
Images of Modernity: Madness in the Films of Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson, Sam Peckinpah and Nicolas Roeg

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Abstract: *This article will examine the work of four filmmakers--Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson, Sam Peckinpah and Nicolas Roeg—whom have produced milestone works in the cinema that address one of the central concerns of modernity, the loss of individual identity and its replacement with a figurative disembodiment in an increasingly complex, technocratic, and specialized world. Preoccupation with the struggle for the soul and the resulting madness and the blurring and collapsing of boundaries, is what unites the four film makers. Three of the four--Reisz, Anderson and Roeg--originated in the British cinema, and thus automatically found themselves somewhat on the margins of the industry, yet the fourth, Peckinpah, is the sole American of the group. This article argues that his primary concerns in the cinema may place him more with his British counterparts than with other Hollywood filmmakers of the same era. The methodology chosen for this analysis firmly secures the films and their makers within their particular social and historical contexts. Rather than employ a particular theoretical orientation to the exclusion of all others, it seems more valuable to*

examine the films as products of movements in the arts and society at large that also affected literature, theater, social criticism, popular politics and even the mass media in general. Alongside this contextual approach, it is particularly important to analyze the formal structures of the films and how their images and motifs might actually fit within a broader iconography, one whose origins lies both in challenges to traditional filmmaking codes and also fits within the patterns of imagery associated with much of modern poetry, literature or other visual arts.

Key words: *Film, Psychology, Self, Madness*

Introduction

The four filmmakers under study here--Karel Reisz, Lindsay Anderson, Sam Peckinpah and Nicolas Roeg--have produced milestone works in the cinema that address one of the central concerns of modernity, the loss of individual identity and its replacement with a figurative disembodiment in an increasingly complex, technocratic, and specialized world. Their characters often inhabit a cinematic universe of blurred boundaries, in whose twilight shadows takes place a primal struggle for the soul, where "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Thus a madness of sorts results. Preoccupation with these notions, especially the blurring and collapsing of boundaries, is what unites the four. Born within a few years of each other, they are all of the same generation of filmmaking, that which came of age in the 1950s and 1960s. With the exception of Roeg, who alone suggests a means of overcoming this crisis, they each produced their most memorable films in the 1960s and early 1970s, a time when, save for the decade following the First World War, traditional individual and institutional values underwent their most severe challenge. Three of the four--Reisz, Anderson and Roeg--originated in the British cinema, and thus automatically found themselves somewhat on the margins of the

industry. The fact that they also challenged the assumptions of mainstream British cinema, indeed, placed them on the margins of the margins. Peckinpah, meanwhile, is the sole American of the group. Yet this article argues that his primary concerns in the cinema may place him more with his British counterparts than with other Hollywood filmmakers of the same era.

This study of their films incorporates formal analyses, matching them to the ideas that might be said to have inspired or generated the films under consideration. And indeed that is one of the most exciting aspects of looking at these particular filmmakers. Ideas influence them. Their films are not mere reflections of the world around them. Nor are they merely the products of film commerce. Quite the contrary. Anderson and Rogue, in particular, can be said to be outsiders, uncompromising individualists who challenge the basic conventions of the commercial cinema, while still managing to place their work through the commercial cinema's system of distribution and exhibition. Sam Peckinpah, meanwhile, was a creature of Hollywood, albeit one usually termed a rogue, a maverick. Not only was the content of his films controversial, but his conflicts with studios and producers were epic. And the result of those conflicts has meant a bonanza for distributors in the home entertainment business, with the debut of restored "director's cuts" of *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973). In turn, a critical reassessment of Peckinpah quickly ensued, most notably Michael Bliss's *Justified Lives*. (Bliss 1993)

Karel Reisz

Karel Reisz is likely the most difficult of the four to assess. His reputation really rests on just three films he directed, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *Morgan--A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981). A member of the group of filmmakers who loosely allied themselves under the banner of Free Cinema in the 1950s, Reisz joined Lindsay

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Anderson and Tony Richardson in redirecting British cinema away from its upper middle class orientation. Free Cinema's origins were in documentary filmmaking. But the movement's filmmakers soon moved to providing images of working class life in features, the so-called "kitchen sink" films. Richardson directed such classics of the era as *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *The Entertainer* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), while Reisz directed *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and produced Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life* (1963).

Aside from the uneven nature of Reisz's output in film, at least two other problems emerge. First, his most important films strongly rely on the literature from which they were adapted. The Hollywood maxim that "great literature" translates into bad movies, while pulp fiction and potboilers yield to freer readings of the source and make for "classic" works of cinema, certainly does not apply to Reisz. The two films under examination here illustrate this fact. Even today, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* retains its power and urgency as a film. Nevertheless, the images of Alan Sillitoe's novel persist behind its scenes. But for Albert Finney's breakthrough performance as Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Reisz's film lacks the sense of raw edged revolt that permeates Sillitoe's novel. *Morgan--A Suitable Case for Treatment*, meanwhile, owes its radical depiction of schizophrenia to its screenwriter, David Mercer, rather than Reisz. As Alexander Walker points out, Mercer first created *Morgan* as a play for television in 1962. Soon thereafter, he came under the influence of R. D. Laing. Laing's provocative ideas about "madness" then made their way into Mercer's script for Reisz's film. (A. Walker 1974, 310-11)

It is impossible even to begin to imagine Reisz as a film auteur, someone whose authorial stamp, film style and thematic pursuits remain as consistent as those of Anderson, Peckinpah and Roeg.

