gregor osserva e ascolta la pioggia dalle finestre della sua stanza. La macchina da presa, attraverso la soggettiva di Gregor, cerca le suggestioni della luce e del controluce, seziona il quadro con i disegni geometrici dell'intelaiatura, contempla le silhouette solitarie delle mani contro il vetro. Il sonoro è costituito dal solo rumore della pioggia battente. Le disarmonie del presente si sono placate: il suono della pioggia suggerisce l'esistenza di una dimensione *ulteriore*. Il picchiettare favorisce la transizione verso una musica più strutturata e più ritmata, porta con sé un ritmo naturale e vitale al quale Gregor si rivolge. Con la fantasia, abbiamo visto, Gregor visiterà i luoghi da cui proviene la pioggia, si spingerà verso il cielo, assumendo per pochi attimi quella natura angelica che è propria dell'*outsider* e che la Mazzetti ha individuato come caratteristica fondamentale del suo personaggio («Bisognava [...] che la famiglia di Gregor provasse ribrezzo per qualcosa che era sì diverso, ma nel senso di *altro*, di bellissimo, di angelico addirittura»).

9.

In chiusura, vogliamo discutere una scelta di montaggio insolita ma rivelatrice operata all'interno di una sequenza apparentemente ordinaria. Nelle scene in questione, Gregor segue il suo datore di lavoro lungo la strada. Continuando a parlargli e non venendo ascoltato, gli gira intorno¹⁴ e presto inciampa e cade. Un taglio netto ci



mostra per qualche secondo Gregor in camicia da notte, a quattro zampe nella sua stanza. Un successivo stacco ci riporta alla sequenza principale, che vede Gregor rialzarsi e raccogliere le sue cose.

L'inserzione giunge inattesa ma si rivela illuminante. Innanzitutto, la sua posizione (tra la caduta di Gregor e il suo rialzarsi) ci indica che il Gregor che si rimette in piedi *non è più lo stesso Gregor*. Qualcosa è intervenuto, nel momento stesso della caduta, e ha modificato la natura del personaggio: la sua metamorfosi, già accennata in precedenza, precipita definitivamente a partire da qui. Questa improvvisa ferita di montaggio va intesa come un lapsus, un flashforward, che dischiude un futuro ineluttabile e già presente.

Per spiegare cosa intendiamo, ci rifacciamo agli studi che Ervin Goffman stava sviluppando negli anni in cui venne girato *K* e che ritroviamo nel famoso saggio *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione* (una delle "bibbie" di quel periodo, assieme a *L'io diviso* di Ronald D. Laing). Mentre cammina per la strada col suo datore di lavoro, Gregor veste la maschera della propria quotidianità, quella che Goffman chia-

ma "facciata"¹⁵: il Gregor "diurno", lavoratore indefesso, commesso viaggiatore intraprendente, non è che una rappresentazione (intesa anche in senso teatrale). Con il suo abito, il cappello, le due valigie, l'incedere, l'atteggiamento, Gregor mette in scena un falso io che, seguendo il già citato Laing, sottostà «alle intenzioni o alle aspettative degli altri» (la famiglia, il datore di lavoro, la società) e che serve a «conservare una normalità esteriore della condotta»¹⁶. La caduta accidentale di Gregor interrompe la rappresentazione e il Gregor-attore esce momentaneamente dalla parte. L'impatto col suolo genera una breccia nella facciata e lascia intravedere il vero Gregor, il Gregor che sarà: alienato, diverso, scollato dal mondo, avvizzito, solo. La regressione di Gregor precipita a partire da qui, dal momento in cui la caduta rivela l'insostenibilità della maschera sociale fino ad allora adottata: Gregor si "risveglia trasformato" e inizia a cercare il suo vero io, salvo poi riscontrare che si tratta di un io per il quale non c'è spazio nel mondo circostante – e allora non gli resta che rifugiarsi nel microcosmo di una stanzetta ingombra e cominciare a sognare¹⁷.

Note

1. Si veda l'intervista a Lorenza Mazzetti pubblicata a p. 4, alla quale facciamo riferimento per tutte le dichiarazioni dell'artista prive di nota. Si vedano inoltre il catalogo della mostra di Lorenza Mazzetti *Album di famiglia. Diario di una bambina sotto il fascismo*, Associazione Culturale Voci della Terra, Roma 2010; e Raffaele Niri, *Una strage nazista contro Einstein*, «Il Venerdì di Repubblica», 4 febbraio 2011, pp. 97-98. Cfr. anche Lorenza Mazzetti *Il cielo cade*, Sellerio, Palermo 2007.
2. Per questo e per altri dettagli biografici rimandiamo a Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il Free Cinema inglese. Vita cinematografica di Lorenza Mazzetti*, Vicolo del Pavone, Piacenza 2002.