But few films capture the tug between traditional ways of life lived by ordinary people and the emergent modern world as effectively as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. And perhaps no other film depicts the response to contemporary society's repressive conformity more dazzlingly than *Morgan*. The fact that these films operate in a specifically British context aside, they speak to situations whose application is universal. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* arises from the world of the so-called "Angry Young Man" and "kitchen sink" realism of Britain during the 1950s and early 1960s. *Morgan* perfectly evokes the feeling of fantasy that became associated with Britain in general and "Swinging London" in particular during the mid-1960s. But both films speak more generally to fears of uniformity, rootlessness and alienation that at the time abounded--and still abounds--in Western Europe and America and has since spread globally. Ideas and feelings that heretofore had been primarily expressed by literary and cultural elites, in Eliot and Yeats and a host of others, for the first time began to be expressed by ordinary and working class voices. Albert Finney's Arthur Seaton became an icon for rebellious youth in Britain and the United States. A few years later, David Warner's *Morgan Delt* appealed to an even more disaffected youth culture, a culture that "was hankering for a hero who felt like themselves, a misfit whose self-contained view of the world didn't require one to endure the pains and frustrations of coming to terms with other (and generally older) people's reality, but instead offered a more seductive line of retreat--into oneself." (A. Walker 1974, 313)

Lindsay Anderson was much more important than Reisz to the development of Free Cinema. In fact, Anderson is one of the most central figures all postwar British cinema. From his writings in the influential film journal, *Sequence*, which he co-founded and co-edited, to articles in *Sight and Sound* and a variety of weekly periodicals, Anderson almost single-handedly altered the critical approach to cinema in Britain. Much like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer and other French critics of the 1950s who

gathered around André Bazin and Cahiers du cinéma, Anderson eventually moved into feature filmmaking. Before doing so, however, he made a series of documentaries. Perhaps the most important of these was *O Dreamland* (1953), an 11 minute film that Anderson termed a poem, something made purely as an expression of personal feelings. If so, it is a peculiar combination of sadness and anger. Sadness at the plight of an amusement park's patrons caught in the grind of trying to enjoy themselves. Anger at the unwillingness of those same people to look for alternatives and remain trapped in a cascade of neon attractions that spin around in constant motion. All the while, the park itself seems a direct manifestation of one of those places where the center cannot hold, where boundaries between the past and present are collapsing.

Lindsay Anderson

Anderson's first foray into feature filmmaking resulted in *This Sporting Life*, another in the series of portraits of working class life made by Woodfall, the production company began by Tony Richardson and the playwright, John Osborne. Yet Anderson's effort was unique. It challenged the traditional content of the British cinema in the same manner as Reisz and Richardson. But its form broke with the general pattern of Woodfall filmmaking, which was content to incorporate timid visual innovations. *This Sporting Life* was more closely akin to those films made by the erstwhile Cahiers critics, whose own films had come to be defined as the *nouvelle vague*, or New Wave. Anderson pictures his tragic hero, Frank Machin, caught between the lure of consumerism and fame, on the one hand, and his pursuit of a widow whose working class world is limited to a dark terrace house, on the other. The story and its setting is reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence. The visual style, however, aligns with that clarion call of the New Wave, Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959). The subjective world, its layered memories, overwhelms the outer landscape. Linear narrative gives way to a

complex web of flashbacks on to which the story pins the gigantic figure of Machin.

Along with *This Sporting Life* and *O Dreamland*, it is necessary to look at two of Anderson's features from the late 1960s and early 1970s. *If . . .* (1968) and *O Lucky Man!* (1973) examine the effect of conformity in contemporary social institutions. While the two films are not directly linked, at least not in the fashion of one being the sequel to the other, both films do revolve around Malcolm McDowell's portrayal of Mick Travis. In *If . . .* Travis revolts against the hypocrisy of public school life. In *O Lucky Man!* Mick literally takes to the road, a coffee salesman under assault from virtually every public institution of British life, from the corruption surrounding the powerful echelons of corporate-government authority to the failure and mush mindedness of hopeless do-gooders.

By 1982, what most critics saw as stirring satire turned into what many were eager to label bleak cynicism. Although not included in this study, *Britannia Hospital* also depicted the further adventures of Mick Travis. Not as successful as *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!*, its picture of Britain captured a harsh truth about a country in moral, social and political decline. So harsh was the picture that few people could bring themselves to accept the film. Typical of this attitude is John Walker:

With *Britannia Hospital*, [Anderson] allowed rant to replace wit, becoming not only increasingly didactic but less in control of his material. . . . [T]he raggedness of its construction, with its many subplots--a royal visit to the hospital, a clash between unions and management, a mad scientist emulating Frankenstein--and the dullness or hysteria of much of its acting, all combined to blunt its point. (J. Walker 1985, 60)

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These sorts of comments indicate that Britons undoubtedly were in a state of denial. Even those members of the educational and entertainment establishment who welcomed the replacement of Britain's imperial vision of itself with the realities of socialism largely rejected *Britannia Hospital*. It is one thing to oppose outdated visions of imperial glory and argue for the full implementation of the welfare state. It is another thing, however, to accept fully the fact that virtually every imperial vestige was indeed gone. After all, that means there is not quite so much to complain about. On top of this, moreover, the obvious failures of the British Labour Party in the 1970s had left socialism associated with a sort of neo-Orwellian grimness. After the ascendancy of the Conservative Party and Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the situation appeared even worse. When Anderson made *Britannia Hospital*, Britain seemed to be a country that just did not work. The movie itself rammed this point home. And for a country where people were dividing into ideological extremes, it was almost inevitable that neither the political Right nor the political Left would like what Anderson was showing them.

This state of affairs likely explains why Anderson has undergone such critical neglect in Britain. In America, it is another matter. The specific British context of Anderson's films and the fact that until the end of his career he refused to leave Britain and work in the United States has translated into his relative invisibility to American audiences and academics. Too, the strength of his satire certainly does not go down well with the middle class audiences most likely familiar with British film and television. Educated for the most part by PBS, audiences in the United States still associate British satire with light weight television programs such as Monty Python's *Flying Circus*, *Fawlty Towers*, *To the Manor Born*, *The Good Life* (known in the U.S. as *The Good Neighbors*) or, more recently, *Absolutely Fabulous*.

Thus neither academics nor popular critics have devoted much space to Anderson or his films. Even his work in the theater, which was much larger than his work in cinema, is usually mentioned only in passing—although an important exception is *At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company*, which includes a chapter by Anderson on “The Court Style.” (Anderson 1981, 143-48) And when there is an assessment, it is often negative. In his 1978 survey of British cinema, Roy Armes concludes that

. . . it is difficult not to feel that the independence of mind that has prevented him from making a “career” as a director has also undermined his gifts. As his films have grown less frequent they have become increasingly aggressive assertions of his views, and the essential narrative unity is often lost beneath the weight of pretensions and ill-digested allusion. (Armes 1978, 276)

Armes believes Anderson’s work in the 1970s was muddled, smothered by his point of view. Earlier, Ernest Betts suggested something similar when he wrote that the director “is that rare phenomenon in films, the wholly political animal . . . he is of one piece, of single vision, breathing revolutionary fire.” (Betts 1973, 303) More recently, in the 1990s, Thomas Elsaesser, an influential academic critic of the cinema, argued the merits of younger British filmmakers at Anderson’s expense, noting that during the 1980s “a more hard-bitten, controlled professionalism among directors eclipsed the volcanic and fizzling talents of a Ken Russell and a Lindsay Anderson from the previous decades.” (Elsaesser 1993, 52) Finally, in 1986, Charles Barr edited a special volume for the British Film Institute, celebrating the first 90 years of British cinema. (Barr 1986) While a few of the articles dealt with Anderson’s film criticism, his *Free Cinema* years and *This Sporting Life*, none of the 23 contributors managed to mention any of his later films. As for works devoted just to Anderson and his films, there are three of note, the early study by Elizabeth Sussex, Allison Graham’s volume on Anderson for *Twayne’s Filmmaker’s Series*, and Erik Hedling’s

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Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-maker, the latter of which is mainly descriptive, although it provides a somewhat updated, 1998, discussion of the criticism on the filmmaker. (Sussex 1969; Graham 1981; Hedling 1998) Too, there is Gavin Lambert's *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, which, alas, is mainly about Gavin Lambert. (Lambert 2000) Finally, there is the important publication of Anderson's diaries in 2005. (Anderson 2005)

Anderson is the most intentionally “modernist” of the four filmmakers under discussion (albeit Roeg is perhaps the most modernist in effect). The settings and stories of his films depict a disassembling of society. His heroes and heroines are caught in the crush of this change. An outsized and out of place Frank Machin in *This Sporting Life* ends up as a tragic representation of the earlier patrons of *O Dreamland*, consumed by consumerism. Mick Travis and *The Girl of If* rebel against the restraints of an institution, the public school, that has betrayed its better traditions, denied individualism and draped itself in the treacly, hypocritical banter of an age in which the computer was about to become king. The Mick Travis of *O Lucky Man!*, meanwhile, absorbs the “lessons” of *If* and strives to become part of this alienating society. His eventual failure and the harsh ramifications of such failure are expressed fully and succinctly at his trial and sentencing:

Mick (with all his heart): My Lord--I did my duty. I only wanted to be successful. I did my best.

Judge (the knell of doom): And you failed . . . (Anderson and Sherwin 1973, 152)

And indeed the price of failure is severe, especially if someone sees no other options. Almost falling into such despair, Mick manages to find his answer at film's end. He simply opts out, neatly summing up the only reply Anderson can find to such pressing times.