3. Si vedano l'articolo di Maria Francesca Agresta pubblicato di seguito e il volume della stessa Agresta: *Il suono dell'interiorità. Daniele Paris per il cinema di Lilliana Cavani, Luigi Di Gianni, Lorenza Mazzetti*, Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca 2010.
4. La K del titolo rimanda infatti a Kafka, ossia all'autore e alla sua poetica piuttosto che alla singola opera. Inoltre, la Mazzetti gira il suo film avendo ben presenti sia *Il castello* (dichiara infatti: «mi sentivo come Kafka che non entrerà mai nel castello; sentivo che non avrei mai avuto un rapporto sereno con gli altri») sia *Un medico condotto*, dal quale trarrà un film, séguito ideale di *K*, oggi perduto. Lorenza Mazzetti ricorda anche di aver lavorato a un ulteriore film tratto da Kafka, *Il colpo alla porta*, del quale però non vi è alcuna notizia.
5. Anche qui scorgiamo un forte tratto autobiografico. Lorenza Mazzetti dichiara infatti: «ad un certo punto, stanca di lavare tazzine al bar, ho capito che non potevo vivere così, in quel mondo limitato nel quale non sapevo più chi ero...».
6. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*, Phoenix, Londra 2001. La traduzione delle successive citazioni è nostra.
7. Cfr. *Idem*, pp. 147, 153.
8. *Idem*, p. 84.
9. *Idem*, p. 25. All'inizio di *K*, Gregor percorre le vie intasate dal "traffico umano" controcorrente, contromano.
10. Cfr. *Idem*, p. 105.
11. Lorenza Mazzetti, *Diari londinesi*, in *A proposito del Free Cinema Movement* (Catalogo della mostra di Lorenza Mazzetti), Associazione Culturale Voci della Terra, Roma 2010, p. 15.
12. Il tema dell'*outsider* permea anche l'opera letteraria di Lorenza Mazzetti. Non tanto il suo romanzo più famoso, *Il cielo cade* (1961), quanto quello successivo, il dolente e ribelle *Con rabbia* (1963), in cui Kafka viene citato a più riprese e la cui protagonista Penny (trasfigurazione autobiografica della Mazzetti) constata: «Tutto è pronto per la vita meno io» (Lorenza Mazzetti, *Con rabbia*, Garzanti, Milano 1969, pp. 181-182).
13. Anche la conformazione della camera di Gregor contribuisce al restringimento degli orizzonti: il suo stanzino si fa sempre più angusto e sempre più ingombro di oggetti, come se anche Gregor venisse considerato un rifiuto, un "avanzo", in perfetta consonanza con il personaggio kafkiano.
14. Qui i movimenti di Michael Andrews si fanno saltellanti e "scodinzolanti" come quelli di un cagnolino – che infatti viene inquadrato subito dopo, in un momento non troppo esplicito di montaggio associativo.
15. Cfr. Erving Goffman, *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1997, pp. 33-46.
16. Ronald D. Laing, *L'io diviso*, Einaudi, Torino 1997, pp. 97-98. Aggiunge Laing che, dopo aver sviluppato un falso io, «si è "se stessi" solo nell'immaginazione, o nei giochi, o di fronte a uno specchio» come succede a Gregor quando immagina di danzare sui tetti. Indubbiamente, in *K* si riscontrano echi di *Morte di un commesso viaggiatore* di Arthur Miller (1949), a proposito del cui protagonista, Willy Loman, l'autore scrisse: «Egli è il tipo d'uomo che si vede parlar da solo nella metropolitana, diretto a casa o all'ufficio; è vestito correttamente, e sembra perfettamente integrato col suo ambiente, tranne che, a differenza di altri, Willy Loman non riesce più a impedire che la forza della sua esperienza spacchi la superficiale socialità del suo comportamento. Di conseguenza egli opera su due piani che spesso si scontrano» (Arthur Miller, *Introduzione* in: *Id.*, *Teatro*, a cura di Bruno Fonzi, Einaudi, Torino 1978, p. 33).
17. La bibliografia riguardante *K* è ristrettissima. Oltre ai testi già citati, ricordiamo anche: *Metamorphosis [K]* (recensione), «The Film User», v. 8, n. 95, settembre 1954, p. 438; René Micha, *Kafka à la Scène et à l'Écran*, «La Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française», a. II, n. 23, 1 novembre 1954, pp. 916-917; Lorenza Mazzetti, *Come divenni scarafaggio*, «Cinema Nuovo», a. IV, n. 69, 25 ottobre 1955, p. 286; Bianca Sermonti, *Lorenza Mazzetti: Le donne non devono vergognarsi di vedere le cose diversamente dagli uomini*, «Rivista del Cinematografo», n. 8, agosto 1966, pp. 542-543.

Daniele Paris, Lorenza Mazzetti e il Free Cinema

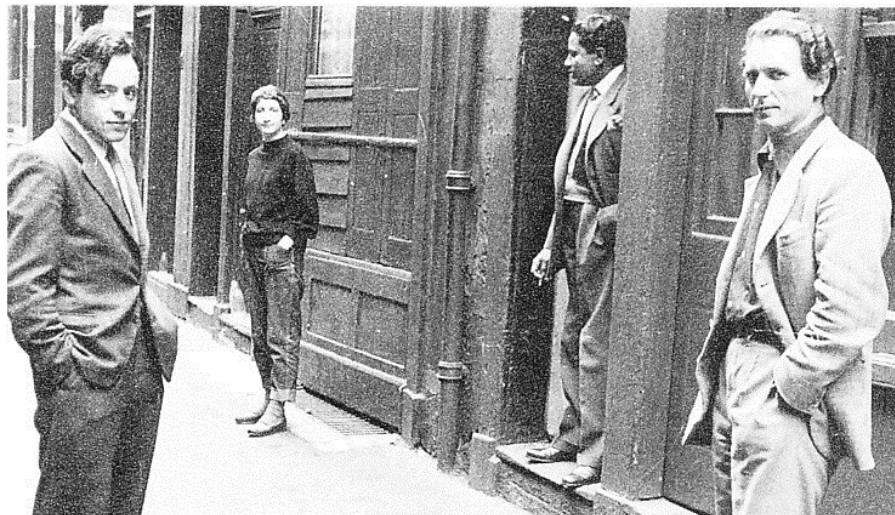
di Maria Francesca Agresta

Il restauro e la pubblicazione del film *K* di Lorenza Mazzetti ci riportano alle origini della carriera di una regista molto singolare che proprio con questo mediometraggio aveva iniziato la sua avventura nel cinema; un'avventura che l'avrebbe condotta a diventare protagonista, assieme ad altri registi, di quel rivoluzionario movimento cinematografico nato intorno alla metà degli anni Cinquanta in Inghilterra e denominato Free Cinema. Il restauro di *K* ci offre inoltre l'opportunità di riscoprire, o meglio di *scoprire*, il talento di Daniele Paris, un musicista importante ma poco conosciuto come compositore di musica per le immagini, il cui lavoro in quest'ambito è divenuto solo recentemente oggetto di analisi e studio¹.

Daniele Paris (1921-1989) era infatti un musicista esclusivamente noto come direttore d'orchestra e divulgatore della musica d'avanguardia in Italia negli anni Sessanta e Settanta, attività che lo hanno visto protagonista di eventi di grande rilievo all'interno delle Settimane Internazionali Nuova Musica di Palermo, di Nuova Consonanza a Roma e del Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea di Venezia.

Oltre all'ambito della musica d'avanguardia, che gli aveva dato una certa visibilità e notorietà, Daniele Paris aveva diretto con successo molte orchestre prestigiose ma, a un certo punto della sua carriera, aveva deciso di abbandonare questa attività per dedicarsi con molto impegno e dedizione alla didattica ed alla direzione del Conservatorio di Musica di Frosinone, sua città natale². La recente messa in luce del percorso di Paris come compositore di musica per film ha sicuramente completato il profilo biografico e artistico di questo singolare musicista, evidenziando intrecci interessanti ed inediti nei suoi vari modi di fare musica.

Per Daniele Paris fare musica ha significato prima di tutto sperimentare il nuovo. Nel suo rapporto con il cinema colpisce il dato che, rispetto ad alcuni compositori della sua generazione come Mario Nascimbene, Carlo Savina, Armando Trovajoli, Piero Piccioni, Carlo Rustichelli, Ennio Morricone, Paris ha scritto pochissimi commenti sonori (una trentina in un arco di tempo molto lungo che va dagli inizi degli anni Cinquanta fino a metà degli anni Settanta).



Lorenza Mazzetti e, ultimo a destra, Daniele Paris

Questa atipicità è dovuta al fatto che il musicista ha lavorato prevalentemente nell'ambito del cinema d'autore o del cinema sperimentale a destinazione culturale. Ci riferiamo con questo da una parte all'esperienza con Liliana Cavani per alcuni dei suoi film più noti, e dall'altra alla sua collaborazione con il Free Cinema, con Luigi Di Gianni per il documentario di interesse etnografico e con Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti per il documentario d'arte (i così detti *critofilm*). Questa atipicità è proprio ciò che ha permesso a Daniele Paris, grazie anche a una personalità connotata da curiosità, intelligenza e preparazione musicale, di scegliere i registi con cui lavorare sperimentando, in sintonia con essi, modalità compositive inedite. Lorenza Mazzetti è la prima regista che offre questa opportunità al giovane Paris che inizia, poco più che trentenne, la sua straordinaria avventura nel cinema. Il musicista conosce la cineasta a Roma, grazie alla mediazione di Franco Evangelisti, un importante com-

positore che avrebbe condiviso con Paris l'esaltante esperienza della fondazione di Nuova Consonanza³.

Daniele Paris manifesta subito curiosità ed interesse nei confronti di *K*, mediometraggio tratto dal racconto di Franz Kafka *La metamorfosi* che la giovane regista aveva appena finito di girare a Londra, la città dove si era trasferita per studiare presso la Slade School of Fine Art. La testimonianza orale della stessa Mazzetti ha permesso di ricostruire la nascita di un'amicizia importante fra lei ed il musicista e le modalità singolari della loro collaborazione artistica; una testimonianza preziosa in assenza di documentazione scritta e soprattutto in assenza della partitura di questo film, che non è stata reperita né nell'unico Archivio privato attualmente a disposizione⁴, né presso la Slade School of Fine Art di Londra che ha sostanzialmente prodotto il film.

Dal racconto della Mazzetti emerge che l'unica richiesta da lei rivolta al

musicista è stata quella dell'inserimento di una musica per violino nella scena finale del film; tale musica doveva infatti creare lo scenario sonoro nel salotto di casa Samsa, dove si tiene un concerto per violino e pianoforte eseguito dalla sorella e dalla madre di Gregor. Per il resto la Mazzetti si è rimessa completamente alle scelte estetiche operate dal musicista, a cominciare dall'individuazione delle scene da musicare. *K* è un film che dura complessivamente ventisette minuti, e il compositore ha deciso di musicarlo quasi totalmente, con l'eccezione di un paio di scene. Una soluzione felice considerando che la musica riesce ad "alleggerire" un soggetto molto impegnativo, e realizzato in maniera anticonvenzionale.

Lorenza Mazzetti era al suo primo esperimento cinematografico e ha utilizzato la macchina da presa in un modo molto libero, avvalendosi della collaborazione di Ahmed Al Hadary⁵, un operatore non professionista, suo amico e collega della Slade School. A tal proposito è interessante notare la presenza di inquadrature sbilenche e un grande uso della soggettiva, quest'ultima utilizzata in tutte quelle scene in cui il protagonista vede il mondo e gli altri dal suo "nuovo" punto di vista: quello di un essere che un po' alla volta perde i connotati umani, incominciando a strisciare per terra nel suo processo (più metafisico che reale) di "metamorfosi".

Paris ha compreso con grande finezza il ruolo che avrebbe dovuto avere la musica in *K*: ampliare il senso di un racconto basato sulla sostanziale incomunicabilità del protagonista. Dato

l'articolarsi a vuoto delle parole di Gregor, la musica agisce come il non detto ed il non esprimibile. Per potenziare questa idea di incomunicabilità Paris ha scelto un ensemble da camera con archi e legni (flauto, clarinetto ed oboe) con l'aggiunta del pianoforte e di alcune percussioni (vibrafono e timpani).

Per questo organico Paris non ha scritto dei temi, ma ha piuttosto cercato di sfruttare le risorse timbriche dei vari strumenti, ricercando sempre delle sonorità particolari: sonorità spesso dissonanti che rifuggono da qualsiasi fascinazione melodica, in sintonia con l'inquietudine interiore del protagonista e con la prospettiva distorta di tutta la storia. Questa musica potenzia spesso le immagini riprese in soggettiva, funzionando essa stessa da "soggettiva acustica".

Solo in un paio di scene la musica si concede al ruolo di commento sonoro o, come si dice nella vulgata della musica per film, al ruolo di musica extra-diegetica. Ci riferiamo alla scena in cui Gregor, con in mano delle grosse valigie, cammina sui tetti; a un certo punto il suo incedere si trasforma in un balletto tragicamente comico sottolineato da una musica dal ritmo molto incisivo, con entrate ironiche e beffarde degli strumenti a fiato ed in particolare dell'oboe. Una musica che, sconfinando nella scena successiva (dove un suonatore ambulante cammina per la città con i suoi strumenti da strada), fa virare il racconto verso una dimensione grottesca e surreale, alleggerendo la tensione prima del finale.

Un finale suggellato dalla scena già citata del concerto in casa Samsa: la

musica per violino e pianoforte, un valzer lento e triste, trasforma l'intrattenimento salottiero nella lugubre reazione dei presenti alla definitiva "metamorfosi" del protagonista violentemente rifiutato dalla sua famiglia e dalla società. La musica molto moderna e a tratti sperimentale composta per *K*, una musica in linea con certe vocazioni del musicista Paris che era in contatto, in quegli stessi anni, con le tendenze dell'avanguardia della scuola di Darmstadt, cattura l'interesse del critico e regista Lindsay Anderson. È proprio Anderson, che in quel momento stava lavorando alla sonorizzazione di *Together*, successivo film di Lorenza Mazzetti, a sfruttare l'autorevolezza di cui godeva presso il British Film Institute per incoraggiare la venuta di Daniele Paris a Londra.

Il musicista viene accolto in un clima di simpatia e di fiducia, e instaura soprattutto con Anderson un rapporto di grande sintonia umana e professionale che lo condurrà a diventare testimone e protagonista della nascita del Free Cinema.

La presenza di Daniele Paris all'interno di questo rivoluzionario movimento della cinematografia inglese presenta dei tratti interessanti e, allo stesso tempo, molto singolari. Paris è l'unico compositore il cui nome figura nei credits dei film del Free Cinema: molti film di questo movimento, infatti, sono documentari che utilizzano i suoni d'ambiente e la musica di repertorio, in pratica la "musica diegetica", come unica colonna sonora. Inoltre Paris è stato ricevuto dal British Film Institute con tutti gli onori del musicista importante, di calibro, ed ha avuto a sua

disposizione un'orchestra di prestigio (il Virtuoso Chamber Ensemble), secondo una testimonianza dello stesso compositore che parla con toni entusiastici della sua avventura oltre Manica. Scrive infatti alla moglie Maria:

Questa mattina sono stato a vedere il film di Lori [Lorenza Mazzetti] e l'ho trovato molto bello. Domani lo rivedrò e dopodomani lo misurerò e incomincerò a lavorare lunedì prossimo. [...] Qui non mi manca niente e conduco una vita abbastanza da Signore. Quando mi servono soldi basta che telefono al direttore del British Film [Institute] e subito sono servito. [...] Ho già visto i posti più belli e più importanti e sto facendo una grande esperienza che senza dubbio mi completerà⁶.

E ancora:

Ieri ho avuto la sincronizzazione per tutta la giornata. [...] La musica, secondo il parere di tutti (British Film [Institute], Orchestra, tecnici, ecc.) è solamente stupenda e meravigliosa. È forse la prima volta che io sono contento di quello che ho fatto. [...] Ti avevo detto che l'orchestra era una parte della Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, invece all'ultimo momento è venuto un altro complesso da camera famosissimo in Inghilterra e cioè il "Virtuoso Chamber Ensemble". [...] Grande la prova per la sincronizzazione (e questo per farti rilevare la differenza con le orchestre di Roma), bastava che io abbassassi il braccio che tutti erano pronti ad ascoltarmi con la massima educazione e disciplina e con il più amabile dei sorrisi⁷.