Sam Peckinpah

Sam Peckinpah also depicts out of place heroes. At least such is clearly the case in the two films of his selected here for examination, *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Straw Dogs* (1971). It is a commonplace of critiques of Peckinpah's films that the filmmaker's primary concern is the American West and the decline of that region's central mythic hero, the cowboy. And this approach is certainly valid, especially when Peckinpah's efforts in television are also made part of the equation, mostly screenplays for *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner* (the latter of which Peckinpah produced). Yet Peckinpah also worked outside of the Western. *The Getaway* (1972) updated *Bonnie and Clyde* for the 1970s, just five years after the latter film had debuted. *The Killer Elite* (1975) and *The Osterman Weekend* (1983) were acceptable, although ordinary thrillers of a sort. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974) is one of the most unique films to come out of Hollywood--cynical, filled with dread, the destruction of its "hero" recreates in microcosm the final shoot-out in *The Wild Bunch*. Among these later works, however, the only special film is *Straw Dogs*, a controversial vision of human behavior built on Robert Ardrey's notions of territoriality. In all his films, Peckinpah creates worlds where human nature undermines human aspirations, where violence undoes almost all prospects for belonging, love or the persistence of community.

Responding to the same forces of modernization that mark Anderson's films, Peckinpah's Western heroes are ne'er-do-wells or outlaws, literally people who reject the coming of the twentieth century and remain outside the law. *Ride the High Country* (1962) and its autumnal settings reinforce the last days of a pair of gunfighters. *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970) leaves its hero frozen in time and place, until the twentieth century overwhelms his desert refuge. *Junior Bonner* (1972) examines a rodeo cowboy

whose “traditional” values clash with his brother’s hyper-consumerism. *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* reveals a West where all the mythic values have broken down and where its heroes feed on each other. What Garner Simmons says of *The Wild Bunch*, “[it] details the last days of a small band of outlaws whose anachronistic code has no place in modern society,” (Simmons 1976, 82) could apply to any of these films. And not just these films. *The Wild Bunch* captures the essence of the anti-Western in general. Not only was the Western genre on its last legs, but the same forces that had helped “classic” Westerns proliferate in the late 1940s and 1950s were either gone or disappearing: the Hollywood studio system, postwar American affluence and self-confidence as well as increasingly outmoded notions regarding the triumph of individualism and male heroism. In their place arose the anti-hero and suspicion of American institutions. The final scene of *The Wild Bunch*, a bloody nihilistic descent into madness, illustrates the reigning values of the times and also operates as a cry of rage against the decimation of loyalty, honor and other “traditional” values. Understood metaphorically, the conclusion of *The Wild Bunch* is similar to the end of *If . . .* . . . Where do “heroes” go in the world of the late twentieth century? How do people reconcile the stabilizing myths and values of an earlier age with a present whose nature is fragmentary, physically as well as psychologically?

At the core of *Straw Dogs*, meanwhile, is the issue of self-identity and place. Its hero, David Sumner, is out of place at home in the United States. Seeking refuge in England, he finds himself even more out of place there. Like *The Wild Bunch*, and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* later, *Straw Dogs* culminates in another of Peckinpah’s visions of violent collapse. David and his English-born wife, Amy, have already revealed themselves to be in a process of emotional regression. By film’s end, emotional regression is matched to psychic regression, as the forces of primal human behavior and madness are loosed.

The setting for *Straw Dogs* is a small English village, a place as far as possible from Peckinpah's usual Western arena of conflict. The fact that it is also the site of one of the filmmaker's bloodiest confrontations and most disturbing misogynistic scenes, the rape of Amy, emphasizes Peckinpah's belief in the universality of the dangers of human nature, its violence and tendencies towards self-destruction. Neither Cable Hogue's desert refuge nor David Sumner's English hideaway save them from assaults, intrusions or personal catastrophe. That *Straw Dogs* takes place in the contemporary world, moreover, emphasizes just how far the forces of modern alienation have gone in intensifying violence. The potential for conflict, in fact, is now greater than in the dusk of the mythical past Peckinpah usually selects for his films. Violence in *Straw Dogs* is more pointed, graphic and psychologically oriented than in any other film made by the director. It is not an irony then that *Straw Dogs* places its action within the confines that icon of gentle pastoral tranquility, the English farmhouse. Within the most placid settings lurks the primal, the mad forces that threaten social order and the individual's sense of security. Whereas Reisz's characters are sympathetic or charmingly daffy and Anderson's are somewhat sad, although bullishly independent, Peckinpah's protagonists, whether in America or England, are ultimately self-defeating expressions of nihilism.

Otherwise, including Peckinpah among a group of British filmmakers may seem unusual at first glance. While Peckinpah is often identified with genre films, the aforementioned Westerns in particular, Anderson, Roeg, and even Reisz are associated with non-genre efforts. Yet things are more complicated than they appear. Peckinpah is involved in a complex reworking of the Western genre. The 1960s shift to the anti-Western, of course, not only included Peckinpah's work, but his films certainly mark every significant stage of its evolution. From *Ride the High Country* to *The Wild Bunch*, Peckinpah's motivation seems to change from representing

an elegiac mood to a bitter regret, a literal bottoming out turning to anger for the loss of times past. In the course of this development, he also makes formal and narrative alterations, ones that more directly represent the chaotic madness he finds filling the void of lost traditions. The most obvious of these in *The Wild Bunch* is the implementation of a subjective point of view that almost becomes narcissistic. The gaze of the bunch turns on itself both during death and afterwards, as the outside world and its premonitions of the twentieth century are closed out.