L'abbondanza di mezzi a disposizione di Paris è in apparente contrasto con la

tendenza sperimentale del Free Cinema, che ha fatto delle risorse tecniche ed umane limitate nei suoi film uno dei cardini della sua poetica anti-conformista.

Daniele Paris ha lavorato ancora una volta al fianco di Lorenza Mazzetti e poi per Lindsay Anderson, dimostrando di sapere accogliere le istanze di rinnovamento di questo movimento, nella codifica di una musica che "amplifica e commenta" le immagini, secondo il manifesto del Free Cinema. *Together* era la seconda fatica cinematografica di Lorenza Mazzetti: la regista, dopo *K*, si avventurava ancora in una storia singolare e "simbolica", raccontando l'estraneità ed il disagio di due sordomuti nell'East End di Londra. Siamo di nuovo di fronte ad una storia di solitudine e di emarginazione, così come era stato per *K*, ma la tecnica e gli intenti con cui viene ritratta la periferia londinese avvicinano *Together* al documentario: quella zona fluviale dell'East End diviene icona di una Londra che non aveva ancora sanato le ferite della guerra, e il mondo degradato della *lower class* (che emerge anche grazie alla cattura dei suoni reali e d'ambiente) incombe minaccioso sull'esistenza dei due sordomuti.

Paris è intervenuto con la sua musica utilizzando, come aveva fatto per *K*, un ensemble da camera costituito da archi e legni (flauti e clarinetti). La cifra stilistica della sua scrittura è decisamente atonale e dissonante ed affida con grande perizia alle risorse timbriche degli strumenti, in particolare del flauto, il compito di rispecchiare la balbuzie interiore dei due protagoni-

sti e la loro difficoltà a relazionarsi con il mondo esterno. La musica contrasta decisamente con il motivetto cantabile che identifica il deuteragonista della storia: quei bambini dispettosi e crudeli che si prendono gioco e perseguitano i due sordomuti, causando l'esito tragico della storia.

Quel motivetto cantabile fu suggerito a Daniele Paris proprio da Lindsay Anderson, secondo una preziosa testimonianza orale della Mazzetti da cui emerge da una parte quel clima di amicizia e goliardia che ha connotato la nascita del Free Cinema e dall'altra l'interesse del cineasta Anderson per la musica popolare. Saranno proprio alcune musiche di matrice popolare a costituire lo scenario sonoro di *Every Day Except Christmas*, un documentario importante sia nell'iter creativo di Lindsay Anderson e sia nella storia del Free Cinema.

Per questo film il lavoro di Daniele Paris, in pieno accordo con le esigenze estetiche di Anderson, è consistito nell'arrangiare alcuni materiali sonori di schietta matrice popolare; obiettivo del regista era infatti non solo descrivere il duro lavoro degli operai del mercato di Covent Garden, ma anche quello di identificare attraverso la musica il loro ambiente sociale e culturale: quella Londra degli anni Cinquanta in cui si mescolavano melodie e ritmi autoctoni a quelli importati dall'America, nel desiderio collettivo ed inconscio di superare gioiosamente gli orrori di una guerra che aveva lasciato segni indelebili nella memoria di tutti.

La musica di Paris ha sicuramente arricchito la struttura narrativa di

Every Day Except Christmas, potenziando il ritmo impresso dal montaggio alle immagini, rese da una suggestiva fotografia in bianco e nero, elementi che determinarono il successo del film a cui venne riconosciuto il Gran Premio Documentario alla Mostra di Venezia nel 1957.

Con questo lavoro si è conclusa l'esperienza di Daniele Paris nel Free Cinema, dove il musicista ha saputo dimostrare, all'inizio della sua attività nel campo della musica applicata, grandi doti umane e grande abilità nel sapere orientare la sua scrittura in stili assai diversi, assecondando le specificità estetiche e poetiche di due registi molto diversi come Lorenza Mazzetti e Lindsay Anderson.

Un'esperienza che avrebbe lasciato una traccia importante nel lavoro futuro che Paris avrebbe svolto nell'ambito

del cinema italiano, dove, da musicista intelligente ed eclettico qual era, seppe osare le sperimentazioni della musica d'avanguardia in molti film di carattere documentario, da quelli di documentazione antropologica di Luigi Di Gianni a quelli di interesse storico firmati da una giovane Liliana Cavani per i suoi esordi in Rai.

Tutto questo senza rinunciare a delle modalità di scrittura più convenzionali e tipiche della musica da film, lavorando sempre in sintonia con i registi per assecondare le loro esigenze estetiche. Una qualità rara che gli ha permesso di concludere la sua carriera proprio a fianco di Liliana Cavani, autrice di film complessi ed impegnati per la quale Paris ha composto musiche di grande valore per opere del calibro di *Milarepa*, *Il portiere di notte* e *Al di là del bene e del male*.



Note

1. Rimandiamo alla nostra monografia: Maria Francesca Agresta, *Il suono dell'interiorità. Daniele Paris per il cinema di Liliana Cavani, Luigi Di Gianni, Lorenza Mazzetti*, Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca 2010.
2. Per una biografia completa di Daniele Paris rimandiamo a: Maurizio Agamennone, (su) *Daniele Paris. Storie e memorie di un direttore d'orchestra*, Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca 2009.
3. Si tratta di quel gruppo che avrebbe dato avvio alla "nouvelle vague" della musica a Roma agli inizi degli anni Sessanta, attraverso la promozione e la diffusione della musica d'avanguardia.
4. Ci riferiamo all'archivio privato Mauro Paris, primo figlio del musicista. Si tratta di un archivio molto importante che non copre, però, con la sua documentazione, tutta l'attività di Daniele Paris nel cinema. Infatti, ad esclusione di alcune lettere molto interessanti che si riferiscono al suo soggiorno londinese ed ai suoi contatti con i registi del Free Cinema, non si sono trovate le partiture relative alle musiche di *K* e degli altri due film di Lorenza Mazzetti e Lindsay Anderson.
5. Nel film *Together* risulta accreditato come Hamed Hadari.
6. Lettera manoscritta non catalogata di Daniele Paris alla moglie Maria Maccarone, 3 agosto 1955 (archivio privato Mauro Paris). Citata in Maria Francesca Agresta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.
7. Lettera manoscritta non catalogata di Daniele Paris alla moglie Maria Maccarone, 7 settembre 1955 (archivio privato Mauro Paris). Citata in *Idem*, p. 13.

Dal *Diario londinese*

di Lorenza Mazzetti

Per gentile concessione dell'autrice, pubblichiamo alcune pagine dell'inedito Diario londinese, ancora in attesa di un editore. Gli estratti che proponiamo si riferiscono al periodo successivo alla realizzazione di K e vedono Lorenza Mazzetti impegnata nel montaggio e nella finalizzazione di Together (1955-56).

Sola e disperata, in una casetta alla periferia della città c'era un laboratorio dove l'angelo del British Film Institute [Denis Forman] mi aveva messo a montare il film [*Together*]. C'era una moviola e io mi ritrovavo in un mare di pellicola. Quando Denis Forman mi domandò come andava, gli risposi che annegavo nella pellicola. E allora lui mi disse: «Ho qui tre persone, che anche loro stanno facendo un film per me; uno di questi è un critico cinematografico, molto intelligente, ma molto burbero, però se gli piacerà quello che hai girato, ti aiuterà certamente a montarlo».

Apparve Lindsay Anderson, un giovane scorbutico, che mi guardò con aria diffidente dicendo che non era sicuro di potermi aiutare. Ma dopo aver visto ciò che avevo girato, mi disse: «Va bene, ti aiuto a montarlo». E così l'angelo mi salvò per una seconda volta, mandandomi un suo emissario, Lindsay, con il quale divenni tanto amica da meritare quasi tutte le sere di essere invitata a cena a casa sua insieme a Daniele Paris, il mio amico italiano che Lindsay aveva chiamato per fare la colonna sonora di *Together*. Sempre Daniele aveva già composto per me la musica del film su Kafka.

Il mio rapporto con Lindsay era molto divertente. Lui comandava sempre tutti quanti e io spesso rispondevo: «Sì, mio capitano». Finalmente avevo trovato qualcuno che mi voleva bene e mi trattava come un padre buono. Le cene da Lindsay consistevano soprattutto in polpette al curry con patate e verdure, whisky alla fine e canzoni suonate con la chitarra. Che bella voce aveva Lindsay: da colonnello si trasformava in un romantico innamorato. Daniele Paris, che in Italia era già un direttore d'orchestra e un compositore d'avanguardia, amava le canzoni folcloristiche cantate da Lindsay; ne scelse una e ne fece la colonna sonora di *Together*, una canzone per bambini. Sonorizzato il film con l'aiuto di John Fletcher e Leon Clore, Lindsay fece vedere *Together* a Karel Reisz e a Tony Richardson, e mi disse che a loro era piaciuto molto, e che erano d'accordo con l'idea di Lindsay di proiettare i loro film e il mio in un unico programma intitolato *Free Cinema*.

Ci riuniamo tutti per scrivere il Manifesto. Ognuno di noi ha un'idea e la butta sul tavolo. Karel e Tony puntano tutto sulla critica alla *upper class* di cui loro fanno parte con Lindsay e alla

necessità di rivolta. Lindsay punta tutto invece sulla solidarietà umana, quindi l'amore tra gli uomini, quella solidarietà che l'Inghilterra aveva trovato sotto le bombe di Hitler e che adesso aveva perso. Comunque un'accusa allo *status quo* dell'Inghilterra, una forma di critica che si trasforma in rabbia a nome di chi non ha voce perché gli è stata tolta. Io sono presa dall'idea del sentirsi estranei – *outsider* – come forma critica della società.

Ci riuniamo tutti a scrivere il manifesto, poi io torno a Charing Cross a fare la cameriera al ristorante *The Soup Kitchen*. Ho una fame terribile.

Sono confusa e agitata, e non riesco a ricordare quello che hanno chiesto i clienti. Porto una *pea soup* ad un signore che invece aveva ordinato una *tomato soup*. Lui protesta ed io esauستا, stanca, non mi reggo più in piedi, è notte fonda, gli dico che per favore deve accettare quello che gli do. Lui si secca e risponde che lui non accetta; io insisto e lo prego di accettare, e me ne vado a servire altri clienti; con la coda dell'occhio lo vedo alzarsi e andare alla cassa dal direttore, protestare, indicandomi con il dito minaccioso e risedersi al suo tavolo. Redarguita dal direttore gli porto il piatto da lui desiderato, mi avvicino al suo viso e al suo orecchio e gli dico: «Adesso mi licenzia, è contento?», e me ne vado. Lui mangia in silenzio. Si alza e se ne va; è un bel giovane, ovviamente ricco, il tipo che io detesto. Continuo a fare il mio lavoro e poi all'ora della chiusura prendo la mia giacchetta e la borsa ed esco. Fuori è notte e fa freddo. Una bella macchina davanti a me, con una persona che mi guarda. È lui, il giovane

della zuppa. Apre il finestrino, mi chiama e con un viso disperato mi supplica di perdonarlo.

Non me lo sarei mai aspettato. Accetto le sue scuse e mi commuovo. Il mostro è diventato umano. Mi chiede se può accompagnarmi a casa. Si occupa di pubblicità vuole farmi vedere i suoi lavori. È bello, ricco e gentile, ma il mio cuore è altrove.

Emozionati ci troviamo tutti e quattro il giorno stabilito al Film Theatre del British Film Institute a Waterloo alle ore 5 pm. I tre film [*Together*; *Momma Don't Allow*, di Karel Reisz e Tony Richardson; *O Dreamland*, di Lindsay Anderson] saranno proiettati uno dopo l'altro e Lindsay sarà nell'ingresso a vendere il manifesto.

Io, Tony e Karel siamo tutti molto agitati. Cosa succederà? Quello che ci impressiona è che c'è una coda lunga quasi un chilometro. Com'è possibile tutta questa gente?

La proiezione finisce con applausi. I giornali «Observer» e «Sunday Mirror» parlano di *white hope* per il cinema. Gavin Lambert scrive un sacco di cose belle su di noi, siamo tutti e quattro invitati in tv a parlare con un signore famosissimo che si degna di rivolgermi la parola. Dopo qualche giorno Lindsay viene al mio ristorante con la notizia che il mio film *Together* va a Cannes e io devo andare a Cannes a rappresentare l'Inghilterra. Io dico che da sola non ci vado perché io mi vergogno e poi non sono vestita decente; allora lui dice: «Non ti preoccupare, partiamo tutti insieme in macchina», una macchina aperta, come in un sogno e poi Lindsay mi dà una busta

piena di soldi dicendo: «Questi sono i soldi che abbiamo raccolto per te con la vendita al pubblico del manifesto del Free Cinema. Potrai comprarti un bel vestitino...».

Io accenno a rifiutare tutti questi soldi, ma lui mi guarda negli occhi e con il suo tipico tono mi dice: «Questo è un ordine!». E io ridendo dico: «Sì, mio capitano».