Another similarity between Anderson and Peckinpah is their common tendency to lead their protagonists to opt out of society. The bunch has the opportunity to escape their deaths, but instead they embrace it and in so doing decline to participate in a world where they no longer have a sense of place. David Sumner simply walks away from his wife at the end of *Straw Dogs*, seeming to prefer to marry himself to an idiot instead of facing domesticity one more time. This preference for isolation and removal rather than participation and involvement is drawn in particularly striking images.

The bunch, almost laughing at their own fate, is superimposed over *The Wild Bunch*'s final seconds. David, meanwhile, disappears into a darkness which might be seen as devouring his very soul. In both instances, Peckinpah, it must be emphasized, is not engaging in some fascistic glorification of death. Rather he pictures humanity enveloped in blackness. And the culprit is an alienating modern world. Neither is Peckinpah someone filled with a fascist-like rejection of the modern in art. Indeed, Peckinpah, like other modernists, endorses the aesthetic manipulation of the modern. His portrayals of the bunch as well as David and Amy Sumner turn on formal depictions of the fragmented self, lost identity and the exploding of cinematic models of the Western and the thriller/melodrama.

Nicolas Roeg

After a fashion, Nicolas Roeg's films do seem to offer an answer to the psychological and physical agony expressed in films such as *If . . .*, *O Lucky Man!*, *Straw Dogs* and *The Wild Bunch*. It may not be the answer demanded by political ideologues, but it does provide his characters with a sense of self and stability. *Performance* (1970) is the exception to this rule, and notably it is the one film produced during the same time as Reisz's, Anderson's and Peckinpah's heyday during the 1960s. Otherwise, the remaining works of Roeg under discussion here stand somewhat apart. *Walkabout* (1971), *Don't Look Now* (1973) and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), works of the 1970s, seem to despair at their end. Yet they also suggest a clear path for rejuvenation of the spirit, something lost in Morgan's madhouse, frustrated in *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!* and completely out of the realm of possibility in *The Wild Bunch* and *Straw Dogs*. Films of the 1980s, meanwhile, offer up primarily heroines who achieve an impressive sense of balance in their lives in works such as *Insignificance* (1985), *Castaway* (1986), *Track 29* (1987) and *The Witches* (1990). Roeg's best film of the 1990s, *Two Deaths* (1996), while depicting a bloody suicidal waltz at its end, nonetheless offers up a sense of psychic liberation.

While the final emotional and psychological states of characters are significantly different from those of Anderson, Peckinpah and Reisz, so, too is Roeg's manipulation of cinematic forms. As alluded to above, he is perhaps the most "modernist" in terms of his formal structures. His works not only disassemble characters and narrative, but they also explode the codes of cinema. That is, Roeg's films fundamentally are interested in collapsing boundaries, especially the boundaries abutting the "rules" normally applied to editing, framing, lighting, staging and set design as well as what is best termed in his films as the "interrupted moment," the break in the flow of narrative, the moment when the viewer must connect to

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icons lifted out of the storyline of the film. These interrupted moments include pauses on lines of poetry, paintings, musical notations. They separate from the storyline yet integrate into the larger image of the films. This style, which Lindsay Anderson condemned as “romantic neo-baroque,” is much more than an elaborate pastiche. (Anderson 1991, 55) Rather it constructs metaphors for contemporary states of being, worlds of consciousness aspired towards and often achieved in Roeg’s films, albeit often at a fearsome price.

The odd effect of these portrayals, however, is that they never leave the viewer alienated from the characters. Abstract as they may be, there is none of the coldness usually associated with modernistic portrayals of character. Such certainly is the case with Reisz’s Morgan, Peckinpah’s bunch or David Sumner and Anderson’s Mick Travis. And of course even these filmmakers and their character’s pale in comparison with coldness exhibited by Hitchcock’s modernist characterizations or, especially, the master of cold abstraction, Stanley Kubrick. But with Roeg viewers are left with an emotional investment in Performance’s Chas, Walkabout’s Girl or Aborigine, The Man Who Fell to Earth’s Newton, Track 29’s Linda or Two Death’s Ana Puscasu. Roeg disrupts and fragments the narrative, leaving the viewer in the position of an active participant in the making of the film, that is, the creation of meaning. Yet all the while audiences are left with a thread to follow, to connect with core of the story, through a sense of sharing the journeys of Roeg’s characters. Thus I think Robert P. Kolker, in his Brechtian-based analysis, is both wrong and correct when he writes “fundamentally our stock in the characters is small, and our interest concerned in puzzling out events and following clues which refuse to lead us very far. We are distanced from the films, forced to ask questions . . . questions that the text will not answer for us.” (Kolker 1977, 83) It is instead precisely the quality of distancing the narrative while making the characters more intimate that makes

Roeg rather unique, and it is perhaps the reason Anderson was led to label his work romantic neo-baroque.