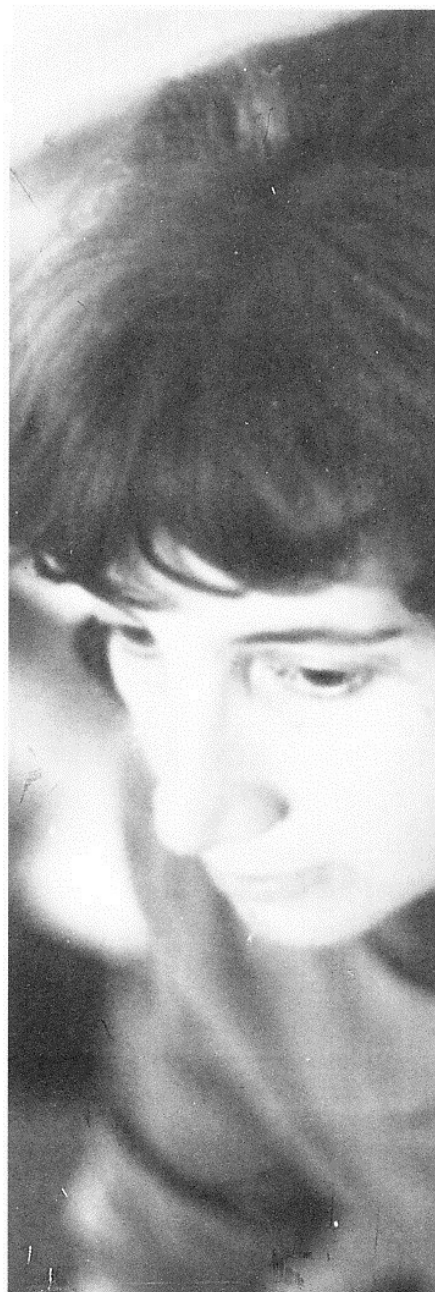
Una macchina aperta, con il vento in faccia come nei libri di Liala. Arriviamo a Cannes dove vedo Cesare Zavattini, l'artista e scrittore italiano di cui ho divorato i libri e che ammiro.

Cesare Zavattini mi dice: «Lorenza mi pare che il tuo film sia molto piaciuto, ma non dirlo a nessuno perché è un segreto».

L'Inghilterra avrà il "Palmares dell'avanguardia" con *Together*. Io e Lindsay siamo molto felici, ci abbracciamo. Poi loro partono per Londra e io decido di fare un salto a Firenze da Baby, la mia gemellina, che mi aspetta con una bambina appena nata.

Ancora non so che non tornerò mai più a Londra.

I miei occhi si riempiono di lacrime all'idea che la mia gemellina si è sposata. Ma come ha potuto abbandonare me, la sua sorella gemella che ha diviso con lei il banco di scuola, la vasca da bagno, il letto, le passeggiate, la bicicletta, i fiori, i pinoli, le pigne, i libri, i quaderni, i pensieri e le lacrime? Come può vivere senza di me, allegra e felice, mentre io senza il suo sorriso non respiro?



Appendix 4

The original synopsis of *D.P.* [*Displaced Person*]

Paper no. 6 attached to the minutes of the Experimental Production Committee's 16th meeting, London, 24 July 1958 (BFI Special Collections, BFI Archive, Box P/2 [Location O/25/5]: Experimental Film Fund).

D.P.

A proposal for a 16mm. b/w film submitted by Robert Vas

Synopsis

The film begins with the following lines from a poem by a fine Hungarian author in exile:

“...England, my last fortress on the rocks,
Oh give me back my dignity!”

Waterloo Station on an autumn morning. A train arrives. The last one who alights from it is a young man with a sharp-featured face. He is a Hungarian about 25 years old, a country boy. He wears a shabby coat and a cloth cap. Lonely, he walks along the platform, surrounded by the chaotic whirl of the station hall. A woman's choir sings a carol: they are collecting money for the Hungarian refugees. A smiling girl jingles her money box also before the young man, but he shows with a clumsy gesture that he hasn't got a penny.

He walks out into the street and faces the whole town. Which way should he go? He was never here before and can't speak English. The only thing which keeps him in London is a short address written on a piece of paper “G. T. Cox, 25, Love Lane.” He must go and find this place.

He sets out haphazardly. It is a typical "lovely morning", the town almost takes a bath in sunshine. He shows his address to an elderly lady, then to a cockney; they tell him which way to go. The young man nods ardently as if he understands what they say. He crosses the town. He is a bit awkward and amazed, but still admires and enjoys the top hats, the pigeons on his shoulder, the chain-breaker, the busy traffic, etc. He even has time to take a glance at the girls and almost laughs at the comical blinking of the "Sidney" figure, "who tells the future". He looks up the word future in the dictionary. A negro, another foreigner asks him the way showing him an address on paper, but the young man cannot help him.

It's about noon when he arrives at the house - 25 Love Lane, N. 17. He shows his address to a pensioner, who cuts the grass in his garden; but his name is not Cox, but Fitzpatrick. So the answer is just a pitying headshake. The young man is absolutely perplexed. Again he is on the street. He meets a policeman, who looks up his little atlas book, and from the list of streets the young man realises with something of a shock that there are six Love Lanes in London.

The policeman gives him a map - and so the young man's Odyssey goes on. But he is in a hurry now. He has no time to waste, he has to find the house. The weather becomes gloomy, the traffic chaotic and disquieting. At this part of the day London takes lunch. People are resting at the Trafalgar, or eating behind glass-walls of coffee bars. A long queue stands at the box-office of a non-stop strip-tease theatre. An old lady feeds her dog sausage with absorbed concentration. He sees a poster of the "Bon Voyage" travel bureau: "Welcome to Sun Valley". Two clowns are singing and dancing on the road: The Happy Wanderers. The young man hurries along the streets. His face looks drawn. A street-photographer jumps in front of him with a camera before the eyes. Rain begins to fall, streets become empty, umbrellas open, office girls take cover in doors of shops. The young man hurries along the rainy streets.

He arrives at a house in a suburban district: 25 Love Lane, S.E.18. He shows his address – but again the answer is a pitying handshake. The lady at the door gives him some money for the tube.

It's evening, already quite dark. The young man is almost running now. He has not eaten, he is tired, he does not even know where he will sleep. He would like to talk to someone. And now the town shows its ice-cold depressing and fearfully inhuman face. The rhythm of the traffic becomes almost frantic. Newsboys shout their sensational headlines inarticulately. The streets are crowded, people are enjoying themselves. Everything is harsh and indifferent; it's almost unbearable. He is afraid and he is tired. The sky-sign of Pepsi Cola flashes; "it peps you up!" Now the only thing which reminds him of his native country is a name, glancing towards him in neon letters; the name of BARTOK – Eva Bartok, of course.

A dark desolate street: Love Lane, E.C.2. Tired and absolutely indifferent the young man walks along the street. He rings the bell at the door of 25. The door opens, a narrow beam of light shines out into the dark street. He shows the address – then he stands at the door expectantly.

After a dissolve we see a crackling fresh, snow-white table cloth falling gently, almost floating onto the table. Somebody puts plates, a spoon, a fork and a knife on the table, and a napkin too in a napkin ring. There is a drink in the jug and crisp rolls in the bread basket. The young man sits down at the table. Now he is a human being again; and so his first day Odyssey ends.

The authors of this synopsis are two Hungarians who want to re-create something of their first fresh personal experiences of the arrival in London from a refugee camp. It will be a film novelette, a documentary with a personal theme. The main part of the film will be snapshots taken from life. The scenes involving the young man, by contrast, will be scripted in detail and directed – though here too we aim to achieve a very simple direct sort of effect.

We want to convey the thrilling interest as well as the cold indifference of a modern Babylon. In other words: to give an innocent's eye view of London. We want to show what the ordinary everyday incidents of the town mean to a "D.P." – who has never been here before and who from now on has to live here. We want to show that the homeless do not seek pity but a simple human understanding. These themes should emerge through the contrast of a single man seen against the background of the big city.

The theme will be expressed in the sound track too. This will consist of music – variations on a Hungarian folk song, played on a single flute – and street sounds. It is estimated that the film will run some 20-22 minutes. Black and white. 16mm. Shooting will be done in September-October.

Budget £415

Appendix 5

Lindsay Anderson's review of *A Taste of Honey*

Lindsay Anderson, "*A Taste of Honey*" (review)
Encore, v. 5 n. 2, July-August 1958, pp. 42-43

To talk as we do about popular theatre, about new working-class audiences, about plays that will interpret the common experiences of today – all this is one thing, and a good thing too. But how much better even, how much more exciting, to find such theatre suddenly here, suddenly sprung up under our feet! This was the first joyful thing about Theatre Workshop's performance of *A Taste of Honey*.

A work of complete, exhilarating originality, it has all the strength, and none of the weaknesses, of a pronounced, authentic local accent. Going north in Britain is always like a trip to another country, and *A Taste of Honey* is a real escape from the middlebrow, middle-class vacuum of the West End. It is real, contemporary poetry, in the sense that its world is both the one we know and read about every Sunday in the *News of The World* – and at the same time the world seen through the eyes and imagination of a courageous, sensitive and outspoken person.

Just how far Josephine, the plump, untidy schoolgirl who moves into a Salford attic with her flighty Mum, just how far she is Shelagh Delaney, we cannot, of course, say. But the play belongs to her just as unmistakably as *The Catcher in the Rye* belongs to Holden Caulfield. She learns about life the hard way. Her mother goes off again, this time to marry a peculiar, drunken upper-class boy with one eye and a weakness for older women. She spends Christmas with a charming Negro sailor, and ends up pregnant. She shares her room with a brisk, affectionate, vulnerable queer art student, who knows pretty well how to manage her and likes the idea of babies more than she does. Pretty well anything could have been made of this material, which is written in vivid, salty language and presented without regard for conventions of dramatic shape. In fact, so truthful is Miss Delaney, so buoyant in spirit, and so keenly alive to what is preposterous, vulgar and ruthless in human beings (as well as to what is generous, creative and warm), that she makes us forget about judging. We simply respond, as to the experience itself.

The world has always been a corrupt and disappointing place; but the total commercialisation, the dead-ending over-organisation of the big societies of today makes us prize more than ever the naïf, spontaneous, honest visions of youth. This is where this play compares interestingly with *The Catcher in the Rye*. Like Holden, Josephine is a sophisticated innocent. Precious little surprises her; but her reactions are pure and direct, her intuitions are acute, and her eye is very sharp. The little kid she watches, out in the yard, with hair so dirty it looks as though it's going to walk away – "He doesn't do anything, he just sits on the front doorstep. He never goes to school..." Holden would have noticed him; and he would have made the same right moral and social comment. Mothers like that shouldn't be allowed to have children. But Josephine is luckier than Holden in some ways: she is tougher, with a commonsense, Lancashire working-class resilience that will always pull her through. And this makes her different too from the middle-class angry young man, the egocentric rebel. Josephine is not a rebel; she is a revolutionary.

One of the most extraordinary things about this play is its lack of bitterness, its instinctive maturity. This quality was emphasised by Joan Littlewood's production, which seemed to me quite brilliant. Driving the play along at breakneck pace, stuffing it with wry and humorous invention, she made sentimentalism impossible. The abandoning of the fourth wall, the sudden patches of pure music hall, panto-style, were daring, but completely justified by their success. No soppy "identification" here; just the ludicrous, bitter-sweet truth, a shared story. And so, when the lyrical moments did come, we could credit them, knowing the reality from which they sprang.

Grateful (as actors always seem to be) for first-rate material and production, the company played together splendidly, with the complete rightness of tone that alone could bring off the most startling and difficult transitions. Frances Cuka, as Josephine, had exactly the right, adolescent fitfulness, the abrupt rages and tendernesses, the concealed longing for affection, and the inner, unshakeable optimism. As her mother, Avis Bunnage, managed most skilfully to combine the broadest, eye-on-the-gallery caricature, with straightforward, detailed naturalism. Surely this was real Brechtian playing. John Bay made a most exotic grotesque out of the seedy boy friend; and as the art student, Murray Melvin gave a performance that was a miracle of tact and sincerity. John Bury's set was bold, simple and effective as usual; and the jazz interludes by the Apex trio gave the whole evening a friendly, contemporary and hopeful air. The movement continues.

Appendix 6

The DVD

The enclosed DVD includes the restored version of Lorenza Mazzetti's *K* and the unreleased interview "*Se guardo con orrore il mondo*" / "*If I Look at the World in Horror*".

K was restored from 16mm negative and positive prints at Augustus Color, Rome. Restoration was funded by Cinit – Cineforum Italiano. Head of project: Marco Vanelli. Restoration supervisor: Marco Duse.

"*If I Look at the World in Horror*": *An Interview With Lorenza Mazzetti* was shot in Porretta Terme (Bologna, Italy) on 18 July 2010. Directed and edited by Marco Duse. English subtitles translated by Marco Duse, revised by Frank Burke.

Format: 4:3, b/w (*K*) and colour (interview).

Running time: 27' (*K*) + 20' (interview).

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Essential filmography

About "The White Bus" (dir. John Fletcher, 1968, 60 mins).

Alone with the Monsters (dir. Nazli Nour, 1958, 16 mins).

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Enginemen (dir. Michael Grigsby, 1959, 17 mins).

Every Day Except Christmas (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1957, 37 mins).

Fires Were Started (aka *I Was a Fireman*, dir. Humphrey Jennings, 1943, 80 mins).

First Days, The (dir. Humphrey Jennings – Harry Watt – Pat Jackson, 1939, 23 mins).

Food for a Blush (dir. Elizabeth Russell, 1959, 30 mins).

If... (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1968, 111 mins).

Italiane e l'amore, Le (ep. "L'educazione sessuale dei figli", dir. Lorenza Mazzetti, 1961, 110 mins).

K (dir. Lorenza Mazzetti, 1953, 27 mins).

Kind of Loving, A (dir. John Schlesinger, 1962, 112 mins).

Listen to Britain (dir. Humphrey Jennings – Stewart McAllister, 1942, 19 mins).

London Can Take It! (dir. Humphrey Jennings – Harry Watt, 1940, 9 mins).

Look Back in Anger (dir. Tony Richardson, 1959, 115 mins).

Lorenza Mazzetti: In the World of Silence (dir. Giulio Latini, 2001, 52 mins).

Loves of a Blonde [*Lásky jedné plavovlásky*] (dir. Roman Polanski, 1965, 90 mins).