The importance of the notion of journey in Roeg's films is the subject of what is likely the most in-depth study to date of Roeg's films, John Izod's Jungian-based analysis, which, admittedly, sometimes borders on the self-indulgent. (Izod 1992) It is not necessary to accept the validity of Jung in order to see the value in Izod's discussion of the films. For Izod, Roeg's characters are all working their way through a maze, both narrative and psychological. In the process, a sort of madness confirms itself but also leads Roeg's protagonists towards a maturation or individuation. In particular, Izod introduces an interesting comparison to the maze in Andrew Marvell's "The Garden." Accordingly, he finds "[t]he people whom Marvell mocks have 'amazed' themselves. As he [Marvell] uses it the word still bears the vestiges of an even earlier sense in which to be in a maze was to be deluded, even to be in a delirium." (Izod 1992, 16-17) Individuation, meanwhile, according to Roeg and Izod is the sense of self awareness, balancing a more enlightened consciousness of individual uniqueness--not to be mistaken with individualism--with an understanding of what each person shares with everyone else, their commonality. (Izod 1992, 6-7) And it is this commonality of human experience that allows viewers to tie in to the characters and their stories. Despite the oddity of their circumstances or the bizarre arena in which their lives play out, Roeg's heroes and heroines strike the chords of individuation in most people viewing them.

At the other extreme, of course, lies the disruption of narrative and, more importantly, the aforementioned blurring of boundaries. It is here that Kolker is right, although such a narrative scheme also lies within the domain of Izod's explanation. For Roeg's films both pose questions and leave his characters initially, at least, adrift in a maze of apparent emotional confusion. And the form of this apparent dilemma is the collapse of sexual boundaries in *Performance*, where Chas is led to a scene of sexual amorphousness,

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where flesh is undefined and gender a neutral concept. In *Walkabout* the artificial boundaries between cultures comes under assault, as the Aboriginal culture of 30,000 years penetrates the brutality of the late twentieth century. Meanwhile, the film also brings out the value of common human experiences, fears and loves. While some critics may argue that this particular theme is now dated or even somewhat paternalistic and naive, the poetic fashion in which Roeg films his story keeps *Walkabout* relevant to contemporary audiences. Indeed, as it is constructed, *Walkabout* might be seen as one single extended “interrupted moment.”

Otherwise, Roeg makes alienation central in his experiment with the horror film, *Don't Look Now*. Architecture, physical and psychological, works to make its hero, John Baxter, a victim of his own fears. The same artificial construction of life--and denial of self--next manifests itself in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Here alienation is made literal, as the extraterrestrial, Newton, suffers from overexposure to modern life and, by film's end, is made all too human. In both these films the boundaries between the rational and irrational dissolve, as each state leads back towards the other. Whereas rigid adherence to rational designs dooms John Baxter and leads him to madness and death, Newton's irrational faith in people eventually betrays and destroys him.

The next two films examined, *Castaway* and *Track 29*, narrow their interests considerably. Both films focus on detailed studies of love, marriage and self-identity. (An interesting, albeit brief, alternative analysis of *Track 29* is available in Neil Sinyard's *The Films of Nicolas Roeg*, which sees the film's main issues owing more to its screenwriter, Dennis Potter, and his preoccupation with images of childhood.) (Sinyard 1991, 117-22) The boundaries here also are much more focused. In particular, both *Castaway* and *Track 29* depict people who live behind masks, elaborate images whose strength derives from the civilizations in which they grow. Thus the

drabness of small town Texas quite literally colors Track 29's Linda. And the power of a dreary London environment leads Castaway's Gerald Kingsland toward self deception and the recreation of the world he left behind. Only Lucy Irvine fully succeeds at attaining a certain maturation, what Izod would describe as individuation, removing her mask and dissecting her own image of herself.

Two of Roeg's efforts, *The Witches* and *Two Deaths*, took differing paths to the screen. Perhaps the most popular of Roeg's efforts, *The Witches* ostensibly is a children's film. In it, however, the lines between childhood and adult psychology are obliterated. As is the case with all good children's literature, especially with fairy tales, much more is at stake than a simple child's adventure tale. Beneath the surface of *The Witches* is a story that details how to come to terms with death. Much the same is also the case in *Two Deaths*, except that what is under examination here is the death of spirit. Largely received rather negatively, where it was viewed at all, *Two Deaths* not only depicts the individual deaths of its two main protagonists, it also draws parallels between the larger death that institutions and society can impose on individuals. In the case of *Two Deaths*, the backdrop is the night the Romanian revolution ousted Ceausescu and the obsession with power over every facet of life that regimes such as Ceausescu's supports. Thus Roeg's most intimate film, the story revolves around a dinner party, is also his most political.

In each case, with Anderson, Peckinpah, Roeg and the two films directed by Reisz, maladjustment to the modern world and madness is thus not altogether a bad thing. With Reisz it boils down to sticking a finger in the eye of society. His mad rebellions possess a superficial charm. If little else, his two films capture the very essence of popular attitudes at the time of their release. Anderson and Peckinpah are much more bitter. They understand more fully the modernist's lament for traditions lost and the stability derived thereof, even while they--or at least Anderson--recognize the impossibility of returning to traditions whose underpinnings were

unfair, dehumanizing themselves, self-limiting and in many cases just absurd and silly. Roeg's films and characters inhabit the same universe, but they seem intent on finding ways to coexist with it. Even if the price is to limit the distractions from without and focus only on the personal, they often do manage to negotiate their mazes and at least achieve a sort of individual liberation.