March to Aldermaston (prod. Lindsay Anderson – Karel Reisz – Chris Menges et al., 1959, 33 mins).

Misteri di Roma, I (dir. Lorenza Mazzetti et al., 1963, 94 mins).

Momma Don't Allow (dir. Karel Reisz – Tony Richardson, 1956, 22 mins).

Nice Time (dir. Alain Tanner – Claude Goretta, 1957, 17 mins).

O Dreamland (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1953, 12 mins).

O Lucky Man! (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1973, 183 mins).

Omnibus: Heart of Britain (dir. Robert Vas, 1970,

On the Bowery (dir. Lionel Ragozin, US, 1955, 65 mins).

Red and Blue (dir. Tony Richardson, 1967,

Refuge England (dir. Robert Vas, 1959, 27 mins).

Ride of the Valkyrie (dir. Peter Brook, 1967, 15 mins).

Room at the Top (dir. Jack Clayton, 1958, 115 mins).

Saturday Night Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1961, 90 mins).

Se guardo con orrore il mondo. Intervista a Lorenza Mazzetti (dir. Marco Duse, 2011, 19 mins).

Shelagh Delaney's Salford (dir. Ken Russell, 1960, 15 mins).

Singing Street, The (dir. N. McIsaac – J.T.R. Ritchie – R. Townsend, 1952, 30 mins).

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Smith, Our Fiend (dir. Derek York and Walter Lassally, 1948, 15 mins).

Spare Time (dir. Humphrey Jennings, 1939, 15 mins).

Taste of Honey, A (dir. Tony Richardson, 1961, 117 mins).

Taste of Honey, A, dir. Tony Richardson

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (dir. Tony Richardson, 1962, 104 mins).

This Sporting Life (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1963, 134 mins).

Thursday's Children (dir. Lindsay Anderson – Guy Brenton, 1954, 21 mins).

Together (dir. Lorenza Mazzetti, 1956, 49 mins).

Vanishing Street, The (dir. Robert Vas, 1962, 19 mins).

Wakefield Express (dir. Lindsay Anderson, UK, 1952, 30 mins).

We Are the Lambeth Boys (dir. Karel Reisz, 1959, 49 mins).

White Bus, The (dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1967, 47 mins).

Words for Battle (dir. Humphrey Jennings, 1941, 7 mins).

End credits

This thesis would not even exist had it not been for Marco Vanelli, who first introduced me to Lorenza Mazzetti and handed me a copy of *K*.

Lorenza Mazzetti herself has played a very important role in the making of this thesis, providing memories and materials to draw upon.

My sincerest regards go to the staff at Cinit Cineforum Italiano and to its director Massimo Caminiti. Their love of cinema made the restoration of *K* possible and made the film available for everyone to watch, study and enjoy.

I wrote this thesis during my four years as a PhD student at Ca' Foscari University (2009–2012). I spent the first year in Venice, where I could not have done without my family and especially my fellow PhD students, who supported me and shared their knowledge. I spent most of the second year in Rome, where Federico and Nadia provided me with shelter, love and comfort (and heaps of delicious food), for which I will be eternally grateful. In Rome, I also had the pleasure of meeting some of the people working with or around Lorenza Mazzetti (Jolanda Casari, Ribes Sappa and Riki Vandelli), including her twin sister Paola. Everyone has been of great help. The busiest and most exciting time was the one I spent in London during my third year: there are many friends and Londoners I would like to thank – but most of all it is the city I will always be indebted to. On my fourth year, I came back to Venice, where I would not have wrapped up my thesis without the love

and support of Mario, without Angela's caring hospitality, and without my friends.

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If this thesis is readable and written in good English, I owe it to Jo-Ann Titmarsh and to John Bleasdale, who patiently proofread my pages, including this one. Thanks for wasting your time so generously. One day I'll pay you back. In drinks. If something sounds funny, blame it on my Australian friend Rebecca Mariani, with

whom I have shared precious moments (and rounds of spritz) in Venice and in London.

Somewhere out there, someone some years ago tried to auction an envelope containing a letter from Daniele Paris to Lorenza Mazzetti written in 1953. Enclosed with the letter was a handwritten music sheet of Paris' score to Mazzetti's *K*. That was the only surviving copy of an item that until then had been considered lost. No one won the auction (which was held at Bloomsbury, London) and the item went back to its original owner. It has since disappeared. Should anyone find a crumpled old envelope at a flea market containing an annotated composition entitled *Metamorfos* [sic], please contact me. It is worth a lot more than you can imagine.

Venice, 24 January 2013

Estratto per riassunto della tesi di dottorato

Studente: **MARCO DUSE** _____ matricola: **955567**

Dottorato: LINGUE, CULTURE E SOCIETA'

Ciclo: XXIV

Titolo della tesi: ***Loving the Aliens: Outsiders, Foreigners and Uprooted Characters in Short and Experimental British Films***

Abstract:

Questa tesi analizza sette film girati a Londra negli anni '50 da registi di provenienza straniera. L'italiana Lorenza Mazzetti, l'ungherese Robert Vas, l'egiziana Nazli Nour e l'inglese (ma dai natali indiani) Lindsay Anderson hanno elaborato, attraverso le loro opere, una visione personale dell'alterità.

K (1953) e *Together*, di Lorenza Mazzetti, sono due variazioni sul tema dell'*outsider*, realizzate con stile sperimentale e con toni esistenzialisti.

Alone With the Monsters (1958), di Nazli Nour, vede un'anziana emarginata venire giudicata e derisa da gente mostruosa – che vive, però, nella sua testa.

Refuge England (1959), di Robert Vas, ricostruisce l'arrivo di un rifugiato a Londra, il suo primo impatto con la città, la ricerca di un posto in cui stare, e i tentativi di decifrare la lingua e la società inglesi.

Di Lindsay Anderson, *O Dreamland* (1953) e *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957) definiscono l'impianto estetico e politico, che verrà poi sviluppato in *The White Bus* (1967), un racconto sperimentale, surreale e Brechtiano in cui una giovane ragazza si ritrova aliena in un contesto urbano al quale non appartiene.

This thesis studies seven films shot in London in the 1950s by foreign-born directors. The Italian Lorenza Mazzetti, the Hungarian Robert Vas, the Egyptian Nazli Nour and the English (but Indian-born) Lindsay Anderson developed, through these works, their personal view on 'otherness'.

Lorenza Mazzetti's *K* (1953) and *Together* (1956) are variations on the character of the outsider, directed with an experimental style and influenced by existentialism.

Alone With the Monsters (1958), by Nazli Nour, sees an outcast being judged and laughed at by monstrous people – that are all in her head.

Robert Vas' *Refuge England* (1959), narrates a refugee's first impact with the city of London, his search for a place to stay and his attempts to decipher the English language and society.

Lindsay Anderson's *O Dreamland* (1953) and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957) define Anderson's aesthetic and political stance, which will be fully developed in *The White Bus* (1967), an experimental, surreal and Brechtian tale in which a young Girl is alienated in an urban context to which she does not belong.

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