Failures of Civilization

From this, it is also evident that a secondary issue under discussion in this study is a preoccupation with the failure of civilization to civilize. Indeed, the concept of civilization itself is under attack from these filmmakers, at least insofar as it has failed to nourish the very notion of what it means to be human and instead has elected to demean individuality. And of course this is a prominent theme of many modernist works, the confrontation with urban life, technology and questions of personal identity. In response arises an interest in the irrational, the forces of the unconscious mind or the spiritual. Thus Reisz's *Morgan* depicts the ascension of a superior state of consciousness over the humdrum world of bourgeois respectability. Anderson's *Mick Travis* projects a stream of consciousness that operates as a metaphoric rebellion against the forces of anti-individualistic conformity. Peckinpah's bunch, just entering the twentieth century, enlist that century's most devastating technological symbol of death and destruction, the machine gun, and loose chaos on the world. Roeg's characters, meanwhile, each seem to undertake a trek of some degree that leads back towards the mythic origins of humanity and its more socializing rituals.

Aesthetically, their works are marked by their innovation. Formal experimentation runs the gamut, from a novel sort of postwar psychological realism to expressionism, from surreal exposés of the workings of the unconscious mind to visual and

thematic primitivism. In each case, they also demonstrate a discontinuity with earlier aesthetic traditions, most particularly Victorian codes of narrative and character exposition. Of course, as is the case with any artist, these labels are little more than generalizations, easy handles that place readers on the first rungs of the ladder which will lead to a more detailed examination of their filmworks. And it is an examination, moreover, that aspires to demonstrate a complexity of aesthetic stylization--not mere adherence to specific schools of expression--which connects with the world of ideas, intellectual, mythic as well as folkish, for their inspiration.

While this discussion so far helps to see how the subjects of this study, especially Anderson and Roeg, fit within the confines of what has come to be termed modernism, there exists as well particular circumstances that apply to the cinema itself and the impact of the modern on the art form of the twentieth century. The origin of the frustration with the psychology and attitudes of modern consumer society is clear enough to most viewers. It lies in the dehumanization characteristic of so many of today's compartmentalized institutions. It obviously has helped produce the generalized anxiety that Reisz, Anderson, Peckinpah and Roeg respond to in their films. What may be less clear, however, is the response this frustration takes towards the particular institutions of the cinema. Perhaps the first truly mass art form, cinema quickly established codes and rules of production that were closely akin to the assemblyline manufacture of cars, washing machines or any other consumer item. Yet while remaining frustrated with such limitations, these filmmakers also chose to work within that very same system of distribution and exhibition yet all the while challenging its basic premises.

Their situation, therefore, is different from the makers of experimental or art films. It is after all the difference between film and cinema. Cinema entails all the apparatus of commercial

filmmaking, those same institutions of production, distribution and exhibition. It also implies a more relevant role for viewers and audiences. Cinema is something spoken of, something of influence upon an audience, a general public. It is part of the fabric of mass culture and mass marketing to a lesser or greater degree. Filmmaking does not necessarily include any factors of the industrial apparatus. And its impact on a general public or audience is more likely to be in the form of influencing contributors to the commercial cinema.

None of this is meant to disregard the overall impact of experimental and art films. Expressionism, for example, dominated the German commercial cinema during its early years, and modernist forms and narratives continued to influence German film up into the Nazi era. Indeed, because of the impact of this earlier era, John Orr refers to the commercial filmmakers of the 1950s and 1960s as neo-modernists. (Orr 1993) Also during the 1920s and 1930s, when dada and surrealist filmmakers were at the apex of their influence, artists such as Man Ray, Hans Richter, Luis Buñuel, René Clair, Fernand Léger, Salvador Dalí and Jean Cocteau all moved into filmmaking. And Clair, Cocteau and Buñuel made highly important inroads in the commercial cinema. In the 1940s, Maya Deren's ambiguous narratives took their place alongside Cocteau's and Buñuel's efforts. After World War II, the modernist impulse broke out of the realm of experimental film and made its way solidly into the European commercial cinema, where the notion of the cinematic auteur thrived. Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963) serves as centerpiece of modernism in the Italian commercial cinema. Buñuel's films of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Belle de jour* (1967) and *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972), were international successes whose discontinuous storylines found wide acceptance amongst general audiences. Like Buñuel, Jacques Tati applied an eccentric narrative structure to very popular films such as *Jour de fête* (1949), *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* (1953) and *Play Time*

(1967). At the other extreme, audiences often found troubling Michelangelo Antonioni's formal manipulations of emotional alienation in works such as *L'Avventura* (1960), *Deserto rosso* (1964), *Blow-Up* (1966) and *Zabriskie Point* (1969). (Armes 1976)

The Modernists

Included with these more or less "independent" modernists, of course, are the loosely defined "schools" or "movements" in film arising in several European countries. The aforementioned French *nouvelle vague* included filmmakers such as François Truffaut, Alain Resnais, Eric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol, all of whom worked within an extravagantly different narrative and psychological context in their films. In Italy, meanwhile, the tradition of postwar Neorealism was challenged by Pier Paolo Pasolini's visual pastiches, Mario Bava's baroque horror films and especially Sergio Leone's abstract "spaghetti Westerns," the latter of which succeeded in supplanting, in terms of popularity, American-made Westerns. Coming out of the New German Cinema and the so-called *Autorenfilm* were works from Alexander Kluge, Jean-Marie Straub, Volker Schlöndorff and Edgar Reitz. Even Hollywood and the American cinema produced its own version of a modernist commercial cinema. Arthur Penn's noirish *nouvelle vague*-inspired *Mickey One* (1964) perhaps led the way. Subsequent work from Stanley Kubrick (*2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968], *A Clockwork Orange* [1971], *Barry Lyndon* [1975]), Robert Altman (*Brewster McCcloud* [1970], *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* [1971], *Nashville* [1975]), Francis Ford Coppola (*The Conversation* [1974]) and Martin Scorsese (*Mean Streets* [1973], *Taxi Driver* [1976], *Raging Bull* [1980]) ventured in the same direction. Robert P. Kolker provides some insight, here, and discusses modernism in the commercial cinema up until the early 1980s. He especially concentrates on non-Hollywood filmmaking. (Kolker 1983)

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Such a detailed listing is necessary in order to see that there is a tradition of modernism in the commercial cinema--and it complements the discussion of British cinema found at the beginning of this introduction. Neither Reisz, Anderson, Roeg or Peckinpah are working in unexplored territory. What they are doing that is somewhat different is twofold. First, they are much more uncompromising in their challenge to cinematic forms and themes than were their British and American contemporaries, most of whom more or less were content to conduct mild experiments within established genres. And this leaves filmmakers such as Anderson and Roeg in particular in something of a quandary. Just how do you express your dissatisfaction with modern institutions, when the institution you must work within is itself one of the most dehumanizing, fragmented and compartmentalized in the industrial world. A filmmaker such as Sam Peckinpah may never adjust, always remaining in conflict with his studio overlords. On the other hand, Lindsay Anderson often employs a Brechtian strategy, involving his viewers in a sort of "montage of attractions" that works simultaneously to entertain and undermine their aesthetic and social prejudices. Meanwhile, a filmmaker such as Nicolas Roeg often seems oblivious. He is that rarest of filmmakers, one who sometimes creates a marginal "hit" but who is satisfied to let his work mostly speak for itself. He almost seems indifferent to audience, viewer or critical response for the most part. Thus not only is Roeg's work the most modernist in effect, as I mentioned before, but his attitude towards commercial filmmaking is itself something of a modernist point of view.

Second, these filmmakers have a peculiar obsession with the depiction of madness, particularly schizophrenia. Of course, as seen can be seen in the short summary of postwar commercial cinema above, madness and alienation are themes endemic to modernists working in film, literature, theater or any other medium. As Louis A. Sass has written:

Modernist art has been said to manifest certain off-putting characteristics that are reminiscent of schizophrenia: a quality of being hard to understand or feel one's way into. . . . Human action in our time . . . lacks "shape and measure" and is "veined with currents of inertia." . . . related to a burgeoning of a certain introversion and alienation, the acceleration of an inner process that Kafka, a figure representative of the age, described in his diary as the "wild tempo" of an "introspection [that] will suffer no idea to sink tranquilly to rest but must pursue each one into consciousness, only itself to become an idea, in turn to be pursued by renewed introspection." It is in the modernist art and thought of the twentieth century that this self-generating, often compulsive process has reached its highest pitch, transforming the forms, purposes, and preoccupations of all the arts and inspiring works that, to the uninitiated, can seem as difficult to grasp, as off-putting and alien, as schizophrenia itself. (Sass 1992, 8-9)

From Sass, it is obvious that here, too, the subjects of this study are working within a well-established area, one also developed by many other commercial film directors. The exploration of schizophrenia, for example, could hardly be more dramatically portrayed than with Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Nor could any film provide a more eerie look into the landscape of the schizophrenic's mind than the disconnected psychotic world of Stanley Kubrick's frustrated artist, Alex of *A Clockwork Orange* (like Mick Travis, also played by Malcolm McDowell). Even one-off works, such as Terrence Mallick's *Badlands* (1973) or Peter Jackson's more recent *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) have provided wonderfully textured portrayals of the workings of the mind, particularly what might be considered the tableaux of schizophrenics.

Conclusion

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Indeed, so often is the subject of “madness” injected into cinema in general, and schizophrenia or other “modern ailments” made part of storylines, that Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell have written a survey of the topic. (Fleming and Manvell 1985) Yet again it should be emphasized why the selected works of the four filmmakers of this study merit special attention. With Reisz, it is a matter of the direct inclusion of R. D. Laing’s radical theories of schizophrenia in his work. With Lindsay Anderson, virtually every film he made is obsessed with issues dear to the schizophrenic. So much so that it would seem to be an integral part of the filmmaker’s own character. Peckinpah, on the other hand, both demonstrates the calculations of the schizophrenic, in *Straw Dogs*, and depicts the circumstances that induce such a condition in the modern mind, in *The Wild Bunch*. And Nicolas Roeg creates schizophrenic settings and forms through which his characters’ travel and mostly seem to prevail. Madness, schizophrenia, thus is the center point of these films and these filmmakers’ preoccupations. More integrally than is the case with other modernists, who are often content to depict alienation and leave their viewers lost in a quandary, Reisz, Anderson, Peckinpah and to some degree Roeg rail against situation. They call for a reply from their characters and from their audiences, even if it is just a bitter acknowledgment of their plight.

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